

PUNISHMENT AND SATISFACTION IN AQUINAS'S ACCOUNT OF THE ATONEMENT: A REPLY TO STUMP

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According to Eleonore Stump, Thomas Aquinas rejects a “popular” (roughly, penal substitutionary) account of the atonement. For Stump’s Aquinas, God does not require satisfaction or punishment for human sin, and the function of satisfaction is remedial, not juridical or penal. Naturally, then, Aquinas does not, on this reading, see Christ’s passion as having saving effect in virtue of Christ substitutionally bearing the punishment for human sin that divine justice requires. I argue that Stump is incorrect. For Aquinas, divine justice *does* require satisfaction; satisfaction involves punishment (*poena*) and has a penal function; and one way Christ’s death has saving effect is in virtue of his satisfying that requirement on people’s behalf. Christ saves by “paying our debt,” bearing in the place of humans the penalty or punishment required by divine justice. My argument implies that Aquinas’s account of satisfaction in the atonement significantly resembles key aspects of Stump’s “popular account” – and of the Penal Substitution Theory it represents.

Introduction

In her presentation of Thomas Aquinas’s account of the atonement, Eleonore Stump contrasts Aquinas’s account with a “popular account” of the atonement. According to that popular account, Christ’s death has saving effect in virtue of his bearing for sinners, in their place, the penalty of punishment for sin that God, in his justice, required.¹ Though Stump

¹Stump, *Aquinas*, chap. 15. Stump defines the “popular account” as follows:

Human beings by their evil actions have offended God. This sin or offense against God generates a kind of debt, a debt so enormous that human beings by themselves can never repay it. God has the power, of course, to cancel this debt, but God is perfectly just, and it would be a violation of perfect justice to cancel a debt without extracting the payment owed. Therefore, God cannot simply forgive a person’s sin; as a just judge he must sentence all people to everlasting torment as the just punishment for their sin. God is also infinitely merciful, however; and so he brings it about that he himself pays their debt in full, by assuming human nature as the incarnate Christ and in that nature enduring the penalty which would otherwise have been imposed on human beings. In consequence, the sins of ordi-



admits that Aquinas's account of the atonement sometimes *sounds* similar to this popular account, she claims that the similarity is only "superficial;" according to Stump, the two accounts are actually completely different.²

As I show in Section I, Stump makes three claims about Aquinas's account to substantiate her claim that Aquinas and the popular account do not agree. Those claims are the following:

- S1) For Aquinas, God does not require satisfaction for the remission of human sin;
- S2) For Aquinas, the aim of satisfaction is remedial, and not juridical; its aim is to restore love in the wrong-doer's will, rather than to fulfill a requirement of justice;
- S3) For Aquinas, Christ's death, as a work of satisfaction, functions in virtue of Christ serving as a template of love and obedience (one which elicits our love), *rather than* in virtue of his fulfilling a requirement on our behalf by bearing our punishment.

As Stump contends throughout her exposition of Aquinas's account, S1–S3 set Aquinas's account of the atonement off from the so-called popular account of the atonement.

After briefly noting in Section II the fact that others agree with Stump's reading and that Stump's popular account is more or less a cipher for a Penal Substitution Theory (PST) of the atonement,³ I argue in Sections III–VI that Stump's interpretation is incorrect; Aquinas, in fact, *affirms* each of the three notions Stump takes him to deny. That is, I argue that:

- A1) For Aquinas, divine justice (based on the divine will) requires satisfaction for the remission of sin.
- A2) For Aquinas, satisfaction has a juridical function: it involves undergoing punishment for sin required by divine justice, a requirement "satisfied" by the undergoing of that punishment.
- A3) For Aquinas, one way in which Christ's death has saving effect is that he bears the punishment required by justice for us, in our place, thereby freeing us from our debt of punishment.

In Section VII, I observe that A1–A3 undermine Stump's attempt to mark Aquinas account off from the popular account and the Penal Substitution Theory it tends to represent. In fact, A1–A3 show that Aquinas's account of the Christ's death, in its function as a work of satisfaction, substantially resembles a PST—though, as I concede, a more definitive statement about

nary human beings are forgiven; and, by God's mercy exercised through Christ's passion, human beings are saved from sin and hell and brought to heaven. (427)

²Stump, *Aquinas*, 440.

³See Section II, especially footnote 26, for discussion of the relation of the popular account to PST.

the relation of Aquinas's account to PST requires a separate and rigorous consideration.⁴

To be clear at the outset, note the following: my argument for A1–A3 against Stump's S1–S3 does not form an objection to Stump's helpful treatment of the other *positive* functions of Christ's death in Aquinas's account. Indeed, Aquinas's multifaceted account, with its *numerous* benefits and modes of efficacy—which Stump helpfully conveys—make that ill-advised.⁵ Rather, my dispute is restricted to Stump's *denials*: i.e., to her claim that Aquinas does *not*, in contradistinction to the “popular account,” think that Christ's atonement functions in virtue of Christ's bearing in humanity's place the punishments required by God's justice. I argue that Aquinas *does* admit this as *one* of the atonement's many functions.

I. Stump's Reading of Aquinas on the Atonement

In her exposition of Aquinas's account (which doubles as a case for differentiating Aquinas's from the popular account of the atonement) Stump's first key claim is that, unlike the popular account which sees God as *constrained* by his justice to punish sin unless satisfaction be made, Aquinas holds that God does *not* require satisfaction for human sin.⁶ (Note: Stump does not explicitly define satisfaction, but she seems to understand it as the act of offering “compensatory payment” or of “making restitution” for the injury one has caused another. So, for example, if a boy trampled his mother's flower garden, satisfaction could consist in repairing the flower bed to at least its original condition).⁷ In support of her contention that, for Aquinas, God does not require satisfaction, Stump points to *Summa Theologiae* (ST) III.46.2. There Aquinas argues that God *could* have delivered humans without satisfaction, reasoning in the following way:

If God remits sin . . . he does no one an injury, just as any human being who, without [requiring] satisfaction, remits an offence committed against himself does not act unjustly but is merciful.⁸

From this text, Stump infers that “it is not necessary that satisfaction be made for human sins.”⁹ God does not require it; he is “free . . . to forego it.”¹⁰

⁴I take up this task in an essay currently in preparation.

