

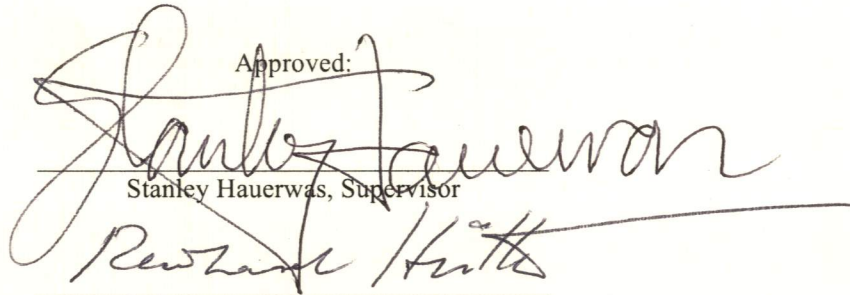
St. Thomas Aquinas on Disability & Profound Cognitive Impairment

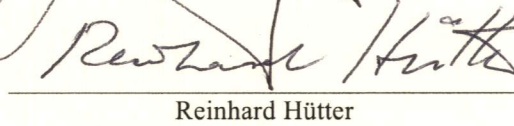
by

Miguel J. Romero

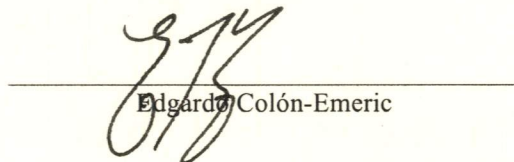
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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2012

ABSTRACT

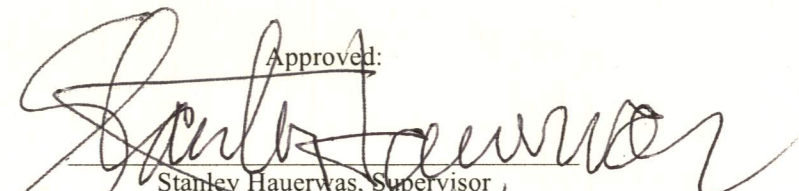
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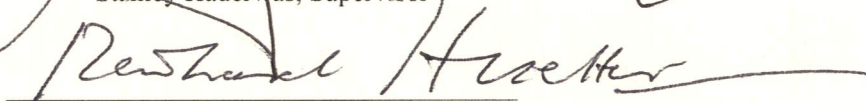
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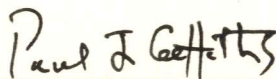
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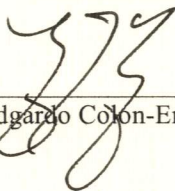

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Abstract

This dissertation raises a question regarding the relationship between the condition of the body, moral virtue, and human flourishing. Our main objective is to reconstruct Aquinas's theological understanding of corporeal infirmity in order to depict, in broad outline, a Thomistic theology of disability and cognitive impairment. A prominent concern in this investigation is to understand, according to Aquinas, the significance of the body in the perfection of human activity towards the realization of our natural and supernatural end, as well as the implications of Aquinas's view with respect to persons who have a profound and utterly debilitating cognitive impairment.

Remarks on disability and impairment are found throughout Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and his treatise *De Malo*. Although Aquinas did not compose an *ex professo* theological tract on 'disability,' the integral and systematic character of what he says about these matters implicates the whole of his thought and, in particular, his moral theology. In his *Summa*, Aquinas brings together careful scriptural exegesis, patristic and medieval sources, as well as the best philosophy of his day. The result, with respect to our theological understanding of corporeal infirmity, is an innovative and far-reaching depiction of a properly Christian understanding of these matters.

In the experience of corporeal infirmity, we are confronted with a question that pertains directly to the proper object of moral theology.¹ Regrettably, there remains a notable lacuna in contemporary Aquinas studies and Thomistic moral theology on the topics of disability and cognitive impairment. In particular, the vulnerability of human beings to the evil (*malum poenae*) of corporeal infirmity and the moral significance of profound affliction has received very little attention. We intend that the interpretive work of this investigation in the theology and philosophy of Aquinas will help address that lacuna.

We can describe the relevance of this project to the work of Thomistic moral theology in stronger terms. Aristotle's great insight was to understand that any description of the good life and the happy life of the human being cannot be separated from an account of how that life is possible for the kind of beings that we are, i.e., the biological constitution of the rational animal. Aquinas appropriated that Aristotelian thesis and revised it in the light of the Christian doctrine of creation. So conceived, integral to moral reasoning in the Thomistic

¹ For Aquinas, the question of happiness is the principle concern of all morality. To be happy is to live a good life, which is the life of moral virtue. Affirming that basic judgment, Servais Pinckaers, O.P., remarks that "if the idea of happiness is the initial consideration in moral theology, the place of suffering will be obvious, for it is precisely the reverse of happiness. Suffering will then be an element of moral theology from the very start...[the] banishment of the consideration of suffering from ethics is an outgrowth of a rationalistic conception of the human person." Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 25.

theological tradition is the ability to account for how faithful discipleship, Christoformic virtue, and cruciform love are possible for the kind of beings that we are, i.e., our creaturely constitution: mortal rational animals made in the image of God.

Moreover—and here are the stronger terms mentioned above—no moral theology can pretend to any measure of seriousness if it does not account for how discipleship, Christoformic virtue, and cruciform love is possible for the created rational animal *while contingently and unequally bearing the corporeal wounds of original sin*. Specifically, grace restores and heals what was lost at the fall (original justice), but baptism does not immediately heal the wounds of original sin in our bodies (our trust in Christ entails the hope of bodily resurrection). Yet, Christ calls us to discipleship, virtue, and love as we await the restoration and healing of our wounded bodies in the consummation of glory. On this understanding of the human predicament, our present concern is to provide a theological account of what it means for the created rational animal to flourish with respect to its natural and supernatural ends, even as it continues to bear the corporeal wounds of original sin.

The four chapters of this dissertation are divided into two parts. Part 1 (chapters 2 and 3) is concerned with Aquinas's understanding of the first perfection or creaturely integrity of the human being. The objective is to depict

Aquinas's account of the human being by showing how he made use of Aristotle and Augustine. Towards that end, chapter 2 focuses on Aristotle's metaphysical biology and his account of human defect; Aquinas's Augustinian doctrine of creation; and Aquinas's appropriation and subversion of Aristotle's account of 'defective human beings.' Of particular importance in chapter 2 is Aquinas's engagement with the forms of irrational human behavior described in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Aristotle's theory of natural slavery outlined in Book 1 of the *Politics* (i.e., despotic rule over an essentially defective human being who is incapable of discursive reasoning).

Special attention is given to the precise metaphysical defect of the 'slave by nature,' as distinct from other forms of human defect on Aristotle's terms. We show how Aquinas subverts Aristotle's notion of natural slavery (by rejecting the possibility of essential defect), while revising Aristotle's phenomenological description of the natural slave's dispositional dependency under the moral logic of merciful care for vulnerable and dependent persons. Specifically, Aquinas stipulates the moral imperative to counsel and protect human beings who variously and unequally 'lack the use of reason' due to an extraordinary injury of the cognitive faculties.

In chapter 3 we focus on Augustine's account of the image of God and the mind (*mens*); Aquinas's appropriation and development of Augustine on the

activity of the *imago trinitatis*; Aquinas's understanding of the rational soul as the substantial form of the body; and the incorruptible aptitude of the rational soul to image God by knowledge and by love.

Part 2 (chapters 4 and 5) treats Aquinas's understanding of the second perfection or orderly operation of the human being, and the effects of original sin upon that activity. The objective is to depict Aquinas's account of the purpose and perfection of the human being and to do so by showing how he went beyond Aristotle and Augustine. Chapter 4 describes Aquinas's understanding of the operational limitations unequally experienced by particular human beings as a consequence of original sin. We address, according to Aquinas, how the second perfection of the human being in operation came to be wounded, and we formulate a metaphysical account of evil suffered (or affliction). From that basis, a typological sketch of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment on Aquinas's terms is provided. The purpose of this systematic overview is to reconstruct Aquinas's theology of disability and cognitive impairment, to show its internal coherence, and to indicate points of significance from the aspect of our creaturely dignity and creaturely destiny.

Chapter 5 describes how those who 'lack the use of reason' participate in the sacramental life of the Church (principally through Baptism and Eucharist). In particular, we treat Aquinas's understanding of the condition *amentia*

(‘mindlessness’), where a person ‘lacks the use of reason’ due to a profound and utterly debilitating impairment of particular corporeal and cognitive faculties. We provide an account, on Aquinas’s terms, of the moral implications of a profound cognitive impairment on the order of *amentia*. Our interest is the way Christians afflicted with *amentia* can, on Aquinas’s view, participate in the life of the Church and live the virtues.

Specifically, just as the acquired virtues dispose and enable a person to act in accordance with the light of natural reason, which is proportionate to human nature; in the light of grace and consequent of baptism, the infused virtues dispose and enable a person to act in a ‘higher manner’ and toward ‘higher ends,’ in relation to a ‘higher nature’—which is our progress toward the perfect participation of the blessed in the divine nature. On Aquinas’s terms, the consummation of grace and infusion of supernatural virtue at baptism can be understood to capacitate someone who completely ‘lacks the use of reason’ with supernatural knowledge and a supernatural principle of self-movement. So capacitated, there is no reason to deny that a person afflicted with an *amentia*-like condition could be graced to realize a meritorious magnanimity in knowledge and love of God.

Likewise, on Aquinas’s terms, there is good reason to believe that in baptism persons with profound and utterly debilitating cognitive impairments

are capacitated for Christian friendship—even as they remain incapable of performing the acts ordinarily associated with Christian friendship. That is to say, although profoundly impaired, through baptism a person with an *amentia*-like condition is capable of the kind of friendship that is only possible for creatures endowed with an immortal and incorruptible rational soul. It is a friendship based on the fellowship of our deepest happiness, which is the consummation of grace; where our creaturely likeness to God according to image (by knowledge and by love) precedes and causes a supernatural likeness that we share as members of the Body of Christ.

Beginning with a thorough description of the human being and corporeal infirmity, on Aquinas's terms, and in light of his main influences, it is possible to reconstruct his account of cognitive impairment as such, its moral implications, and the moral significance of profound bodily affliction in the Christian understanding of the good life. The goal is to bring to light the doctrinal and moral integrity of what Aquinas says about physical disability and cognitive impairment—he says quite a lot—and, subsequently, to make reasonable inferences on those matters where he is silent.

Fate is not destiny. Saint Thomas Aquinas helps us recognize our fate—we who are or who will soon become weak, disabled, and cognitively impaired—in the light and the hope of the Divine consummation of nature, grace, and glory. He

helps us not only to see but also to recognize that the existence of the mortal rational animal, the image of God, is beautiful. It is the beauty that belongs to the One called Beautiful, the exemplar after whom our likeness is for now but an imperfect shadow. Our infirmities, the evil we suffer, and the afflictions of our mortal wretchedness is our fate; but our fate will be redeemed and made perfect in the light of His glory, through the Beauty of the Cross.

For my brother, Vicente Juan Romero;
A token of my gratitude for the gift and giftedness of his friendship.

La Fiesta de San José Obrero

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1 The 'Invention' of A Thomistic Theology of Disability & Impairment

This dissertation raises a question regarding the relationship between the condition of the body, moral virtue, and human flourishing. Our main objective is to reconstruct Aquinas's theological understanding of corporeal infirmity in order to depict, in broad outline, a Thomistic theology of disability and cognitive impairment. A prominent concern in this investigation is to understand, according to Aquinas, the significance of the body in the perfection of human activity towards the realization of our natural and supernatural end, as well as the implications of Aquinas's view with respect to persons who have a profound and utterly debilitating cognitive impairment.

Two discrete senses are indicated by our titular use of the word 'invent,' harkening back to an older use of the word in the Latin west.¹ First, we mean to indicate that Aquinas creatively 'invents,' by way of Augustine and Aristotle, a way to think theologically about corporeal infirmity, physical disability, and persons who 'lack the use of reason.' It is a mode of

¹ That is to say 'inventus', as in a *discovery* or a *creation*; and, correspondingly, 'invenio', as in *I find* or *I recognize*. The dual etymological sense of 'invent' is preserved in the *Feast of the Invention of the Cross* (May 3rd), as it has been celebrated by Mozarabic Catholics in Spain since the 12th century. The feast however, dates as early as 630. See Raul Gomez-Ruiz, *Mozarabs, Hispanics, and the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2007), 84-89.

investigation and reflection that is rooted in Scripture, conversant with the Christian intellectual tradition, and philosophically sophisticated. Second, we mean to indicate that we discover, or, better, that we come to recognize with the help of Aquinas a goodness, beauty, and destiny that we might not have otherwise seen. Aquinas helps us recognize our own vulnerability and dependency, our disabilities and impairments, in the goodness of creation, in the perfection of grace, and in the glorious consummation of our hope.

For Aquinas, the most general description of the various ways that the human body is subject to damage, dysfunction, and decay is ‘corporeal infirmity’ (*corporis infirmitas*).² To a certain extent, Aquinas’s remarks on corporeal infirmity suggest a correspondence between his terminology and the contemporary category ‘disability.’ In ordinary use, both locutions can be used to demarcate a broad class of discrete conditions where some bodily organ, appendage, or system does not function in the conventional way. One

² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* [= *STh*] English translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Ave Maria Press, 1981), 1-2.77.3, *response*. Aquinas writes, “The human body is said to be infirm, when it is weakened or impaired in the execution of its proper action [*Dicitur autem corpus hominis esse infirmum, quando debilitatur vel impeditur in executione propriae operationis*], through some disorder of the body’s parts, so that the humors and members of the human body cease to be subject to its governing and motive power. Hence a member is said to be weak, when it cannot do the work of a healthy member, the eye, for instance, when it cannot see clearly...” *NB*: Except where noted otherwise, the Dominican Father’s translation will be used throughout. When necessary, adjustments will be made to that standard English translation for clarity or precision. In those cases, the Latin text will be provided in line.

key difference between these two terms, however, is the comparatively wider semantic range of the English word ‘disability,’ owing to its use across discursive and disciplinary domains.³ In contrast, for Aquinas, ‘corporeal infirmity’ only describes a faculty of the body that does not function in the conventional way, a condition that may or may not entail suffering, struggle, unjust discrimination, or require political accommodation.⁴

In the pages that follow, we will consider corporeal infirmity within the theology and philosophy of Aquinas. Special attention will be given to

³ For example, the word ‘disability’ is often used with reference to subjective experience (struggle or difficulty as disability), the consequences of problematic cultural or social customs (race, gender, or other ordinary differences as disability), or unnecessary political inequities (lack of access or support as disability). Hans S. Reinders provides insightful and illuminating discussion of the philosophical and political implications of the terminology we use when discussing matters related to physical and cognitive impairment. See, for example, Hans S. Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society: An Ethical Analysis* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame, 2000), 42-46; See also Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 44-47.

⁴ We will favor Aquinas’s terminology for this reason: the word *infirmity* (as Aquinas uses it) describes the character of a function, while the most common contemporary use of the word “disability” concerns a broad spectrum of context-specific assessments about particular goods which derive from various functions. For example, favoring one’s left hand is not an infirmity, but it might be a disability in some social contexts. In contrast, to be deaf is to have auditory organs that do not function as they ordinarily do within the human species—a proper corporeal infirmity, on Aquinas’s terms—but deafness does not necessarily entail disability, for either Aquinas or in fact of life. Similarly, to have a profound cognitive impairment is to have cognitive faculties that do not function the way they conventionally do for human beings. And although it is not necessary that such a condition should render someone so afflicted disabled, it is ordinarily the case. In the chapters that follow, we will use the terms corporeal infirmity and disability interchangeably, on the understanding that our principle concern in this discussion is a theological account of bodies that do not function in the conventional way.

matters that concern persons who ‘lack the use of reason,’ which for Aquinas broadly describes a spectrum of conditions similar to what we today identify as cognitive impairment.⁵ In particular, we will specially attend to Aquinas’s understanding of the condition *amentia* (‘mindlessness’), where a person ‘lacks the use of reason’ due to a profound impairment of particular corporeal faculties.⁶ Our interest is the way, on Aquinas’s view, Christians afflicted with *amentia* can live the virtues; and the implications of Aquinas’s view in our understanding of the good life. Although disability and cognitive impairment are the principal concern of our treatment of Aquinas, that concern includes

⁵ What it means to ‘lack the use of reason’ will be discussed in the chapters that follow (for representative passages from Aquinas, see *STh*, 101.2, *response*; 1-2.77.2, *response*; 3.68.12; 3.80.9). The term “cognitive impairment” is a blanket category most directly associated with the discipline and research of neuropsychology. Importantly, the use of the term is disciplined by its consistent use in a wide body of scientific literature, which belongs to an extensive and varied network of investigators and researchers. For the purposes of this investigation, analogous terms are intellectual disability, developmental disability, mental retardation, idiocy, etc. Nevertheless, in our treatment of Aquinas on “disability,” there is good reason to favor the semantic entailments of *cognitive impairment* over the language of *intellectual disability*. Specifically, the adjectival use of the word “cognitive” better isolates, on Aquinas’s terms, what exactly it is that is found to be impaired when someone ‘lacks the use of reason.’ Thomistically speaking, it is the operation called “cognition” that is impaired in those who ‘lack the use of reason.’ For Aquinas, the causes of this sort of impairment are individual and unique, but are always associated with some form of bodily injury or brain lesion (c.f., *STh*, 1.84.7, *response*; 2-2.15.1, *response*). The “intellect” or “rationality” of the human being, according to Aquinas, cannot be impaired in its principle operation. These matters will be discussed in Part 1. See also Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 12.3, *reply 7*. English translation of *De Malo* by Richard Regan; edited with introduction and notes by Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶ The term *amens* (“mindless person”) is variously translated as imbecile, idiot, madman, or fool, for example. The condition *amentia* is variously translated as “madness,” “insanity,” “lack of reason,” and “foolishness,” for example. This class of persons and this affliction will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

the further intent to depict Aquinas's understanding of the virtuous communal response to the ordinary vulnerabilities and dependencies of the human being—where the goods internal to shared life and friendship are recognized and pursued.⁷

Our aim is to bring to light the doctrinal and moral integrity of what Aquinas says about disability and cognitive impairment (he says quite a lot) and, subsequently, to make reasonable inferences on those matters where he is silent. This study is fundamentally an exercise in Thomistic interpretation. It is an attempt to answer the following question: In the mature theology of Thomas Aquinas, what is the relationship between the condition of the body, moral virtue, and human flourishing; and what are the implications of this relationship in Aquinas's understanding of the moral status, agency, and human potential of a person who has a profound cognitive impairment?

The remainder of this introduction will proceed as follows. First, we provide a general description of this investigation, addressing its warrant (1.1), method (1.2), and structure (1.3). Second, we treat two preliminary matters, by discussing the historical association of the condition *amentia* with

⁷ Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled*, 206-8.

Aristotle's so-called 'natural slave' (1.4) and the practical orientation of this theoretical enquiry (1.5).

1.1 *Moral Theology, Disability, Aquinas Studies, and the Relevant Literature*

On Aquinas's terms, an account of the weakened or impaired human body follows from the standard Christian affirmation that there is a relationship between our account of the human beings⁸, our understanding of human well-being with respect to particular ends⁹, and our discourse concerning the final perfection of the human being as the image of God. In the experience of corporeal infirmity, we are confronted with a question that pertains directly to the proper object of moral theology.¹⁰ Regrettably, there

⁸ An integral account of the human being; the created rational animal, the image of God; capable of perfection; created for the purpose of friendship with God.

⁹ A relational or proportional account of the human being in active relationship with other creatures and the Creator; a creature that is configured for particular ends, is capable of action, is wounded by sin, redeemed by grace, and destined for beatitude.

¹⁰ For Aquinas, the question of happiness is the principle concern of all morality. To be happy is to live a good life, which is the life of moral virtue. Affirming that basic judgment, Servais Pinckaers, O.P., remarks "if the idea of happiness is the initial consideration in moral theology, the place of suffering will be obvious, for it is precisely the reverse of happiness. Suffering will then be an element of moral theology from the very start." See Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* [= *Sources*](Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 25. On the moral significance and theological importance of affliction, a paraphrase and extension of what Pinckaers has to say should suffice (see Pinckaers, *Sources*, 18-27): Morality—and this is true for Aristotle and Plato, Augustine, the Greek and Latin Fathers, for Christian theologians and Pagan philosophers alike—is concerned with answering the basic question concerning human happiness. What the happiness we desire is and how one becomes happy. The Good News of Jesus Christ answers the question of our true and ultimate happiness, and moral

remains a notable lacuna in contemporary Aquinas studies and Thomistic moral theology on the topics of disability and cognitive impairment. In particular, the vulnerability of human beings to the evil (*malum poenae*) of corporeal infirmity and the moral significance of profound affliction has received very little attention from self-identified Aquinas specialists. This situation is analogous to MacIntyre's characterization of Anglophone moral philosophy in his 1998 *Carus Lecture*.¹¹ We intend that the interpretive work of this investigation in the theology and philosophy of Aquinas will help address that lacuna.

theology is concerned with understanding the ways that lead to true happiness or the form of life, the good life, that is true happiness. The human experience of misery, suffering, and profound wretchedness are fundamental features of the Gospel account of the Christian life. The relevance of suffering to the work of moral theology should not be understated: Christian discipleship is to suffer, we are called to take up our cross and follow Christ (Mark 8:34); we are baptized not only into Christ's Passion, but our physical and spiritual suffering fulfills what is lacking in Christ's suffering (Colossians 1:24). The moral significance of suffering and the privileged status of the wretched of the earth is plainly stated in the Beatitudes: excellence in the kingdom of heaven belongs, in a special way, to those who suffer as a result of poverty; physical and psychological affliction; or the endlessly imaginative ways we invent to persecute, exploit, and alienate one another (Matthew 5:3-12). Even for those who do not suffer and are not found wretched, the inheritance of eternal life is received through self-exposure, vulnerability, and dependency (Matthew 19:16-30).

¹¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), ix-x. MacIntyre remarks that moral philosophy, as a discipline, had yet to take seriously the significance of the ordinary vulnerabilities and dependencies that follow from the fact that human beings have bodies. In the decade following MacIntyre's *Carus Lecture*, a great deal of scholarship was produced by moral philosophers on the topic of cognitive impairment.

The relevance of this project to the work of Thomistic moral theology can be put in stronger terms. Aristotle’s great insight was to understand that any description of the good life and the happy life of the human being cannot be separated from an account of how that life is possible for the kind of beings that we are, i.e., the biological constitution of the rational animal. This is the ‘metaphysical biology’ that Alasdair MacIntyre was eager to abandon in *After Virtue*.¹² The core intuition of which—i.e., the connection between substantive moral philosophy and human animality—MacIntyre reconsiders in *Dependent Rational Animals*.¹³ It is relevant to note that our affirmation of Aristotle’s core insight regarding the moral significance of the human body does not necessitate an endorsement of Aristotle’s metaphysical biology or even a version of Aristotle’s metaphysical biology—for his own part, MacIntyre goes on to make a Thomistic-Aristotelian philosophical argument about the virtues that we need to flourish as dependent rational animals.¹⁴

¹² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 158-60.

¹³ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, x–xi. As an aside, MacIntyre acknowledges that this was something he learned from a prayer written by Aquinas.

¹⁴ MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 4-6. That is to say, according to MacIntyre, if we are to “develop from our initial animal condition into that of independent rational agents.” Although we will not treat MacIntyre’s project in *Dependent Rational Animals*, we hope to show that MacIntyre’s contrast of ‘initial animal condition’ with ‘independent rational agents’ does not square with Aquinas’s understanding of the human being as a mortal rational animal and image of God. Specifically, although it is correct to say that all human beings must develop into independent rational agents, Aquinas does not provide

Our present concern is different from MacIntyre's, though in general continuity when it comes to the importance of the body for moral reasoning about the human good and the good life.

Aquinas appropriated the Aristotelian thesis regarding the moral significance of our animality and revised it in the light of the Christian doctrine of creation. So conceived, integral to moral reasoning in the Thomistic theological tradition is the ability to account for how faithful discipleship, christoformic virtue, and cruciform love are possible for the kind of beings that we are, i.e., our creaturely constitution: mortal rational animals made in the image of God.

Moreover—and here are the stronger terms mentioned above—no moral theology can pretend to any measure of seriousness if it does not account for how discipleship, christoformic virtue, and cruciform love is possible for the created rational animal *while contingently and unequally bearing*

us with a way to think about that process as a transition from less rational to more rational. We are rational animals, for Aquinas; our form is reason. That is to say, reason is the species of our likeness unto God, a likeness which is according to image. (John O'Callaghan's formulation of this will be discussed in chapter 3) So, for Aquinas, there is no 'initial animal condition' of human beings, there is only the initial condition of the rational animal. One further note, nothing about this distinction necessarily implies a devaluation of our animality; rather, it is an affirmation that our theological understanding of the human being, if we are following Aquinas, presumes our creaturely status as mortal rational animals.

the corporeal wounds of original sin. Specifically, although baptismal grace restores and heals what was lost at the fall (original justice), baptism does not immediately heal the wounds of original sin upon our bodies (our trust in Christ entails the hope that these corporeal wounds will be healed at the resurrection). Yet, the baptized are called by Christ to discipleship, virtue, and love as we await the restoration and healing of our wounded bodies in the consummation of glory. On this understanding of the human predicament, our present concern is to provide a theological account of what it means for the created rational animal to flourish with respect to its natural and supernatural ends, even as it continues to bear the corporeal wounds of original sin.¹⁵

¹⁵ Beyond MacIntyre's philosophical engagement with Aquinas on the theological virtue *miser cordia*, the body of relevant literature is profoundly limited. Francisco de Vitoria discusses the condition *amentia* with considerable seriousness in his small tract on moral obligation and the use of reason titled "De Eo Ad Quod Tenetur Homo Ueniens Ad Usum Rationis," in *Relecciones Teologicas del Maestro Fray Francisco de Vitoria*, edited by Luis G. A. Getino (Madrid: Imprenta la Raza, 1935), 312-352. Vitoria also provides a careful and measured acknowledgement of the condition *amentia* (and the moral obligation of Christians in response to the condition) in his well known tract *De Indis et De iure belli relectiones*, edited by Ernest Nys, John Pawley Bate, Johann Georg Simon, and Herbert F. Wright (Washington: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1917), most notably in his so-called 'Eighth Title.' More recently, the Robert Slavin, O.P., variously discusses brain injury, "degrees of intellectual capacity," "imbeciles," and "mental defectives" in his dissertation entitled *The Philosophical Basis of Individual Differences: According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Ph.D. dissertation: Catholic University of America, 1936). Slavin's several excurses treating corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment on Thomistic terms suffers on the grounds that he does not take his cues from what Aquinas actually has to say on these matters. Nevertheless, the resulting imprecisions are not able to

Despite the scarcity of Thomistic engagements on the topic of disability and related themes, Aquinas has indeed been taken up by scholars concerned with these matters. In the past century, a handful of self-identified non-specialists in Aquinas have offered interpretations. The relevant theological proposals of non-specialties vary in sophistication and length, but share in common a general unfamiliarity with several of the more basic principles of Aquinas's thought—unfamiliarity that, in most cases, cannot be considered a fault, given their respective concerns.¹⁶ There is no question, however, that the overwhelming majority of the scholarly work concerning Aquinas on themes related to corporeal infirmity has come from specialists in the fields of psychology and psychiatry. The governing concern in this body of literature is the way in which Aquinas's own psychology can help advance

obscure the obvious compassion by which Slavin seems to be motivated. More recently, Richard Cross has written on Aquinas and baptism in a forthcoming essay provisionally titled "Baptism, Faith, and Severe Cognitive Impairment in Some Medieval Theologies" (expected 2012). Unfortunately, time constraints made it impossible to take Cross's essay into consideration for the work of this dissertation.

¹⁶ Key theological engagements with Aquinas by non-specialists on the topic of disability and related themes include the following. Theologian and philosopher Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 88-122, 279-310, 352-4; and his essay "Life's Goodness," *Theology, Disability and the New Eugenics: Why Science needs the Church* (London: T & T Clark, 2007). Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007), 264-266. Peter Byrne, *Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000), 146-147. Our interpretation of Aquinas on the question of corporeal infirmity, as it relates to disability and cognitive impairment is at variance with and sometimes strictly contradicts the readings of Aquinas advanced by the above theologians.

or correct certain tendencies in modern psychology.¹⁷ The general concern of this limited, yet substantive, body of literature is to reflect upon ‘mental illness’ and/or ‘psychological disorder’ by why of Aquinas. More recently, theologian and psychiatrist Warren Kinghorn has adapted a philosophically analytic interpretation of Aquinas’s moral theology for re-imagining the significance of virtue in the development of psychiatric diagnostic criteria.¹⁸

¹⁷ For example, see E.E. Krapf’s monograph *Thomas de Aquino y la psicopatologi* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Index, 1943). Representative articles include Paul Kopp’s “Psychiatrisches bei Thomas von Aquin,” *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 152 (1935): 178–196; Gottfried Roth’s “Thomas von Aquin in der neueren und neuesten Psychiatrie,” *Confinia Psychiatrica* 3 (1960): 180–186; and Jacques Simonnet’s “Folie et notations psychopathologiques dans l’oeuvre de Saint Thomas d’Aquin,” in *Nouvelle histoire de la psychiatrie*, edited by Jacques Postel and Claude Quételet (Toulouse: Privat, 1983) [c.f., Hirvonen (2006)]. See also Martín Echavarría’s “Las enfermedades mentales según Tomás de Aquino sobre las enfermedades (mentales) en sentido estricto,” *Scripta Mediaevalia*, 2, no. 2: 85-105. Particularly noteworthy is Simonnet’s 1971 dissertation (M.D., psychiatry) entitled *Du Concept de maladie mentale chez saint Thomas d’Aquin*. Simonnet’s is the only monograph length account of the condition *amentia* in the thought of Aquinas. Unfortunately, Simonnet’s treatment of Aquinas is analytically undisciplined and exegetically inaccurate. In developing what he identifies as the clinical utility of Aquinas’s account of ‘folly’ (i.e., *amentia*), Simonnet deals with a very limited number of primary texts. As a result, he is not able to advance his analysis of the theme *amentia* in Aquinas (which he misconstrues as dynamically equivalent to Foucault’s “*folie*” from *Madness and Civilization*) much further than the basic demonstration that the theme is there to be developed in some internally coherent form. There is a confusion of basic Thomistic terms and categories throughout. Simonnet’s analysis, moreover, is fraught with theological and philosophical imprecisions unrelated to his explication of Aquinas. His conclusion seeks to establish the (dubious) correspondence between Aquinas on folly/*amentia*/mental illness and Foucault’s account of the fool/madman in *Madness and Civilization*.