⁵Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST] III.48.1–4 gives four different ways by which Christ's death has salvific efficacy.

⁶Stump, *Aquinas*, 431.

⁷Stump, *Aquinas*, 437–438. Stump speaks of “undoing his mischief” and “fixing the damage.” In some satisfaction theories of the atonement, it may be important to distinguish between restoring the goods which one has “stolen” or otherwise taken from the victim, and that of offering some compensation, above and beyond that restoration, to “make up” for the fact that an injury was caused at all. As far as I can tell, this distinction is not important to Stump's account.

⁸Stump, *Aquinas*, 431; ST III.46.2 ad.3.

⁹Stump, *Aquinas*, 431.

¹⁰Stump, *Aquinas*, 432.

The interpretation appears plausible. One could also appeal to Aquinas's claims that it was possible for God to have restored human nature with no incarnation at all—and, presumably, therefore, with no act of satisfaction.¹¹

But if God is not unwaveringly committed to “damn[ing] human beings unless [satisfaction] be made,” then the problem, Stump claims, is not on *God's* side of the divine-human relationship; instead, the problem caused by sin lies on the *human* end, with human nature.¹² Thus, since satisfaction addresses the problem in the divine-human relationship, and the problem is on “our side,” satisfaction aims at overcoming a problem or obstacle on the human end of the divine-human relationship.¹³ And the specific problem there (at least the one rooted in our past sin) is the fact that our *wills* have turned away from God. So Stump's second major claim is that *the aim of satisfaction is the healing or restoration of love in the wrong-doer's will*.¹⁴

This aim of satisfaction can be understood by considering cases of injury within interpersonal relationships. When one person maliciously wrongs a friend (or inadvertently wrongs her friend but then feels no remorse for her act), the friendship is broken in an important way. Whether the goods taken by the perpetrator are restored to the victim may or may not be necessary for the restoration of the relationship; what *is* necessary is for love to be restored in the wrong-doer, for the will of the wrong-doer to turn *back* to her friend in love, since that mutual love is an important, constitutive ingredient of that friendship. Moreover, when one undertakes to undo the damage she has caused another, her will may be transformed in this very undertaking. The external act can help draw out the needed internal state. And for Stump, this internal change is the point of satisfaction.

To support her claim regarding the function of satisfaction in Aquinas, Stump points to the fact that satisfaction is part of the sacrament of penance, which, for Aquinas, “aims primarily at the restoration of friendship between the wrong-doer and the one wronged.”¹⁵ She writes, “Aquinas sees penance in general as a kind of medicine for sin.” She quotes *ST III.90* in support: “The detestation of [one's] past sins belongs to penance, together with the purpose of changing [one's] life for the better, which is, as it were, the goal of penance.”¹⁶

¹¹*ST III.1.2*, an article on “whether it was necessary for the restoration of the human race that the Word of God should become incarnate.”

¹²Stump, *Aquinas*, 432.

¹³Stump, *Aquinas*, 432.

¹⁴Stump, *Aquinas*, 432. Stump distinguishes between various problems in the divine-human relationship having to do with sin. There is the problem of “past sin” and “future sin,” and Christ's work of satisfaction solves the first.

¹⁵“On [the popular account], the problem with the sins a person . . . has committed is that they have resulted in God's-alienation from [that person] and in God's consequent inability to refrain from punishing him, without satisfactions having been made. But, on Aquinas's account, [the sinner] is alienated from God, who is free to require satisfaction or to forego it; and the problem is a problem in human nature” (Stump, *Aquinas*, 432).

¹⁶Stump, *Aquinas*, 432.

What is especially important for the purpose of my argument is that Stump thinks that the remedial function of satisfaction excludes or displaces its *juridical* one, that is, its involving the "payment" of a penalty that justice requires be paid. Or at least Stump often frames her claim this way, playing the one function off against the other. The popular account, with its claims that God requires that satisfaction be made and that punishments be dispensed, envisages God as a kind of cosmic "accountant keeping double-column books on the universe. When a person commits a sin, a debt of guilt is registered in one column which must be balanced on the same line in the other column by the payment of a punishment which compensates for the guilt."¹⁷ Aquinas's conception of God, on the other hand, "is more nearly analogous to a parent than to an accountant." For Stump, this kind of good parent is not concerned with "trying to keep the spiritual books of the household balanced;" rather, "the parent's concern is with the child, that the child develop into the best person she can be and that there be a loving relationship between the child and her parent." Consequently, "any punishing, then, is strictly a means to the end of making the child a good person in harmony with the parent."¹⁸ To return the analogy to God, "God," for Stump's Aquinas, "is not concerned to balance the accounts. He is concerned with the sinner. What he wants is for that person to love what God loves and to be in harmony with God. His aim, then, is to turn that person around."¹⁹ So, she contends that for Aquinas, the point and purpose of satisfaction is "to return the wrongdoer's will to conformity with the will of the person wronged, rather than to inflict retributive punishment on the wrongdoer."²⁰

These two claims—that God does not require satisfaction and that the aim and function of satisfaction is the restoration of love in the sinner, rather than the fulfilling of a requirement of justice, say, that sin be penalized or punished—are the basis of how Stump's Aquinas thinks Christ's death functions. Christ's death is a work of "vicarious satisfaction,"²¹ a case of one person acting to repair the damages another has caused. According to Stump, the important concern in vicarious satisfaction (at least in the context of loving interpersonal relationships) is not repairing the damages, but rather, repairing the will of the wrong-doer. A person's act of vicarious satisfaction can help solve that problem. For insofar as one "allies" herself with the other who makes satisfaction on her behalf,

¹⁷Stump, *Aquinas*, 436.

¹⁸Stump, *Aquinas*, 436. (emphasis mine).

¹⁹Stump, *Aquinas*, 437.

²⁰Stump, *Aquinas*, 435. Cf. 432 as well: "The function of satisfaction for Aquinas is not to placate a wrathful God or in some other way remove the constraints which compel God to damn sinners. Instead, the function of satisfaction is to restore a sinner to a state of harmony with God by repairing or restoring in the sinner what sin has damaged." Also, 437: "the aim of any satisfaction . . . is not to make debts and payments balance but to restore a sinner to harmony with God."

²¹Stump, *Aquinas*, 434ff.

insofar as one sees and feels her substitute's actions to be a fulfillment of a restitution she owed, wanted, and needed to provide, then the real problem of the wrong-doer's unloving, disharmonious will would be solved. "On this view, a person making vicarious satisfaction is not providing compensatory payment so much as acting the part of a template representing the desired character or action, in accordance with which the sinner can align his own will and inclinations to achieve a state of mind [i.e., a restored love toward God] which it is at least unlikely" for him to have achieved apart from the initiative and work of the substitute.²² This is how Christ's death functions as a work of satisfaction.

Again, it is Stump's attendant denial which is important for my argument. She writes the following:

According to Aquinas, God does not require the penalties for sins either from human beings or from Christ. God does not inflict Christ's suffering on Christ as a punishment for human sins; rather God receives it as an act of making satisfaction whose goal is the alteration of human intellects and wills.²³

Christ does not atone by "[paying] the full penalty for all human sin so that human beings would not have to pay it."²⁴ He does not atone by paying a debt of punishment for humanity that God requires to be paid.

Such are Stump's three main claims by which she presents Aquinas's account, and, at the same time, by which she argues that Aquinas does not hold (and at places even rejects) the popular account. In what follows, I argue that each of Stump's negative claims about Aquinas is incorrect.

II. Framing the Significance of Stump's Interpretation

Before turning to evaluate the first of Stump's claims, I offer two brief observations which frame the significance of her interpretation. First, Stump's "popular account" is not merely some popular-level theology of the "unreflective."²⁵ Rather, it more or less represents a penal substitutionary theory (PST).²⁶ Both PST and the popular account maintain that God's justice requires some *penalty* or *punishment* for sin; that Jesus bears this penalty or punishment on the cross; that he thereby satisfies the requirement of justice for humans, in their stead; and that by so satisfying

²²Stump, *Aquinas*, 437.

²³Stump, *Aquinas*, 440.

²⁴Stump, *Aquinas*, 428–429.

²⁵Stump, *Aquinas*, 427.

²⁶Stump's popular account likely represents not just PST, but also "Anselmian" accounts of the atonement generally, constituted as such by their holding i) that God has some *requirement* which must be fulfilled before he will resume fellowship with humans who have sinned; ii) that the reality of this requirement constitutes a plight for human beings; and iii) that Christ's death solves that predicament. PST is seen as a kind of variation on this more general Anselmian type. It is important to acknowledge that some construals of PST might not endorse all aspects of the popular account.

the requirement, he delivers humans from their plight, in the manner of paying their "debt."

Second, it is important to note that Stump is not alone in her interpretation of Aquinas. Thomistic scholar Romanus Cessario voices a similar view. After reviewing how Aquinas understands Christ's death as the sacrificial offering of a perfectly loving, submissive, humble and obedient will to God, Cessario concludes:

Aquinas offers no support for those who would advance a theory of penal substitution as the mechanism by which the benefits of Christ reach the human race. Love, not punishment, dominated Aquinas's account of the efficacy of the Passion.²⁷

Another interpreter, Rik van Nieuwenhove, also agrees: "It is a gross misreading" he states, "to understand 'making satisfaction' in terms of retribution and punishment."²⁸ Like Stump, Van Nieuwenhove not only thinks Aquinas conceives of satisfaction in personalistic terms rather than juridical ones, he also appeals to the remedial nature of penance to undermine any penal undertones of satisfaction. Penance "is described as 'a spiritual healing of a sort' . . . or as 'a spiritual medicine,'" and "sin is called 'a sickness of the soul.'" "These metaphors reveal . . . a world of difference: whereas a judge punishes, a doctor heals."²⁹ Thus, according not only to Stump, but also to other prominent interpreters, Aquinas understands the function of Christ's death without reference to a justice that requires punishment for sin.

In what follows, I will attempt to show that Stump and those who agree with her on the nature and function of satisfaction, particularly in the atonement, are reading Aquinas incorrectly.

III. Aquinas on the Necessity of Satisfaction

Stump's first claim (S1) is a proposed answer to the question of whether God, for Aquinas, requires satisfaction—that is, of whether God's *justice* requires satisfaction *for the remission of sin*. Aquinas is surprising clear on

²⁷Cessario, "Aquinas on Christian Salvation," 124. It is possible that Cessario's account may escape my objections to Stump's account of Aquinas. Cessario admits what I argue below: that satisfaction "responds . . . to the needs of the divine justice" (122). (However, he later says that "this arrangement is not binding on God," which, as I will argue, seems inaccurate in an important way). And perhaps his comments about penal substitution have in view aspects of PST outside the "*basic* PST" which I see Aquinas as accepting (see Section VII). Finally, perhaps his claim about the place of love and punishment in Aquinas's view is merely about Thomistic *emphasis*. That said, he at least *seems* to share Stump's view in important ways. He suggests that the idea that "salvation is a matter of restitution and punishment" is a *distortion* (126). He holds that Aquinas does not present "a vengeful God who exacts a terrible punishment from an innocent victim" (125). I do not suggest that Aquinas portrays God as "vengeful;" Aquinas may even think that God does not exact the punishments that Christ bears. But we must consider separately whether Christ satisfies a requirement of punishment, bearing our punishments in our place for the sake of that requirement of divine justice.

²⁸Van Nieuwenhove, "The Saving Work of Christ," 439.

²⁹Van Nieuwenhove, "The Saving Work of Christ," 439.

this question. In his *Compendium Theologiae* (CT), he writes, "If God were to have restored human beings only by his will and power, *the order of divine justice, which requires satisfaction for sins, would not be observed.*"³⁰ He is especially explicit in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG): "The order of divine justice . . . requires that God should not remit sin without satisfaction."³¹

How is one to square these texts with *ST* III.46.2, which Stump (and, to some extent, Cessario)³² cites in support of the *opposite* claim that God does *not* require satisfaction? *ST* III.46.2 considers the question of "Whether there was any other possible way of human deliverance besides the passion of Christ." And indeed, in that article, Aquinas emphasizes an affirmative answer: there *was* another way—which is to say that satisfaction was *not* necessary. While Aquinas expresses this claim in the body of his answer (the *respondeo*), a forceful line of reasoning in support of it is given in the replies to the objections. Stump cites the reply:

[Reply to Objection 3:] A judge who has to punish a fault committed against another . . . cannot remit the fault or penalty without injustice. But God has no one superior to him; rather he himself is the highest and universal good of the whole world. And for this reason, if [God] remits sin, which is defined as a fault from its being committed against [God] himself, he does no one an injury, just as any human being who, without [requiring] satisfaction, remits an offense committed against himself does not act unjustly but is merciful.³³

But, as I will now argue, the passage, read carefully and contextually, does not suggest what Stump takes it to suggest; it does not suggest that God "does not require satisfaction" or that God is "free to forego it."