¹⁸ See Warren Kinghorn’s 2011 dissertation “Medicating the Eschatological Body,” (Th.D. dissertation: Duke University Divinity School, 2009), chapters 6-8; esp. section 8.2.1. The chapters from Kinghorn’s dissertation that are relevant to our concerns sketch the standard account of Aquinas’s psychology, with careful attention to the wider horizon of Aquinas’s theological anthropology, and in rejection of what Kinghorn identifies as four

Through a reconstruction of Aquinas's account of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment we expect (or, better, we hope) that moralists working in the Thomistic tradition will be better equipped to attend theologically to the fact of human vulnerability and the experience of affliction. The proximate goal of this reconstruction is to support theological work that takes seriously the connection between the experience of affliction and our understanding of human happiness. We further intend that this study will contribute to the development of Aquinas's account of corporeal infirmity and the moral implications of cognitive impairment; and, moreover, that this happen in dialogue with Thomistic theology, Catholic moral theology, and contemporary theologies of disability. This inquiry will provide, we hope, a point of departure for those who are tasked with the catechetical formation of a people who recognize that there are goods internal to sustaining the lives of and sharing friendship with persons who are

common contemporary misreadings of Aquinas. Focused as it is on mental illness and the contemporary use of psychiatric technology, Kinghorn advances the relevant psychiatry-specific literature on Aquinas of the past eighty years, by drawing attention to the relationship between Aquinas's psychology and the Aristotelian-Thomistic account of the virtues. In essence, Kinghorn argues that only a tradition-constituted account of human nature, like the teleological and hylomorphic understanding developed by Aquinas, can sustain a nosology adequate to the task of guiding contemporary applications of psychiatric technology. I am intellectually indebted and personally grateful to Warren Kinghorn for his kindness as a conversation partner during the development of my own reading of Aquinas on these matters.

cognitively impaired. In that regard, we understand this work as part of a larger contemporary project to recover a traditional and tradition-disciplined Christian account of corporeal infirmity, and the moral implications of disability and profound cognitive impairment.

1.2 Aquinas, 'Disability,' and Method

Throughout his work, Aquinas variously notes and considers the ordinary fact that the human body is vulnerable to damage, dysfunction, and decay—instances of what we will variously refer to as corporeal infirmity, impairment, or disability (that is, 'disability' under the more circumscribed use indicated above; referring exclusively to bodily damage, dysfunction, or decay).

Usually discussed with reference to particular afflictions, his remarks on bodily weakness and related themes are woven into the scholastic contours of each part of his mature work in the *Summa Theologica*.¹⁹ Although Aquinas did not compose an *ex professo* theological treatise on 'disability,' the integral and systematic character of what he says about these matters

¹⁹ For this study, we will focus on Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* and his treatise *De Malo* (supplemented by a broad selection of Aquinas's other writings).

implicates the whole of his thought and, in particular, his moral theology.²⁰ In his *Summa*, Aquinas brings together the resources of careful scriptural exegesis, theological insights from Patristic authorities and medieval interlocutors, and the best philosophy of his day—and the result, with respect to our theological understanding of corporeal infirmity, is an innovative and far-reaching depiction of a properly Christian understanding of these matters. The gift of Aquinas’s imaginative work for our day is particularly noteworthy when his thinking on corporeal infirmity is examined in light of the contemporary concern and interest in ‘disability.’²¹

One significant challenge, however, facing any attempt to systematically reconstruct how Aquinas understood corporeal infirmity is the wide diffusion his remarks and their nuanced integration into his theological

²⁰ Aquinas’s remarks on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment are metaphysically complex. These remarks, moreover, are found in every major section of his *Summa*—the treatise on the human being, his moral theology, his account of the virtues, his Christology, his treatment of the sacraments, etc. By comparison, the handful of studies on ‘disability’ in Aquinas have primarily focused on his doctrine of God and his treatise on the human being.

²¹ A matter to be discussed below, the theological and philosophical premises from which Aquinas wrote undermine certain terms which condition many of the most trenchant theological problems we associate with the ordinary experience of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment. For example, Aquinas presumes that a human being with a profound, life-long cognitive impairment bears the image of God without defect and is capable of realizing proximate goods proportionate to human nature and supernatural goods that exceed human nature. Thus, Aquinas’s presumption on what it means to be a human being excludes from the outset modern anthropological anxieties concerning whether or not one so afflicted is a ‘person.’ That is to say, questions that have motivated, for example, no small number of theological engagements with Peter Singer’s work.

thinking. As indicated above, a great deal of what Aquinas wrote on these matters can be interpreted as more or less corresponding to the contemporary notion of 'disability.' Nevertheless, despite the loose semantic correspondences, it would be a mistake to presume that our contemporary formulations and philosophical difficulties related to the category of 'disability' and related themes will find an unproblematic analogue in Aquinas's thought.

Our insistence upon the difference between Aquinas's understanding of 'corporeal infirmity' and our contemporary notion of 'disability—even as we capitalize of their similarities—has to do with certain semantic muddles that condition Anglophone theological engagements with disability. Specifically, when it comes to reading Aquinas, one particularly noteworthy difficulty has to do with translation and the interpretive history supporting particular translation choices. The reason for raising these issues is our desire to avoid the consequences of hasty and unsubstantiated interpretations of particular texts— eisegesis of the 'plain sense,' so to speak—concerning what may or may not be relevant to our reconstruction of Aquinas's theology of

weakness, disability and cognitive impairment; and, further, the moral significance of cognitive impairment in his thought.²²

One instance of the sort of semantic muddle we aim to avoid, common amongst Anglophone interpreters of Aquinas, is the construal of the condition that Aquinas calls *amentia* (a form of cognitive impairment) as a mental illness or cognitive disorder—where the *amens* (a person afflicted with *amentia*) is a template upon whom interpreters have projected ‘mental illness’ writ large; everything from schizophrenia and depression, to PTSD, dementia, and Alzheimer’s Disease.²³ Part of the problem, no doubt, can be

²² Anthony Pagden writes regarding this issue. Contemporary treatments of premodern arguments and discussions “seem to be laboring under the misapprehension that the analysis of texts which were written by men whose world was wholly unlike our own is essentially an unproblematical enterprise. The text is assumed to be merely what is there on the page. All but the minimum of contextual information is held to be irrelevant. What a sixteenth century theologian might have meant by a word or phrase and what a modern theologian might have understood by the same word or phrase is assumed to be, in all significant respects, the same. This failure to perceive that words change their meaning and that issues of pressing intellectual concern for one generation may be of scant interest to the next, has led to much historically irrelevant and politically tendentious discussion by scholars...over the ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of certain writer’s arguments.” *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7.

²³ In his essay “Mental Disorders in Late Medieval Philosophy and Theology”, Vesa Hirvonen analyzes three late medieval theologians—Peter Olivi, John Duns Scotus, and William Ockham—and outlines their respective theories of mental disorder. He begins his essay by reviewing the modest, but by no means nonexistent, number of investigations into medieval theories of mental disorder that have been produced in the last one hundred years. Hirvonen makes special note of the scholarly attention that has been given to the psychological theories generated during the early and high medieval periods, especially the thought of Aquinas. Hirvonen is certainly correct that Aquinas’s psychology and philosophy of mind has received a great deal of scholarly attention (R.E.

traced to the way Aquinas's use of the term *amentia* has been translated into English. In the widely used English translation produced by the Dominican Fathers, for example, the word is variously translated (and, thereby, interpreted) as 'imbecile,' 'madman,' 'idiot,' 'fool,' or someone 'insane,' 'demented,' or 'deranged.'²⁴ To a great extent (and as we will show in chapter 4), this inconsistency in translation obscures the nuanced way Aquinas formulates and makes use the notion *amentia*. Yet, though misleading, this inconsistency is certainly understandable. Specifically, because the concepts in question have only been thematized on Aquinas's terms a handful of times since the 16th century, it was certainly inevitable that multiple translators,

Brennan's *Thomistic Psychology* (1941) is exemplary in this regard). Nevertheless, as his cursory review of the literature suggests, although there are indeed a handful studies focused on mental or psychological disorder in the thought of Aquinas, there have been no monograph length studies which substantively locate Aquinas's theory of mental disorder within the wider horizon of his theology and philosophy—in particular, Aquinas's basic understanding of corporeal infirmity. This situation suggests, at the very least, that we are long overdue for such a work. Vesa Hirvonen's essay can be found in *Mind and Modality: Studies in the History of Philosophy in Honour of Simo Knuuttila*, edited by Vesa Hirvonen, Toivo J. Holopainen and Miira Tuominen, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, volume 141 (Brill, 2006).

²⁴ What exactly Aquinas means by *amentia* and how the condition relates to other ways a person might 'lack the use of reason' will be discussed in chapter 4. For now, we'll simply state that although it is appropriate to regard the cognitive *disorders* that Aquinas identifies as corporeal infirmities, Aquinas also speaks of corporeal infirmities that are not disorders, but *impairments*. It is the difference between an organ that does no function in the ordinary way and an organ that functions in the ordinary way, but does so in a weakened or limited way.

working simultaneously, might gloss over distinctions related to a topic that was not at the forefront of their theological imagination.

These translation issues are only compounded by the fact that Aquinas's thoughts on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment are complex, and span his entire body of writing. For that reason, it is not uncommon for appropriately rough contemporary glosses of Aquinas's dogmatic and moral theology to re-introduce problems concerning disability and cognitive impairment that Aquinas was keen to solve.²⁵ Much of what Aquinas presumes on these matters is easy to miss, and there is a resulting tendency in the secondary literature to presume that Aquinas had little interest in the ordinary susceptibility of the human cognitive faculties to

²⁵ As an illustration of why Aquinas's thoughts on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment require such broad and careful reading, beyond his *Treatise on the Human Being*, the problem can be illustrated by way of three basic thesis: On Aquinas's view, (1) the proximate and ultimate flourishing of the human being, the created rational animal and image of God, involves corporeal faculties and powers; (2) the power of cognition has a special role in the acquisition and actualization of the cardinal virtues [proximate flourishing] and the growth or magnification of the infused virtues [ultimate flourishing]; and (3) consequent of the Fall, the bodies of human beings in general and our cognitive faculties in particular are unequally subject in time to the evil (*malum poenae*) of corporeal infirmity. So, given these three standard thesis on how the body relates to virtue in Aquinas's moral theology, it would seem that cognitive impairment, distinct from all other forms of corporeal infirmity, presents a challenge for moral reasoning in the Thomistic tradition. This, we should note, is the basic critique of Aquinas posed by Hans S. Reinders in his book *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*. We intend that the chapters of this dissertation will show nuance and beauty of Aquinas's understanding of cognitive impairment and the moral implications of profound cognitive impairment.

damage, dysfunction, and decay.²⁶ We intend that his dissertation will address these problems.

Methodology

The interpretive approach of this study aims at avoiding the semantic muddles indicated above. For this dissertation we have adapted and integrated the methods proposed, respectively, by I.T. Eschmann in his book *The Ethics of Saint Thomas Aquinas*²⁷ and by Nicholas Lombardo in *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*.²⁸ Following the architectonic of Aquinas's *Summa*, in the mode recommended by Eschmann, we will treat particular psychosomatic phenomena under the relevant 'terms of comparison' or presuppositions that condition what Aquinas has to say.²⁹ Our 'terms of comparison' include [A] the immediate context ('coordinated texts'), [B] the semantic or thematic horizon ('parallel texts'), and [C] the explicit or implicit

²⁶ The complexity of what Aquinas wrote, however, is only a partial answer. In addition to the ordinary challenges associated with translation and interpretation, we should note one further difficulty that is historical in character. The further difficulty has to do with contemporary presumptions about how disability, mental illness, and cognitive impairment were understood in medieval thought, and a radical shift in the way these concepts in Aquinas were interpreted in the 16th century. We will discuss these matters, to a limited extent, in the second part of this Introduction.

²⁷ Ignatius Theodore Eschmann, *The Ethics of Aquinas: Two Courses*, edited by Edward A. Synan and Mark Jordan, Etienne Gilson Series 20. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997).

²⁸ Nicholas Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 2001).

²⁹ Eschmann, *The Ethics of Aquinas*, 6-10.

interlocutors (the thinkers and authorities with whom Aquinas is in dialogue).³⁰

Our presumption will be, in the manner outlined by Lombardo, that Aquinas intends to use the relevant terminology with theological precision and analytic consistency.³¹ Any resemblance to discrete conditions that we ordinarily associate with disability or cognitive impairment will be noted (and the appropriate English word will be used), but its characterization will be formulated on Aquinas's terms. For example, although the same word is

³⁰ Eschmann's recommended reading strategy is, in essence, a mode of textual interpretation that aims to mitigate the consequences of the biases and presuppositions that readers from any period inevitably bring to their interpretation of historical texts. The goal is to interpret what Aquinas has to say as intelligently as possible. As a formula of 'things to keep in mind', Eschmann's method can be paraphrased as follows. [A] *Coordinated texts*—The immediate context of the selection under consideration. The prologues that outline the explicit intent for each section will be afforded a privileged status as setting forth the operative architectonic that comes to bear on the particular text under investigation. The assumption throughout is that Aquinas organized his writing with a purpose and that the intelligibility of particular sections is illuminated by their immediate and wider placement within governing framework. [B] *Parallel texts*—These are instances where Aquinas considers or treats the same subject in either the *Summa* or in another work. Those goal is to achieve a measure of semantic stability for key terms and concepts. Our attention to parallel texts will bring into sharp relief what exactly is at stake for Aquinas in the given section and offers the added benefit of showing what, if any, development there might have been in Aquinas's understanding of particular terms and concepts. [C] *Influences and interlocutors*—The situatedness of Aquinas's argument within what MacIntyre calls a 'tradition-constituted and tradition-constituting inquiry' will be illuminated by an examination of the authorities he cites and the various thinkers with whom he is both explicitly and implicitly in conversation.

³¹ Lombardo, *Logic of Desire*, 18. Lombardo notes that analytic philosophers take a similar approach when they consider the concept of emotion in dialogue with other philosophical traditions. It is presumed, Lombardo explains, that a particular and limited set of phenomena is indicated by the common and ordinary use of the word "emotion"—for example, the common experience of joy or sadness.

used, Aquinas's use of the term 'idiot' is not identical to our contemporary use of the term 'idiot.'³²

This presumption about the ordinary character of corporeal infirmity (and Aquinas's awareness of that fact), will allow us to read Aquinas closely when he notes or comments upon particular conditions. Through close attention to the presuppositions and principles that come to bear upon Aquinas's terminology, we hope to avoid most of the muddles that pervade contemporary readings of Aquinas on disability.³³ Given our special concern with cognitive impairment in Aquinas's thought, additional attention will be given to phenomena which we would ordinarily associate with the notions 'mental handicap,' 'retardation,' 'intellectual disability,' or 'imbecility.'

³² For Aquinas, an "idiot" is an uneducated, rural person who has difficulty navigating the social and institutional mores of the 13th century city.

³³ Eliminating or mitigating projective tendencies in our interpretation of Aquinas's concept of *amentia* and the class of person he calls the *amens* is particularly important. In particular, because Aquinas uses the concept in a way that has no clear contemporary analogue. Specifically, Aquinas's use of the concept entails a distinction. In some places he discusses what we will term the '*amens* in principle,' speculating on matters that we cannot know directly. Elsewhere, he treats pastoral challenges involving persons who are in a condition that seems like *amentia*. What is key here is that, for Aquinas, we have no way of knowing what takes place in the inner or hidden life of people with *amentia*-like conditions. The nature of the *amentia* makes it impossible for those so afflicted to communicate their experience of the impairment. We simply cannot know in principle, according to Aquinas, if we are faced with an *amens*. Nevertheless, the speculative caricature of the *amens*—the most extreme case of an *amentia*-like condition—is utilized by Aquinas at key points, and usually in conjunction with less profound forms of cognitive impairment.

There are at least two risks associated with the approach just outlined. First, it makes it more difficult to recognize when particular words are being used as epithets, informally, or metaphorically. The word *stultus* (a 'foolish' or 'stupid' or 'dim-witted' person), for example, has both a formal or technical use, and an informal, metaphorical use. Second, there is the risk of our imposing an analytic precision onto Aquinas that simply is not there; that is, inventing connections that do not exist, nuances that exceed, obscure, or even undermine the plain sense of the text.

An additional risk of this approach is its tendency away from the material history of Aquinas, in favor of the internal integrity of the ideas themselves; particularly in the case of Aquinas's many pastoral remarks on disability related themes and conditions. To a certain extent, we lose a sense of Aquinas the Dominican friar, preacher; and (importantly) Aquinas the physically vulnerable and profoundly dependent human being; a man whose mortal fragility and ordinary limitations prevented him from completing his *Summa*. It is certainly relevant to our concerns that (as legend would have it) Aquinas was mocked for both his size and faltering speech as a young man (they called him a 'dumb ox') and that a special table was built to accommodate his girth (perhaps he had a glandular condition?).

Of particular relevance, with respect to the man, are the events of Aquinas's final three months. On December 6, 1273, while celebrating the Mass, St. Thomas was suddenly shaken (*commotus*) by something that "profoundly affected and changed him," after which he could not continue his work.³⁴ Aquinas's impairment was so severe, at least initially, that a Dominican brother described his condition as *amentia*.³⁵ From then until his death on March 7, 1274, Aquinas was constantly 'dazed' and 'out of his senses' (*stupefactus*), his speech was impaired, he lost manual dexterity in his hands, and his ordinarily steady gait was reduced to a shuffle—all standard symptoms of severe brain damage through hemorrhage.³⁶ In his final days, he could no longer take care of himself and received the *Viaticum* to help him on his way, a final provision for our passage from the afflictions and sufferings of this life into the life of the blessed.

³⁴ James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), 321-22. Weisheipl interprets reports of the event as indicating, unproblematically, both an authentic mystical experience and an acute physical or mental breakdown. We are in complete agreement with Weisheipl on this point.

³⁵ "Idem vero frater Raynaldus, timens ne propter multum studium aliquam incurrisset amentiam" (*Processus canonizationis Neapoli*, n.79).

³⁶ Edmund Colledge "The Legend of St. Thomas Aquinas" *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974; commemorative studies*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974). 13-28, esp. 26. Weisheipl narrates the various struggles, physical and cognitive challenges, and further injuries that Aquinas incurred in his final months—including a severe head trauma, just weeks before his death, after which Aquinas was disoriented and unable to stand. See Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas*, 320-7. When asked if he was injured, St Thomas responded *quod parum* (*Processus canonizationis Neapoli*, n.78).

Those are the risks that characterize our methodological approach in this study of Aquinas. We believe, however, that the benefits of this approach outweigh the consequences. Nevertheless, something important would be lost if we failed to keep in mind the above image of Aquinas in his final days: St. Thomas Aquinas, a stupefied, stammering, and shuffling man; mindless and feeble; vulnerable and profoundly dependent.

1.3 *Organizing Rationale and Description of Structure*

1.3.1 *The first and second perfections; constitutive limits and impairment*

Parts 1 and 2 are related in a manner that roughly corresponds with two modes of theological reflection or questioning about humanity modeled in the structure of the *Summa Theologica*.³⁷ The first mode belongs to Aquinas's *Treatise on the Human Being* (QQ. 1.75–102), concerning what a human being is—which includes both the essential nature of humankind (QQ. 1.75–89) and the creation of the human being in the image of God (QQ. 1.90–102). The second mode of reflection belongs to Aquinas's enormous treatment of human action in the second part of the *Summa Theologica* (Parts 1-2 and 2-2), concerning human well-being—which includes an account of the natural and

³⁷ C.f., Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 7-22 (especially 16-20). See also Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1988), 352-390.

supernatural happiness of the human being (QQ. 1-2.1–5); the means through which those ends are attained or lost (QQ. 1-2.6–89)³⁸; the divine support of our activity toward those ends (1-2.90–114); and the perfection of the human being in virtue (2-2.1–189).

The first mode of questioning concerns the human being as such, our essential nature and our existence as the image of God: *the first perfection*. The second mode of questioning concerns the activity and flourishing of particular human beings, the dramatic unfolding of divine grace in time and our individual experience of redemption: *the second perfection*. For the purposes of our investigation, following Aquinas's lead in the structure of his *Summa* highlights a key distinction in his thought pertaining to the vulnerabilities and dependencies of the human being. Specifically, we are referring to the difference between 'constitutive limitations,' substantial properties (with respect to species and creaturely integrity); and 'operative limitations' or 'impairments,' accidental characteristics (with respect to circumstance and the fallibility of matter). Aquinas indicates the importance

³⁸ *STh*, 1-2.1, *prologue*. Aquinas writes "In this matter we shall consider first the last end of human life; and secondly, those things by means of which man may advance towards this end, or stray from the path: for the end is the rule of whatever is ordained to the end."

of this distinction throughout his body of work. In his treatise *De Malo*, for example, he writes

if there are deficiencies in aspects of things in nature, we cannot say that the deficiencies are evils for them. For example, it is not evil for human beings not to have wings, nor for stones not to have the power of sight, since these deficiencies are according to nature.³⁹

In his *Summa*, Aquinas provides an alternative formulation of the same distinction with a different emphasis:

not every defect of good is an evil, but [only] the defect of the good which is naturally due. For the want of sight is not an evil in a stone, but it is an evil in an animal; since it is against the nature of a stone to see.⁴⁰

On the basis of the foregoing distinctions, the following is presumed in the overall account provided in this dissertation. First, for Aquinas, *vulnerability and dependency* are essential to the human condition (or, well-being), these are constitutive limitations and are proper to the first perfection of the human being *qua* created rational animal and image of God. Second,

³⁹ *De Malo*, 1.3, response; c.f. *STh* 1.96.3, response. Similarly, Aquinas writes in his *Compendium Theologiae* [= *CT*], §114 “A question worthy of consideration arises at this point. As the term “good” signifies perfect being, so the term “evil” signifies nothing else than privation of perfect being. In its proper acceptance, privation is predicated of that which is fitted by its nature to be possessed, and to be possessed at a certain time and in a certain manner. Evidently, therefore, a thing is called evil if it lacks a perfection it ought to have. Thus if a man lacks the sense of sight, this is an evil for him. But the same lack is not an evil for a stone, for the stone is not equipped by nature to have the faculty of sight.”

⁴⁰ *STh*, 1.48.5, response.

affliction and impairment are not essential to the human condition, but are the accidental privations experienced by particular human beings after the Fall—such operational limitations are not proper to the second perfection of the human being *qua* created rational animal and image of God.⁴¹

⁴¹ C.f., MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 4. It is worth noting that MacIntyre does not formulate his account of human vulnerability and dependency in a manner that recognizes these distinctions.

1.3.2 *Description of dissertation structure*

The four chapters of this dissertation are divided into two unequal parts. Part 1 is the larger of the two and our concern is Aquinas's understanding of the first perfection of the human being (that which is untouched by sin). The objective is to depict Aquinas's account of the human being and to do so by showing how he made use of Aristotle and Augustine. One way of understanding Aquinas's account of the human being is to investigate how he navigates the anthropological 'problem cases' of his two main influences. For Aristotle's part, the problem cases are *defective human beings*: women, 'slaves by nature,' and bestial men. Aristotle understands the essential defects of these three classes as the consequence of the plasticity of matter. For Augustine's part, the problem cases are wounded or *damaged human beings*: the stupefied, the comatose, the insane, and monsters. Augustine understands this damage to be the consequence of original sin, which impaired the praeternatural ability of the human being to overcome the plasticity of matter.

Aristotle and Augustine each provide an account of why these problem cases are intelligible on the basis of their respective descriptions the human being; that is to say, why these forms of human life do not undermine their respective accounts of the human being. For Aristotle, the function

(*ergon*) of the human being is ordered towards the realization of the perfect or complete human nature: the well-born, well-formed, adult Athenian male. Defective human beings do not undermine Aristotle's account, on Aristotle's terms, because the *telos* of the human being is not individual and the functional participation of defective human beings in the realization of that political purpose can be fulfilled through a species of friendship with a perfectible adult male. For Aristotle, defective humans are members of the human species (they share in the form [*eidōs*] of the human), and they have a proper function (*ergon*) in relationship to the *telos* of the human being.

For Augustine, the purpose of the human being is to perfectly image God in the beatific vision; extraordinarily damaged human beings do not undermine Augustine's account of humankind because the purpose of the human being cannot be ultimately thwarted by bodily damage. Wounded by original sin, all human beings are in some way damaged and dysfunctional. Those who are extraordinarily and unusually damaged in this life, are unambiguously rational creatures, and function as signs (or portents) to the goodness and beauty of God's creation. For Augustine, the ultimate good of damaged human beings—as with all human beings—will be fulfilled when their particular bodily injuries and impairments are healed at the Resurrection. Extraordinarily damaged human beings are fully human, but

their potential to realize proximate and ultimate moral goods can be significantly, and even profoundly, hindered in this life.

The solutions of Aristotle and Augustine leave something to be desired. For Aristotle, his account of defective human beings reflects the coalescence of a particular understanding of natural history and contingent cultural practices. For Augustine, his account of damaged human beings allows for only the thinnest account of the virtue and vocation of cognitively impaired persons in this life. Aquinas's explicit and implicit navigation of the anthropological 'problem cases' of his two main influences indicates what of the human being, on Aquinas's view, is incorruptible and likewise untouched by the effects of original sin; and importantly, by way of his selective integration of their respective strengths, Aquinas is able to supplement the previously mentioned weaknesses of each account.

Chapter 2 will focus on Aristotle's metaphysical biology; Aquinas's Augustinian doctrine of creation; and Aquinas's appropriation and revision of Aristotle on the human being. Chapter 3 will focus on Augustine's account of the image of God and the mind (*mens*); Aquinas's Aristotelian understanding of the rational soul as the form of the body; and Aquinas's appropriation and development of Augustine on the human being as the image of God. In our presentation of Aquinas on the human being in Part 1, it

will be necessary for us to presume the conclusions that precede Aquinas's *Treatise on the Human Being*—in particular his account of evil and affliction.⁴²

Part 2 (chapters 4 and 5) is the smaller of the two parts. Our concern is Aquinas's understanding of the second perfection of the human being (that which is affected or wounded by sin). The objective is to depict Aquinas's account of the purpose and perfection of the human being and to do so by showing how he went beyond Aristotle and Augustine. Aquinas understands the human being to have two ends. A natural end that is proportionate to the first perfection of the human being, the life of grace and virtue. And an

⁴² By structuring this dissertation in the way we have, we are departing from the exact order of the relevant doctrinal themes in *Summa Theologica*. The reasons for this departure are pragmatic in nature. A more complete and clear account of Aquinas on the concerns of this dissertation would follow the structure or *ordo doctrinae* of the *Summa Theologica*. There are two main drawbacks to such a comprehensive approach. On the one hand, that approach would exceed the requirements and purpose of this dissertation. On the other hand, a full account of cognitive impairment following the *ordo doctrinae* of Aquinas's *Summa* would be a massive volume, many times the size of this dissertation. My objective is more modest. I simply want to show that St. Thomas has something to say about these matters and that what he has to say is illuminating and beautiful. I hope someone more capable than I will someday write the massive volume described above—it should be beautiful, of course—and I hope that my clumsy and probably inaccurate account of Aquinas will help her or him do what I could not. *May the God of Mercy, the ineffably wise and good Creator, grant all who desire to serve and honor the poor with their theological knowledge the gifts of insight, eloquence, and happiness. "Wouldn't it be extraordinary? The face of the world would be changed. We would no longer want to compete in going up the ladder to meet God in the light, in the sun and in beauty, to be honored because of our theological knowledge. We would desire to understand because we believe that our knowledge and theology are important only so long as they are used to serve and honor the poor."* Jean Vanier, "Through their wounds we are healed" *Wit Lecture* (Paulist Press, 1992).

ultimate end that is the second perfection of the human being, the life of glory.

Chapter 4 will describe Aquinas's understanding of the operational limitations experienced by the human being as a consequence of original sin. The following topics will be addressed: how the second perfection came to be wounded; the metaphysics of evil suffered according to Aquinas; and a typological sketch of corporeal infirmity and profound cognitive impairment will be provided. The purpose of this basic overview is to systematically reconstruct Aquinas's theology of weakness, disability and cognitive impairment; to show its internal coherence; and to indicate points of significance from the aspect of our creaturely dignity and creaturely destiny. In the careful interpretive manner prescribed by Eschmann and with the confidence of phenomenological correspondence modeled by Lombardo, significant care will be given throughout to follow Aquinas's distinctions, discrete formulations, and categories. Chapter 5 provides a close reading of how those who 'lack the use of reason' participate in the sacramental life of the Church; in particular, Baptism and Eucharist; and an account of profound cognitive impairment and the threefold perfection of the human being will be provided.

During our consideration of these themes in Part 1 and Part 2, we will occasionally note and comment upon points of relevance to contemporary theological engagements with Aquinas on 'disability' and related themes. Those notations will be irregular and the comments will generally be cursory—irregular because very little work has been done to interpret Aquinas on these themes; cursory because, of the work that has been done, as indicated above, very little warrants serious engagement given the objective of this dissertation.

Aquinas vigorously maintains that no measure of bodily affliction—including profound cognitive impairment and severe dementia—can decisively frustrate the human creature's potential for the actualization of our highest good and ultimate flourishing in relation to our Creator. Aquinas's theology helps us understand the way cognitively impaired Christians live the virtues (indeed, even those who suffer a profound cognitive impairment) and the significance of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment in the Christian understanding of the good life.

Beginning with a thorough description of the human being and corporeal infirmity, on Aquinas's own terms, and in light of his main influences, we will be well positioned to reconstruct his account of cognitive impairment as such, its moral implications, and the significance of cognitive

impairment in the Christian understanding of the good life. The objective, on that matter, is to formulate a coherent and systematic depiction of Aquinas's view—while making a serious attempt to show how Aquinas's way of thinking might be a resource for contemporary theologizing on human vulnerability and dependency. So conceived, our approach can be characterized as 'constructive and systematic.'

1.4 *Spanish Colonialism, Cognitive Impairment, and the 'Slave by Nature'*

No account of Aquinas on 'disability' can pretend to any measure of seriousness without treating Aquinas's engagement with Aristotle's *metaphysical biology* and *theory of the natural slave*. Moreover, every serious description of cognitive impairment within the Thomistic theological tradition must acknowledge the 16th century use of Aquinas and Aristotle's writings in order to justify the abuse of the Amerindian peoples. Specifically, the Spanish colonial conflation of Aquinas's remarks on those who 'lack the use of reason' and the Aristotelian notion of 'natural slavery.' For it is precisely in this use (and abuse) of Aristotle and Aquinas that we find remnants of a Thomistic tradition on disability and cognitive impairment.

Admittedly, at first sight, the connection between Aquinas's account of cognitive impairment, Aristotle's theory of 'natural slavery,' and 16th century Spanish colonialism is not obvious. We intend to show why this connection is integral to thinking about disability and cognitive impairment within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.⁴³ For reasons both practical and prudential, we will not return to these matters outside of the introduction. We discuss them here, however, for the light they will shed on the organization of this dissertation and the unique contribution of our investigation.

With respect to the above, our account of Aquinas's understanding of disability and cognitive impairment includes the treatment of two important and controversial matters. First, concerning Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle, we show that Aquinas subverted Aristotle's description of the 'natural slave' and that he repurposed the theory typologically in his various remarks on persons who 'lack the use of reason.' Second, with respect to 16th

⁴³ It is unlikely that I would have ever come to recognize these deep theological and historical connections had they not first been pointed out to me over a bowl of oatmeal by Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P. in 2007. His original insight was the catalyst for what I hope is a more exact interpretation of how weakness, disability, and cognitive impairment have been understood within the Thomistic theological tradition. For a concise account of how these connections are on display in Vitoria's *De Indis*, see Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 339-341.

century appeals to the authority of Aquinas and Aristotle, we show Aristotle's understanding of the particular metaphysical defect of the natural slave (as distinct from other forms of human defect) and the irreconcilability of Aristotle's notion of natural slavery with Aquinas's understanding of the human being and, in particular, those who 'lack the use of reason.'⁴⁴

In order to demonstrate the predicate plausibility of the two matters we intend to treat, however, two kinds of arguments would need to be made. First, we would need to make an interpretive argument regarding Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle's theory. Such an argument would need to address the material history of slavery relevant to each man's context, systematically interrogate Aristotle and Aquinas's remarks on the topic of natural slavery, and then show Aquinas's subversion and repurposing of Aristotle's notion. Second, we would need to make an historical argument concerning the 16th century colonialist appeals to Aristotle and Aquinas. Such an argument would need to establish what Aristotle and Aquinas actually have to say on the relevant topics (i.e., Aristotle on natural slavery, barbarism, and bestiality; and Aquinas on slavery, natural slaver, and *amentia*), describe representative

⁴⁴ This reading is in contrast to the 16th century conflation of Aristotle's 'natural slave,' 'barbarian,' and 'bestial man' into the caricature of a rootless, semi-rational, man-shaped beast of burden. This caricature was ratified, at various points in the 16th century, under the auspices of an allegedly Thomistic understanding of the condition *amentia*.

15th and 16th century interpretations of Aristotle and Aquinas on those topics (especially the conflation of those notions), and account for how those particular interpretive judgments were implemented. Obviously, establishing the predicate plausibility of the two controversial matters we will be treating exceeds the scope of this dissertation.

Fortunately, those arguments have already been made by others, although both accounts come up short precisely on the two matters we intend to discuss in the forthcoming chapters. On the one hand, the interpretive argument concerning Aquinas's engagement with Aristotle on natural slavery is found in an unpublished dissertation entitled *The Theory of Natural Slavery According to Aristotle and St. Thomas*, written by Fr. Benedict Ashley in 1941.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the historical argument concerning 16th century appeals to the authority of Aquinas and Aristotle is found in *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, by Anthony Pagden.⁴⁶ We will briefly discuss these arguments in turn and show their relevance for our investigation into Aquinas on disability and cognitive impairment.

⁴⁵ Winston Ashley, *The Theory of Natural Slavery According to Aristotle and St. Thomas* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Notre Dame, 1941).

⁴⁶ Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

1.4.1 *Ashley's* The Theory of Natural Slavery According to Aristotle and St. Thomas

The primary concern of Ashley's dissertation is to limit the association of Aquinas's theology with the various forms of chattel slavery practiced in Europe and the Americas in the modern era. As it relates to our present investigation, Ashley's dissertation accounts for the material histories relevant to both Aristotle and Aquinas, and he systematically interrogates everything that Aristotle and Aquinas have to say on institutional slavery and 'natural slavery.'⁴⁷

By Ashley's reading, Aquinas appropriates and revises Aristotle's indefensible defense of slavery; nevertheless, as Ashley argues, Aquinas's noncommittal view is incomparable to the chattel slavery of modernity.⁴⁸ Ashley proposes that the reason Aquinas did not reject slavery outright is best understood as the unfortunate consequence and influence of medieval prejudices.⁴⁹ Ashley's description of Aquinas's view of slavery is cast as a qualified modification of Aristotle, modeled after medieval feudalism. This is one significant shortcoming of Ashley's investigation—for he fails to

⁴⁷ *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 8-34; 50-128

⁴⁸ *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 129-139.

⁴⁹ *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 4; 128.

recognize Aquinas's complete theological subversion of Aristotle's theory and the relevance of Aristotle's presumptions about human origins and the distinctiveness of the human species.

Despite that shortcoming, Ashley effectively shows that for Aquinas the 'natural slave' is only intelligible as a human being who lacks the full use of reason on account of being 'feeble-minded' or 'mentally deficient.'⁵⁰ In the final chapter of his dissertation, however, Ashley balks at what he demonstrated exegetically over the course of three chapters, for what can only be described as scholarly embarrassment.⁵¹ Ashley is scandalized by the possibility that Aquinas considered some persons to be dispositionally dependent and functionally incapable of managing their own affairs, so Ashley proposes a metaphorical interpretation: for Aquinas, natural slavery (under the logic of medieval feudalism) is a 'dispositional servitude' that is the result of poor education, injustice, and social inequities.⁵²

In his account of Aquinas on natural slavery, Ashley does not fully appreciate the relationship between Aquinas's doctrine of evil, in particular evil suffered or affliction (*malum poenae*), and what Aquinas has to say about

⁵⁰ *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 63-74; 114-121; c.f., *STh*, 2-2.57.3, reply 2.

⁵¹ *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 126-128.

⁵² *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 140-146.

human equality after the Fall.⁵³ Nevertheless, Ashley's disciplined treatment of the relevant material histories and his systematic interrogation of Aquinas and Aristotle on the topic of natural slavery, establishes the predicate plausibility for our account of Aquinas. In particular, Ashley's careful exegetical work makes it possible for us to show how Aquinas subverted Aristotle's description of the 'natural slave' and how Aquinas repurposed the theory typologically in his various remarks on persons who 'lack the use of reason.'

Aristotle's understanding of the 'slave by nature' is rhetorically nuanced and supported by a detailed metaphysical biology. For Aristotle, natural slaves (and women, for that matter) are *defective* human beings; they are natural exceptions to ordinary adult human life. Our concern in chapter 2 is Aquinas's theologically subversive revision of Aristotle's notion of the 'slave by nature.' At the most basic level, the metaphysical biology supporting Aristotle's account of the natural slave is irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of creation and Aquinas's Augustinian presumption of the

⁵³ Cf., *Theory of Natural Slavery*, 102-4. Ashley's treatment of the Patristic understanding of slavery and the Fall is as close as he comes to identifying the relationship between Aquinas's doctrine of evil and his revision of 'natural slavery' under the horizon of corporeal infirmity.

unambiguous status of every human being as the image of God.⁵⁴ In his revision of Aristotle, Aquinas interprets the ‘slave by nature’ to be a human being who lacks the full use of reason on account of a corporal infirmity.⁵⁵

1.4.2 *Pagden’s* The Fall of Natural Man

In our reconstruction of Aquinas on disability and cognitive impairment, we have a stake in stipulating how Aristotle understands the particular metaphysical defect of the natural slave, in contrast to other forms of ‘defective’ human life (i.e., Aristotle’s view of women, bestial men,

⁵⁴ In the chapters that follow, we will not treat Aristotle’s account of women except in the most general terms. This is a regrettable consequence of our decision to remain focused on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment in the theology and philosophy of Aquinas. We will, of course, note points of particular relevance as they arise; in particular, the way in which Aquinas undermines Aristotle’s presumption that women are essentially defective human beings, while attempting to make theological sense of individual sex differences on the basis of an inaccurate description of biological reproduction. See *STh*, 1.118.1 and 2; cf., *STh*, 1.92.1, *reply 1*; 93.4, *reply 1*; 98.2, *response*; 99.2. When it comes to individual sex differences, Aquinas’s remarks pertain to only the material and efficient cause of the human being. Which is to ask ‘why *female* and not male, why *male* and not female, in this particular case’—on the presumption of the following theological anthropology: the human being, the image of God, is a substantial composite of immaterial (a rational soul, formal cause) and material properties (a body, material cause), resulting from the cooperation of human faculties with a prime act of God (efficient cause), for the purpose of a twofold end (final cause). Thus, ‘why X and not Y, in this particular case’ is an further interrogation of the preliminary judgment that individual differences (in sex or otherwise) are correlative with the unqualified dignity of the human being, the image of God. On how individual differences in sex come about, Aquinas is obviously mistaken; on the judgment that those differences are good and beautiful, Aquinas is not mistaken. On individual differences, equality, and perfection see *STh*, 1.96.3.

⁵⁵ See *STh*, 2-2.57.3, *reply 2*; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.81, *remarks 1* and 5. Aquinas follows Albertus Magnus in this interpretation of Aristotle’s *Politics*.

madmen, etc.).⁵⁶ On the basis of that interpretation of Aristotle, we intend to show the fundamental irreconcilability of Aristotle's notion of natural slavery with Aquinas's understanding of the human being and, in particular, Aquinas's understanding of the moral status, agency, and potential (natural and supernatural flourishing) of persons who have a profound cognitive impairment.

The bare plausibility of these interpretations of Aquinas and Aristotle, however, is a controversial matter within the Aristotelian-Thomistic theological tradition. Two particular points of controversy have to do with (1) the metaphysical and biological judgments behind what Aristotle has to say about natural slavery and barbarism, and (2) what, exactly, Aquinas has to say about the moral status and potential of those who 'lack the use of reason.' In our judgment, there is a gap between what popular opinion assumes to be the case on these matters and what is indeed the case.⁵⁷ For example, there is

⁵⁶ Those distinctions in Aristotle's thought have been developed in recent literature, although not in relation to Aquinas. See Malcolm Heath "Aristotle on Natural Slavery" *Phronesis* 53 (2008): 243-270; Eugene Garver "Aristotle's Natural Slaves: Incomplete *Praxeis* and Incomplete Human Beings" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32.2 (1994): 173-195.

⁵⁷ We are referring here to the tendency to enact what historian David Fisher called "the fallacy of prevalent proof"; the presumption of popular opinion as historical fact. See *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a logic of historical thought* (New York: Harper Collins, 1970), 51-52. A contemporary example of this is the "ship of fools" from Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. In positing the analogy between the 'Medieval leper' and the 'Enlightenment

the common tendency to presume that Aristotle believed all ‘barbarians’ to be ‘natural slaves’, and *vice versa*. This interpretation of Aristotle, however, is historically conditioned and exegetically inaccurate.⁵⁸

On the first controversial point, how the *barbarian-cum-natural slave* interpretation of Aristotle emerged in the 15th century is irrelevant to our present concern with Aquinas.⁵⁹ What is not irrelevant to our present

madman,’ Foucault invented a history to support his theory. Specifically, the idea that there was once a practice of filling boats with insane people and other social outcasts—the ship of fools. It is a point of historical fact that no such practice ever took place as Foucault describes it (see W.B. Maher, “The ship of fools: *Stultifera Navis* or *Ignis Fatuus*?” *American Psychologist*, 37/7 (1982): 756-61. Elizabeth Bredberg remarks that after Foucault most theorizers of disability have perpetuated his historical misconceptions; and, far worse, they have emulated his grand narrative style of reading the histories of disability. See Bredberg’s essay “Writing disability history: problems, perspectives and sources” *Disability and Society*, 14/1, (1999): 189-201.

⁵⁸ See *Politics* 1252b 5; and Aristotle’s conclusion in 1255a 28—1255b 4. See also Malcolm Heath’s discussion of Aristotle’s *thumos* theory in relation to the condition of the natural slave in “Aristotle on Natural Slavery” *Phronesis* 53 (2008): 243-270. We will discuss the distinction between Aristotle’s barbarian and natural slave in chapter 2.

⁵⁹ John Mair’s (1467-1550) commentary on Book II, distinction 44 of the *Sentences* is usually identified as the earliest proposal the *barbarian-cum-natural slave* reading of Aristotle’s *Politics* in relation to a racialized people group (the people who Ptolemy describes in his *Tetrabiblos*). Mair’s commentary on the *Sentences* was likely studied at the Burgos junta of 1512, which Padgen suggests served to promulgate and popularize this interpretation of Aristotle. See *Fall of Man*, 38-41; 46-51. Leading up to the Burgos junta, on Pagden’s account, king Ferdinand was being pressured by the Dominican order to justify the Spanish claim on the Americas, and he called upon the council of Burgos to formulate a response to the Dominicans. Although the language of the documents produced is measured and qualified, the Amerindian peoples were identified to the Spanish crown as wandering herds of the ‘natural slave’, lawless mobs rendered insane as a consequence of original sin and habituated into a form of wildness that would take generations to heal—healed, that is, on the assumption that it was legitimate to baptize ‘natural slaves’, which was itself a contested matter. *Fall of Natural Man*, 47-50.

concern, however, are a set of distinctions in Aquinas and Aristotle that the *barbarian-cum-natural slave* reading obscures. In our account of Aquinas and Aristotle, we will not be discussing the historical origin of this and other unfounded interpretations of Aristotle and Aquinas, nor will we be discussing the way those interpretations were used to justify the abuse and exploitation inflicted upon the Amerindian peoples in the 16th century—Anthony Pagden has already done this work, and masterfully so.⁶⁰ However, we will be reading Aristotle and Aquinas in a way that cuts against the grain of the common opinion; Pagden’s work helps set the stage for the plausibility of our reading.

In *The Fall of Natural Man*, Anthony Pagden describes a representative set of 15th and 16th century interpretations of Aristotle and Aquinas on the topics of natural slavery, barbarism, bestiality, and (to a certain extent) *amentia*. He outlines, moreover, the way those interpretations were implemented, both rhetorically and practically. Pagden demonstrates, for

⁶⁰ Pagden does this while, nevertheless, assuming the exegetical accuracy the interpretations he describes. For example, Pagden assumes the exegetical validity of John Mair’s interpretive conflation of barbarism and natural slavery, although such a reading of Aristotle has no representation before the 15th century. Were there earlier examples, Pagden would have certainly used them. Nevertheless, Pagden does attempt to impute the view to Albert the Great and Aquinas in a somewhat misleading way, through selective excerpts from their commentaries on Aristotle’s *Politics*. See *Fall of Natural Man*, 45-47.

example, that key remarks from Aquinas on the ‘absolute barbarian’ and concerning persons who ‘lack the use of reason’ were interpreted as more or less identical to Aristotle’s description of the natural slave.⁶¹

One significant shortcoming of Pagden’s account, with respect to our present concern, is that he presumes the exegetical validity of a particular set of Spanish colonialist appeals to Aristotle and Aquinas. Specifically, Pagden allows the 16th century conflation of ‘natural slavery’ and ‘barbarism’ to set the terms for and ultimately determine his own reading of Book 1 of the *Politics*.⁶² Of particular relevance to our main concern with Aquinas on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment, is Pagden’s easy gloss over glaring 16th century indications that Aquinas had a proper account of persons who ‘lack the use of reason.’⁶³ For example, the Thomistic formulation of the condition *amentia* pervades the literature that Pagden directly treats, but it seems not to occur to Pagden that the 16th century use of the notion might be interrogated for its fidelity to what Aquinas actually said about persons afflicted with *amentia*.⁶⁴ Coordinate with that disregard and loose treatment of

⁶¹ C.f., *Fall of Natural Man*, 63-4; 111-112; 127,132-134; 137.

⁶² *Fall of Natural Man*, 41-47.

⁶³ C.f., *Fall of Natural Man*, 63, 112, 128-31.

⁶⁴ One obvious example is Francisco de Vitoria’s Thomistic consideration of *amentia* throughout his treatise *De Indis*, and in particular in Vitoria’s so-called ‘Eighth Title’.

Aquinas's actual remarks on topics relevant to his own investigation, is Pagden's tendency to project an exaggerated Aristotelianism onto Aquinas. For example, Pagden uses a misleadingly truncated passage from Aquinas's commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* as proof positive of Aquinas's endorsement Aristotle's theory of natural slavery.⁶⁵ He even goes so far as to credit Aquinas with the 'revival' of Aristotle's theory of 'natural slavery' in the 13th century.⁶⁶

Despite these shortcomings, and respecting our present concern with Aquinas, Pagden demonstrates why every serious description of cognitive impairment within the Aristotelian-Thomistic theological tradition must acknowledge the 16th century use of Aquinas and Aristotle. Specifically, Pagden shows that although the *topic* of the various debates was the rational status and moral agency of the Amerindian peoples, the *doctrinal problematic* being debated was the theological and moral implications of cognitive impairment.⁶⁷ That is, the moral implications of the condition *amentia* on Thomistic terms. In particular, the debates concerned what the Amerindian peoples were capable of realizing with respect to the proximate or natural

⁶⁵ See *Fall of Natural Man*, 47; c.f., Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, 8.11.12-13 (1699-1700).

⁶⁶ *Fall of Natural Man*, 41.

⁶⁷ *Fall of Natural Man*, 93-4.

end of the human being (if they were indeed the ‘mindless’ *barbarian-cum-natural slave*) and the proper form Christian mercy should take in response to this alleged defect.⁶⁸ Now, in many instances, the Salamanca rejection of the allegation that the Amerindians were the ‘mindless’ *barbarian-cum-natural slave* was attended with a rhetorical move similar to Ashley’s metaphorical interpretation of Aquinas on the natural slave; namely, that the Amerindians

⁶⁸ An exemplary example of this is the debate between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda at Valladolid, 1500-1558. Sepúlveda was commissioned to justify, on evangelistic grounds, the Spanish colonial enterprise in general and the “benevolent” subjugation of the Amerindian peoples in particular. Toward that end, Sepúlveda made use of Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery and claimed Aquinas and Francisco de Vitoria, O.P. (1483-1546) as endorsers of his idiosyncratic reading. By Pagden’s account, Sepúlveda’s argument was heavily dependent upon the “mindless” *barbarian-cum-natural slave* caricature formulated by theologians like Juan de Quevedo (1450-1519), Bernardo de Mesa (1470-1524), and Gil Gregorio (146x-153x) who each participated (along with many others) in a *junta* at Burgos in 1512. At the Valladolid debate, las Casas rightly rejected Sepúlveda’s claims about the Amerindian peoples, but in a rhetorical rush to defend his master (Vitoria), las Casas argued against Sepúlveda’s conclusions on Scriptural and normative theological grounds. Las Casas, implicitly (and at points explicitly) accepted Sepúlveda’s interpretation of Aristotle and Aquinas. One important outcome of the debate, which does not directly pertain to our reading of Aquinas on the topics of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment, was the wide distribution throughout Europe of las Casas’s account of the debate at Valladolid (*In Defense of the Indians*). One could speculate that las Casas inadvertently promulgated Sepúlveda’s readings of Aristotle and Aquinas and that the 17th and 18th century body of literature associated under the heading “The Black Legend” popularized Sepúlveda’s readings of Aristotle and Aquinas—which, to say again, were not directly contested by las Casas in his *Defense of the Indians*. The claim that the Amerindian peoples were ‘natural slaves’ was uniformly recognized as false and rejected in the Spanish-Catholic world by the end of the 17th century. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to surmise that the contemporary Anglophone presumption that the *barbarian-cum-natural slave* properly belongs to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition has its origin in the Black Legend. Specifically, we are suggesting that the contemporary presumption might be the product of a colonial propaganda campaign—insofar as translated excerpts from las Casas’s *Defense* were widely distributed by northern European colonial interests, in order to bolster their claims against Spanish colonial interests in the Americas. This, however, is a speculation—one that has no direct bearing on our present concerns.

were emphatically not *amentibus* and that, if they lack anything, it is education and fair treatment in the Spanish occupied territories.⁶⁹ To be clear, the Salamancan Thomists offered a speculative explanation for the alleged unseemliness of certain Amerindian practices; Ashley interprets Aquinas as codifying a category for the unseemly behavior of uneducated and exploited people.

Pagden helpfully describes the 16th century *application* to the Amerindian peoples, through philosophical and theological defenses of Spanish colonial practices, of particular *interpretations* of Aquinas and Aristotle—interpretations that we are not here concerned with refuting, but that we will be contradicting in our own work to understand Aquinas on disability and cognitive impairment. Our interest in these 15th and 16th century matters has to do with the presumed legitimacy of those interpretations, but only insofar as those presumptions condition contemporary preconceptions regarding what counts as a plausible reading of Aquinas and Aristotle.

This is why Pagden's work in *The Fall of Natural Man* matters for this dissertation on disability and cognitive impairment in Aquinas: Despite the

⁶⁹ Vitoria's *De Indis* is a good example of this strategy.

fact that Pagden replicates (and even invents) unfounded interpretations of Aquinas and Aristotle on the matters we are concerned with here, he demonstrates (sometimes against his own narrative) that novel interpretive judgments were being made about Aquinas's theology and philosophy. More importantly, Pagden shows that the Thomistic tradition has both the resources and historical precedence for a serious investigation into the relationship between the condition of the body, cognitive impairment, moral virtue, and human flourishing.⁷⁰

1.4.3 *Salamanca Thomism and Contemporary Theologies of Disability*

Here, then, is the second controversial matter mentioned above regarding what, exactly, Aquinas has to say about the moral status and potential of those who 'lack the use of reason.' The 16th century Dominican defense of the humanity of the Amerindian peoples should be regarded as one of the great achievements of Salamancan Thomism; among the prominent voices we remember Matias de Paz (1468-1519), Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546), Domingo de Soto (1497-1560), Anton de Montesinos

⁷⁰ Excepting the characterizations of Aristotle and Aquinas, our understanding of this period is entirely dependent upon the scholarship of Pagden; and, additionally, the work of Lewis Hanke. See Hanke's *Aristotle and the American Indians* (Chicago: Indiana University Press, 1970) and *All Mankind is One* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974).

(14??-1545), Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566), Juan de la Peña (1513-1565), Domingo Báñez (1528-1604), and many others.⁷¹

Against the most common justifications for the violent enslavement of the Amerindians—i.e., natural slavery and profound moral depravity—the Thomistic defense centered on the development of two basic judgments.⁷² On the one hand, a theological argument, affirming that the Amerindian peoples are rational creatures, formed in the image of God and capable for moral virtue. On the other hand, based on the natural rights of the Amerindian peoples, an argument from political philosophy, demonstrating that Spanish colonial violence in the Americas was indefensible on just-war grounds and the ‘law of nations.’ It is the theological argument about reason, freewill, and virtue that intersects with our present concern.

The allegation that the Amerindian peoples were an instance of the ‘mindless’ *barbarian-cum-natural slave* took many forms. Sepúlveda, for example, received his formulation from theologians like Juan de Quevedo,

⁷¹ See Thomas F. O’Meara, “The Dominican School of Salamanca and the Spanish Conquest of America: Some Bibliographic Notes,” *The Thomist* 56 (1992): 555-582.

⁷² O’Meara, “School of Salamanca,” 572.

Bernardo de Mesa, and Gil Gregorio.⁷³ As noted above, the caricature cast was of wandering herds of semi-rational barbarians. It was ordinarily granted, nevertheless, that the Amerindians were human beings in principle; however, because their lives (according to the colonialist caricature) did not manifest their essentially human potential for rational discourse and moral virtue, it was alleged on a variation of the axiom *agere sequitur esse* (action follows being) that the irrationality and wildness of the Amerindians was indicative of some profound defect.

Because the end (*telos*) of the human being, as the argument went, consists in the perfection of reason and will, the 'mindless' *barbarian-cum-natural slave* was incapable of living a human life properly so called. Unable to realize the natural human good, it was questionable whether they could attain the ultimate good of rational human nature in relationship with God. The Amerindians were therefore in need of the sort of 'benevolent' patronage afforded in the *encomienda* system (where an unspecified number of persons were 'entrusted' to the protection and instruction of an *encomendero*, or

⁷³ That is to say, according to Pagden's narrative. By contrast, Lewis Hanke's account of the period sees less conspiracy of political and institutional powers, while placing more of an emphasis on individual failings and agendas.

trustee). It was a hardly qualified form of institutional slavery, as Pagden notes.⁷⁴

In his narration of the Dominican response to Spanish colonial violence in the Americas, Thomas O'Meara shows that of all the resources brought to bear in the various debates, among the most important was the theological judgment that "the image of God was universally present in human intelligence and freedom."⁷⁵ This strategic defense of human dignity was entirely appropriate given the ends sought.⁷⁶ And in the thousands upon thousands of pages written in this Salamancan effort, that principle is formulated in dozens of ways. Despite that diversity, however, a useful set of common tendencies or shared emphases can be gleaned. *The Fall of Natural Man* is particularly useful in this regard, for Pagden shows no particular sympathy for the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and he displays no interest in parsing out the nuances of 16th century Salamancan Thomism.

Considered by way of Pagden's account, the 16th century emphasis on the manifest rationality and freewill of the Amerindians has a particular

⁷⁴ *Fall of Natural Man*, 49-50.

⁷⁵ O'Meara, "School of Salamanca," 578; c.f., 570, 572, 574.

⁷⁶ Those ends being, as we should expect, the establishment of just laws to regulate the violence of vicious people and the cultivation of the conditions under which moral virtue flourishes. This is what we should expect—whether or not these were the ends being sought in particular instances is another matter.

relevance to our present concern. In particular, circumstances required that the Thomistic defense of human dignity be coupled with the rejection of reports that the Amerindian peoples en masse were an instance of the *barbarian-cum-natural slave* and *amentibus*. This is perfectly illustrated in the first five chapters of las Casas's *Defense of the Indians* and Vitoria's *De Indis*, especially in the awkward formulation of Vitoria's 'Eighth Title.'

There were implications, however, that followed from the particular way the false characterizations were rejected. Specifically, several important aspects of Aquinas's understanding of the human being—particularly on the topics of rationality and freewill—were unintentionally obscured and, sometimes, profoundly distorted. Here are three generic examples, by way of Pagden, of the kind of problematic formulations we have in mind: First, there were arguments that thinned out Aquinas's understanding of how the 'use of reason' relates to the rational status of the human being.⁷⁷ Second, some

⁷⁷ *Fall of Natural Man*, 63-4. Pagden writes "For the Thomists all men, whether Christian or not, were human...For Aquinas and his followers the biological and psychological unity of man was taken to be a fact. All men, Aquinas had said, are, so to speak, part of a single body, the harmony of their movements resembling that of the spheres...For the Thomists man was, quite literally, what man does...a man who, regularly and with no sense of being at fault, acted against nature, could make no unassailable claim to being fully human." Thus, in chapter 2 we will show that, for Aquinas, although the use of reason is a manifestation of our rational status, manifest rationality is not constitutive of our rational status. *Agere sequitur esse*, in the scholastic formulation, and the essence of the human being is the rational soul. However, although it belongs to the notion of 'soul'

arguments exaggerated the significance of the capacity to reason in relation to the end (*telos*) of the human being, to that extent that other aspects of Aquinas's thought were undermined.⁷⁸ Third, given the political forum for which the arguments were tailored, it was not uncommon for treatments to pass over important entailments of the fact that Aquinas's account of the human being is subordinate to the Christian doctrine of creation.⁷⁹

to be the form of a body and, as such, the soul is always in act (*STh*, 1.75.5, response), for Aquinas the rational soul "which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation 'per se' apart from the body" (*STh*, 1.75.2, response). Among other things, what this means is that for Aquinas the human being is not *per se* what the human being is capable of doing.⁷⁸ *Fall of Natural Man*, 94. Pagden writes "If the Indian was, as Vitoria had made clear, fully able to perform some rational acts but *psychologically* incapable of performing others, then his mind must, of necessity, have been frozen in a state of becoming; and any man in this condition would be useless *as a man*...if the natural slave is incapable, as a Aristotle says he is, of participating in a state of happiness (*eudemonia*), then he must also be incapable of achieving his proper end (*telos*) as a man. If nature never creates anything which is, of itself, incapable of accomplishing its ends—for such a thing would be useless—then the natural slave cannot be a man...once reason is present *in potentia* it cannot, however long the process takes, fail to achieve actuality...For in order to be a man in the first place, the Indian must be *in possession* of a faculty of reason and that faculty must be capable of achieving a full state of actuality." Thus, in chapter 3, we will show that for Aquinas the final perfection of the 'use of reason' pertains to the beauty (or magnanimity) of our imitation of God in knowledge and love. This is distinct from the perfection and conformation of the human being to the likeness of Christ, a likeness in faith, hope, and love. On the one hand, the participatory imitation of beatitude, conformation of glory. On the other hand, the conformation in a likeness of virtue, the conformation of grace. For Aquinas, as we will show, the conformation of grace is conferred at baptism and the conformation of glory is the final perfection that follows the resurrection.

⁷⁹ *Fall of Natural Man*, 95. Pagden writes "Vitoria's insistence that no *man* can be potentially human without being actually so was crucial both for him and for his successors because it touched on the principle factor in their interpretation of the law of nature, its essentiality. For the Thomists the properties of things were...an essential part of them...The essential property of man is, of course, reason...For a man to be human *and*

Instances of these various tendencies are not difficult to find. For example, in his *Defense*, las Casas's energetic refutation of Sepúlveda is punctuated with remarks concerning the anthropological and moral status of those who 'lack the use of reason.'⁸⁰ Taken together these comments could be interpreted to suggest that a person who 'lacks the use of reason' is "despised by God"⁸¹; that "half witted or foolish" people are "mistakes of nature and freaks in rational nature" because they "cannot seek God, know him, call upon him, or love him," having no capacity to "perform the acts of faith or love"⁸²; that a more-than-rare regional occurrence of "slow-witted, moronic, foolish, or stupid" individuals would frustrate the beauty and perfection of God's plan for the universe⁸³; and that those who lack the use of reason are "far removed from what is best in human nature."⁸⁴

incapable of deliberation...he would, in effect, have to live in another world, in a world where the necessary conditions for human life are other than those which we know in this world." Thus, in chapter 4, we show how particular theological judgments on goodness, evil, privation, and materiality—and others—come to bear in Aquinas's account of how the created rational animal, the image of God, can be afflicted by a corporal infirmity or cognitive impairment.

⁸⁰ Bartolome de las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992).

⁸¹ *Defense*, 28.

⁸² *Defense*, 36.

⁸³ *Defense*, 38.

⁸⁴ *Defense*, 38.

Las Casas makes most of these remarks in the context of stipulating *what is not the case* for the Amerindian peoples; i.e., they are not half-wits, they are not despised by God, they are not mistakes of nature, they are bear the image of God, and they are capable of faith and love. Moreover, Las Casas forcefully argues that the Amerindian peoples have the full use of reason, bear the image of God, and are capable of faith and love. Nevertheless, what is clearly illustrated is a tendency to read against what Aquinas has to say about those who ‘lack the use of reason.’