Consider first the objection to which the passage just mentioned replies:

[Objection 3:] God's justice required that Christ should satisfy by the Passion in order that man might be delivered from sin. But Christ cannot let His justice pass . . . since He is justice itself. It seems impossible, then, for man to be delivered otherwise than by Christ's passion.

This objection, and the others that similarly seem to suggest that Christ's passion was necessary, meet a strong opposition in the article's *sed contra*:

[On the contrary:] Augustine says (*De Trin.* 13): [While] we assert that the way whereby God . . . delivered us [namely, Christ's passion] . . . is both good

³⁰*Compendium Theologiae* [CT] 200, as translated by Regan, 150; emphasis mine.

³¹IV.54.9.

³²On the one hand, Cessario recognizes that in *ST* III.46.2 Aquinas's point is that God *could have* decided "to free man from sin in some other way than by the sufferings of Christ" (Cessario, "Aquinas on Christian Salvation," 122). On the other hand, Cessario also thinks that in the passage, Aquinas says that "this arrangement is not binding on God." He sees Aquinas as "preserving" "the absolute freedom of divine love as it communicates itself in the world." However, as I explain below, Aquinas thinks that once God has willed, the matter becomes necessary since God cannot change his will. Thus God is not free "at this point" to merely liberate a person from sin without satisfaction. In that sense, God does not "preserve" his freedom with a "non-binding" requirement.

³³Stump, *Aquinas*, 431. This translation of *ST* III.46.2.ad3 appears to be Stump's own.

and befitting . . . let us also show that other possible means were not lacking on God's part, to whose power all things are equally subordinate.

Aquinas's own answer (*respondeo*) steers a middle course between the opening objections and this testimony from Augustine. Aquinas begins his answer saying the following:

[I answer that:] A thing may be said to be possible or impossible in two ways: first of all, simply and absolutely; or secondly, from supposition. Therefore, speaking simply and absolutely, it was possible for God to deliver mankind otherwise than by the Passion of Christ. . . . Yet it was impossible if some supposition be made.

With Aquinas's "yes and no" answer in place, we see the importance of *the opening lines* of Aquinas's "reply to objection 3," lines which Stump fails to quote:

*Even this justice depends on the Divine will, requiring satisfaction for sin from the human race. But if [God] had willed to free man from sin without any satisfaction, He would not have acted against justice.*³⁴

With these words, Aquinas's concedes the premise of the third objection: God's justice *did* require satisfaction. Yet the conclusion that Christ *had* to die does not follow because "even this justice depends on the divine will." The suggestion is that Christ did not, "absolutely speaking," *have* to die, because justice did not, absolutely speaking, *have* to require satisfaction. Justice is based on God's will, the content of which, apparently, was not itself necessary.

Aquinas's talk of alternative possibilities as to what justice could require, and his talk of justice and its requirements "being based on the divine will," clearly draws on his discussion of divine free will in *ST I.19*. There, Aquinas considers two kinds of things that God wills: viz., his own goodness and things apart from himself. The former he wills necessarily, but the latter he wills "in so far as they are ordered to His own goodness as their end."³⁵ But "in willing an end," Aquinas reasons, it is necessary that we will some means *only if* that means is necessary to attaining the end. Therefore, since God's goodness "can exist without other things," "it follows that [God's] willing things apart from Himself is not absolutely necessary."³⁶ This conclusion is important because Aquinas explains later in the question that "God has free will with respect to what He does not necessarily will." Thus, on Aquinas's terms, the basis of his claim in *ST III.46.2* that Christ's satisfaction was not "*absolutely necessary*" is that God's requirement of satisfaction is an act of divine free will. Cessario appears correct when he observes that Aquinas's claim "exhibits a shift in theological interpretation. For Anselm . . . the thought of God forgiving

³⁴These words immediately precede the section of "reply to objection 3" quoted above.

³⁵*ST I.19.3*.

³⁶*ST I.19.3*.

sin without punishment necessarily implies a disorder."³⁷ For Aquinas, however, God requires satisfaction (to borrow the formula from *ST* I.19.3) neither *by his nature*, nor *contrary to his nature*, but rather, *voluntarily*.³⁸

While Aquinas maintains that satisfaction is not "*absolutely*" necessary but instead was a matter of divine free will, nevertheless as *ST* I.19 and *ST* III.46.1–2 explain, there is for Aquinas an important sense in which the requirement of satisfaction for sin *was and is necessary*—namely, necessary "*by supposition*." "Supposing that God wills a thing, then He is unable not to will it, as His will cannot change."³⁹ Supposing, then, that God has willed to require satisfaction, which Aquinas indicates God has done (by his "*ordinance*" for creation), then it *is* indeed necessary that satisfaction be made.⁴⁰ Hence, the opening lines of "reply to objection 3" are *counterfactual* in nature: "If [God] *had* willed to free man from sin without satisfaction, he *would* not have acted against justice." Aquinas in no way suggests that "*after*" God's ordinance for creation, he is "*free to forego*" satisfaction. Thus, the text to which Stump points (*ST* III.46.2.ad3) does not undermine Aquinas's clear claims—not only in *CT* and *SCG*, but also in the very article from which the cited passage is drawn—that divine justice requires satisfaction; instead, the text notes that this requirement of satisfaction by divine justice is something God freely willed.⁴¹

IV. Aquinas (and Anselm) on Justice, Satisfaction and Punishment

Stump was able to maintain that satisfaction had a purely remedial function because she first held that God did not *require* satisfaction. The same logic holds for my account, only in reverse: my establishing that God *does* require satisfaction in Aquinas's account suggests that satisfaction has *more-than-remedial* function in that account. Satisfaction somehow upholds the order of justice. Aquinas does not merely leave us to infer this additional function of satisfaction; rather, he makes the point explicitly in discussing the nature of penance in *ST* Supp 12.⁴² (This is particularly interesting because Stump and Van Nieuwenhove appeal to satisfaction's being part of penance to suggest just the opposite, *viz.*, that it has only a remedial function.)