Particularly relevant to our present concerns, las Casas attempts to follow Aquinas in at least one important way concerning those who ‘lack the use of reason’ — although his account of Aquinas’s actual thought is muddled as certain points. Specifically, las Casas invokes a key text in Aquinas’s theological subversion and revision of Aristotle’s notion of the ‘natural slave.’ In his commentary on the *Politics*, Aquinas interprets the ‘strange’ (*extraneum*) condition of Aristotle’s natural slave as only intelligible if the notion is referring to a cognitively impaired human being.⁸⁵ On the basis of this reading of Aquinas, and despite the rhetorical excess of the remarks noted

⁸⁵ *Sententia libri Politicorum*, Book 1, lectio 1, remark 15. The key distinction is between a *damaged or injured human being* on Aquinas’s understanding and an *essentially defective human being* on Aristotle’s understanding. We discuss these matters with care in chapters 2 and 4.

above, las Casas affirms that persons who ‘lack the use of reason’ are created in God’s image and capable of attaining Christ’s Kingdom; how that is possible, nevertheless, is not addressed by las Casas in a manner that would resolve the rhetorically hyperbolic assertions of what is not the case (noted above) for the Amerindian peoples.⁸⁶

For our present study, the significance of the 16th century Thomistic defense of human dignity and the examples provided from las Casas’s *Defense* is twofold. First, these examples illustrate why it is necessary to treat Aquinas’s theological subversion of Aristotle’s *metaphysical biology* and his *theory of the natural slave*. At the very least, there is a precedent in the Salamancan school for such an interpretive strategy. Second, they illustrate why our systematic reconstruction of ‘Aquinas on disability and those who lack the use of reason’ requires careful exegesis of what, exactly, Aquinas and Aristotle have to say about the relevant topics. And this because what, exactly, Aquinas and Aristotle have to say on the relevant topics is by no means a settled matter. In the final analysis, because we will not be returning to these 16th century themes, it is clear that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition has both the resources and historical precedence for a serious

⁸⁶ *Defense*, 39.

theological discussion concerning the relationship between the condition of the body, cognitive impairment, moral virtue, and human flourishing. Any speculation as to why these resources have remained largely undeveloped since the 16th century, as noted above, is beyond the scope of our present study.

1.5 *On the Invention of Weakness, Disability, and Cognitive Impairment*

The aim of this introduction has been to set the terms for an alternative reading of Aquinas and to begin to reconfigure the common view that Aquinas affords no place for cognitively impaired persons in his account of the good life. Yet, to describe this as an ‘alternative reading’ of Aquinas is not entirely accurate, for this was the interpretation of no small number of Thomists well into the early sixteenth century.

Be it a rival reading or a recovery project, in order to reason well along these lines we must acknowledge that the creative discipline of imagining theological and moral alternatives is a political discipline. That is to say, it is a communal practice to coherently interpret sources that are held in common. On that basis, the purpose of our proposal on how we might read Aquinas differently is not to *invent* a new interpretation of Aquinas. Rather, what we are after is the *invention*—a discovery, that is a recognition—of an older way

of thinking that exists within the scholastic mores of the Thomistic theological tradition. And this on the agreement that there are goods internal to that conversation that can be known only within the act itself. Thus, predicating any substantive argument concerning the plausibility of our account of Aquinas, is the agreement that it *in someway* matters what Aquinas thought about corporeal infirmity, disability, and those who ‘lack the use of reason.’ Moreover, we must agree that the tradition constitutive of the ongoing argument about what Aquinas thought is one that is worth entering into and advancing.

The tradition-dependent understanding that ‘politics is a practice of the imagination’ performed within a community, in Cavanaugh’s phrase, reminds us that the privileged location of the politically imaginative act cannot be separated from the practices which sustain the stories constitutive of the life of a particular community.⁸⁷ For that reason, the *imaginative skill* that is required to recognize this plausible reading of Aquinas as, likewise, a defensible account of what the good life is for human beings, will principally belong to a community which has discovered the goods internal to such a life. This is precisely the point that Hans Reinders makes at the conclusion of his

⁸⁷ See William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (T&T Clark , 2002), 1-7.

book *The Future of the Disabled in Liberal Society*, where he explains that whatever goods there are in sharing one's life with dependent others, such as the dependencies associated with cognitive impairment, they are goods that are principally known within the activity itself.⁸⁸

I've made it a point to include Reinders' assessment of the goods internal to living life with dependent persons for two reasons: First, because I think he is correct—of that I have little doubt. The second reason has to do with the fact that Reinders maintains a reading of Aquinas that is very different from the one that I am proposing here.

Following Reinders (in a way), because the common reading of Aquinas presumes that Aquinas's moral theology cannot tolerate the realities of cognitive impairment or account for the good of cognitively impaired persons, it follows that to commend a recovery of a rival reading as not only plausible, *but superior* to the common reading, must coincide with the practical embodiment of something approximate to the rival reading in the life of a particular community. This would need to be a community that in Reinders' terms recognizes the goods internal to such a life. In a sense, I am using Reinders's intuition about the goods internal to a life of friendship

⁸⁸ Reinders, *The Future of the Disabled*, 206-208.

shared with profoundly dependent persons in order to substantiate an interpretation of Aquinas that Reinders might not endorse; however, I hope that the doctrinal and moral integrity of what Aquinas has to say about cognitive impairment is recognizable to those who know the goods internal to sustaining the lives of and sharing friendship with persons who are cognitively impaired.

So conceived, and as Alasdair MacIntyre has convincingly argued, this tradition-conditioned mode of rational investigation is conditioned by ones membership in a moral community that has the practical resources from which to coherently and creatively imagine alternatives—such as the recognition that a standard interpretation of Aquinas is not the necessary interpretation of Aquinas.⁸⁹ For a plausible rival reading of disability and cognitive impairment in the theology of Aquinas only matters insofar as the recognition of the truth (or falsity) of the reading belongs to a moral community committed to living in a way that embodies those recognition(s), and in a manner correlative to the truthfulness of the recognition.⁹⁰ Thus, as

⁸⁹ See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1990), 60-68, 127-148. MacIntyre commends such an approach on the understanding that “reason can only approach being genuinely universal and impersonal insofar as it is neither neutral nor disinterested.”

⁹⁰ MacIntyre contends that prior loyalties are required such that, as in case of the reading of Aquinas we aim to develop, the “conclusions which emerge as enquiry progresses will

moral enquirers we appropriate or reject various readings of Aquinas in such a way that directs our *present understandings* towards the realization of not just any future, but of a particular future—which, then, shows that the question of how Aquinas understood the status of cognitively impaired persons is not merely a matter of theoretical inquiry, but also entails the practical embodiment of the inquiry in individual lives.⁹¹

On the basis of the above description of the role that imagination plays in our account of what Aquinas may or may not have thought about the moral status and potential of cognitively impaired persons, we might ask in the words of MacIntyre *What type of enacted narrative would be the embodiment, in the actions and transactions of actual social life, of this particular theory?*⁹²

of course have been partially and crucially predetermined by the nature of this initial commitment." *Three Rival Versions*, 60.

⁹¹ MacIntyre writes that the "*telos* of moral enquiry, which is excellence in the achievement not only of adequate theoretical understanding of the specifically human good, but also of the practical embodiment of that understanding in the life of the particular enquirer, most of all requires therefore not just a craft but a virtue-guided craft." *Three Rival Versions*, 62-3.

⁹² MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 80. We hope this account of Aquinas will enable recognitions that were not otherwise possible and inspire the pursuit of goods that were previously unimaginable.

1.6 *Conclusion*

We hope it will become clear that the reading of Aquinas we are proposing is not only plausible, but that it will bring to light an obscured aspect of Aquinas's thought and help in the work to form a people who recognize and embody a form of life shared with cognitively impaired persons.

The 16th century debates surrounding key texts from Aquinas and the available literature treating Aquinas on disability and cognitive impairment underscore the importance of the central question for our study: In the mature theology of Thomas Aquinas, what is the relationship between the condition of the body, moral virtue, and human flourishing; and what are the implications of this relationship for Aquinas's account of the moral status, agency, and moral potential (natural and supernatural flourishing) of a person who has a profound cognitive impairment?

We wish to reiterate that this study is fundamentally a work of Thomistic interpretation. Our background remarks concerning contemporary interpretations of Aquinas and 16th century Spanish colonialism are only important insofar as they orient our present treatment of Aquinas and his sources. The fundamental metaphysical assumption of Aquinas is that the

body is a function of the soul, and an expression of the soul; and insofar as it is a function of the soul, the body is also the communicator of the soul. And in that sense, if there is an impairment in the provided matter, the soul in its subsistence—its subsistence, of course, not at all impaired, because it is a principle—continues to relate to God, by way of the first perfection, and in the case of the baptized, by way of a supernatural likeness of virtue. This likeness of virtue in faith, hope, and love is a likeness unto Christ, the one true and perfect image of God.⁹³

Aquinas provides a theologically rich, analytically rigorous, and sacramentally grounded description of corporal infirmity and cognitive impairment. It is an account that might offer guidance to contemporary moral theologians and ethicists who want to understand the ‘reality of natural love, friendship, and charity in the lives of people who have a profound cognitive impairment.’⁹⁴

⁹³ *STh*, 1.93.1.

⁹⁴ C.f., Reinhard Hütter’s “Review of Michael Sherwin’s *By Knowledge and By Love*” *Pro Ecclesia* 15, no. 1 (2006): 134-138.

Part 1: The Created Rational Animal: The First Perfection & Constitutive Limits

Aquinas's account of the human being is Aristotelian and Augustinian. There is no question that what Aquinas has to say about human nature is unintelligible without the background of Aristotle's metaphysics and psychology. Likewise, we would not understand Aquinas if we ignored the fact that Augustine is his primary theological influence and interlocutor. Related to these influences, there are two common tendencies when reading Aquinas's account of the human being: one is to impute an exaggerated Aristotelianism and the other is to impute an exaggerated Augustinianism. Both tendencies obscure the significance and novelty of Aquinas's understanding of corporeal infirmity, cognitive impairment, and *amentia*.

First, an exaggerated Aristotelianism: Predicated by Aristotle's significant philosophical influence upon Aquinas's thinking on human nature, there is the all too common tendency to take the first part of *Treatise on the Human Being* (QQ. 75-89) as covering all the main points of Aquinas's understanding of what it means to be a human being. The theological descriptions of the human being that follow in QQ. 90-102 and in the remainder of the *Summa* are read, thereby, as the draping of the Christian

story over an Aristotelian philosophical infrastructure.⁹⁵ Aquinas is cast as Aristotle with better special effects—the subsistence and incorruptibility of the rational soul being prime examples of how Aquinas revised Aristotle’s anthropology to fit within the Christian schema.⁹⁶ We will try to show why this is an interpretive mistake.

Aquinas’s patently Aristotelian description of human nature in the first half of the *Treatise on the Human Being* is one piece of the thoroughly theological enterprise in the *prima pars* to account for what can be understood of God—an attempt to understand the Creator God by way of God’s creation.⁹⁷ In structural terms, and as to its context, the *Treatise on the Human Being* is one of three discrete blocks of questions constituting Aquinas’s account of the procession of creatures from God in QQ. 44–119. The first block addresses the production of creatures by God in general (QQ.44–46).

⁹⁵ Porter remarks that there is “a tendency among Aquinas scholars...to read Aquinas as if he not only baptized Aristotle, but is himself little more than Aristotle baptized. On this view, there is little in Aquinas’ ethical thought that does not come from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, together with whatever modifications are suggested by Aquinas’ Christian context. This assumption has even led scholars to attempt to find Aristotelian roots for aspects of Aquinas’ thought that can be traced to other sources. Certainly, Aquinas is deeply indebted to Aristotle’s ethics, especially in his analysis of the virtues. But it is impossible to understand his thought in purely Aristotelian terms, even in his analysis of the virtues, and much less in his treatment of other topics.” Jean Porter, “Right Reason and the Love of God,” *The Theology of Thomas*, edited by Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Peter Wawrykow (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 170.

⁹⁶ C.f., Stump, *Aquinas*, 238-241.

⁹⁷ Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 19.

The second block reviews God's creatures: spiritual, corporeal, and composite (QQ. 47–102); where the human being is identified as a composite creature. The third block addresses the divinely-sustained-existence and correlative governance of all created things by God (QQ. 103–119).

Following Augustine, Aquinas certainly understands the human being to be a creature: made in the image of God; ordered or constituted from our beginning toward an ultimate intimacy with God; as suffering the damage and impediment of original sin upon our return to God; and as the object of the reconciling and cleansing work of Christ, who is the means by which our desire for God is realized. *Patently Augustinian*, of this there is little doubt.

Second, an exaggerated Augustinianism: Predicated by what is indeed patently Augustinian in most of what Aquinas has to say theologically about the human being, there is an alternative tendency. By one common reading, Aquinas's description of human nature in QQ. 75–89 is understood as an auxiliary analytic exercise in philosophical semantics; or, said differently, as a supplement or prop for Aquinas's properly Augustinian account of the production and perfection of the human being as the image of God. However, this too is an interpretive mistake. This tendency, in its exaggerated form, reads Aquinas's philosophical descriptions of human nature in QQ. 75–89 as, at its best, an *ad hoc* hat-tip to 13th century philosophical debates. At its

worst, this tendency interprets Aquinas's use of Aristotle's metaphysics for theological ends as an unfortunate cooption and corruption of traditional Christian thought in its Augustinian purity by nefarious, 13th century socio-political interests. That is to say, the kind of social-political interests that would have stake in the elevation of exclusionary and prejudicial 'norms' to the status of a metaphysical account of human nature.⁹⁸ Aquinas's careful demotion of "mind" (*mens*) and promotion soul (*anima*), with respect to the image of God, stand as the prime examples of how Aquinas developed Augustine in his account of humankind.

⁹⁸ Jean Porter raises this question in her defense of a teleological conception of human nature, asking "Even if we can develop and defend the requisite kind of conception of humanity, would it be desirable to do so? There is a widespread uneasiness about this kind of project which is not just scientific or philosophical—it also reflects a serious worry about the moral implications of such a move. After all, if we believe that we have identified the defining characteristics of a 'real' human being, doesn't this imply that those who lack these characteristics, for example, the very young or the profoundly handicapped, would not count as human persons? And might this not imply that they would be denied the protections normally accorded to human persons, including most fundamentally the right to life? In this way, a discussion of theoretical questions having to do with the concept of human nature quickly intersects with painful and difficult debates over abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. For just that reason, it might seem the better part of wisdom for the moral theologian to leave these questions to one side." Porter goes on to contend that "it is a fundamental misunderstanding to regard the general concept [of human nature] as if it provided necessary and sufficient conditions for inclusion within a category...the point of such a concept [of human nature] is precisely to enable us to recognize less than perfect examples of a kind—including, in the case of living creatures, individuals who are immature, ill or injured, or otherwise impeded from optimum function in an appropriate environment—and to analyze them in terms of the ideal set by the concept." *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005), 107-108.

Aquinas's mature account of the human being in his *Summa Theologica* is more interesting than the above caricatures. When it comes to the human experience of corporeal infirmity and the moral significance of cognitive impairment, the question of how, exactly, Aquinas appropriates and integrates the respective teachings of Augustine and Aristotle in his account of the human being is profoundly important.

By way of Augustine, Aquinas does what Aristotle could not do: namely, Aquinas provides a way to understand—in Aristotle's own terms, although against Aristotle's presuppositions—the undiminished humanity of *people who participate in the rational principle of human nature, who are able to recognize what is reasonable, but who are not capable of discursive reasoning.*⁹⁹ For Aristotle, such persons are defective in their nature (a defective soul); and as defective such human beings (sub-human or marginally human) were understood to be incapable of attaining the perfect happiness appropriate to rational human nature. Aquinas, against Aristotle, presumes the incorruptibility of human nature in the immortal and immaterial subsistence of the rational soul as the form of the body, which is the creation of the human being as the image of God.

⁹⁹ See *Politics*, 1254b 4-6; c.f., *STh*, 2-2.57.3, *response* and *reply 2*.

By way of Aristotle, Aquinas does what Augustine could not do: namely, Aquinas provides a way to understand the inviolable and undiminished status of those who 'lack the use of reason' as the image of God.¹⁰⁰ For Augustine, the ability (or potential) to image God in the human being is always present and active, but the perfection (or beauty) of that image is a matter of degree corresponding to the quality of particular cognitive acts in the mind. Infants, the comatose, and madmen, according to Augustine, do not image God so well as those who are able to actively contemplate God. For Augustine, such persons are damaged (not defective). Aquinas, however, presumes that the image of God is not an activity of the mind, but the very existence of the human being as a mortal rational animal.

For Aquinas, human beings are not animals that have reason as a complement to their animality, who thereby image God in mental acts, which is the tendency of Augustine's view. Rather, for Aquinas, human beings are rational animals, who image God in all their activities. When a human being looks, speaks, defecates, or cogitates, each of these acts are rational acts.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ *De Trinitate*, XIV.6; c.f. *STh*, 1.93.4 and 7.

¹⁰¹ See John O'Callaghan's "Imago Dei: A Test Case for Aquinas's Augustinianism," in *Aquinas the Augustinian*, edited by Michael Dauphinais, Barry David, and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 100-44. O'Callaghan writes "Rational is the form of the animal acts that we engage in. Our acts of

Such acts are rational not because the acts are considered or are of a particular quality or character, but because these acts are performed and experienced by the human being. Every act of the human being that is subject to choice has a moral species; i.e., there are more faithful and less faithful ways of looking, speaking, defecating, and cogitating. Aquinas does not distinguish between 'irrational acts' performed by human beings (acts that humans share with other, non-human animals) and human acts (i.e., rational or considered acts). Rather, all human acts are rational acts, acts of the created rational animal, the image of God.

In the two chapters that follow, we will consider these matters introduced above in greater detail. We will begin with a discussion of Aristotle's metaphysical biology and an account of Aquinas's qualified reception of Aristotle on human nature. Next, we will discuss Augustine's account of the *imago Dei* and Aquinas's development of Augustine on mind.

eating, reproduction, and so on are not primarily proceeded by acts of reason. Reason is their form" (124).

2 Human Nature: Rejecting Essential Defect; Recognizing Creation

2.1 Introduction

Aquinas presupposed an Aristotelian view of human nature in his account of the human being. However, Aquinas did not presume Aristotle's views of the eternity of the universe or Aristotle's understanding of the basis for the distinctiveness of the human being, as differentiated from other forms of biological life. On the topics of corporeal infirmity in general and cognitive impairment in particular—topics where Aquinas's presumption and departure from Aristotle's views is relevant—it is important to understand that the coherence of Aristotle's background thought (his metaphysical biology) is irreconcilable with a Christian doctrine of creation. Although Aquinas appropriates a great deal of Aristotle's metaphysical description of human nature, the mythological horizon of Aristotle's formulations is completely replaced.

In this chapter, we will proceed as follows. First, we will discuss Aristotle's quasi-evolutionary account of terrestrial life and the distinctiveness of the human being (a "devolutionary transformist theory," in the words of

Stephen Clark).¹ Second, we will examine a series of Aristotle's remarks on people who are essentially incapable of realizing ordinary adult human life. These are Aristotle's anthropological 'problem cases,' so to speak. For Aristotle, there are both unnatural and natural exceptions to ordinary human life. The unnatural exceptions are essentially perfectible human beings—well-born males—who suffer a defect that is caused by some intervening force (e.g., madmen, the incontinent, and barbarians). By contrast, the natural exceptions are essentially defective human beings; their defect is coordinate with 'nature's intent' and the *telos* of the human being (e.g., women and natural slaves). Third, we will discuss Aquinas's account of human nature, focusing on the relationship between his doctrine of creation and the human being.

Our governing interest in Aristotle has to do with the way Aquinas made use of Aristotle in the development of his own thinking about corporeal infirmity and those who 'lack the use of reason.' Our immediate concern, however, is how Aristotle understood the distinctiveness of the human being, the completion or perfection of the human being, and the exceptions to

¹ I am indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre for introducing me to Stephen Clark's important book; and, moreover, for discussing with me at length Aristotle's devolutionary theory of human biology and Aristotle's account of the 'slave by nature' in the summer of 2011. His generosity saved me from committing myself to a set of significant mistakes in my interpretation of Aristotle and opened the door for a more exact interpretation of Aquinas's use of Aristotle on matters related to corporeal infirmity, cognitive impairment, and *amentia*.

ordinary human life. As it is relevant to our later discussion of cognitive impairment and virtue, particular attention will be given to Aristotle's theory of the 'slave by nature' (φύσει δοῦλον).²

2.2 Aristotelian Metaphysical Biology

Aristotle presumed a devolutionary view of terrestrial life, natural history, and human biology. This 'metaphysical biology' is the framework upon which Aristotle builds his account of the moral life and the human good. Aristotle's account of the good life and the happy life of the human being is directly connected to a presumption on how that form of life is possible for the kind of beings that we are, our biological constitution.³ In his book *Aristotle's Man*, Stephen Clark provides an account of Aristotle's devolutionary theory. Having established what is now, forty years later, the consensus view in

² Regarding the edition and translation of Aristotle's *Politics* to be used. In this essay we rely on the critical English translation entitled *Aristotle's Politics, Books I and II*. Translation and Commentary by Trevor J. Saunders (Oxford University Press, 1995). We will occasionally opt in favor of translation choices from the W.D. Ross emendation of the Benjamin Jowett English edition (2005) or the Stephen Everson translation of the *Politics* entitled, *Aristotle: The Politics and the Constitution of Athens* (Cambridge University Press, 1996). When a particular translation choice is significant, we will make whatever adjustments are called for and provide the original text inline—drawing upon the critical Greek edition of the *Politics* edited by W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Politica* (Oxford, Clarendon Press; 1957).

³ This is the 'metaphysical biology' that Alasdair MacIntyre was eager to abandon in *After Virtue* (158-60). The core intuition of which—the connection between moral philosophy and human animality—is reconsidered in *Dependent Rational Animals* (Open Court, 1999). x—xi.

Aristotle studies, Clark demonstrates the way in which all living beings are, according to Aristotle, defective human males. It will be helpful to briefly map Aristotle's understanding of human nature and human life, in contrast to the unnatural and natural exceptions to human nature and human life.

According to Aristotle, male humans have the form or nature coordinate with the perfection of the human being, which is a form of life. This does not mean that all human males are perfect human beings; rather, it means that, for Aristotle, males have the essential nature or potential for achieving human perfection. Specifically, to have human nature without defect means is to be male, rational, and to have a human body. *Human perfection* is to have human nature without defect, *and* to be well-born (i.e., not physically defective), well-formed (i.e., cultured and virtuous), and fortunate (i.e., free from misfortune or tragedy). Aristotle understands the perfect life of the perfectible male to be the *telos* of human nature: god-like in his posture, rationality, virtue, and seminal potency; with a woman to bear his seed, a natural slave to be an extension of his body, friends to mirror his magnanimity, and a city to benefit from his contemplation of truth and goodness. In contrast to the essentially intact, well-born, well-formed, and fortunate human male, for Aristotle, there are unnatural and natural exceptions to ordinary (i.e., male) human life.

Aristotle's understanding of human nature and human life stands in contrast to the exceptions to human nature and human life. The unnatural exceptions are essentially perfectible human beings (male and rational) who suffer a defect that is caused by some intervening force; a defect that frustrates the realization of the properly human potential of an essentially intact human being. Among the unnatural exceptions Aristotle includes physically deformed men, madmen, the incontinent, barbarians, and those who are senile, for example. By contrast, the natural exceptions to ordinary adult human life are essentially defective human beings (either not male or not rational); the defect in this class of human beings is coordinate with 'nature's intent' and ordered towards the perfection of the human good (*telos*) in particular perfectible males. Among the natural exceptions Aristotle counts women and natural slaves. Naturally defective, women and natural slaves do not have the full potential to realize the *telos* of the human being. However, because they have a measure of the human potential (females have reason; natural slaves have human bodies and seminal potency), they are able to realize properly human goods coordinate with the perfect good of the human being—through a species of friendship with well-born and well-formed perfectible males.

Aristotle's understanding of human nature and human life (and the exceptions to human nature and human life) is supported by a detailed metaphysical biology and natural history. Stephen Clark's account in *Aristotle's Man* provides an account of that background thought in Aristotle. Because Clark's is a synthetic account of presuppositions that Aristotle nowhere thematized, and because our governing concern is how Aristotle's view of human nature is subverted and appropriated by Aquinas, our proximate aims will be appropriately served by highlighting the most salient features of Clark's exegetical work.

To illustrate Aristotle's unusual understanding of the metaphysical origins of terrestrial life (that is, unusual for modern westerners trained to think according to reductively materialistic explanations of biological origins and processes), Clark draws a comparison between modern evolutionary biology and Aristotle's 'devolutionary transformist theory.' By Clark's self-admittedly crude description, modern evolutionary biology posits a first moment (measured in millions of years) when particular material processes transitioned into particular biological processes. Common in ancestral or genetic origin, all terrestrial life developed and diversified through adaption, isolation, mutation, and natural selection. Modern evolutionary biology judges the human being to be the product of such a process.

One important strength of that account, according to Clark, is the way ‘modern evolutionary transformist biology’ and its materialism is coordinate with the most highly valued philosophical judgments of modern westerners: for example, the materiality of secular politics in the form the nation-state (as an antidote to religious conflict) or evolutionary accounts of culture, social progress, and (therefore) the just global hegemony of western powers.⁴ This is no different from Aristotle’s devolutionary theory; specifically, Aristotle’s mythological presumptions concerning the origin of biological life and the biological distinctiveness of the human being is coordinate with the most precious self-understandings of Aristotle’s Athenian counterparts. Specifically, Aristotle’s understanding of human nature and human life cannot be separated from his understanding of the biological constitution of human beings, in their natural and unnatural diversity, and as distinct from other forms of terrestrial life.

Clark’s account of evolutionary biology is not intended to critique the consensus view of the modern natural sciences; rather, his goal is to highlight the embodied philosophical judgments that condition the plausibility of modern evolutionary biology and exclude alternative accounts of the

⁴ Clark, 39.

distinctiveness of the human being within the whole of biological life.⁵ Because these kinds of judgments are embodied and because these kinds of judgments condition what is said about human nature and human life, they are morally significant. Although in principle and strictly speaking it “purports to be a purely historical account,” writes Clark, modern “evolutionary transformism is in great measure a way of marking out the present world with man triumphant in the center.”⁶ As we shall see, Aquinas understood this relationship between his account of human origins and distinctiveness, and his account of human nature, human life, and the human good (which he formulates as perfections).

Aristotle’s understanding of the human being presumes a folkloric or mythical account of the origin of the human being and the diversity of biological life—one which, likewise, marks out the perfection of the human being as the zenith of all terrestrial life. The explanatory strength of that devolutionary myth is the heart of Aristotle’s account of the natural and unnatural exceptions to ordinary human nature and life. It is precisely here that Aquinas subverts Aristotle in his otherwise Aristotelian description of the human being in the *Summa Theologica*. For there is no way, presuming a

⁵ Clark, 40.

⁶ Clark, 39.

Christian doctrine of creation, to appropriate Aristotle's understanding of natural or essential defect.

So, what did Aristotle think about the distinctiveness of the human being amid the diversity of biological life? Aristotle, according to Clark, presumed a "devolutionary transformist" model throughout his varied accounts of terrestrial life and, especially, in his account of the human being.⁷ Clark writes that for Aristotle "man is not a deformed ape. Apes more likely are deformed men"; in contrast to standard evolutionary theory, for Aristotle the only candidate for a First Ancestor of biological life is Man.⁸

Clark provides a way in which the essence of Aristotle's view could be faithfully rendered in the terms of modern evolutionary biology. Clark writes,

we can conflate [Aristotle's devolutionary theory] with evolutionary transformism: suppose that all terrestrial life does derive from highly complex macro-molecules. On Aristotelian terms these would be larvae and all evolution would be the working-out of a preset pattern, with man as the *telos* of terrestrial life. These larvae, sown by proto-man, or (as is more likely) generated by the earth itself, would derive their form from an earlier possessor: the earth itself, we may suppose, contained the form of man.⁹

⁷ Clark, 28-47; esp. 28-32.

⁸ Clark, 38; cf. Aristotle's *On the Parts of Animals*, 689b 31.

⁹ Clark, 41.

Like modern evolutionary theory, Aristotle held that there was a first moment (in the eternal universe) when inanimate terrestrial matter became biological life.¹⁰ This turn, however, was not a gradual material transition, it was a metaphysical event. What took place was a transformation of designate matter through a divine (or super-human) imposition of the *eidos* (form) and *ergon* (function) of Man onto inanimate matter.¹¹ The *ergon* of Man is oriented by the *telos* of the human being—it is the impulse of the human being to actualize and realize his god-like potential.¹² Aristotle’s account of the super-human imposition of the *ergon* and *eidos* of Man is folkloric and mythological in character—it might also be properly identified as theological—and it is the natural history that Aristotle presumes.¹³ Clark writes that

the folk background...of Aristotle’s [view] is the tale of the primeval giant from whom the world was made and of whom we are the unworthy descendants. What this says in Aristotelian terms, is that the Human Form, the human way of living, is the one original form from which all other lives and forms [of life] are degenerate.¹⁴

For Aristotle, Clark argues, the form of Man (*eidos*) is coordinate with, but distinct from, the function of Man (*ergon*). Kathleen Wilkes, following

¹⁰ On the basis of the judgment that no thing can come from nothing, Aristotle held that the universe is eternal.

¹¹ Clark, 26.

¹² Cf., Clark, 16, 26.

¹³ See David Sedley’s “Is Aristotle’s Teleology Anthropocentric?” *Phronesis*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1991), pp. 179-196. Esp. 192-4.

¹⁴ Clark, 46; cf., 191, 204.

Thomas Nagel, provides a concise description of the 'function argument' in Aristotle's thought. She writes

The *ergon* of any X is the function that it has; or, if it is the kind of thing which cannot readily be said to have a function, it is its characteristic activity. It is definitionally assigned; it is what X does that makes it just what it is, and if for any reason X becomes unable to perform its *ergon*, it is then no longer genuinely an X at all (cf. *De Anima* 412b 20 ff.). A sheepdog has the *ergon* of herding sheep; a good sheepdog is one that herds sheep well. Correspondingly the good man is the one who performs admirably the activities specific to his kind (see 1098a 11-15).¹⁵

Wilkes notes the challenge of translating *ergon*, explaining that 'function' and 'characteristic activity' better express Aristotle's use of the word and helps distinguish it from the purpose or end (*telos*) of the form (*eidos*). The purpose of Man (as a species), then, is to realize its end or *telos* in particular human beings: to stand upright like the gods, with the same rationality and seminal potency by which Prometheus was able to make mud into the first human being.¹⁶ The function of Man (*ergon*) is the means by which the purpose of Man (*telos*) is completed or perfected. The adult male is endowed with the perfect or complete form of the human being (*eidos*); and, for that reason, has

¹⁵ Kathleen V. Wilkes, "The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics" *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 87, No. 348 (Oct., 1978), 553-571. Esp. 555. Cf., Thomas Nagel's article "Aristotle on *Eudaimonia*". *Phronesis*. Vol, 17, No. 3 (1972). 253-259.

¹⁶ See Clark's essay "The Use of 'Man's Function' in Aristotle", *Ethics* 82, 1972. 269-283.

the potential to achieve or realize the end of the human being.¹⁷ By this account, the function of Man (*ergon*) could be understood as seminally present in the form (*eidos*) or soul (*anima*) of the earliest living primordial being, while the substantial form of the biological life remained defective owing to the deficiencies of the designate matter.

As each instance of biological life seminally informed successive generations of new beings, the form of Man (*eidos*) strove for the perfection (*telos*) of its purpose (*ergon*) in whatever way the designate matter would allow.¹⁸ Discrete and homeostatic vegetative and animate species arose when the defects of the designate matter characteristic of a particular class of beings could no longer be perfected by the seminal unity of all biological life.¹⁹ Clark writes, that for Aristotle

in losing their human unity, becoming imbalanced, [plants and irrational animals] must consolidate their lesser powers as best they

¹⁷ Clark, 29.

¹⁸ "What happens in devolution? The male principle is what imparts motion to the material provided by the female. It follows that the male enshrines the power of nature to a greater degree, a power evinced in a greater supply of heat. Decent down the hierarchy is accompanied by a gradual loss of heat and of differentiation." Clark, 44; cf. 37-8.

¹⁹ For Aristotle, according to Clark, although the soul of man is one, it is also potentially plural: "human unity is built upon the ordering and control of an internal plurality, and 'in general there is the greatest diversity of parts in animals capable of living well'". Clark, 45.

can. In doing so they are deprived of the power to make long-term plans for living well, and act only to achieve present satisfactions.²⁰

The vegetable soul and the animal soul are, in a certain way, dignified with respect to their origination from what is perfect in the *eidos* of Man. Yet, in a more determinative sense, vegetable and animal souls are irredeemably defective with respect to their inability to actualize the function (*ergon*) of the human being, on account of their defective form (*eidos*). For Aristotle, the upright posture, rationality, and seminal potency of the adult, male human being is the condition of perfectibility toward which all biological life strives. The function (*ergon*) of all terrestrial life, nevertheless, continues to orient the activity of defective beings—to the extent that an individual and particular good can be realized as these defective beings actively support the realization of the purpose (*telos*) of the human being in particular perfectible males.

Most humans, according to Aristotle, fail to realize this perfection while nevertheless remaining members of the human species—insofar as they possess a measure of male rationality, seminal potency, and upright posture. For Aristotle, there are two main exceptions to perfectible male human life: natural exceptions and unnatural exceptions. These exceptions all possess a rational (i.e., human) soul, but the defects of their bodies *effectively* deform or

²⁰ Clark, 46.

mutilate their human soul. Being so deformed, these exceptions do not function (*ergon*) as the form (*eidos*) of Man ought. These exceptions are not irrational animals of another species—they are human; however, they are psychosomatically defective humans.

2.3 *Aristotle's Defective Humans, a Metaphysical Account*

According to Aristotle, the human being can be defective in two ways. Natural defects are deformities or deficiencies that follow from a defective soul. Unnatural defects are deformities or deficiencies that follow from the influence of some intervening force upon the human being. The unnatural exceptions to perfectible human life are those whose state is the result of some intervening force or imbalance of humors: madmen, barbarians, and those who have become senile, for example. These human beings are not born defective, as is the case with women and natural slaves, but they are made defective through some habit or accident.

The principal natural exceptions to adult human life for Aristotle are women and natural slaves. These human beings are born defective, and Aristotle understands them to be sub-human or misbegotten human males. Male children are, in a certain way, born defective—they are physically, intellectually, and seminally immature. The difference is that the male child

has the potential to become complete. This potential must be cultivated and properly habituated, however, if it is to be actualized. Nevertheless, very often, something goes wrong (which would be an instance of an unnatural exception).

For Aristotle, human females are physically malformed (*peperamenon*) human males; and this by nature's intent. Women are unambiguously rational beings and their essential defect has a proper function in relationship to perfectible human beings.²¹ Women have the form of the human being (*eidos*), but that form is defective. According to Aristotle, a woman is thought of as someone who has all the deliberative reason that an adult male has, but doesn't follow reason in act, or only follows reason sporadically—and this because her volatile passions cannot be habituated.²² Because women are able to reason as the human being ought to reason, according to Aristotle, men can share a form of friendship with women in the *oikonomia* of the household.²³ This relationship is the relationship between ruler and ruled, and it is by way

²¹ *Generation of Animals*, I, 737a 25. For Aristotle, the human female is a *qualified defection* (*peperamenon*) from the form of the human species, but she is not a separate species from that which the human male is the exemplar. The same holds true for the equally qualified by more pronounced defect of the natural slave. This qualified defect of the Aristotelian woman is different from the simple defect of the deformed or mutilated infants that Aristotle recommends for exposure. *Politics*, 1335b 19-22.

²² *Politics*, 1260a 11-14.

²³ *NE*, 1158b 11-13; 1160b 33-35; 1161a 24-25; 1162a 21-29.

of this relationship that women are able to realize properly human goods that are proportionate to their defective nature.²⁴ The principal purpose of the woman's natural defect, according to Aristotle, is for the continuance of the human species—as the reproductive partner of a human male. However, because women are essentially defective, they do not have the potential coordinate with the *telos* of the human being.

Unlike the woman, for Aristotle the 'slave by nature' or 'natural slave' is not physically deformed or defective; and unlike male children, the slave by nature possess the mature seminal potency of an adult male. The defect of the 'slave by nature' is his complete lack of the 'deliberative faculty.'²⁵ Unlike dispositionally free adult males and females, the 'slave by nature' has a weak and therefore servile soul. Aristotle writes that the slave by nature "participates in reason, to the extent that he can apprehend reason, but he does not possess reason."²⁶ In contrast to adult males and females, the natural slave lacks the ability to reason discursively with respect to ends and is incapable of self-determination or purposive choice.²⁷ For this reason,

²⁴ *Politics*, 1245b 12.

²⁵ *Politics*, 1260a 12.

²⁶ *Politics*, 1254b 22-23.

²⁷ Cf. Richard Bodeus "The natural foundations of right and Aristotelian philosophy", trans. Kent Enns, *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the moral and political thought of Aristotle*. (Albany: State University of New York Press; 1999). 88—92.

according to Aristotle, the natural slave is further removed from the perfectibility of the adult male than women are. However, like women, the natural slave is capable of attaining a properly human good proportionate to his defect nature.

It is important here to underscore the 'naturalness' of the defective condition of women and natural slaves in Aristotle's metaphysical vision of human biology. For example, if we are thinking according to Aristotle's terms, the slave by nature is always 'he.' If a woman were to lack the 'deliberative faculty' it would be due to some intervening force that caused an unnatural defect. She would still be classed as a woman because the purpose of her essential nature, defective by nature's intent, is as a reproductive partner for a perfectible male. On Aristotle's view, a woman does not need the deliberative faculty to bear children. By comparison, barbarians and madmen are essentially intact human males (they are seminally potent), but they are unnaturally defective due to some intervening force.

Coordinate with the woman and the slave by nature, Aristotle also discusses the natural defect of 'the bestial man.'²⁸ Bestial men are physically and psychologically deformed humans. Existing on the border between the

²⁸ *NE*, 1148b 15—1149a 24.

human being and the irrational animal, the bestial man derives sensate pleasure from bestial activities. His defects could be understood as devolutionary; that is to say, on Aristotle's terms, the bestial man might be indicative of how terrestrial diversity arose. As we will show below, there are exegetical grounds to believe that, for Aristotle, the bestial man who lives in "far-off lands" is a natural slave. Specifically, a bestial man could be understood as a natural slave (essentially defective) who suffers the misfortune of a wild and irrational existence due to homelessness (no natural master to guide him) and who is unnaturally defective in affective inclinations (due to a regionally caused imbalance of the humors, or abnormal *thumos*).

As natural exceptions to perfectible human life, women and natural slaves are instruments in a causal chain ordered towards the full realization of the *ergon* and *telos* of Man (the adult, male Athenian philosopher). On Aristotle's view, this is how women and 'slaves by nature' participate in the *ergon* and *telos* of Man. Aristotle understands the perfection of the perfectible adult male to be the *telos* of all terrestrial life; god-like in his posture, rationality, and seminal potency. Free of defect, Aristotle's perfect or complete man is not immortalized or divinized, he is simply free to live according to what is best for all life: to become what he is (i.e., to realize that which all

terrestrial life strives to become).²⁹ Defective human beings, those who bear the *eidōs* of Man, yet fail to achieve the *ergon* of Man are the antecedent condition of possibility for the actualization of the perfect and complete human being. The life of Aristotle's complete man would be impossible without the support of defective and deformed human beings: only the 'misbegotten' woman can give birth to the perfect man and only the body of the 'slave by nature' in his household can free him for the contemplation of universals. Dependent as the completed man is upon women and the natural slave, their defects grant them no claim upon his perfection; the perfection realized in his life is the meaning and purpose of their life.

Defective human beings possess the *eidōs* of Man, and this in a way that irrational animals do not. Their defective (yet, in a way, dignified) function (*ergon*) is to pass on the *eidōs* of Man and secure the *telos* of Man for the unburdened male, in whatever way their particular defects will allow. This is the function they serve on behalf of all perfectible human life, and in service to the perfection of human existence. The individual relationship of women and natural slaves to the *ergon* and *telos* of Man (limited as it is by their defective form [*eidōs*]) is that of origination. However, they cannot and

²⁹ Clark, 26-27.

will not individually realize the *telos* correlative to the *ergon* of Man, owing to the defective form (*eidōs*) of their bodies.

2.3.1 Aristotle's Defectives

Aristotle's biological universe is overflowing with defective beings. Most of humanity is defective. The only exception for Aristotle is the well-born, well-formed, and fortunate adult male. For only males of that sort have the potential to realize the perfection of the human being. Presently, however, we are more interested in Aristotle's defectives.

As a vehicle to better understand the various ways that a human being can be defective on Aristotle's terms, we will isolate and discuss Aristotle's 'slave by nature' in contrast with other forms of defective human life. With respect to the governing concern of this chapter, focusing on Aristotle's natural slave has three advantages. First, a clear picture of Aristotle's notion of the natural slave will allow us to show how, exactly, Aquinas, selectively appropriates and subverts Aristotle's metaphysical biology and account of human nature. Second, a clear understanding of the particular defect of the natural slave in Aristotle's view will demonstrate exegetically the interpretive novelty of the 16th century caricature of the 'mindless' *barbarian-cum-natural slave*. Such a demonstration, and presuming the scholarship of Ashley and

Pagden outlined in the introduction, will set the context for our interpretation of Aquinas; and, in particular, Aquinas's understanding of the natural and ultimate perfectibility of those who 'lack the use of reason' (in chapter 3).

Third, a clear picture of the natural slave on Aristotle's terms is necessary for the work of chapter 4, where we will depict Aquinas's proper account of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment. We will, then, briefly describe Aquinas's revision of natural slavery as a corporeal infirmity (a profound and therefore rare impairment of the cognitive faculties) and show the key points in Aquinas's repurposing of the natural slave template in his remarks on those who 'lack the use of reason.'

Our immediate concern is to isolate, on Aristotle's terms, the particular defect of the natural slave from the spectrum of other forms of defective or otherwise deficient human life. In particular, the *natural defects* of women, bestial men, and irrational animals; the *unnatural defects* of barbarians, the intemperate, and the incontinent; and the *bad luck* of the civil slave.

We will proceed as follows. First, through a close reading of the introduction and the conclusion of Aristotle's *treatise on the natural slavery* in Book 1 of the *Politics*, we will demonstrate Aristotle's basic distinction between the natural slave, women, and barbarians. Special attention will be

given to Aristotle's description of the unnatural defect of the barbarian in Book 7 of the *Politics*. Second, through a close reading of Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we will discuss Aristotle's distinction between natural slavery and three types of *akrasia*, the irrational acts of those who are capable of rational choice (*prohairesis*): intemperance, simple-incontinence, and bestiality. Further attention will be given to Aristotle's description of the natural slave in contrast to *akraisa* in Book 1 of the *Politics*. A general concern in this section is to show, according to Aristotle, the difference between the 'natural slave', the 'civil or unnatural slave', and irrational animals.

2.3.2 *The basic distinction between natural slaves, women, and barbarians*

2.3.2.1 *The first relevant section: from the introduction to the treatise on natural slavery*

Aristotle begins the *Politics* with a claim that every community is established for the sake of some good.³⁰ He notes that contrary to common opinion, the position of the statesman, king, household manager, and the 'master of slaves' are not of the same kind. Specifically, these positions are not grades of the same kind of rule, differentiated only by the number of

³⁰ *Politics*, 1252a 1-2.

subjects.³¹ Aristotle sets for himself the task of showing why these societal functions are not of the same kind. To demonstrate this, Aristotle proposes to investigate each of these forms of rule in their particularity; in order to show how they differ from one another and how they fit together to form a city state.³²

Aristotle begins with those things that cannot naturally exist without relational counterpart. He takes these relations to exist necessarily, without deliberate choice, because they are matters of basic human existence—and thereby basic to human experience. First, he notes the procreative relation between male and female. Second, he notes the political relation between ‘master by nature’ (*phusei despoton*) and the ‘slave by nature’ (*phusei doulon*).³³ Both of these relations are for Aristotle common sense: Humans would not exist if humans did not procreate; and humans would not survive if they did not cooperate with one another through the orderly differentiation and performance of societal roles. He presumes, moreover, that both the master and the slave benefit from the master-slave relationship; the natural master benefiting from the labor of the natural slave, and the natural slave benefiting

³¹ *Politics*, 1252a 7-5.

³² *Politics*, 1252a 25-30.

³³ *Politics*, 1252a 30-35.

from the protection and guidance of the natural master. For Aristotle, the most basic political relationships within the household are, thus, male-female and ruler-ruled. Aristotle, of course, presumes that the ruler of a subordinate is always male, however he does not presume that all males rule over subordinates.

What follows is the first section of relevance to the distinction between natural slaves, women, and barbarians. For reasons that will soon become clear, it is appropriate to include the full context of the key lines concerning the distinctions we intend to show. Aristotle writes,

it is by nature that a distinction has been made between female and slave. For nature produces nothing skimpily (like the Delphic knife that Smiths make), but one thing for one purpose; for every tool will be made best if it serves not many tasks but one. Non-Greeks [as an undifferentiated class, presumably male], however, assign to female and slave the same status. This is because [non-Greeks, as a class] do not have that which naturally rules [i.e., a class of natural rulers]: their association [i.e., their relating to one another] comes to be that of a male slave and a female slave. Hence, as the poets say,

‘it is proper that Greeks should rule non-Greeks
[barbarians]’,

on the assumption that non-Greek and slave are by nature identical. Thus it was from these two associations that a household first arose...the association formed according to nature, for the satisfaction of the purposes of everyday, is a household...³⁴

³⁴ *Politics*, 1252a 34—1252b 14.

We have included this large passage from Aristotle for two reasons: First, because most of what Aristotle has to say about the master-slave relation in Book 1 is an interrogation of the judgments surrounding Iphigenia's claim in *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Euripides.³⁵ Second, how one interprets the rhetorical function of the provided excerpt within the natural slave discourse conditions what can count as a plausible description of Aristotle's proper 'slave by nature.'³⁶ Specifically, *what is the status of the lines on the association of 'barbarians' and 'slaves'? Do we have before us a metaphysically stipulative definition; a prefatory description of Athenian common-sense; or, perhaps, a foil?* The status of these lines and the rhetorical significance of the provided passage can be identified through a close reading. We will do that now.

The extended passage provided above begins with a distinction between the female and the undifferentiated slave, which is held forth as the ordinary view by Aristotle. To show the principled status of that distinction

³⁵ Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, 1400.

³⁶ The reason is it important to accurately depict Aristotle's 'slave by nature' is so that we can recognize the way Aquinas subverts and repurposes the notion. In other words, we cannot account for what is theologically problematic about Aristotle's natural slave theory until we understand what, exactly, the theory is about. And, further, if we do not understand what Aquinas found theologically problematic about the very notion of 'natural slavery,' we will not be able to follow his theological subversion of the notion and his repurposing of the natural slave template. The ignorant disdain of an allegedly bad idea will only get you as far as a self-righteous prejudice; it will not show you how to go on. Ignorance does not cure ignorance. In order to go on, we need to understand what exactly it is that makes the idea a bad one.

for what he has to say about the family within the polis, Aristotle offers a generic contrast in how non-Greek's are understood to relate to one another, i.e., "they assign female and slave the same status." It is important to recognize that Aristotle does not designate if the slaves being referenced are 'civil slaves' or 'natural slaves' within the non-Greek social order; however, the absence of this distinction does not bear upon Aristotle's apparent reason for introducing the contrastive position.

The logic runs like this: The implied major premise is that all natural rulers distinguish between females and slaves. The minor premise is that (presumably male) non-Greeks do not distinguish between females and slaves. The proposed conclusion is that there are no natural rulers among non-Greeks, they are an association of slaves. The line from *Iphigenia at Aulis* is introduced to illustrate this Greek judgment about non-Greek associations, and it does this by positing the natural rule of Greeks over non-Greeks. Iphigenia's theatrical claim is interpreted by Aristotle to indicate that

Euripides considered barbarians to be 'by nature' slaves, and slaves to be 'by nature' barbarians.³⁷

Regarding the minor premise (that a failure to distinguish between females and slaves is characteristic of non-Greeks) Aristotle *infers* that the cause of this failure to distinguish is that non-Greeks do not have a class of 'natural rulers.'³⁸ The implication being that a class of 'natural rulers' would demonstrate or model the natural distinction between females and slaves within generically non-Greek social orders. For Aristotle, if that inference is indeed the case (that there are no natural rulers among the non-Greeks), the 'male-female reproductive partnerships' among non-Greeks would be disordered, in that there would be no hierarchy governing the interaction of barbarian females and barbarian slaves within the barbarian household.³⁹

³⁷ It should be noted here that Iphigenia's claim that the Trojans should be conquered and ruled as slaves (the alternative being the destruction and ravaging of Athens), is hardly axiomatic.

³⁸ Saunders, "Commentary", *Aristotle's Politics*. 65. "The naturally ruling element lacking among non-Greeks is one rational enough to distinguish the natural roles of women and slaves."

³⁹ The language of 'male-female reproductive partnership' is preferred as it communicates the wider thematic concern of the 1252a 24—1252b 14. In particular, it is the middle stage between the natural urge and necessity to breed indicated in 1252a 27, and the economic or familial male-female association indicated in 1252b 9-15. C.f., Rackham's translation in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 21, translated by H. Rackham. (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; 1944).

The rhetorical function of the excerpt from *Iphigenia at Aulis* is to illustrate the common-sense status of a particular Greek claim about non-Greek associations. The claim has to do with the order or governance of non-Greek households, i.e., that non-Greeks make no distinction between the role of females and the role of slaves. The purpose of the illustration is to support the reasonableness of this claim as it stands in relation to Aristotle's initial proposition that there is a natural distinction between females and natural slaves within the household.

There is no way for us to know the status of Aristotle's proposal (i.e., that there were certain non-Greek males who did not recognize distinct modes of relating proper to the difference between females and slaves). However, we can reasonably presume that the rhetorical significance of the comparison of barbarians and slaves (i.e., regarding the order of non-Greek households, and the line that illustrates the point) is best understood by way of the conclusion Aristotle seems to draw from them in *1252b 9–15*. Specifically, the conclusion that the two basic associations of the household are male-female (for the purpose of reproduction), and ruler-ruled (for the sake of mutual survival and benefit).

For Aristotle, the claim that the two basic associations of everyday household life are ordered toward procreation and survival, is not dependent

upon the proposal that there are no natural rulers among non-Greeks. Thus, without further explanation, the rhetorical function of the line from *Iphigenia at Aulis* (“it is proper that Greeks should rule non-Greeks”) and Aristotle’s interpretation of Euripides’ presumption (“that non-Greek and slave are by nature identical”) is ambiguous. Nevertheless, there is no ambiguity about what we do not have in 1252b 9-10. Specifically, we do not have a metaphysically stipulative definition of either the barbarian or the natural slave.

2.3.2.2 *The second relevant section: from the conclusion to the treatise on natural slavery*

Fortunately, Aristotle directly engages the claims of the Euripidean line near the conclusion of his discourse on natural slavery. There are many good reasons to explicate Aristotle’s account of the natural master-slave relation as it unfolds in his treatise; however, given that our reading contradicts the popular opinion, there is a certain utility in jumping straight to the conclusion. Specifically, recognizing the trajectory of Aristotle’s argument will help us to later identify the distinctions pertinent to Aristotle’s proper account of the ‘slave by nature.’ We will then be better equipped to identify Aquinas’s subversion and repurposing of Aristotle’s notion.

In 1255a 25-31, Aristotle outlines the key difficulties with categorically mapping an undifferentiated state of slavery onto the status of non-Greeks. Those Greeks, Aristotle explains, who claim that the enslavement of non-Greeks by way of war is natural and just, simultaneously deny the claim. The central problematic provided is the recognition that Greeks can, indeed, be conquered and enslaved through violent force by non-Greeks.⁴⁰ In what seems to be a critique of Athenian racism, Aristotle points out that those who consider non-Greeks (barbarians) to be slaves by nature are at the same time unwilling to describe a forcibly enslaved Greek noble as a slave by nature.⁴¹ They only want to describe non-Greeks as natural slaves. And yet, Aristotle writes,

when they say this, they are merely seeking for the principles of natural slavery of which we spoke at the outset; for they are compelled to say that there exist certain persons who are essentially slaves everywhere and certain others who are so nowhere.⁴²

Here, Aristotle recalls the line from *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Behind the false categorical claim that ‘Greeks should rule non-Greeks’ and not the reverse, Aristotle identifies a basic recognition. Namely, that some people are natural

⁴⁰ *Politics*, 1255a 25–28. “since it is possible for wars to be started unjustly, and in no way could one call someone a slave who does not deserve to be a slave [i.e. an enslaved Greek noble]; otherwise, it will turn out that those considered to be of the noblest birth are slaves and descendants of slaves, should any of them be captured and sold.”

⁴¹ *Politics*, 1255a 29.

⁴² *Politics*, 1255a 29-32.

slaves, essentially (i.e., they are naturally defective); these are people who functionally participate in the rational principle of human nature (*ergon*), who are able to be moved by reason towards an end (*telos*), but do not possess what is necessary for reasoning (*eidos*).⁴³ When the Euripidean line and Aristotle's interpretation from the beginning of the treatise (1252b 9-10) are interpreted in light of this trajectory, the suppositional status of the initial association of barbarism with natural slavery is evident.

For Aristotle, Iphigenia's claim is true in a sense for it illustrates the intuition that there is a permanence attending the status of one who is a slave by nature. That permanence is what Greeks who take the line as axiomatic aim to express in their attribution of natural slavery to a seemingly stable and identifiably distinct social class—that is, the generically non-Greek, barbarian society. Aristotle shows the problem with mapping the permanence of natural slavery onto the circumstantial status of civil slavery (resulting from a war, for example) or the strangeness of the barbarian. Yet, while problematic, Aristotle affirms that there is a certain rationale in the association of natural slavery with civil slavery and barbarism. Specifically, for Aristotle, a *natural defect* (slave by nature) is confused with the *unnatural defect* of the barbarian, neither

⁴³ *Politics*, 1254b 22-23. "τὰ γὰρ ἄλλα ζῶα οὐ λόγῳ αἰσθανόμενα ἀλλὰ παθήμασιν ὑπηρετεῖ."

of which are identical to the *bad luck* of a freeman (Greek or non-Greek) who happens to be enslaved following a war.

Read in this way, the theatrical conflation of the 'slave by nature' and the 'barbarian' in the Euripidean line from *Iphigenia at Aulis* is rejected by Aristotle, but likewise reconfigured to affirm the intuition that constitutes the appeal of the proverb to Greek nobles. Specifically, that there is a naturalness and corresponding permanence to the condition of the 'slave by nature.' For Aristotle, the natural defect of the 'natural slave' is constitutive of the justice of the institution of slavery itself; insofar as the civil institution is the political expression of a fundamental human association. This is the heart of Aristotle's defense of slavery as a social institution. For Aristotle, 'barbarians' and 'slaves' do not share the same nature, but there are persons who are slaves by nature. At least one question follows, pertinent to Aquinas's reading of Aristotle, *What is wrong with the barbarian, such that he could be so easily confused with a slave by nature?*

2.3.2.3 *The unnatural defect of the barbarian, as compared with the natural slave*

For Aristotle, barbarians (e.g., Europeans, Asians, and Egyptians) are not slaves by nature. However, he does consider non-Greeks to be defective; and this in a way that effectively impairs what is perfectible in the form of a

well-born, adult male. What is important here is the etiology of the barbarian defect. Specifically, Aristotle believes that the climate and food of particular regions stimulate or depress the spirit or 'heat' (*thumos*) of the human being, causing them to tend towards *unnaturally brutish* or *unnaturally slavish* behavior.⁴⁴ There is an intervening force that impacts the functioning (*ergon*) of an otherwise perfectible human being. Cold climates over-stimulate the ordinarily balanced internal *thumos* of human beings, causing them to have excessive internal heat—which, as in Europeans, corresponds with high passion and low intelligence.⁴⁵ Correspondingly, for Aristotle, hot climates depress the *thumos* of the human being, causing an deficiency of internal heat—which, as in Asians, corresponds with low passion and high intelligence. What Aristotle has to say about the etiology of the barbarian defect is particularly relevant to Aquinas's subversion and revision of Aristotle's theory of the natural slave.

⁴⁴ *Politics*, 1327b 20-30. Aristotle writes, "Those who live in a cold climate and in Europe are full of spirit [*enthumos*], but wanting in intelligence and skill; and therefore they retain comparative freedom, but have no political organization, and are incapable of ruling over others. Whereas the natives of Asia are intelligent and inventive, but they are wanting in spirit [*athumos*], and therefore they are always in a state of subjugation and slavery. But the Hellenic race, which is situated between them, is likewise intermediate in character, being high-spirited and also intelligent."

⁴⁵ Malcolm Heath "Aristotle on Natural Slavery" *Phronesis* 53 (2008). 255-8.

It was not that Aristotle favored the Athenian Greeks, although he did, so much as that he believed that variations in climate from region to region had a direct influence on the faculties of the body and, as a result, the disposition of human beings who happened to live in the region. This is shown to be the case in that Aristotle speaks highly of all *Mediterranean barbarians*, in particular, the Egyptians.⁴⁶ As already demonstrated, Aristotle did not consider ‘barbarians’ and ‘slaves by nature’ to have an identical nature. In fact, there are some ‘barbarians’ about whom he speaks with high regard.⁴⁷ His understanding of how the environment effectively deformed the bodily dispositions of perfectible, well-born males (and not race or ethnicity) is the principal rationale for Aristotle’s low estimation of barbarian *qua* non-Greek.

This fact is well illustrated in his discussion of the status of the *paroikos*—non-Greek residents of Greece in the *Politics*. Aristotle writes that the farmers in his ideal city-state should be given land to cultivate, and that the farmers themselves “will of necessity be [civil] slaves or barbarian *paroikos*.” It

⁴⁶ See *Politics*, 1329a. Aristotle writes “From this part of the world [the regions immediately surrounding Greece] originally came the institution of common tables; the separation into castes from Egypt...Egypt witnesses to the antiquity of all these things, for the Egyptians appear to be of all people the most ancient; and they have laws and a regular constitution existing from time immemorial. We should therefore make the best use of what has been already discovered, and try to supply defects.”

⁴⁷ I.e. the courage of non-Greek Hector; cf. *NE* 1116a 17–1117a 29.

should be noted that Aristotle makes a distinction between the civil slave and the 'resident alien' *paroikos*, neither of which are 'slaves by nature.' Without a doubt Aristotle considers these Mediterranean-born barbarians to be inferior to the Greeks, but the *perioikoi* are not slaves by nature—for a slave by nature would not be able to cultivate land.⁴⁸

For Aristotle, non-Greeks are unnaturally 'slavish' or 'slave-like' because of an adverse environmental influence (characteristics which he takes to be often, but not necessarily, inheritable), and not because of a naturally weak capacity for practical rationality as in the case of the natural slave. Importantly, these environmentally conditioned tendencies are associated with particular regions and thus the populations en masse. However, for Aristotle, these tendencies very often do not express themselves on a case-by-case basis and, as a result, cannot be taken to be necessarily correlative with the *unnaturally brutish* or *unnaturally slavish* behavior of any particular non-Greek barbarian.⁴⁹ Understood in this way, on Aristotle's terms, if the non-Greek 'barbarian' is *slave-like*, this condition is an *expected, but unnatural defect*; however, in no way does he consider the non-Greek 'barbarian' to be a slave

⁴⁸ *Politics*, 1330a 25-35.

⁴⁹ *Politics*, 1255a 38—1255b 8.

by nature without qualification. Specifically, on Aristotle's terms, non-Greeks are 'slavish' or 'slave-like' only by transference of the name.⁵⁰

What we are describing here, as a point of comparison, is at variance with Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of the Aristotelian barbarian and slave. Specifically, MacIntyre maintains that there is an essential association in Aristotle's thought between the barbarian and the slave.⁵¹ Now it is possible that MacIntyre is basing this judgment on the basis of the second type of rulership described in Book 3 of the *Politics*.⁵² However, it should be noted that the 'barbarians' Aristotle is talking about in that passage are not Asiatic, European, or Egyptian; nor is he discussing all barbarians, but only *some*

⁵⁰ *NE*, 1149a 21-36.

⁵¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. (Norte Dame Press, 1984). 158-60. "What is a barbarian? Not merely a non-Greek (whose language sounds to Hellenic ears like 'ba, ba, ba') but someone who lacks a polis and thereby shows—on Aristotle's view—that he is incapable of political relationships. What are political relationships? The relationships between those members of a community who both rule and are ruled over. The free self is simultaneously political subject and political sovereign. Thus to be involved in political relationships entails freedom from any position that is mere subjection. Freedom is the presupposition of the exercise of the virtues and the achievement of the good. [...] With this part of Aristotle's conclusion [i.e. freedom] we need not quarrel. What is likely to affront us—and rightly—is Aristotle's writing off of non-Greeks, barbarians and slaves, as not merely not possessing political relationships, but as incapable of them. [...] Some men are slaves 'by nature', on Aristotle's view."