³⁷Cessario, "Aquinas on Christian Salvation," 122.

³⁸*ST* I.19.3.ad3 "It is not natural to God to will any of those other things that He does not will necessarily; and yet it is not unnatural or contrary to His nature, but voluntary."

³⁹*ST* I.19.3.

⁴⁰Aquinas speaks in *ST* III.46.2 of God's "*ordinance*" as one of the things whose supposition implies necessity.

⁴¹Stump's error comes when she drops the counterfactual framework of *ST* III.46.ad3 and concludes, "So, on Aquinas's view, it *is* not necessary that satisfaction be made for human sins" (Stump, *Aquinas*, 431; emphasis mine).

⁴²Though compiled after his death from earlier writings, the way that the account outlined in *ST* Supp. 12 coheres with Aquinas's other writing tells in favor of the assumption that its account of the aim of satisfaction represents Aquinas's established views.

In *ST Supp* 12, Aquinas considers the question, "Whether satisfaction is an act of justice?" By reference to the nature of justice and of satisfaction, he quickly delivers the affirmative answer.⁴³ In the remainder of the article, Aquinas pursues a more detailed account of satisfaction's relation to justice. He notes first that satisfaction "expresses equality in the agent," and as such "denotes, properly speaking, an act of justice of one man to another."⁴⁴ Then, noting that justice toward another can involve external goods or merely actions, Aquinas specifies that satisfaction has to do with *actions*, specifically with doing something that "*equalizes*" one's past unjust action.⁴⁵ As such, a person's making satisfaction presupposes that that person had previously failed to act toward another in a just way. This failure of justice is an "inequality" which "constitutes an offense; so that satisfaction regards a previous offense." He then immediately adds that "no part of justice regards a previous offense, except *vindictive* justice." Implicitly anticipating an objection, he explains that the fact that satisfaction is self-imposed—that "the penitent holds to the penance"—is no obstacle to satisfaction being an act of vindictive justice (*iustitia vindictiva*), "since vindictive justice establishes equality indifferently, whether the patient be the same subject as the agent, as when anyone punishes himself, or whether they be distinct, as when a judge punishes another man." He concludes that penance itself is "in a way a species of vindictive justice. This proves that satisfaction, which implies equality in the agent with respect to a previous offense, is a work of justice, as to that part which is called penance."

Importantly, when Aquinas speaks of vindictive justice, he speaks of one being punished. The suggestion is that satisfaction involves (perhaps among other things) voluntarily⁴⁶ inflicting a punishment on oneself, and that this undergoing of punishment establishes justice by *equalizing* one's prior offence. I will argue below that Aquinas elsewhere explicitly endorses this suggestion, which we see only implicitly here. (Indeed, in the subsequent article, *ST Supp*. 12.3, Aquinas speaks of satisfaction as "the act of justice inflicting punishment"). But first it will be helpful to

⁴³He writes, "Justice is considered with regard to an equation between thing and thing according to a certain proportion;" and satisfaction, by its very name ("enough"), "denotes an equality of proportion." It follows that, formally, "satisfaction is an act of justice."

⁴⁴In those elaborations (*ST Supp*.12.2), Aquinas explains that there are two kinds of acts of justice: commutative and distributive (i.e., those where a person gives to another that which is due the other, and those where a person, acting as a judge, establishes justice between two others. Cf. *ST* II-II.61.1). In these two kinds of acts of justice, the justice, or new equality, is "taken up" in different places: in the first, it is established in the agent; in the second, it is established in the subject who has suffered injustice. Aquinas presents this observation to explain why satisfaction is an act of commutative justice.

⁴⁵So, while we might think that the important part of satisfaction is the state in which the goods are restored to the victim, Aquinas think that satisfaction properly concerns the *act* of wrongdoer.

⁴⁶See below for a discussion of Aquinas's explanation of how satisfactory punishment can be voluntary, given that he sees punishment as involving an aspect of involuntariness.

head off an objection to this interpretation of Aquinas's understanding of satisfaction.

One might object to the interpretation of satisfaction I have suggested (namely, that satisfaction involves voluntarily assuming punishments that satisfy an order of justice) by arguing that the concept of satisfaction is determined by Anselm (who first espoused the "satisfaction" theory of the atonement) and that Anselm frames satisfaction as an *alternative to* punishment. Indeed, Anselm *does* frame satisfaction in this way. Anselm holds that when a person wrongs God by "robbing God of his honor," the justice of the "order of things" over which God presides can be upheld either by God punishing the wrongdoer, or by the wrongdoer (or someone else) providing "satisfaction," something which God considered sufficiently good to compensate for the sin. Thus, for Anselm, divine justice requires punishment *or* satisfaction—and satisfaction is clearly presented as an *alternative to* punishment.⁴⁷ If Aquinas's account of satisfaction follows Anselm's, then there must be a mistake in the argument that Aquinas understands satisfaction as involving punishment.

The solution to this objection is to recognize that Aquinas's conception of satisfaction differs from Anselm's. Whereas Anselm conceives of satisfaction and punishment as alternatives, holding that divine justice requires *one or the other*, Aquinas conceives of satisfaction as *involving* punishment. As such, he holds throughout his writings (in *SCG*, *ST*, and *CT*) that divine justice simply requires punishment.⁴⁸ "Divine justice requires, for the preservation of equality in things, that punishments [*poenae*] be assigned for faults; "the order of justice demands that a punishment [*poena*]

⁴⁷See Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, at, for example, I.13: "Necessarily, then, when God's honor is taken away [i.e., the essential feature of sin for Anselm], either it is paid back [which is satisfaction] or else punishment follows." He speaks of God enforcing a requirement of "either repayment or punishment." Note also Millard Erickson's remark that in the developing medieval penitential system, one could "by rendering some form of satisfaction . . . avoid punishment for one's offenses. This was in keeping with a legal principle of the time: in matters of private offense, various forms of satisfaction could be substituted for punishment" (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 814). Also, see Bruce McCormack, "Atonement."