⁵² *Politics*, 1285a 16-30. Aristotle writes "there is another sort of monarchy, such as the kingships found among some of the barbarians. These are like tyrannies in their powers, but they are legal and traditional. Because barbarians are more slavish in their regional [or ethnic] nature than Greeks [γὰρ τὸ δουλικώτεροι εἶναι τὰ ἤθη φύσει οἱ μὲν βάρβαροι τῶν Ἑλλήνων], and those in Asia more so than those in Europe, they endure despotic rule without distaste. Thus these monarchies are tyrannical in this respect, but they are secure because they are traditional and legal."

barbarians. The second thing to note is that the particular barbarians Aristotle is talking about are not ‘slaves by nature’; rather, these barbarians are more ‘slave-like’ or ‘servile’ in their regional (or ethnic) nature when compared to Greeks. The similitude indicated by δουλικώτεροι is stipulated as being geographically contingent (τὰ ἤθη φύσει).

The most likely interpretation is that the particular barbarians that Aristotle discusses in Book 3 (1285a 16-30) endure despotic rule because of a depressed *thumos*, and not because they are slaves by nature. The significant distinction, according to Aristotle’s understanding of human physiology, is between the *environmentally caused unnatural defect* of particular ‘slave-like barbarians’ and the *natural defect* of the slave by nature.⁵³ This is clearly indicated in that, for Aristotle, the inordinately stupid and unskilled European

⁵³ If we have interpreted Aristotle correctly, it would seem that MacIntyre is not correct in his view that Aristotle conflates ‘non-Greeks, barbarians and slaves’ into a single logical class; neither would it be correct to claim that Aristotle did not consider this group (the unified amalgam of non-Greeks, barbarians, and natural slaves) to be capable of political relationships. The problem, we suspect, has to do with the force of popular opinion in how Aristotle is interpreted on these matters. Specially, a failure to recognize the *suppositional* status of the Euripidean line (1252b 9-10) and Aristotle’s interpretation make it all the more difficult to trace the way Aristotle understands the particular defects of the ‘natural slave’ and the ‘barbarian.’ I do not yet know if MacIntyre will find my argument convincing, however I am profoundly grateful for the various ways he has helped me develop my own judgments on these matters.

barbarian is so unruly (due to an over-stimulated *thumos*) that men born in those regions can only be ruled by tyrants.

To sum up. Aristotle's distinction between the defects of the natural slave, women, and barbarians goes straight to the heart of Aristotle's metaphysical biology. A clear understanding of what Aristotle has to say about the natural essential defect of the 'natural slave' is crucial to an account of how Aquinas undermines and repurposes the notion. Moreover, a clear understanding of how the *natural defect* of the natural slave differs from the *unnatural defect* of the barbarian, on Aristotle's view, is an important part of displaying the relevance of 16th century interpretations of Aristotle and Aquinas for a contemporary reading of Aquinas on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment.

What Aristotle has to say about the etiology of the barbarian defect is an important feature of Aquinas's revision of Aristotle's theory of the natural slave. Aquinas interprets the 'strange' condition of Aristotle's natural slave as only intelligible if the notion is referring to a human being with a rare and unusually profound cognitive impairment.⁵⁴ Commenting upon the line from

⁵⁴ *Sententia libri Politicorum*, 1.1, n.15. (my translation) Aquinas writes "We interpret the word 'barbarian' to mean 'strange'. Since one can call the human being 'a stranger' either

Euripides, against Aristotle, Aquinas uses a play on the word ‘barbarian’ (derived from Book 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) to stipulate what is different or ‘strange’ about the natural slave.⁵⁵ Specifically, it is a profound strangeness in appearance and manner, such that the person being perceived seems to lack what is essential to human nature. Central to understanding Aquinas’s subversion of Aristotle on this point is that the profoundly impaired human being *seems* to be a ‘stranger with respect to human kind’ and that this *seeming* is accidental (i.e., not essential). To a certain extent, the accidental strangeness of those who ‘lack the use of reason’ according to Aquinas is comparable on phenomenological grounds to the unnatural defect the Aristotelian barbarian, insofar as the essence of human nature is intact in both cases.

Nevertheless, Aquinas’s revision of Aristotle on this matter is made explicit in his *Summa*.⁵⁶ He subverts Aristotle’s notion of natural slavery, while

strictly speaking or in relation to someone. Strictly speaking, for example, someone lacks the use of reason, by which the human being is described, seems to be ‘a stranger’ with respect to human kind. And, so, those who are called ‘barbarians’ in the strict sense are those whom reason has left...” [in nomine enim barbari extraneum aliquid intelligitur. Potest enim aliquis homo extraneus dici vel simpliciter vel quo ad aliquem. Simpliciter quidem extraneus videtur ab humano genere qui deficit ratione, secundum quam homo dicitur; et ideo simpliciter barbari nominantur illi qui ratione deficiunt...]

⁵⁵ *NE*, 1149a 9-10.

⁵⁶ *STh*, 2-2.57.3, reply 2. Rejecting Aristotle’s metaphysical presuppositions concerning essential human defect and the naturalness of institutional slavery, Aquinas writes “Considered absolutely, the fact that this particular man should be a slave rather than another man, is based, not on natural reason, but on some resultant utility or benefit

revising Aristotle's phenomenological description of the natural slave's dispositional dependency under the moral logic of merciful care for vulnerable and dependent persons.⁵⁷ Specifically, Aquinas stipulates the moral imperative to counsel and protect human beings who variously and unequally 'lack the use of reason' due to an extraordinary injury of the cognitive faculties.

For Aristotle, the natural slave is an essentially defective human being; for Aquinas, the 'slave by nature' *only seems* to be an essentially defective human being. On the template of the unnaturally defective barbarian, Aquinas revises Aristotle's notion to describe the rare and accidental condition of a human being (essentially intact) who lacks reason or who has lost reason due to some intervening effect.

Returning to the beginning of Aristotle's discourse on slavery, Aristotle acknowledges that some Greeks claim that the barbarian and the slave have

[utilitatem], in that it is useful or beneficial [utile] to this man to be practically guided [regatur] by a wiser man, and to the latter to be helped by the former, as the Philosopher states in *Politics* I, 2." For Aquinas, in stark contrast to Aristotle, the key terms are utility or benefit, practical guidance, and mutual help. The difference between the wise man who guides and a man with an "impaired intellectual light" (*debilitatem intellectualis luminis*) who needs guidance is not an essential difference; rather, it is an accidental difference pertaining to the natural vulnerability of the cognitive faculties to damage, dysfunction, and decay. See Aquinas's *SCG*, III.81, remarks 1-6.

⁵⁷ This will be discussed in chapter 4.

an identical nature. We have shown that there are no textual grounds to take that theatrical supposition as metaphysically stipulative. The key concern for Aristotle at the introduction of his treatise on the natural slave (1252a 34—1252b 14) is to establish that females and natural slaves have distinct natures. What we have seen, however, only indicates what the ‘slave by nature’ *is not*, on Aristotle’s terms—as distinguished from women, barbarians, and those who are circumstantially enslaved. For Aristotle, there is a difference between the environmentally caused unnatural defect of the ‘barbarian’ (*qua* non-Greek foreigner) and the essential or natural defect of the ‘natural slave.’ What has not been displayed, on Aristotle’s terms, is the significance of the naturalness of the condition of one who *participates in reason so as to apprehend it, but not to possess it*.

There are, for Aristotle, many ways that a human being can lack the use of reason. For Aquinas, the basic metaphysical description of the human being conditioning the *natural essential defect* of Aristotle’s natural slave is irreconcilable with the Christian view of the created rational animal, the image of God. In light of our governing aim in this chapter, it is necessary to highlight, and further isolate, the various defects Aristotle associates with human beings who lack the use of reason.

2.3.3 *The distinction between natural slavery and three types of irrational behavior*

At the introduction of Book 7 in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle indicates three conditions of character that are to be avoided: vice, unrestraint or incontinence (*akrasia*), and brutishness (or bestiality).⁵⁸ This first set of conditions are contrasted with a second set of conditions that are to be admired and pursued: virtue, self-restraint, and the heroic, god-like virtue, of a divine man.⁵⁹ An oppositional correspondence is established between the two sets of conditions: vice is opposed to virtue, continence is opposed to incontinence, and heroic virtue is opposed to the bestial state.

Aristotle's concern in this particular section is to distinguish the particular condition of the incontinent person (i.e., the *akratic*) from other forms of unrestraint. A person who is incontinent cannot control her or his animal impulses or urges, and acts contrary to what is properly understood and desired; such a person is fully capable of understanding and desiring particular ends, deliberating on the means to those ends, and choosing to act towards the achievement of those ends.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *NE*, 1145a 15.

⁵⁹ *NE*, 1145a 15-35.

⁶⁰ See commentary by Terence Irwin. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Translation and textual comments by Terence Irwin (Hackett, 1990). 322, 323, 335.

With respect to the divine and bestial opposition, neither are matters of virtue or vice for they exceed the limits of what Aristotle considers to be properly human capacities.⁶¹ Both designations are stipulative for Aristotle, and they illustrate instances of human-like existence (which is to say, neither the god, nor the beast, are human beings).

Aristotle reasons that just as the heroic virtue of the god is impossibly great, so too is the brutishness of the beast impossibly base.⁶² Although Aristotle's moral treatment of both states is speculative in nature, this does not mean that these figures do not matter. In fact, the significance of these figures should not be understated. For both the god and the beast negatively delimit what is distinctive about the human being, in contrast to other terrestrial life and the life of the gods; and, moreover, these figures display the transformational thrust of Aristotle devolutionary theory of biological life.⁶³

⁶¹ *NE*, 1145a 20-30.

⁶² *NE*, 1145a 25–28. Aristotle writes, “Hence if, as men say, surpassing virtue changes men into gods, the disposition opposed to bestiality will clearly be some quality more than human; for there is no such thing as virtue in the case of a god, any more than there is vice or virtue in the case of a beast: divine goodness is something more exalted than virtue, and bestial badness is different in kind from vice.”

⁶³ A contemporary example of what Aristotle is doing in chapter 7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* would be an anthropology that labored to seriously incorporate sasquatch sightings, the possibility of extraterrestrial rational beings, and the superhero mythology of comic books, all into a formal treatment of human existence.

Aristotle's figuration of moral status of the god and the beast is how he formulates the divine trajectory of the human form (*eidos*) and, by contrast, the devolutionary dysfunction of terrestrial life in comparison to the perfect human being. For Aristotle, *god-like-men* and *beast-like-men* actually do exist; his metaphysical understanding of the human being (*eidos*, *ergon*, and *telos*) turns on the presumption of the possibility of such beings—they are the defining outliers of properly human existence.⁶⁴ As previously explained, the end (*telos*) of the human being is for particular men to achieve the perfection of activity (*ergon*) proportionate to human nature (*eidos*): a man who is god-like in his posture, rationality, and seminal potency. Reports of particular beast-like men in far off lands, instances of human devolution, only confirm the profound importance the *polis*. Only the Aristotelian *polis* can coordinate the activities of defective and marginally defective human beings in the corporate human effort (the *ergon* of Man) to establish the conditions by which well-born and well-formed men can achieve human perfection.

Aristotle identifies three ways in which human beings are called bestial, each of which he subsequently addresses with greater detail. He writes,

⁶⁴ *NE*, 1145a 28-30.

a bestial character is rare among human beings; it is found most frequently among barbarians, and some cases also occur as a result of disease or arrested development. We sometimes also use 'bestial' as a term of reproach for a surpassing degree of human vice.⁶⁵

In the first clause, Aristotle is describing the outlier beast-like man—one who, as I will show below, Aristotle only understands to exist by way of uncertain reports from distant shores. In the second clause, the brutish character that results from disease or unnatural defect is a beast-like state of incontinence caused by an outside influence upon the natural dispositions of an individual. Aristotle associates diseased or deformed states of this sort with people who experience what he calls "epileptic" episodes and with people who are disposed to "fits of madness."⁶⁶ In the third clause, Aristotle notes the transference of the designation "bestial" from its absolute (or simple) sense, when it is used as a term of reproach for either intemperate or incontinent men; however, it is a transference of only the name, not the formal attribution of a bestial (or brutish) nature in the one being reproached.⁶⁷

Just as heroic, god-like virtue approaches what is taken to be a divine existence; correspondingly, the beast-like viciousness approaches what is taken to be an irrational, brutish existence. Aristotle addresses the possibility

⁶⁵ *NE*, 1145a 30-34.

⁶⁶ *NE*, 1149a 25-31; 12-13.

⁶⁷ *NE*, 1149a 21-24.

of men becoming gods elsewhere.⁶⁸ In the section of the *Nicomachean Ethics* we are here concerned with, Aristotle compares the various causes of brutish behavior that one would find among the Greeks with the prototypical bestial man. The typical bestial man lives in barbarian regions, which is not to say that barbarians are bestial men; rather, bestiality is a natural defect that Aristotle believes to occur disproportionately amongst the barbarians.

Strictly speaking, for Aristotle, the reason the bestial man takes pleasure in activities that are ordinarily unpleasant is because he is naturally defective; he would enjoy, for example, the act of killing pregnant women and eating the fetus, or consuming raw meat.⁶⁹ In contrast to the natural defect of the bestial man, Aristotle identifies two types of unnatural defect that cause behavior similar to the bestial state. These conditions are distinct in their own right: on the one hand, a natively diseased state indicated by fits of madness; on the other hand, an acquired defect caused by some intervening force.⁷⁰ With regard to the former, natively diseased states are unnatural defects that cause brutish activities from birth. Regarding the latter, similar in expression to the first, but distinct in etiology, these acquired unnatural defects can be

⁶⁸ C.f., *NE*, 1159a 5; 1166a 19.

⁶⁹ *NE*, 1148b 15-19.

⁷⁰ *NE*, 1148b 18.

caused by injury, illness, or by poor habituation. Whether the defect is native or acquired, these people have the unnatural desire to do 'unnatural' things such as to kill and eat one's own mother, to tear out one's own hair, and to take pleasure in unpleasant things.⁷¹

Despite their similarity, Aristotle maintains a clear distinction between the bestial-state and diseased or deformed states: the former is a *natural defect* (essential) and the latter two are *unnatural defects* that effectively deform or mutilate whatever was perfectible of the human being. The bestial state is a natural defect because it is one that cannot be prevented, cured, or habituated away. Things could not have been otherwise for the bestial man. Importantly, for Aristotle, just as there is no tragedy in the essential defect of women and natural slaves; and just as it is no tragedy that an irrational animal lacks reason; there is no tragedy in the essential defect of the bestial man.

By contrast, the diseased or deformed states of madmen and/or epileptics are tragic for Aristotle. Things might have been otherwise; their condition is an unnatural exception to human life. Indeed, the most appropriate way to characterize unnatural exceptions to adult human life, for

⁷¹ *NE*, 1148b 25-34.

Aristotle, is as a tragedy.⁷² Their defect is the result of fortune. Greek madmen and epileptics had the good fortune to be well-born (i.e., male); however, they were struck miserable by an accidental misfortune (a congenital defect, some later injury, or poor habituation), which did not arise from “vice or wickedness, but because of some error.”⁷³

Like the bestial state, unnatural conditions which cause people to take pleasure in unpleasant things are outside the limits of virtue and vice; however, unlike the bestial state, these tendencies are caused by a diseased or deformed sense of what is pleasurable for a human being. For Aristotle, these unnaturally defective perceptions are not the same as the humoral imbalance caused by a hostile environment, as is the case with some barbarians.⁷⁴ Thus, Aristotle makes a clear distinction between, on the one hand, *natural irrational*

⁷² See Charles H. Reeves, “The Aristotelian Concept of the Tragic Hero” *The American Journal of Philology*. Vol. 73. No. 2 (1952). 172-188.

⁷³ Aristotle, *The Poetics*, 1452b 30—53a 17; cf., NE 1150a 2-9. In his discussion of poetic tragedy, Aristotle makes an important distinction. The error of a tragedy can be various, and the pity aroused in the audience is coordinate with the action of the protagonist. On the one hand, misfortune that arises from errors in judgment make for the *finest* poetic tragedy (according to art); the protagonist is the most pitiful and his condition the most fearful because the misfortune arose from his own action (1452a 5-6). On the other hand, for Aristotle, misfortune that arises from accidents are the *greatest* tragedies, but they are less appropriate as plot devices for fine or poetic tragedy. Accidental misfortune is “repugnant or repellant or shocking, but not pitiful or fearful.” See text commentary in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Translation and comments by H.G. Apostle, M. Parslow, and E.A. Dobbs (Peripatetic Press; 1990). 66-8, n.10.

⁷⁴ That is to say, the stimulated or depressed *thumos* of the barbarian discussed in *Politics* 1327b 1-15.

behavior and, on the other hand, *unnatural irrational behavior* resulting from a diseased condition (as in ‘fits of madness) or habituated condition (as in the case of “those who have suffered wanton sexual assault since their childhood.”⁷⁵

Aristotle provides a concise parenthetical formulation of natural and unnatural forms of human irrationality:

As regards foolishness: foolish people who lack reason by nature, surviving by instinct [or sense apprehension], are bestial, like some kind of absolute [or distant] barbarian; foolish people who lose their reason owing to some disease, such as epilepsy, or through insanity, are tragically afflicted.⁷⁶

The foolish people who ‘lack reason by nature and survive by instinct’ in the *Nicomachean Ethics* are comparable to the ‘slave by nature’ in the *Politics*; that is, one who ‘participates in reason so far as to apprehend it but not so far as to possess it.’ Two reasons are noteworthy. First, with respect to Aquinas, the above characterization of those who ‘lack reason by nature’ as ‘absolute barbarians’ is the basis of for Aquinas’s revision of Aristotle’s natural slave. Second, both ‘foolish people’ and the ‘slave by nature’ lack reason essentially; they are both naturally defective. There is only one difference between the

⁷⁵ *NE*, 1148b 30-32.

⁷⁶ *NE*, 1149a 10. (translation mine). “καὶ τῶν ἀφρόνων οἱ μὲν ἐκ φύσεως ἀλόγιστοι καὶ μόνον τῇ αἰσθήσει ζῶντες θηριώδεις, ὥσπερ ἓνια γένη τῶν πόρρω βαρβάρων, οἱ δὲ διὰ νόσους, οἷον τὰς ἐπιληπτικὰς, ἢ μανίας νοσηματώδεις.”

'bestial man' and the 'slave by nature' for Aristotle. That difference is the master-slave relationship, within the polis.⁷⁷

The irrational behavior of people tragically afflicted by some unnatural defect is not, strictly speaking, identical to the irrational behavior of naturally defective, bestial men. For Aristotle, there is no question that both the irrational actions of the diseased madman and the irrational actions the defective bestial man are beyond vice and virtue; however, the a-moral species of these actions does not obtain for the same reason.⁷⁸ Natural appetites correspond to temperance and intemperance; unnaturally defective bestial appetites correspond to temperance and intemperance only by way of transference of description; and the deformed and diseased appetites of madmen correspond to temperance and intemperance in a manner analogous to the transference of description as applied to unnaturally aggressive

⁷⁷ Analogous to the vulnerability of a domestic animal lost in the wild, the Aristotelian 'slave by nature' needs the protection afforded by way of a political relationship with a domestic guide like the 'master by nature' (1254b 9-11). It is on account of the particular dependencies of the 'slave by nature' that Aristotle considers it natural and just for a 'master by nature' to exercise the art of war (correlative to the natural goodness of hunting) in order to pursue and recover natural slaves who are lost and/or who unnaturally resist the good proportionate to their particular natural defect (which is their inability to reason practically) (1256b 21-26). Hence, for Aristotle, a lost or homeless natural slave may be justly captured and forcibly placed in a relation corresponding to his natural good. However, on Aristotle's terms, if a human being resists the natural master-slave relation, it is a good indication that the 'slave' is not a slave by nature (1255b 16; c.f., 1255b 30-40; 1256b 30).

⁷⁸ *NE*, 1149a 1-7.

animals.⁷⁹ Aristotle provides an illuminating description of his understanding of what it means to lack reason by nature, contrasting the moral gravity of bestiality with the formal significance of bestiality:

Bestiality is less grave than vice, but more horrifying, for the principal part [i.e., the intellect] is not corrupted as it is in a [madman], but is absent altogether.⁸⁰

2.4 *A Metaphysics of Creation: Contra Aristotle*

Aquinas's doctrine of creation conditions his appropriation of Aristotle's metaphysical account of human nature and psychology. Aquinas's account of the human being, our essential nature and existence in time, is rooted in his doctrine of creation. In particular, Aquinas held that God created all that is from nothing (*de nihil condidit*) and that this creation occurred from the very beginning of time (*simul ab initio temporis*).⁸¹ Creation is the theological presumption that allows Aquinas to appropriate Aristotle's natural philosophy, while unambiguously rejecting the mythological and

⁷⁹ *NE*, 1149a 29–36. Aristotle writes “As we said in the beginning, [1] some appetites are human and natural in kind and degree, [2] some bestial, [3] some caused by deformity and diseases. Temperance and intemperance are concerned with only the first of these [i.e. natural human appetites]. This is also why we do not call beasts either temperate or intemperate, except by a transference of the name, if one kind of animal, exceeds another altogether in wanton aggression, destructiveness, and ravenousness. For [such] beasts have neither decision nor rational calculation, but are [departures] of the natural norm; as madmen among human beings are [departures of the natural norm].”

⁸⁰ *NE*, 1150a 1-2.

⁸¹ Forth Lateran Council in 1215.

devolutionary presumptions of Aristotle's account of the distinctiveness of the human being.

The natural history and diversity of terrestrial life is the proper concern of natural philosophy and the biological sciences—for Aquinas, these are not theological matters. For Aquinas, what matters is the fact that there is something rather than nothing—including time and a diversity of biological beings; this is a properly theological concern. It is the question of existence. The Christian doctrine of creation is a theological answer to the question of existence and an affirmation of the profound metaphysical dependence of all creatures upon the Creator. For Aquinas, creation is the Christian presumption of God's continual sustaining of the existence of all that is. Creation is not, alternatively, about the evolution or devolution of things in time.⁸²

The purpose of the preceding gloss on the distinction between a scientific account of the origin of species (concerned with change, whether reductively materialistic or metaphysically astute) and the Christian doctrine of creation (concerned with existence) is to highlight how Aquinas makes use

⁸² For a much better account of these matters than I am able to provide, see William E. Carroll's "Creation, Evolution, and Thomas Aquinas" *Revue des Questions Scientifiques* 171 (4) 2000: 319-347.

of Aristotle and where he parts ways with Aristotle. Most important, following Josef Pieper, is to understand *creation* as the central feature of Aquinas's metaphysics.⁸³ In particular, in light of our immediate concerns, the foundation of Aquinas's metaphysical account of the human being is the Christian presumption that the human being is, most determinatively, a creature whose very existence is sustained by and dependent upon an act of God.⁸⁴

Aristotle held the eternity of the universe, an infinite causal regression. For Aristotle, the human being is a product of that causal chain. For Aquinas, by contrast, the existence of the universe and time are an ongoing creative act of God, a finite causal regression. The human being is not the accidental product of a causal chain; rather, the human being is a creature individually created by God.

This is not a question, for Aquinas, of how the cosmos unfolds and changes in time (a matter of natural philosophy); rather, it is a question of

⁸³ Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*. Translation by John Murray, S.J., and Daniel O'Connor, 3rd edition (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 1999). See also David Burrell's essay "Creation, Metaphysics, and Ethics," *Faith and Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2001): 204-221.

⁸⁴ See John O'Callaghan's "Creation, Human Dignity, and the Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence," review *Dependent Rational Animals*, by Alasdair MacIntyre, *Nova et Vetera* 1, no. 1 (2003): 109-140.

why there is something rather than nothing (a matter of metaphysics and theology). It is not a question of how the human being came to be distinct from other forms of life (natural history and the biological sciences); rather, it is a question of why the human being, qua creature, *is*—our individual and common purpose in relation to the Creator. Aquinas presupposes theological judgments regarding why there is something rather than nothing (creation) and the purpose of the human being (to image God). These predicate theological judgments require Aquinas to abandon Aristotle’s answers to these questions. Specifically, for Aristotle, the cosmos never came to be (it is eternal) and the purpose of the human being is to achieve the end correlative to his form, a purpose that only well-born and well-formed Athenian males are capable of realizing.⁸⁵

For Aquinas, the human being is defined not by its essence or form, but by its creaturely existence as a “mortal rational animal” in relationship with the Creator.⁸⁶ To paraphrase Pieper’s way of putting this: *for Aquinas the*

⁸⁵ Clark, 16, 26.

⁸⁶ In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Aquinas writes “the whatness of a thing is what its definition signifies. Hence when a definition is predicated of the thing defined, the whatness of that thing must also be predicated of it. Therefore, humanity, which is not predicated of man, is not the whatness of man, but mortal rational animal is; for the word humanity does not answer the question, “What is man?” But mortal rational animal does. Yet humanity is taken as the formal principle of the essence, just as animality is taken as the principle of the genus and not as the genus, and as rationality is taken as the principle

*essence of a thing is its existence as a creative act of God.*⁸⁷ What this means is that the human being is not reducible to its essence *qua* species; rather, the human being is principally a creature created in the image and likeness of God—of which, human nature is one part, but not the definitive part.

2.5 Aquinas on the essential nature of the human being

Aquinas's account of human nature begins with the presumption that any account of the essence of humanity is predicated by the existence of the created rational animal.⁸⁸ We can talk of human nature because there are

of the difference and not as the difference...Now to this extent humanity is not absolutely the same as man, because it implies only the essential principles of man and excludes all accidents. For humanity is that by which man is man. But none of the accidents of a man is that whereby he is a man. Hence all accidents of man are excluded from the meaning of humanity. Now it is the particular thing itself, namely, a man, which contains the essential principles and is that in which accidents can inhere. Hence although a man's accidents are not contained in his intelligible expression, still man does not signify something apart from his accidents. Therefore man signifies as a whole and humanity as a part." Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, translated by John Rowan, (Chicago, 1961). Book VII.5, 1378-9.

⁸⁷ Pieper, 45-51.

⁸⁸ As already indicated, Aquinas's account of human nature in 1.75-89 is part of a larger investigation to understand God by way of God's creation. Additionally, nothing in our description of Aquinas on human nature is intended to be particularly original, innovative, or controversial. The main objective is to present Aquinas's view in a manner that highlights the most salient aspects for further reflection on corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment. Our reading of Aquinas reflects interpretive judgments developed under the influence of the following secondary literature. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*; R.E. Brennan, *Thomistic Psychology*; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas*; H.D. Gardeil, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*; Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought*.

particular human beings—who, insofar as they exist, live and experience the relational intercourse between creature and Creator.

For Aquinas, when we speak of human nature we do so primarily by way of the principle of humankind, the immortal and incorruptible rational soul.⁸⁹ The rational soul is the substantial form of the human body; it is the immaterial principle that all human beings have in common and it is the condition of the unity of the human species.⁹⁰ This is the basic assumption at work in Aquinas's account of human nature and psychology: it is God who creates the human soul, with all its innate powers and capacities. What the parents pass on to the child is the biological matter, which is somewhat preconfigured in the form of the genetic potentiality donated by each parent.⁹¹

In the relation of the rational soul to the human body, the soul is the highest principle of a particular human person and it configures the biologically human material to form a composite individual substance. Aquinas calls this configuration ensoulment, and it is the result of a direct act of creation by God. The rational soul is not the result of material causality, where certain biological conditions and properties coordinate in the

⁸⁹ *STh*, 1.75, prologue.

⁹⁰ *STh*, 1.75, prologue; 1.76.5, response; 1.76.4.

⁹¹ *STh*, 1.76.6.

spontaneous eruption of biologically human life; rather, the unity of a rational soul with a particular body is a cooperation between human actions, in the establishment and provision of the material conditions for human life, with a prime creative act of God.⁹²

The human being ‘happens,’ so to speak, by way of a supernatural cooperation between human faculties and Divine action. This direct relationship between creature and Creator continues between God and each particular human person; and it is the case for every living human being, at every stage of biological and cognitive development up until the death of the body. For Aquinas, a biologically distinct and living human body is a human person, and every living human body has a rational soul as its substantial form.⁹³ Correspondingly, when a living human body fails or otherwise ceases, a human person dies—even while the soul of that person subsists indefinitely.⁹⁴

What Aquinas is up to here is very important. His understanding of the rational soul helps us understand the implications of what we can mean when we say that the rational soul and the material body are distinct aspects

⁹² *De Malo*, 4.1, *response*.

⁹³ *STh*, 1.76.3.

⁹⁴ *STh*, 1.75.6.

of a the singular reality that is the human being. Among the most important implications is the understanding that the relation between the rational soul and its body is not parallel.⁹⁵ The rational soul needs the body for its perfection and the body needs the soul for its substance, insofar as the rational soul is the substantial form of the human body.⁹⁶ However, against Aristotle, Aquinas's view does not allow the body to *effect* the condition of the rational soul.⁹⁷ The body *affectively* impacts the soul's well-being, of course, but the soul retains its essential nature.⁹⁸ Aquinas's account of the relation between the rational soul and the human body entails a fundamental affirmation of the

⁹⁵ *STh*, 1.75.3, 4.

⁹⁶ *STh*, 1.76.8.

⁹⁷ *STh*, 1.84.7, *response*. Aquinas writes "In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passable body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms. First of all because the intellect, being a power that does not make use of a corporeal organ, would in no way be hindered in its act through the lesion of a corporeal organ, if for its act there were not required the act of some power that does make use of a corporeal organ. Now sense, imagination and the other powers belonging to the sensitive part, make use of a corporeal organ. Wherefore it is clear that for the intellect to understand actually, not only when it acquires fresh knowledge, but also when it applies knowledge already acquired, there is need for the act of the imagination and of the other powers. For when the act of the imagination is hindered by a lesion of the corporeal organ, for instance in a case of frenzy; or when the act of the memory is hindered, as in the case of lethargy, we see that a man is hindered from actually understanding things of which he had a previous knowledge."

⁹⁸ This is not a qualified form of Cartesian dualism. See Eleonore Stump's "Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism, and Materialism without Reductionism," *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1995): 505-531.

body. In particular, God directly creates the soul of every human being for embodiment, with all its innate powers and capacities.⁹⁹

2.5.1 *The Composite Creature*

Aquinas accepts the standard Christian view that the human being is a composite creature: a unity of subsistent immaterial properties and transient material properties; an immortal soul and animal body.¹⁰⁰ For Aquinas, the human soul (also called ‘the intellective soul’ and ‘the rational soul’) is a “configured configurer,” as Eleanor Stump artfully put it.¹⁰¹ Which means two things: First, the human soul is configured, having a subsistent form and immaterial properties: intellect and will.¹⁰² Second, the human soul configures matter, which is the composite unity of the human being.¹⁰³ The place of the human creature in the hierarchy of being is the boundary between the spiritual and immaterial, and the corporal and material—human beings are ‘metaphysical amphibians,’ so to speak.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ *De Malo*, 4.1, *response*; *STh*, 1.76.7, *sc.*

¹⁰⁰ *STh*, 1.75.4, *response*. Aquinas writes “it is clear that man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body”; c.f., 76.1, *response*.

¹⁰¹ Stump, *Aquinas*, 200-210.

¹⁰² *STh*, 1.75.2.