⁴⁸SCG III.142.5: "To the increase [either of good or bad] which depends on the number of works there must be a corresponding increase in rewards and punishments; otherwise, there would not be a compensation under divine justice for all the things that a person does, *if some evils remained unpunished and some goods unrewarded.*"

SCG III.158.5: "If [a person] does not exact this penalty of himself, then, since things subject to divine providence cannot remain disordered, this penalty will be inflicted on him by God."

ST I-II.77.ad1: "The Divine law leaves nothing unpunished that is contrary to virtue."

ST I-II.87.3.ad3: "God does not delight in punishments for their own sake; but He does delight in the order of His justice, which requires them."

ST I-II.91.4: "In order, therefore, that no evil might remain unforbidden and unpunished [impunitum], it was necessary for the Divine law to supervene, whereby all sins are forbidden."

CT 181, in a passage on why purgatory is needed: "The order of divine justice demands that punishment be undergone for sins."

Also, Bruce McCormack gives support for at least this *general* line of interpretation relating Aquinas to Anselm. "That 'satisfaction' might occur through punishment did not occur to Anselm, though it was basic to the thinking of a host of medieval and Reformation

be assigned for a sin."⁴⁹ That God punishes all sin is part of his work, not as a cosmic accountant, but as a *governor*. Aquinas writes, "The function of punishing and rewarding belongs to him whose office it is to impose the law. . . . But it belongs to divine providence to lay down the law for men. . . . Therefore, it belongs to God to punish [*punire*] and reward men."⁵⁰ Punishing and rewarding are part of how God upholds this order.

How does punishing uphold the order? Aquinas holds that God maintains the good ordering of the world by subsuming breaches of that order, i.e., evil acts, back under an aspect of good: "We observe that every evil in things of nature is included under the order of something good. So, the corruption of air is the generation of fire and the killing of a sheep is the feeding of a wolf."⁵¹ The good aspect under which God subsumes human sin is that of punishment. While sin consists in a human choosing to exercise her will *her* way—it is her pushing off or rejecting God's ordering—punishment consists in God imposing God's order back on the sinner.⁵² The response of punishment creates a kind of appropriate equality—in other words, justice, which is precisely the thing a governor is responsible to maintain. So, SCG 140.5: "This iniquity is removed when, *against* his will, man is forced to suffer something in accord with divine ordering. Therefore, it is necessary that human sins be given punishment [*punitantur*] of divine origin and, for the same reason, that good deeds receive their reward." Aquinas makes the same point in ST I-II.87.1: "Whatever rises up against an order, is put down by that order or by the principle thereof. And because sin is an inordinate act, it is evident that whoever sins, commits an offense against an order: wherefore he is put down, in consequence, by that same order, which repression is punishment [*poena*]."

So, unlike Anselm, for whom God required satisfaction or punishment, Aquinas states that divine justice requires punishment; and Aquinas holds that undergoing punishment establishes justice in virtue of its being an act which "equalizes" one's past offence. This confirms the suggestion of ST Supp. 12, that *satisfaction, as an act of vindictive justice, involves one voluntarily performing an action that involves inflicting on one's self a punishment (for sin) that God, in his justice, requires*. Moreover, Aquinas explicitly affirms this understanding of satisfaction in SCG III.158.5:

After a man has secured remission of his sin by grace and has been brought back to the state of grace, he remains under an obligation, as a result of God's justice, to some penalty [*poenam*] for the sin that he has committed. Now, if he imposes this penalty on himself by his own will, he is said to

thinkers and represented a development whose importance [Gusaf] Aulén underestimated" (McCormack, "Atonement").

⁴⁹SCG III.142.1; SCG III.158.4

⁵⁰SCG III.140.2.

⁵¹SCG III.140.5.

⁵²SCG III.140.5.

make satisfaction to God by this: inasmuch as he attains with labor and punishment the divinely established order by punishing [*puniendo*] himself for the sin, which order he had transgressed by sinning through following his own will. But, if he does not exact this penalty of himself, then, since things subject to divine providence cannot remain disordered, this penalty will be inflicted on him by God. Such a punishment is not called one of satisfaction, since it is not due to the choice of the one who suffers it.

This understanding of satisfaction as involving voluntarily undergoing the *punishment* or *penalty* (*poena*) required by justice explains why Aquinas does not need to employ Anselm's "either-punishment-or-satisfaction" formula.

This interpretation of Aquinas on satisfaction might prompt the following objection: how can satisfaction involve *voluntarily* inflicting *punishment* on oneself, given that, for Aquinas, "the nature of punishment is to be *against* the will"?⁵³ The question raises an important point, one which shows that for Aquinas, there *is* a difference between "satisfaction" and "punishment" —but the difference is not a matter of punishment. Aquinas writes the following in *ST* I-II.87.6:

When punishment is satisfactory, it loses *somewhat* of the nature of punishment: for the nature of punishment is to be against the will; and although satisfactory punishment, absolutely speaking, is against the will, nevertheless in this particular case and for this particular purpose, it is voluntary. Consequently it is voluntary simply, but involuntary in a certain respect. (Italics mine)

On Aquinas's view, divine justice requires either "punishment simply" or "satisfactory punishment" —in either case, though, there is an imposition of divine order against the sinner's will which removes the "inequity" of the sinful offence; in short, there is genuine punishment. And thus, we see why Aquinas can say that divine justice simply requires punishment for sin. Furthermore, understanding satisfaction as involving a voluntary undergoing of punishments required by divine justice explains Aquinas's remark that the one who performs satisfaction makes, by their voluntary choice, "a virtue out of a necessity": one *chooses* to undergo the punishment justice requires.⁵⁴ Finally, as I will argue below, Aquinas understanding of Christ's satisfaction as bearing our punishment for us, in our place, provides yet further evidence for this reading of satisfaction.

On the basis of these texts, then, I suggest that Stump (and Van Nieuwenhove) have rejected a function of satisfaction that Aquinas endorses: satisfaction aims and functions to uphold the order of divine justice, which requires that sin be punished, and it upholds or "satisfies" this requirement of divine justice by undergoing the required punishment.