¹⁰³ *STh*, 1.76.1, *response*.

¹⁰⁴ C.f., Stump, “Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism,” 514; Stump, *Aquinas*, 200; Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, 19.

Aquinas describes the human soul as a 'subsistent form,' which means that the soul has immaterial properties that operate (in a limited way) independent of the body.¹⁰⁵ Such are the properties of 'intellect' (the capacity to know) and 'will' (the capacity to love what is known).¹⁰⁶ Although these immaterial properties have operations independent from the human body, they are configured to cooperate with the material properties of the human body.¹⁰⁷

The human soul has two powers: intellectual powers and appetitive powers. In their potentiality, these powers are called intellect (to ability apprehend) and will (the ability to desire what is apprehended).¹⁰⁸ In their active operation, these powers are called reason and free-will. Considered in themselves (absolutely), the intellect is the highest power of the soul, that is to say, it is higher than the will; considered in relation to their object (relatively), sometimes the will is a higher power than the intellect.¹⁰⁹ The particular object of desire that makes the will a power higher than the intellect is love of God,

¹⁰⁵ *STh*, 1.75.2-3; *CT*, §152.

¹⁰⁶ *C.f.*, *STh*, 1.45.7, *response*.

¹⁰⁷ *STh*, 1.75.7; *STh*, 1.76.5, *response*.

¹⁰⁸ *STh*, 1.76.6; 79.8; 82.4.

¹⁰⁹ *STh*, 1.82.3.

according to Aquinas, for the love of God is better than the knowledge of God, but the knowledge of things is better than the love of things.

Aquinas uses the terms 'intellectual soul' and 'rational soul' interchangeably in his discussion of the human soul. It is important to be clear on the distinctive way Aquinas uses notions like the 'rational soul' and concepts like 'the operation of reason.' Most important, the quiddity or 'whatness' associated with the term 'rational' does not principally refer to the cognitive operations we call intelligence, understanding, or reason. Rather, for Aquinas, the term 'rational' is shorthand for the substantial form of the human being.¹¹⁰ According to Aquinas although qualities and operations tend to follow from species membership, species membership is not correlative with qualities and operations.¹¹¹ Thus, to claim, as Aquinas does, that 'the

¹¹⁰ O'Callaghan's way of putting this is helpful. He writes "Rational is the form of the animal acts that we engage in. Our acts of eating, reproduction, and so on are not primarily proceeded by acts of reason. Reason is their form" (A Test Case, 124).

¹¹¹ *STh*, 1.76.1, *response*. Aquinas writes "from the very operation of the intellect it is made clear that the intellectual principle is united to the body as its form. The same can be clearly shown from the nature of the human species. For the nature of each thing is shown by its operation. Now the proper operation of man as man is to understand; because he thereby surpasses all other animals. Whence Aristotle concludes [*Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7] that the ultimate happiness of man must consist in this operation as properly belonging to him. Man must therefore derive his species from that which is the principle of this operation. But the species of anything is derived from its form. It follows therefore that the intellectual principle is the proper form of man. But we must observe that the nobler a form is, the more it rises above corporeal matter, the less it is merged in matter, and the more it excels matter by its power and its operation; hence we find that the form of a mixed body has another operation not caused by its elemental qualities. And the higher

rational soul is the principle of human nature' is very different from the (false) claim which identifies the capacity for discursive reason or purposive action as constitutive of human nature and personhood.¹¹² For Aquinas, what is 'rational' about the rational soul is the creation of the human being in the likeness of God according to image; insofar as the human being has a natural active aptitude for knowledge and love of God.¹¹³

The human being is a configuration of immaterial and material properties. As with an Angel, the immaterial properties of the rational soul are immaterial and incorruptible.¹¹⁴ However, unlike the Angel, these immaterial properties are configured to cooperate with the organic properties of the human body.¹¹⁵ There is no material thing (no bodily organ) that connects the rational soul to the animal body—just as there is nothing connecting wax and its shape.¹¹⁶ The whole intellectual soul is the form of the whole body, and the

we advance in the nobility of forms, the more we find that the power of the form excels the elementary matter; as the vegetative soul excels the form of the metal, and the sensitive soul excels the vegetative soul. Now the human soul is the highest and noblest of forms. Wherefore it excels corporeal matter in its power by the fact that it has an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever. This power is called the intellect."

¹¹² C.f., *STh*, 1.78.4, *response*.

¹¹³ C.f. 1.93.8, *reply* 3. Aquinas's account of the image of God will be discussed in the next section.

¹¹⁴ *De Malo*, 16.3, *response*; 16.4, *response*.

¹¹⁵ *STh*, 1.75.7; *STh*, 1.76.4

¹¹⁶ *STh*, 1.76.7.

soul constitutes the unity of each part of the body. Individual parts of the body are not expressions of the intellectual form, rather it is the whole human body together which has the rational soul as its form.¹¹⁷ The human soul is created to be the substantial form of a material body, it is not a complete substance unless it is configuring matter. Nevertheless, the human soul can subsist apart from the human body for a finite interval, upon the dissolution of the body (i.e. death).¹¹⁸ Because a human being is the unity of an immaterial rational soul and a material body, biologically human flesh without its animating principle (the rational soul) is not a human body. The disembodied or separated human soul is only part of the whole composite human being (soul and body)—that is to say, it is the natural state of the human soul to be united with its body.¹¹⁹ The subsistent and separated soul is the principal part of a particular human being, and that separated soul must be restored to its status as a configurer of matter if it is to be rightly identified as a human being.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *STh*, 1.76.8.

¹¹⁸ *STh*, 1.75.6. As a subsistent form, the rational soul can exist indefinitely separate from the body; that it is de facto a finite interval is not due to the constitution of the soul, but to the economy of salvation.

¹¹⁹ *STh*, 1.76.8.

¹²⁰ *STh*, 1.75.4.

2.5.2 Cognition

The 'rationality' of the rational soul does not originate from an instrumental faculty belonging to some bodily organ, i.e., the brain.¹²¹ Rather, it is the operation of reason that belongs to body. This is a theological judgment that Aquinas very often articulates and, when he does so, it is usually provided in metaphysical terms.¹²² Aquinas rejects all attempts to reduce the essence human nature to a corporeal operation, while affirming the goodness and beauty of human existence as an embodied creature.¹²³ For Aquinas, the operation of reason in the human being involves both the powers

¹²¹ C.f., Pasnau, *TAHN*, 284-6; 342-4.

¹²² *STh*, 1.54.5, *response*. For example, Aquinas writes, "In our soul there are certain powers whose operations are exercised by corporeal organs; such powers are acts of sundry parts of the body, as sight of the eye, and hearing of the ear. There are some other powers of the soul whose operations are not performed through bodily organs, as intellect and will: these are not acts of any parts of the body." Or, *STh*, 1.76.1, *response* and *reply 1*, Aquinas writes "We must assert that the intellect which is the principle of intellectual operation is the form of the human body...But we must observe that the nobler a form is, the more it rises above corporeal matter, the less it is merged in matter, and the more it excels matter by its power and its operation; hence we find that the form of a mixed body has another operation not caused by its elemental qualities...Now the human soul is the highest and noblest of forms. Wherefore it excels corporeal matter in its power by the fact that it has an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever. This power is called the intellect...the intellectual power does not belong to a corporeal organ, as the power of seeing is the act of the eye; for understanding is an act which cannot be performed by a corporeal organ, like the act of seeing. But it exists in matter so far as the soul itself, to which this power belongs, is the form of the body, and the term of human generation."

¹²³ *STh*, 1.84.7, *response*.

of the rational soul and the sensory powers of the human body.¹²⁴ This operation is variously termed ‘intellection’, ‘cogitation’, and ‘understanding.’

The internal sense operations of the human body are no different than the internal sense operations of a non-rational animal.¹²⁵ The difference between irrational animals and the rational animal, with respect to internal sense operations, is what the rational soul makes possible for human beings in relation to the phantasm. To be clear, for Aquinas, the human being is not an ‘irrational animal’ that happens to have a rational soul; rather, the human being is a rational animal. Aquinas explains that when this operation takes place, the rational soul makes use of and cooperates with the ‘internal sensory powers’ of the organ called the brain.

As it is relevant to his reflections on those who lack the use of reason, it is appropriate to briefly summarize Aquinas’s nuanced account of human

¹²⁴ *STh*, 1-2.4.5; c.f., *STh*, 1.75.4; *STh*, 1.76.5.

¹²⁵ *STh*, 1.78.4, *response*. Aquinas writes “Now, we must observe that as to sensible forms there is no difference between man and other animals; for they are similarly immuted by the extrinsic sensible. But there is a difference as to the above intentions: for other animals perceive these intentions only by some natural instinct, while man perceives them by means of coalition of ideas. Therefore the power by which in other animals is called the natural estimative, in man is called the “cogitative,” which by some sort of collation discovers these intentions. Wherefore it is also called the “particular reason,” to which medical men assign a certain particular organ, namely, the middle part of the head: for it compares individual intentions, just as the intellectual reason compares universal intentions. As to the memorative power, man has not only memory, as other animals have in the sudden recollection of the past; but also “reminiscence” by syllogistically, as it were, seeking for a recollection of the past by the application of individual intentions.”

cognition. For Aquinas, under descriptively ‘ordinary’ operation, there are four simultaneous and coordinated movements in distinctively human cognition.¹²⁶ First, the “external sense organs” of the human body (eyes, ears, nose, etc.) undergo material changes in response to environmental stimulation—let us say the stimulation generated when a dog is present. Second, an “internal sense organ” Aquinas associates with the brain organizes the various sense impressions of the thing (sight, sound, smell, etc.) into a dynamic and unified bodily experience, which Aquinas calls a “phantasm.”¹²⁷ Third, the power of the human soul called intellect (which is always active) acts upon the bodily phantasm by drawing forth ‘dog-ness’ (the ‘form’ of the dog) from the raw sense experience.¹²⁸ Finally, the intellect ascribes a ‘mental concept’ or ‘internal word’ to the experienced form, analogous to saying or thinking the word ‘dog.’¹²⁹

For Aquinas, the mental concept is what enables us to ‘re-cognize’ one sense experience (a phantasm) as corresponding to an earlier sense experience.

Although these mental concepts are ordinarily associated with an occurrent

¹²⁶ This is not a sequence of events for Aquinas; rather, it is a coordinated operation. This way of describing the operation reason is drawn from Brennan, and organized in manner that follows Stump. See Brennan, *Thomistic Psychology*, 45-63; Stump, *Aquinas*, 268-270.

¹²⁷ *STh*, 1.76.1, *response*; 76.5, *response*; 79.8-9.

¹²⁸ *STh*, 1.85.1-2.

¹²⁹ *STh*, 1.85.3, *reply 1*.

awareness of notions like 'dog' or 'pet,' for Aquinas the mental concept is not constituted by an occurrent awareness of such notions nor is it conditioned by the capacity to think or utter the words normally associated with such notions.¹³⁰ Things can be known 'confusingly'; though not understood, imperfect knowledge of this sort is coordinate with a cognitive operation.

The human being understands what its senses perceive because the rational soul 'illuminates' the substance and significance of what is perceived. Thus, according to Aquinas, the conventional operation of the human intellect manifests the essentially rational nature of the human creature; however, the

¹³⁰ *STh*, 1.85.3, *response*. Aquinas writes "our intellect proceeds from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality; and every power thus proceeding from potentiality to actuality comes first to an incomplete act, which is the medium between potentiality and actuality, before accomplishing the perfect act. The perfect act of the intellect is complete knowledge, when the object is distinctly and determinately known; whereas the incomplete act is imperfect knowledge, when the object is known indistinctly, and as it were confusedly. A thing thus imperfectly known, is known partly in act and partly in potentiality...Now it is evident that to know an object that comprises many things, without proper knowledge of each thing contained in it, is to know that thing confusedly...for each whole can be known confusedly, without its parts being known...by sense we judge of the more common before the less common, in reference both to place and time; in reference to place, when a thing is seen afar off it is seen to be a body before it is seen to be an animal; and to be an animal before it is seen to be a man, and to be a man before it seen to be Socrates or Plato; and the same is true as regards time, for a child can distinguish man from not man before he distinguishes this man from that...Thus it is evident that indistinct knowledge is midway between potentiality and act."

manifestation of these capacities is not constitutive of any particular person's status as a rational creature.¹³¹

The rational soul has an intellectual operation *per se* apart from the body, which means that the actualization of at least one intellectual power does not depend on the operational integrity of body¹³² However, this essential intellectual operation is not the faculty of reason proper to the human being. The faculty of reason requires the sensory capacities of the body for its normal operation.¹³³ In this way, a defect or material disorder of some aspect of the body's sensory powers can impair the operation of reason, insofar as the coordinated activity of the intellective powers with the sensitive apprehensive powers requires particular bodily organs in the production of phantasms.¹³⁴

2.6 *Constitutive limitations and individual differences*

Contemporary treatments of Aquinas on human nature often refer to 'the problem of individual differences.' Brennan provides a useful summary of this alleged problem. He writes,

¹³¹ See Eleanor Stump, "The Mechanisms of Cognition" in *Aquinas*, 244-276. Stump helpfully illustrates the nuances of Aquinas's view of human cognition by way of the neurological conditions called 'blindsight' and 'agnosia.'

¹³² *STh*, 1.54.5, *response*; *STh*, 1.76.1, *reply 1*.

¹³³ *STh*, 1.84.7, *response*.

¹³⁴ *STh*, 1.75.3.

As star differs from star, so one man differs from another in native endowment or in the gifts of nature. The memory or intellect of one individual, for example, is superior to the memory or intellect of another individual...With this fact Aquinas appears to have been well acquainted...How do these accidental differences of nature arise? Through the soul's union with matter...As a result of this fact, human nature is not shared by bodies in the same degree of nobility and freedom of exercise.¹³⁵

On the contrary, *pace* Brennan, individual differences are only a problem if one understands the 'nobility and freedom' of the human being to consist in the corporeal actualization of static immaterial potentialities (the essence of human nature). It is a conflation of 'human nature' with the first perfection of the human being. Aquinas understands the matter differently.

For Aquinas, the dignity and freedom of the human being is best understood in the light of the creation of the human being, the image of God; and the movement of the created rational animal towards its proximate (or natural) and ultimate (or supernatural) ends. That is to say, the first perfection of the human being, our essential nature and our existence as the image of God; the second perfection of the human being, the activity of particular human beings toward the realization of our twofold end; and the final perfection of the human being in the beatific vision.

¹³⁵ *Thomistic Psychology*. 256-257. C.f., Robert Slavin, *The Philosophical Basis for Individual Differences: According to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, PhD Dissertation, Catholic University of America (CUA; 1936).

Thinking about ‘individual differences’ by way of the first, second, and final perfection of the human being helps us understand why ‘individual differences’ are not a theological problem for Aquinas. The perfections will be treated in greater detail in Part 2. For now, with respect to Aristotle’s metaphysical biology, it is important to make clear how Aquinas’s understanding of the first perfection of the human being undermines Aristotle’s construal of human defect. Specifically, Aquinas’s distinction between what we have termed ‘constitutive limitations,’ and ‘operative limitations’ or ‘impairments.’ As indicated in the introduction, this distinction appears throughout Aquinas’s body of work.¹³⁶

Aquinas’s understanding of the ordinary and extraordinary limitations of our corporeal nature can be understood in this way: First, *constitutive limitations* are the ordinary properties and limits of the human being *qua* human being—the first perfection—including goods that are not natural to humankind (such as wings), as well as the vulnerabilities and dependencies that are natural to humankind. These limits obtain both before and after the Fall, and are correlative to the kind of creature that a human being is. For example, Aquinas indicates that in the state of original grace, humankind was

¹³⁶ For example, *De Malo*, 1.3, *response*; *STh*, 1.48.5, *response*; 1.96.3, *response*; *CT*, §114.

constitutionally vulnerable and dependent, and needed food to live.¹³⁷ These limitations, however, were not an impediment to the flourishing of the human being as the image of God, owing to a praeternatural suppleness of the body to the holy desires of the rational soul.¹³⁸

Second, *operative limitations* or ‘impairments’ are accidental characteristics of the human being living without the supernatural help of original grace—i.e., following from the impairment of second perfection. These impairments include the privation of goods that are naturally due (such as sight or the organic faculties necessary for deliberative or discursive reasoning), as well as the extraordinary vulnerabilities and dependencies that follow from such privations. Limits of this sort obtain only after the Fall and coincide with, but are distinct from, the constitutive limitations of the human being. Various and unequally experienced, but nonetheless characteristic of

¹³⁷ *STh*, 1.96.3, *response*.

¹³⁸ *STh*, 1.99.1, *response*. The loss of this special grace will be discussed at the beginning of Part 2. Among other things, this cooperation of the body with the desires of the rational soul included a supernatural capacity for self-healing. Regarding the primordial suppleness of the body to holy desires of the rational soul, Aquinas writes: “Now we have it on the authority of Scripture that “God made man right” (Ecclesiastes 7:30), which rightness, as Augustine says [*City of God*, XIV.11], consists in the perfect subjection of the body to the soul. As, therefore, in the primitive state it was impossible to find in the human limbs anything repugnant to man's well-ordered will, so was it impossible for those limbs to fail in executing the will's commands. Now the human will is well ordered when it tends to acts which are befitting to man. But the same acts are not befitting to man at every season of life.”

the common condition of humankind, these operational limitations affect the flourishing of the human being.¹³⁹ Operative limitations are experienced as affliction (evil suffered; *malum poenae*) and are the wounds of original sin upon the ordinary, constitutive vulnerability of the human body to damage, dysfunction, and decay.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ *STh*, 3.14.4, *response*. Aquinas writes of the variety of operative limitations when considering the infirmities of Christ at the incarnation: "Christ assumed human defects in order to satisfy for the sin of human nature, and for this it was necessary for Him to have the fullness of knowledge and grace in His soul. Hence Christ ought to have assumed those defects which flow from the common sin of the whole nature, yet are not incompatible with the perfection of knowledge and grace. And thus it was not fitting for Him to assume all human defects or infirmities. For there are [first] some defects that are incompatible with the perfection of knowledge and grace, as ignorance, a proneness towards evil, and a difficulty in well-doing. [Second] some other defects do not flow from the whole of human nature in common on account of the sin of our first parent, but are caused in some men by certain particular causes, as leprosy, epilepsy, and the like; and these defects are sometimes brought about by the fault of the man, e.g. from inordinate eating; sometimes by a defect in the formative power. Now neither of these pertains to Christ, since His flesh was conceived of the Holy Ghost, Who has infinite wisdom and power, and cannot err or fail; and He Himself did nothing wrong in the order of His life. But there are some third defects, to be found amongst all men in common, by reason of the sin of our first parent, as death, hunger, thirst, and the like; and all these defects Christ assumed, which Damascene calls "natural and indetractable passions"—natural, as following all human nature in common; indetractable, as implying no defect of knowledge or grace."

¹⁴⁰ *STh*, 3.14.3, *reply 2*. Aquinas presumes this distinction between constitutive and operative limitations in his discussion of the infirmities of Christ. He writes: "The cause of death and other corporeal defects of human nature is twofold: the first is remote, and results from the material principles of the human body, inasmuch as it is made up of contraries. But this cause was held in check by original justice. Hence the proximate cause of death and other defects is sin, whereby original justice is withdrawn. And thus, because Christ was without sin, He is said not to have contracted these defects, but to have assumed them."

In his treatise *De Malo*, Aquinas discusses the appropriateness of corporeal corruption and death to the nature of human beings.¹⁴¹ Aquinas explains that the existence of every material creature entails a certain constitutional fallibility.¹⁴² For Aquinas biological matter is never perfect matter; he simply provides no way to think about uncorrupt or perfect matter.¹⁴³ Because all matter is subject to change and variation, the human

¹⁴¹ *De Malo*, 5.5, *response*. Aquinas writes “some things are natural to human beings regarding their form, for example, understanding, willing, and the like, and other things are natural to them regarding their matter, that is, their body...in as much as the human soul is potentially intellectual, it is united to the body so that it may through the senses acquire intelligible forms, by means of which it actually understands. For the union of the soul with the body is for the sake of the soul, not for the sake of the body, since matter exists for the sake of form, not form for the sake of matter...the disintegration of the elderly and all deficiencies are contrary to the particular nature of a particular thing as determined by its form, although in accord with the whole of nature, by whose power matter is brought into the actuality of every form for which matter has potentiality...the dissolution resulting from a necessity of matter is in a special way unbecoming the form that is the rational soul. For other forms can pass away at least incidentally, but the rational soul can pass away neither intrinsically nor incidentally...And likewise there can be no body composed of elements that is by the nature of matter indissoluble, an organic but dissoluble body is by nature suitable for the soul that cannot pass away...Therefore, death and dissolution are natural to human beings by reason of a necessity of matter, but immortality would befit them by reason of the form’s nature. And yet natural sources do not suffice to provide immortality. Rather, a natural disposition for it indeed befits human beings by reason of their soul, and supernatural power fulfills it.”

¹⁴² C.f., *De Malo*, 1.3, *response*.

¹⁴³ Things with material properties, like the human body, have both substantial and accidental forms. And every material substantial form is subject to change and corruption. A particular thing’s *substantial form* is the existence of that thing as it belongs to a particular kind or species of thing. A thing’s *accidental form* is the particular configuration of the thing’s substantial form, a configuration that does not alter the species of the thing. All material things have exactly one substantial form. Likewise, all material things have an accidental form, which is the unique configuration of accidental properties belonging to the substantial form of the particular thing as it actually exists.

body is intrinsically subject to the contingencies of causality.¹⁴⁴ Concordantly, the corporeal faculties by way of which the rational soul operates are inherently susceptible to impairment and dysfunction as finite organic systems. Specifically, the enacted operation of the powers of the soul, proper to every particular human being, are always in some way affected by the plasticity and appropriate variability of corruptible organic material. For that reason, the human species exhibits a broad range of capacities for enactment and, in Aquinas's view, this spectrum is not a defect; rather, the diversity communicates the beauty of the material universe and the created order.¹⁴⁵ For Aquinas, the dependency and vulnerability of the human creature is intrinsic to our *creatureliness*—these are the *constitutive limitations* of embodiment and a good common to all human beings.¹⁴⁶ Every human body is subject to injury

¹⁴⁴ *De Malo*, 4.1, response

¹⁴⁵ *CT*, §141; cf., *City of God*, XI.18, 22; XII, 5-4.

¹⁴⁶ *De Veritate*, 18.8, *reply 1* and *reply 2*. Aquinas writes "The soul can be restricted by the body in two ways. One is by way of opposition, as happens when the body resists the soul and obscures it. This, however, would not have happened in the state of innocence. The other is by way of incapacity and defect, namely, in so far as the body is unable to execute all that the soul would be capable of considered in itself. And there was nothing to keep the soul from being restricted by the body in this way in the state of innocence. For it is thus evident that by reason of the body the soul is hindered from passing through things thrust in its path and from changing its location with as much ease as it does when separated from the body. In this way, also, it is kept from being able to have perfect use of its powers. Still, there would have been no pain in this, since the soul, by reason of its orderly disposition, would have given only those commands which the body could carry out...Although the understanding does not use an organ, nevertheless, it receives something from faculties which use an organ. Therefore, its act can be restricted because

and decay. These limitations are coordinate with the first perfection of the human being.¹⁴⁷

Before the Fall, according to Aquinas, the human creature lived in a state of graced intimacy with God. One gift associated with this state was that God's grace 'overflowed' from the soul into the body.¹⁴⁸ For Aquinas, this overflow of grace entailed among other things a praeternatural ability of the human being to will the integrity and proper functioning of the body. It was a supernatural capacity to manage the ordinary vulnerabilities of the human body. This theological history will be picked up at the beginning of chapter 4.

2.7 Conclusion

Most important is that for Aquinas the essence of the created rational animal, the image of God, is incorruptible and cannot be made defective

of an impediment or defect of the bodily organs"; c.f., *STh*, 1.99.1, *response*; c.f., MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, x-xi.

¹⁴⁷ *STh*, 1.96.3, *response*. Aquinas writes regarding whether human beings were equal in the state of innocence: "We must needs admit that *in the primitive state there would have been some inequality... There might also have been bodily disparity*. For the human body was not entirely exempt from the laws of nature, so as not to receive from exterior sources more or less advantage and help: since indeed it was dependent on food wherewith to sustain life. So we may say that, according to the climate, or the movement of the stars, some would have been born more robust in body than others, *and also greater, and more beautiful, and all ways better disposed*; so that, however, in those who were thus surpassed, there would have been no defect or fault either in soul or body." Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁸ *De Malo*, 5.1; c.f. *De Veritate*, 26.10, *response*.

through some intervening force. In that way, Aquinas subverts the metaphysical conditions according to which a human being can be described as either essentially or effectively 'defective.' The key distinction, with respect to the natural slave, is between an *essentially defective human being* on Aristotle's understanding, and a *damaged or injured human being* on Aquinas's understanding. The difference, with respect to the Aristotelian barbarian, is between an *unnaturally defective human being* on Aristotle's understanding, and the *subjective experience of affective 'strangeness'* between people who do not speak the same language. These distinctions are important. Specifically, the template of the unnatural defect of Aristotle's barbarian provides a way for Aquinas to describe how the body of an essentially intact and perfectible human being, the image of God, can be impaired in its operation. In the next chapter we will treat Aquinas's account of the image of God and the perfection of the image of God in those who 'lack the use of reason.'

3 The image of God: Contending with Mindlessness; Recognizing the Image

3.1 Introduction

Aquinas appropriates Aristotle's conceptual vocabulary to describe human nature; nevertheless, Aquinas subverts and radically repurposes Aristotle's descriptive resources by way of Augustine's account of the Christian belief that the human being is the image of God (principally, *De Trinitate*).¹ Like Augustine, Aquinas's account of human nature is not a set of criteria for determining if a being is or is not a human being.² Without ambiguity, Aquinas maintains that individuals are members of the human species because they come from human parents.³ However, for Aquinas, the 'humanity' of human offspring is not a matter of biological origin. Rather, 'humanity' is a theological judgment about how the procreative faculties of the created rational animal, the image of God, cooperate with a prime creative act of God. In that way, for Aquinas, our account for the essential nature of a created rational animal begins with the faith of the Catholic Church in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; while our notional description of the human being as a metaphysically composite creature is amendable according

¹ Pieper, *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1962), 43-54.

² C.f., *City of God*, XVI.8.

³ *STh*, 1.98.1; 1.100.1.

to descriptive convention.⁴ What this means is that Aquinas intends that his account of human nature would correspond with what must be true, on the Christian view, for every particular human being, without exception.

This is the theological framework that conditions Aquinas's account of the human being and how he seems to appropriate the conceptual and descriptive resources provided by Aristotle. As it relates to our principal concern, Aquinas's understanding of corporeal infirmity and cognitive impairment presumes the standard Christian view that every human being is created by God, in the image of God, for perfection in knowledge and love—which is our imitation of God in the beatific vision of divine glory. This account of the impaired human body is articulated by way of that metaphysical and theological framework.

Aquinas's mature account of the image of God in his *Summa* is an integration of philosophical resources from Aristotle and principle theological judgments from Augustine. Aquinas uses the Augustinian understanding of the creation of the human being in the image of God to identify and correct limitations in Aristotle's description of human nature and the rational soul;

⁴ See Porter, *Nature As Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005). 103-125, esp. 107-8.

concordantly, Aquinas uses resources afforded by Aristotle's metaphysical description of human nature to refine and develop Augustine's account of the image of God.⁵

In his essay "Imago Dei: A test case for Aquinas's Augustinianism," John O'Callaghan discusses the conceptual resources by which Aquinas develops "the central Augustinian thesis that a human being is an imago Dei in virtue of his or her rational nature."⁶ Aquinas retains the theological thesis, he explains, but reformulates it with greater theological precision through a selective appropriation of Aristotelian philosophical resources.

O'Callaghan provides a way for us to understand how Aquinas's account of the imago Dei in Q. 93 incorporates the thought of Augustine on the dynamic image of God in the human being and 'those who lack the use of reason,' and how the Aristotelian formulation of the rational soul helps Aquinas avoid an Augustinian problem with respect to mind (*mens*). Specifically, O'Callaghan describes Aquinas's careful revision of Augustine on the active mind as the essence of the image of God in the human being, in

⁵ C.f. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 205.

⁶ O'Callaghan, "A Test Case," 101.

favor of the subsistent rational soul as the image of God.⁷ This shift allows Aquinas, by our reading, to coherently develop Augustine's basic insights in *De Trinitate* concerning how infants, the comatose, and those who 'lack the use of reason' are the image of God.

We will proceed as follows. First, we will consider Augustine's account of the image of God, paying special attention to those who lack the use of reason. Second, we will consider Augustine's treatment of human beings who have damaged or deformed bodies; and we will discuss the way Augustine's understanding of the human being makes sense of such persons. Third, we will take a close look at Aquinas's teaching on the image of God in Q. 93, paying special attention to his appropriation of Augustine's understanding of mind (*mens*) and the image of God provided in *De Trinitate*. This analysis will introduce an interpretive challenge concerning those who 'lack the use of reason,' characteristic of one prominent contemporary reading of Q.93.⁸

⁷ See "St. Thomas Loses His Mind and Finds His Soul" (O'Callaghan, "A Test Case," 115-138).

⁸ The purpose of our brief review of Augustine on the image of God is to better understand Aquinas's account of the image of God. Specifically, what we have to say about Augustine is oriented towards the work of showing the foundational continuity between his understanding and that of Aquinas, and for highlighting the distinctiveness between their respective accounts on a set of predetermined themes. Unlike the constellation of defect-related themes we addressed in Aristotle's thought, there is general consensus on the more important impairment-related themes in Augustine (i.e., doctrine

3.2 Augustine on the image of God

Augustine's aim in *De Trinitate* is to consider the Catholic faith in the unity of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and, toward that end, Augustine takes up the task of describing what can be known about God by way of an examination of the image of God in the human being.⁹ So, what we find in *De Trinitate* is Augustine's best thinking about one thing, from which we might be able to infer his thoughts about other things. Most relevant to our concern with Aquinas is Augustine's formulation of the distinctiveness of the human being amongst other animate life—an immaterial soul and a material body—

of creation, image of God, damaged creatures [vs. essential defect], the imperative for care, etc.) For that reason, most of the more interesting nuances of Augustine's own proper account of the image of God will be glossed over. In particular, we will only treat a modest selection of the resources that are available in Augustine's own thought—resources that await a systematic reconstruction of a properly Augustinian description of the gift and giftedness of Christians who 'lack the use of reason.' These limitations are regrettable. In the last decade, a modest body of literature and ad hoc treatments has emerged concerning 'disability' and related themes in Augustine's thought. The quality and depth of these engagements is inconsistent (some are patently false). For a helpful collection of selections from Augustine, see Brian Brock's "Augustine on Disability" *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*, eds. Brian Brock and John Swinton (Eerdmans; 2012). 49-72. Other treatments of Augustine include Tim Stainton's "Reason grace and charity: Augustine and the impact of church doctrine on the construction of intellectual disability" *Disability and Society*, Vol.23, N.4 (2008). 485-496; Kristi Upson-Saia's "Resurrecting Deformity: Augustine on Wounded and Scarred Bodies in the Heavenly Realm" *Disability in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Sacred texts, historical traditions, and social analysis*. Eds. Darla Schumm and Michael Stoltzfus (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). I am grateful to Brian Brock for the conversations we shared concerning Augustine on disability in the Spring of 2009.