⁵³*ST* I-II.87.6

⁵⁴*ST* Supp.12.1. Aquinas's exact wording is "makes a virtue of necessity." Thus, *satisfaction* involves an act which is somewhat contrary to one's *will*, in a sense, but not to her actual choice; whereas "simple" punishment is contrary to will and choice.

V. *Punishment: Penal or Remedial?*

Like before, though, how do we explain the texts to which Stump and others point? Specifically, what about Stump's (and Van Nieuwenhove's) claim that the function of satisfaction is remedial, *rather than* penal? My reply is simple: Aquinas does not pit the one function against the other. Indeed, he writes, "Satisfactory punishment has a twofold purpose, viz. to pay the debt, and to serve as a remedy for the avoidance of sin."⁵⁵ And, regarding justice itself, "Justice aims not only at removing inequality already existing, by punishing the past fault, but also at safeguarding equality for the future, because according to the Philosopher, punishments are medicinal."⁵⁶ Clearly, Aquinas sees *two* purposes for satisfaction: remedying the sinner *and* penalizing them to establish an order of justice otherwise infringed upon by their past sin.⁵⁷

That these two purposes can be co-present seems plausible. Imagine a medicine that is repugnant to take, but which made the one who took it more obedient to one's parents. After a fit of a child's disobedience, a parent might administer it to her child for *both* its effects. (On this illustration, satisfaction could consist in the child *voluntarily choosing* to take it after a fit of disobedience). This seems to be precisely what Aquinas has in mind. A penalty or punishment (*poena*) is imposed upon us because it is just; but that which is imposed on us is also for our good. In the simultaneously penal and remedial nature of the punishments of satisfaction, we see God's justice and his mercy operating in a unity, at one and the same time. Interestingly, Aquinas holds that God's "justice and mercy are present in all God's works."⁵⁸ Satisfaction's remedial purpose need not undermine its penal one.

We should consider one more objection, however. In SCG III.158, Aquinas writes that one's love for God and one's remorse for sin may be so strong that the need for "the punishments of satisfaction" is removed.⁵⁹ Punishments are medicine that is "necessary so that the mind may adhere more firmly to the good."⁶⁰ But sometimes, the mind is already so bonded to God that the medicine—the undergoing of punishment by which one makes satisfaction—is not needed. Thus, in this passage, Aquinas seems to say that punishments are necessary *only as a means to the end* of the restoration of one's love, since on account of already possessing that end (love for God), the means (punishment) is said to be not necessary. But if punishments are necessary *only as a means to the end* of the restoration of love, they are not necessary for justice's sake.

⁵⁵ST Supp.13.2.

⁵⁶ST Supp.12.3

⁵⁷See also CT 121: "Punishment is inflicted as a medicine that is corrective of the sin, and also to restore right order violated by the sin."

⁵⁸ST I.21.4.

⁵⁹SCG III.158.6.

⁶⁰SCG III.158.6.

But a close reading of the passage suggests otherwise. In the text, Aquinas steadily utilizes a two-part structure (marked below with “[1]” and “[2]”). He notes that punishment is necessary for two reasons. First, so that “the mind may adhere more firmly to the good,” and second, “so that the order of justice may be observed,” which happens by the sinner “standing the penalty.” He then notes, first, that a strong love for God is sufficient to direct one to the good, and second, that “displeasure for a past fault, when intense, brings great sorrow.” “Consequently,” he writes (and the inferential nature of the claim is important), “through [1] the strength of one’s love for God, and [2] of one’s hatred of past sin, there is removed the need for punishments of satisfaction.” The structure of the passage indicates not that satisfaction is forgone but that the intense sorrow over sin is its own experience of a penal punishment for sin. It is on account of *this* punishment that no *other* punishment is needed. And the already-present love means that (further) punishment is also not needed for the sake of remedy. Both purposes of the punishments of satisfaction can sometimes be fulfilled in an affective realm. Here, too, then, satisfaction’s *penal* nature and *juridical* function should not be undermined by reference to the remedial purpose of the punishments of satisfaction.

VI. Satisfaction in Christ’s Passion

So far, I have argued, first, that Aquinas holds that God’s justice (based on God’s will) requires satisfaction for the remission of sin. Second, I contended that satisfaction involves the voluntary undergoing of the punishment (*poena*) justice requires, and functions to uphold an order of justice that requires that punishment be meted out. I noted how this marks Aquinas off from Anselm (for whom satisfaction was an alternative to punishment), and that this penal purpose of satisfaction need not compete with its remedial one, since Aquinas affirms them both. In this penultimate section I will consider Aquinas’s understanding of Christ’s death, in its work of making satisfaction for sin.

Note that much of the task of interpreting the nature of Christ’s death as a work of satisfaction lies in discerning Aquinas’s understanding of the nature of satisfaction. After all, to say that one of the functions of Christ’s death is to make satisfaction for humanity’s sin obviously applies one’s understanding of satisfaction *to* the atonement. As such, insofar as Christ’s death does function as a work of satisfaction, and insofar as he does not make satisfaction for *his own* sins, the argument above on the nature of satisfaction (Sections III–V) has already given substantial reason to think that the efficacy of Christ’s death involves and draws on Christ undergoing a punishment that justice requires, in order to satisfy that requirement for us. Nonetheless, it is helpful to consider directly Aquinas understanding of Christ’s death.

Given the account of the nature of satisfaction I offered above, one would expect that in speaking of Christ’s atonement as a work of satisfaction, penalty or punishment, and substitution would be important

concepts. One would expect Aquinas to say that one way Christ's death has salvific efficacy is in virtue of his taking upon himself the penalty or punishments assigned by justice for our sins. And—despite Stump's and Van Nieuwenhove's (and to some extent Cessario's) claims—one finds exactly that in Aquinas.

In *CT* 231, Aquinas writes, "Christ wished to suffer not only death, but also the other ills that flow from the sin of the first parent to his posterity, so that, *bearing in its entirety the penalty* [poenam] of sin, He might perfectly free us from sin by offering satisfaction."⁶¹ Humanity incurred a penalty for their sin; but Christ freed humanity from that penalty by bearing it for them—and this was the content of his work of satisfaction.

In *CT* 227, Aquinas issues the same idea, invoking such legal language as "sentence," "charge," "debt," and "penalty":

Christ willed to submit to death for our sins so that, in taking on Himself without any fault of His own the punishment charged against us, He might free us from the death to which we had been sentenced, in the way that anyone would be freed from a debt of penalty if another person undertook to pay the penalty for him.

The text clearly affirms a penal and substitutionary nature of the function of Christ's death, just in that there is one punishment or penalty due to humans, and Christ substitutes himself as the "payer" of that punishment. Moreover, the text suggests that Christ did not just undergo the same *kind* of experience as that due to humanity in consequence of their sin, but that he took on himself humanity's very punishment; he paid humans' particular debt.

Also, *CT* 228:

Christ's death was suitable as a salutary means of satisfaction. [For] Man is fittingly punished in the things wherein he has sinned. . . . But the first sin of man was the fact that he ate the fruit . . . , contrary to God's command. *In his stead* Christ permitted Himself to be fastened to a tree, so that *He might pay for what He did not carry off*.⁶²

Christ pays, as a substitute, the debt of punishment we owed; he bears our punishment "in our stead;" he dies the death due to us.

It is not just in *CT* that Aquinas sees Christ as making satisfaction by bearing in humanity's place, as its substitute, the punishment for human sin required by divine justice. He gives the same account in *SCG* IV.55.22:

Christ had to suffer death . . . to wash away the sins of others. This indeed took place when He who was without sin willed to suffer the penalty [poenam] due to sin that He might take on Himself the penalty due to others, and make satisfaction for others. And although the grace of God suffices by itself for the remission of sins . . . nonetheless in the remission of sin something is required on the part of him whose sin is remitted: namely, that he satisfy the

⁶¹*CT* 231, emphasis mine.

⁶²Emphasis mine.

one offended. And since other men were unable to do this for themselves, Christ did this for all by suffering a voluntary death out of charity.

Whereas we owed God satisfaction in virtue of our debt of punishment, Christ makes satisfaction for us, by “taking on Himself the penalty due to others,” so those others, i.e., sinful humans, would not have to. I conclude, then, that Stump’s third denial is incorrect: Aquinas *does* maintain that one way Christ’s death functions is as a substitute bearer of a penalty or punishment, even one required by divine justice.

VII. Aquinas and Penal Substitution Theory

I have argued that Aquinas maintains three positions, each of which Stump takes Aquinas to deny: A1) that divine justice (based on the divine will) requires satisfaction; A2) that satisfaction involves undergoing punishment in order to satisfy a requirement of divine justice that sin be punished; and A3) that one way in which Christ’s death has saving effect is that he bears the punishment required by justice *for us*, in our place, thereby freeing us from the debt of punishment.

I wish now to consider one important implication of my argument, an implication that concerns how Aquinas’s account relates to other accounts of the atonement. Recall that Stump’s three claims (S1–S3) were presented as key ways in which Aquinas’s account diverged from the popular account of the atonement. In defending the exact *opposite* of Stump’s three claims, my interpretation suggests a much more positive relationship between Aquinas and Stump’s popular account of the atonement—and between Aquinas’s account and the account *represented by* the popular account.

Consider the following 4-point account of the atonement, which also captures the heart of Stump’s popular account:⁶³

- 1) Divine justice requires “penalty” or “punishment” (*poena*) for sin.
- 2) The fact that humans have sinned means that a “sentence,” “debt” or “penalty” of punishment (*poena*) accrues to them; the sinner incurs the obligation of seeing to it that the penalty is undergone.
- 3) Christ’s passion functions by way of his bearing humans’ punishment (*poena*), for them, as their *substitute*.
- 4) This “bearing of punishment” is salvific for humanity in virtue of its “exhausting” the requirement of punishment for sin. Humans do not need to bear the required punishment because the requirement was satisfied when the punishment was borne by the substitute.

As Sections III–VI attest, Aquinas, according to my argument, agrees with all four points of this account (with the important qualification that “this justice is based on the divine will”). While that itself is an important

⁶³Recall Stump’s description of the popular account given in footnote 1 above.

correction to Stump's account, we discern a further implication of the reading defended here when we observe that (1)–(4) also forms a *recognizably* even if *basic* "penal substitution" account of the atonement. Of course, one might object that PST holds that God *punishes* Jesus, and so we first need to consider whether Aquinas's talk of "Christ bearing our punishment" really amounts to talk of Christ being *punished* by God.⁶⁴ While this distinction is important, leaving it for another occasion does not prevent us from saying that (1)–(4) itself merit being called a "basic PST."⁶⁵ Like PST, (1)–(4) focuses on a requirement of divine justice for punishment; it sees a plight facing sinful humanity in virtue of that requirement; and it understands Christ's death in terms of substitution in fulfilling that requirement. Thus, insofar as we take for granted the penal-substitutionary character of (1)–(4), which it clearly appears to bear, my account of Aquinas on satisfaction suggest that, *contra* Stump's interpretation, one part of Aquinas's multifaceted account of the atonement resembles a *basic* PST — and not just "superficially."

Conclusion

Stump's exposition of Aquinas's account of the atonement helpfully conveys to a wider philosophical audience some of the non-judicial, non-penal-substitutionary functions Aquinas ascribes to Christ's death. Yet in her exposition, Stump claims not merely that Aquinas goes *beyond* a popular though philosophically embattled penal-substitution-style account of the atonement; she claims that Aquinas rejects (or at least does not endorse) the account as such. I have argued that this further, negative claim is incorrect. For Aquinas, divine justice *does* require satisfaction, albeit freely; satisfaction involves voluntarily undergoing punishment for sin required by divine justice; and one way Christ's death functions is by his "bearing the punishment" required by justice *for* us, in our place, to free us from our debt of punishment.⁶⁶

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⁶⁴This is the definition of PST given by Murphy, "Not Penal Substitution," 253–254.

⁶⁵I take up the issue of Aquinas's relation to PST, and the relation of "bearing punishment" to "being punished," in an article currently in preparation.

⁶⁶I would like to thank Marilyn Adams for her encouragement to develop an earlier version of this article; Alex Pruss, along with students of the Baylor philosophy department, for their feedback on a previous version of this material; and three anonymous reviewers of this journal for their very helpful comments.

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