⁹ *De Trinitate*, I.1-2.

and Augustine's understanding of how bodily damage relates to the functional or operational integrity of the immaterial soul.¹⁰

Augustine distinguishes between what he calls the 'inner man' and the 'outer man,' which is synonymous with the immaterial and material aspects of the human being.¹¹ The outer man is endowed with and limited to the sensation of temporal things, while the inner man is endowed with and capable of the contemplation of universal and eternal truth. The activity of the inner man is the activity of the mind, and the human being is free to contemplate eternal and spiritual things when the affairs and needs of the outer man are satisfied.¹² For Augustine, the activity of the mind (*mens*) is associated with the rational soul (*animus*), but is not identical to the rational soul.¹³

¹⁰ On the association of 'mind' and 'soul' in Augustine, see *De Trinitate*, IX.2; X.18; XII.1; XV.2.

¹¹ *De Trinitate*, XII.1.

¹² *De Trinitate*, XII.10. For Augustine, the mind is best the image when it is contemplating eternal things; the mind is less the image when it is preoccupied with the temporal matters. He writes, "We said about the nature of the human mind that if it is at all contemplating truth it is the image of God; and when something is drawn off from it and is assigned or directed in a certain way to the management of temporal affairs, it is still the image of God as regards the part with which it consults the truth it has gazed on; but as regards the part which is directed to managing these lower affairs, it is not the image of God."

¹³ In his commentary on Books IX-XIV of *De Trinitate*, Edmund Hill describes the distinct way Augustine uses the terms *mens* (mind), *animus* (rational soul), and *anima* (soul). The mind (*mens*) is synonymous with the 'inner man', and refers to the highest functions of the

The image of God in the human being is the activity or operation of the mind, consisting of both the 'rational activity in temporal things' and the 'contemplation of eternal things.'¹⁴ The highest activity of the mind is to understand and gaze upon God.¹⁵ The mind, maintains Augustine, governs those faculties and activities that human beings share in common with non-rational animals in a way that distinguishes rational human acts from non-rational animal acts.¹⁶

On Augustine's terms, the activity of the mind is identical to the image of God in the human being. While the rational soul (*animus*) is the condition of the activity of the human mind to image God, the rational soul is not the image of God. For Augustine, this means that the distinction between human

human being. The rational soul (*animus*) can be understood as consciousness or the higher rational activities, and is distinct from the souls of animals. The soul (*anima*) is more general term for the life principle of all animals (rational and irrational animals), and when it is used with reference to humans has the connotation of referring to the lower animal activities. Hill cautions, however, that while these distinct uses are characteristic, they are not precise in every instance. For our purposes, these distinctions are sufficient. See Edmund Hill "Forward to Books IX-XIV" *Saint Augustine on The Trinity* (New City Press; 1991). 258-261.

¹⁴ *De Trinitate*, XII.4.

¹⁵ *De Trinitate*, XII.20-21; XIV.6.

¹⁶ *De Trinitate*, XII.1-4, 10.

and not human is an activity that only human beings are capable of performing.¹⁷

Although the upright posture of the human body distinguishes humans from the horizontal posture of animals, Augustine does not take that difference to be ontologically significant.¹⁸ Nevertheless, he does maintain that meaningful inferences can be made from that shape of the human body. Specifically, because consciousness (*animus*) quickens the body's structure, the upright posture of the human body indicates for Augustine an orientation of the human being towards that which is highest and most dignified to our nature.¹⁹

Augustine accounts for the difference between the human being and other animals by way of a meditation upon Adam's search of a suitable

¹⁷ *De Trinitate*, XII.12. Augustine writes, "there can be no doubt that man was not made to the image of him who created him as regards the body or any old part of his consciousness, but as regards the rational mind, which is capable of recognizing God."

¹⁸ C.f., *City of God*, XVI.8. This is important in relation to Augustine's account of "monsters".

¹⁹ *De Trinitate*, XII.1. Augustine writes that with respect to our bodily capacity to sense, recollect, and act, that "the only way we differ from animals is that we are upright, not horizontal in posture. This is a reminder to us from him who made us that in our better part, that is our consciousness, we should not be like the beasts we differ from in our upright posture...just as our body is raised up by nature to what is highest in our bodies, that is, to the heavens, so our consciousness being a spiritual substance should be raised up toward what is highest in spiritual things."

companion among all the animals.²⁰ He surmises that the reason no consort could be found for Adam owed to the singular dignity of the human mind.²¹ Eve, being formed from Adam's flesh, shared a kinship with Adam unparalleled among all other creatures. For, like Adam, she was endowed with mind, by which she could consult the highest and innermost truths, a faculty that belongs to no beast.

By one reading, it would seem that Augustine would grant *more humanity* to some and *less humanity* to others, insofar as there is a spectrum of capacities for 'the contemplation of universal and eternal truth' within humankind. That is not the case, however. Either a being is, or is not a human being on Augustine's understanding; correspondingly, a being either has or does not have the capacity called mind. For Augustine, the human mind admits of no degrees with respect to *possession*. However, just as there are degrees of contemplation, corresponding to the height of the object considered, according to Augustine, the image of God in the human being admits of *degrees of perfection* corresponding to the height of the thing

²⁰ *De Trinitate*, XII.19.

²¹ *De Trinitate*, XII.3. Augustine writes, "Just as among all the beasts there was not found for the man an assistant like himself, and only something taken from himself and formed into a consort could fill the bill, so to our mind, with which we consult the highest and innermost truth, has no assistant like it in the parts of the soul we have in common with the beasts."

considered; *in this life, as humanity suffers the profound wounds of original sin.*²²

But these wounds, according to Augustine, will be healed at the resurrection.²³

On the understanding that the human being is never anything but rational in its nature (*animus*), Augustine discusses circumstances and conditions that impair the activity of the mind and the perfection of the mind's activity.²⁴ He does this in ad hoc comments concerning infancy, senselessness/confusion/stupefaction (*sopitus*), coma (*dormientibus*), intoxication, and madness (*furiosus*).²⁵ For Augustine, although the activity of the mind is not a faculty of the body, the mind makes use of the body in the apprehension and cognition of sensory experience. For that reason, when the body is damaged or impaired, the activity of the mind is not left unaffected owing to the unity of the immortal soul and the material body. However, for Augustine, no measure of physical impairment or sin can annihilate the activity of the human mind. Augustine writes that

though the reason or understanding in [the human soul] may appear at one moment to be confused [*sopitus*], at another to be

²² *De Trinitate*, XIV.22. Augustine writes "by sinning man lost justice and the holiness of truth, and thus the image became deformed and discolored; he gets those qualities back again when he is reformed and renovated."

²³ *De Trinitate*, XIV.23.

²⁴ *De Trinitate*, XIV.6.

²⁵ In *De Trinitate*: For the cognitively impaired, XIV.6; comatose, X.8, XI.7, XII.24, XV.15, XV.21; intoxication, XV.15; madness, X.8, XI.7, XV.21; insanity, XV.21; entranced, X.8.

small, at another to be great, the human soul [*animus*] is never anything but rational and intellectual. And therefore if it is with reference to its capacity to use reason and understanding in order to understand and gaze upon God that it was made to the image of God, it follows that from the moment this great and wonderful nature begins to be, this image is always there, whether it is so worn away as to be almost nothing, or faint and distorted, or clear and beautiful.²⁶

What is key here is that for Augustine the activity that is the image of God in the human being can be diminished in a human being; and profoundly so, to the point of almost ceasing to be. Yet, for Augustine, although the ‘dignity’ of the image of God is distorted when the cognitive faculties of the body are damaged, that image cannot be annihilated.²⁷ Moreover, the activity of mind in the cognitively impaired and comatose cannot be encumbered and impeded to point of stasis.²⁸ Augustine does not admit of a circumstance where the capacity to use reason, that is the activity of the mind, would no longer be present in a living human being.

Augustine clearly indicates that this vulnerability to distortion is limited to the temporal, by way of the effects of original sin upon the body,

²⁶ *De Trinitate*, XIV.6.

²⁷ *De Trinitate*, XIV.6. Commenting on the image of God, Augustine writes “Divine scripture indeed bewails the distortion [*deformitatem*] of its true dignity [*dignitatis*]...[scripture] shows clearly enough that this distortion cannot stop its being image...Although it is a great nature it could be spoiled because it is not the greatest nature; and although it could be spoiled because it is not the greatest, yet because it is capable of the greatest nature and can share in it, it is a great nature still.”

²⁸ *De Trinitate*, XIV.7.

and those wounds (at least the wounds of those who are baptized) will not exceed the temporal.²⁹ As such, the great nature of the immortal soul (*animus*) can be frustrated in its essential activity of mind, but because it is capable of participating in God it cannot be contained or ultimately frustrated once the mind is unburdened of the corruptible flesh.³⁰

The “mind knows nothing so well as what is present to it. And nothing is more present to the mind than itself.”³¹ The mere unity of mind and body is the condition of self-knowledge for Augustine.³² In a manner that is relevant to the condition of a person who lacks the full use of reason, Augustine asks,

what then is to be said about the mind of an infant which is still so small and sunk in such vast ignorance of things that the mind of a man which knows anything shudders at the darkness of that infant mind?...it is not a question of its being able to be ignorant of itself, but of its not being able to think about itself...it is one thing not to know oneself and another not to think about oneself...³³

²⁹ *De Trinitate*, XIV.25. “For in that very twinkling of an eye, before the judgment, the spiritual body shall rise again in power, in incorruption, in glory, which is now sown a natural body in weakness, in corruption, in dishonor.”

³⁰ *De Trinitate*, XIV.23. Augustine writes “this renewal does not happen at the moment of conversion, as the baptismal renewal by the forgiveness of all sins happens in a moment, so that not even one tiny sin remains unforgiven. But it is one thing to throw off a fever, another to recover from the weakness which the fever leaves behind it...the first stage of the cure is to remove the cause of the debility, and this is done by the pardoning of sins; the second stage is the curing of the debility itself, and this is done gradually by making steady progress in the renewal of this image.”

³¹ *De Trinitate*, XIV.18.

³² *De Trinitate*, XIV.17.

³³ *De Trinitate*, XIV.7.

By implication, it would seem, although a living human being may be injured in a way that she is not able to think about herself, she never ceases to know herself. It would not be possible for such a person to be rendered ignorant of herself for the very fact that the nature of the mind cannot cease to remember, understand and love itself—even if these mental acts are clouded, obscured and frightfully dim, as in the case of a cognitively impaired or comatose person.³⁴ For even a person with damaged cognitive faculties, if she were to think about the nature of her consciousness, she would not find what she did not know before but only that which she did not think about before.³⁵

The mind's active knowledge of itself cannot be erased; nevertheless, the mind's ability to think about itself remains a transient and variable capacity. So, for Augustine, insofar as the mind can perform mental acts, regardless of how deteriorated, damaged or impaired the material apparatus

³⁴ *De Trinitate*, XIV.13. Augustine writes "The truth of course is that from the moment [the mind] began to be it never stopped remembering itself, never stopped understanding itself, never stopped loving itself, as we have already shown. And therefore when it turns to itself in thought, a trinity is formed in which a word too can be perceived. It is formed of course out for the very act of thought, with the will joining the two together. It is here then more than anywhere that we should recognize the image we are looking for."

³⁵ *De Trinitate*, XIV.8. Augustine writes "It is enough to assure ourselves that when a human being is able to think about the nature of his consciousness and find out what is true about it, he will not find it anywhere else but inside himself. And what he will find out is not what he did not know before but what he did not think about before...Nothing is in the mind's view except what is being thought about, and this means that not even the mind itself, which does the thinking about anything that is being thought about, can be in its own view except by thinking about itself."

of cognition may be, the human mind is always active.³⁶ For Augustine, it is not the *quality* of the mental act that constitutes the image of the trinity in the human being, but the mere act itself as one belonging to a mind.³⁷ This does not mean, however that the quality of the mental act is irrelevant for Augustine.

A person with a profound cognitive impairment is unambiguously human, on Augustine's terms; however, the quality of the mental act is proportionate to the measure of the human good that such a person would be able to realize *in this life*. The activity of the human mind is sacrosanct for Augustine; and he maintains that the human mind is always active. This includes infants, 'morons,' madmen, and the comatose. In the case of severely damaged human beings, and analogous to his understanding of baptized infants who die shortly after birth, Augustine maintains hope in the restoration and the perfection of the mind's activity at the Resurrection.

³⁶ *De Trinitate*, XIV.18. "The human mind, then, is so constructed that it never does not remember itself, never does not understand itself, never does not love itself.

³⁷ *De Trinitate*, XIV.11. Augustine writes that "even when [the mind] has lost its participation in [God] it still remains the image of God, even though worn out and distorted." Such a loss of participation requires a profound exercise of the will to undermine its own existence. Moreover, such a loss of participation could not be realized by someone whose love or hatred of self was as faint as an infant's capacity for introspection.

3.3 Augustine's Damaged Creatures

In *City of God* Augustine provides an argument for why 'certain monstrous races of men,' if the marvelous and fantastic reports are true, are members of the human family.³⁸ By holding the activity of the mind in reserve as that which constitutes humanity as such, Augustine was not interested in developing a criteria for exclusion or inclusion; rather, positing the activity of the mind was a way to describe the human being in such a way that it would include those whom we might not recognize as human on account of our ignorance. Augustine writes,

no faithful Christian should doubt that anyone who is born anywhere is a man... however extraordinary such a creature may appear to our senses in bodily shape, in color, or motion, or utterance, or in any natural endowment, or part, or quality...Nevertheless, it is clear what constitutes the persistent norm of nature in the majority and what, by its very rarity, constitutes a marvel.³⁹

Augustine outlines his rationale for affirming the humanity of monstrous races by way of an explanation for the "monstrous which are bound to be born among us of human parents." His appeal is to the wisdom and masterful skill of God as good Creator. That is, because God is the Creator

³⁸ *City of God*, XVI.8. Augustine writes, "if these races are included in the definition of 'human', that is, if they are rational and mortal animals, it must be admitted that they trace their lineage from that same one man, the first father of all mankind."

³⁹ *City of God*, XVI.8.

of all and because God is intimately involved in the formation of each of God's creatures, Augustine considers it foolish for one to imagine that the Creator had made a mistake in the case of an abnormal birth. For God "has the wisdom to weave the beauty of the whole design out of the constituent parts, in their likeness and diversity."⁴⁰

Acknowledging the difficulty involved in any attempt to show how monstrous births are integral to the beauty of the whole, Augustine comments that the 'observer who cannot view the whole is offended by what seems the deformity of the part.' The reason for this offense owes to ignorance and pride on the part of the observer, according to Augustine, because the observer does not know how the part fits into the whole and questions the wisdom of God's created order.⁴¹ For Augustine, this rationale works both ways—the humanity of monstrous races help us recognize the wisdom with which God fashions the physical being of the 'monstrous human births' with which his readers were familiar.

Augustine's use of the word 'monster' (*monstrosus*) is important. Specifically, Augustine understood that monsters were created and sent by

⁴⁰ *City of God*, XVI.8.

⁴¹ *City of God*, XVI.8.

God to inspire awe and to reveal the hidden order of the universe. The 'monstrous' of the natural world, including monstrous births, is revelatory and illuminative for Augustine. On one level, what is revealed is that no human being, insofar as she or he is born of human beings—regardless of even the most profound congenital oddities—lacks the singular dignity and honor of mind, which is the activity of the image of God.

Augustine does not develop the judgment, however, until Book XXI (8) of *City of God*. There, Augustine affirms his confidence that God's grace and goodness unfolds in every aspect of the 'distressful situation of mortality,' especially as it is exhibited in our decaying, vulnerable, and radically dependent flesh.⁴² For Augustine, we know that we are not who we are without our flesh, yet we know that our flesh is not who we are. So, considering the 'monstrous,' he asks,

how can any event be contrary to nature when it happens by the will of God, since the will of the great Creator assuredly is the nature of every created thing?⁴³

To wit, the goodness and beauty of God, while still unfolding for the world, is the irreducible form and order within which our mortal and

⁴² C.f., *City of God*, XI.22; XII.4-5.

⁴³ *City of God*, XXI.8.

temporal existence derives its significance. Thus, Augustine writes that a monster or “a portent, therefore, does not occur contrary to nature, but contrary to what is known of nature.” The birth of such human beings is a display of God’s goodness and beauty in our decaying, vulnerable and radically dependent flesh. Yet, the recognition of the existence of such people as gift requires attentiveness and receptivity to God’s self-disclosure.⁴⁴

So conceived, for Augustine, the wonder of these marvelous gifts is the fact that they come to us in the form of our family—that is to say, in the surprising existence of persons who have names and with whom we share the bond of kinship. Their superficial appearance of strangeness, owing to our lack of wisdom and insight, is nullified by the recognition of similarity through the mode of generation. That to say, for Augustine, the semblance of strangeness is undermined by our knowledge that this particular human being is my child, my brother, my friend. In view of that, Augustine writes,

⁴⁴ *City of God*, XXI.8. Augustine writes “So, just as it was not impossible for God to set in being natures according to his will, so it is afterwards not impossible for him to change those natures which he has set in being, in whatever way he chooses. Hence the enormous crop of marvels, which we call ‘monsters’ ‘signs’, ‘portents’, or ‘prodigies’...The name ‘monster’, we are told, evidently comes from monstrare, ‘to show,’ because they show by signifying something...Now these signs are, apparently, contrary to nature and they are called ‘unnatural’...For us, however, they have a message. These ‘monsters’...as they are called, ought to ‘show’ us...that God is to do what he prophesied that he would do...”

if we assume that the subjects of those remarkable accounts are in fact men, it may be suggested that God decided to create some races in this way, so that we should not suppose that the wisdom with which he fashions the physical being of men has gone astray in the case of monsters which are bound to be born among us of human parents.⁴⁵

As such, for Augustine there is an implicit intimacy to the reception of an uncommon birth. It is for Augustine a recognition of the irreducible beauty and goodness of ‘monstrous’ births, understood as mysteries ordered by the wisdom which ‘weaves beauty out of the whole design, in their likeness and diversity.’ Thus, for Augustine, we do not speak of rare and marvelous births in abstraction, but in terms of real relations. Specifically, the affirmation of human rationality in the case of a monstrous birth is not a principled proposition; rather, it is a theological recognition of singular kinship correlative to Adam’s recognition of Eve—‘flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone.’ In that way, for Augustine, no created thing is irreducibly fallen, ugly, or dysfunctional.⁴⁶

The beauty and order of God’s providential design is how Augustine recognizes and accounts for the place of those who are physically damaged

⁴⁵ *City of God*, XXI.8.

⁴⁶ C.f., *City of God*, XIX.13. For example, Augustine writes “There exists, then, a nature in which there is no evil, in which, indeed, no evil can exist; but there cannot exist a nature in which there is no good. Hence not even the nature of the Devil himself is evil, in so far as it is a nature; it is a perversion that makes it evil.”

and whose ability to reason is profoundly impaired.⁴⁷ So, there are beautiful monsters; or, monsters have a beauty and goodness that we (presumably, non-monsters) must learn to recognize due to our faulty, frail and insufficient understanding of God's wonderfully created world. Insofar as our corruptible flesh is created, it is good; thus, while we suffer evil in our flesh, the providential goodness and orderly beauty of our broken flesh is intelligible for Augustine, even if it is not understood. Those with profound physical and cognitive impairments, for Augustine, are witnesses to the goodness and beauty of God.

For Augustine, presupposing such a beauty and good order in the created universe is how the vocation and proximate (or natural) good of damaged and impaired human beings is to be recognized. Although the image of God in those who lack the use of reason is 'worn way' and obscured in its dignity, on Augustine's terms, such persons bear witness to the good order and beauty of God's creation. For Christians, according to Augustine, the performative recognition of the proper and necessary place of broken flesh

⁴⁷ City of God, XII.4. Augustine writes "Of this order [in a world of continual transience and pain] the beauty does not strike us, because by our mortal frailty we are so involved in a part of it, that we cannot perceive the whole, in which these fragments that offend us are harmonized with the most accurate fitness and beauty. And therefore, where we are not so well able to perceive the wisdom of the Creator, we are very properly enjoined to believe it, lest in the vanity of human rashness we presume to find any fault with the work of so great an Artificer."

in the good order of God's creation takes place at baptism—it is the means by which the Church witnesses to the good order and beauty of the universe. This is a certainty for Augustine, principally illustrated in the persistence of Christ's wounds in his resurrection body.⁴⁸

3.4 *Soul as essence: Aquinas's view, pace Augustine.*

Following Augustine, Aquinas understands the 'essence of the human being' or 'human nature' to be one aspect of the creaturely existence of the human being: a mortal rational animal, created in the image of God. Likewise, both Augustine and Aquinas understand the human being to be constitutionally ordained from our creation for an ultimate intimacy with God—our perfect imitation of God, as the image of God. Wounded by original sin, however, that return to God is impaired. The reconciling and healing work of Christ, provides the means by which the human being can realize its natural and ultimate end.

⁴⁸ *City of God*, XXII.20. Augustine writes "For in those wounds [suffered for Christ's name] there will be no deformity, but only dignity, and the beauty of their valor will shine out, a beauty in the body but not of the body...And so the defects which have thus been caused in the body will no longer be there, in that new life; and yet, to be sure, those proofs of valor are not to be accounted defects, or to be called by that name."

To a certain extent, the differences we mean to highlight between Augustine and Aquinas on the image of God can be characterized as idiosyncratic and semantical. What we have before us are not two adaptations of an original composition; rather, we have thematic elaborations of one discrete melody from the overture that is *de fide*. Aquinas's variation on the *imago Dei* theme is different from Augustine's; and, as with Augustine, the integrity of Aquinas's movement is dependent upon his reception of the original theme and his attentiveness to the melodic developments of earlier movements. The purpose of a thematic elaboration is to allow the theme to unfold in continuity with its place in the overture; to discover the expressive possibilities (and the limitations) coordinate with the key; and, if well-performed, to press further toward the end prefigured by the beginning.

In the manner of *De Trinitate*, Aquinas's *Treatise on the Human Being* is situated within a three-part exploration of what can be known of the Creator God by way of God's creation. It is Aquinas's best thinking about one thing (i.e., God), from which we might be able to infer his thoughts about other things. In that way, the description of human nature in QQ.1.75–89 is directly ordered towards his account of the production of the human being, the image of God, in QQ.1.90–93. As previously indicated, according to Aquinas, the human being is principally defined by its creaturely existence as a 'mortal

rational animal' in relationship with the Creator; that relationship being the intimacy of image and exemplar.

The discussion of human nature in QQ.1.75-89 presumes the existence of the created rational animal within the unfolding drama of redemptive history; and it is there that Aquinas shows why the theologian considers human nature, the essence of the human being, with reference to the rational soul.⁴⁹ Specifically, for Aquinas, the Christian certainty of the rational soul, our Christological presumption of the unity of humanity, is the first principle of any notional description of the human species as a metaphysically composite being.⁵⁰ Aquinas's description of human nature is not, however, his full account of the completion or perfection of the human being, the mortal rational animal. The essence of the human being is not identical to the human being as such, for no human being exists apart from her or his accidental form.⁵¹ What this means is that the heart of Aquinas's account of the completion or perfection of the mortal rational animal as the image of God is where the essence of the human being and existence of the human being are considered together. Thus, our principal interest in the remainder of this

⁴⁹ C.f., *STh*, 1.75, prologue.

⁵⁰ Romans 5:12-21.

⁵¹ *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Book VII.5, 1378-9.

chapter is Aquinas's treatment of the completion of the production of the human being in Q.93, *the first perfection*.

As previously indicated, Aquinas follows Augustine's affirmation of the undiminished humanity of those who lack the full use of reason—the cognitively impaired, the comatose, and madmen. In contrast to Aristotle, Augustine does not believe such persons to be defective in their nature. Without ambiguity, for Augustine, such persons are members of the human family (by way of generation) and bear the image of triune God, which is constituted in the activity of the mind. Augustine's affirmation of the active mind in all human beings, however, entails a difficulty that Aristotle's presumption of essential defect does not. This difficulty can be illustrated by way of a comparison with Aristotle.

Because Aristotle believes women and natural slaves to be defective in their essential nature (as defective human souls), he does not need to account for their failure to achieve the perfection correlative to the purpose (*ergon*) of the human being. In particular, because their souls are defective, the perfection or completion of human nature is simply unavailable to women and natural slaves. Nevertheless, Aristotle maintains that women and natural slaves can fully realize proximate goods and a species of virtue—there are 'good women' and 'good slaves.' This goodness is coordinate with each class's

role-defined relationship (or friendship) with a particular well-born and well-formed adult male. Although women and natural slaves are essentially defective, on Aristotle's understanding, they are capable of a species of virtue proportionate to their defective nature. Thus, for Aristotle, defective human beings have, in a way, a dignified function (*ergon*) in this life in relationship to the *telos* of Man.

We have shown why, for Aquinas, Aristotle's metaphysical biology and account of human defect are irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of creation. There is simply no way to think about a human being as essentially and/or naturally defective on Aquinas's terms; it is absolute nonsense. For Aquinas, women, the profoundly disabled, barbarians, madmen, etc. are all human beings created in the image of God, mortal rational animals. We have also shown how Aquinas undermines Aristotle's presumption of unnatural human defect by way of a distinction between constitutive limitations and operative limitations. In that light, the 'problem of individual differences' is not a theological problem that belongs to Aquinas; and this, principally, because of his affirmation that the principal operation of the immortal and incorruptible rational soul has an activity *per se* apart from the body. That operation, for Aquinas, is the image of God. It is here that Augustine's way of

affirming the image of God in all human beings entails a difficulty that Aristotle's way of thinking about defective human beings did not.

For Augustine, in all cases, the human being is the image of God by way of the corruptible, yet indestructible, activity of mind. Those who lack the full use of reason are distinguished from irrational animals on account of their endowment with mind; for to lack the capacity of mind, according to Augustine, is to be an animal.⁵² Although the status of the human being as the image of God is sacrosanct for Augustine, the moral potential of the human being is a matter of degree. On the presumption of their baptism, those who lack the use of reason in a profound way can only attain a shadow of happiness and the human good in this life on account of their bodily impairments. Nevertheless, Augustine understands such persons to be capable of cleaving to God in a beautiful and profoundly moving way.⁵³

⁵² *De Trinitate*, XIV.19-20. "A mind without physical eyes is still human; physical eyes without a mind are merely brutish...I have said all this just very briefly to remind my slower readers into whose hands this work might fall how much the mind loves itself, even when it is weak and confused..."

⁵³ *De Trinitate*, XIV.20-21. Augustine writes "the mind loves itself, even when it is weak and confused...And it could not love itself if it did not know itself at all, that is if it did not remember and understand itself. There is such potency in this image of God in that it is capable of cleaving to him in whose image it is...This will come about with the mind attaining to a share of his nature, truth, and happiness, *not with him growing in his own nature, truth, and happiness*. So when it blissfully cleaves to that nature, it will see as unchangeable in it everything that it sees...its desire will be filled with good things, with the trinity its God who image it is, and to save it from ever again being violated anywhere

Augustine understands the moral growth of persons with profound cognitive impairments to be profoundly and irredeemably impaired in this life, although he is certain that their growth will be continued in the next life. Thus, the challenge, when thinking on Augustine's terms, is how to understand the virtue and vocation of such persons in this life, as members of the Body of Christ.

With Augustine, Aquinas maintains that the status of the human being as the image of God is associated with the gift of the rational soul, and a certain activity of the rational soul.⁵⁴ There are two key differences, however. First, different from Augustine, Aquinas associates the image of God with an immaterial activity of the rational soul, and not with the corruptible activity of mind. For Aquinas, an essentially intact human being can be mindless (*amentia*), completely lack the use of reason, and bear the image of God without defect. This resolves Augustine's anxiety to reserve the activity of the

it will be in the hidden place of his countenance, so filled with plenty that sinning can never delight it again. [21] For the time being, however, when it sees itself it does not see anything unchangeable. Of this it can have no doubt, since it is unhappy and longs to be happy, and its only hope that this will be possible lies in its being unchangeable...but when the mind truly recalls its Lord after receiving his Spirit, it perceives quite simply—for it learns this by a wholly intimate instruction from within—that it cannot rise except by his gracious doing, and that it could not have fallen except by its own willful undoing. Certainly it does not remember its happiness...yet from time to time he is touched by the brilliance of truth everywhere present..."

⁵⁴ *STh*, 1.93.2, *sc.*

mind in all cases, while retaining the essential distinctiveness of the human being.

Second different from Augustine, Aquinas distinguishes between the 'magnificence of the image' in the acts of the mind and the 'conformity of the image' to Christ, by grace, in a likeness of virtue. On the identification of the image of God as an immaterial and incorruptible activity of the rational soul, in the case of those who completely lack the use of reason, their conformity to Christ in likeness of virtue can indeed entail a 'growth in nature, truth, and happiness' *in this life*.⁵⁵ Augustine has no way of providing such a description of the life of Christians who have profound cognitive impairments. By Augustine's construal of the image of God, such a person could not grow until the wounds of original sin upon the body are healed at the resurrection. We will provide a brief outline of Aquinas's treatment of these matters in select articles from question 93 of this *Summa Theologica*.

3.5 *An Aristotelian Elaboration of an Augustinian Melody: Prima Pars, q.93*

Our interest is to depict how Aquinas appropriates and develops Augustine's account of the human being as the image of God, paying special

⁵⁵ C.f., *De Trinitate*, XIV.20.

attention to those matters that concern the damaged and impaired human body. In question 93 of the *prima pars*, Aquinas proposes a ‘certain analogy or proportion’ according to which the image of God in the human being can be understood.⁵⁶ He explains that because an image (as in a mirror) requires likeness in species, and because specific likeness derives from what is essential (the “ultimate difference”), it follows that the image of God in the human being can only be a likeness according to what is essential to human nature—which is our specific capacity to know or understand.⁵⁷

For Aquinas, irrational animals (as with the sun and all other creatures) possess a measure of participatory likeness to God because they are beings created (or caused) by God.⁵⁸ However, theirs is a contingent participation by way of effect and not an absolute participation according to image.⁵⁹ These created things lack the natural dignity and intensity of the Divine image in the human being. What distinguishes the human beings is that ours is a likeness of a particular sort. In particular, Aquinas holds that irrational creatures, creatures that do not possess a rational soul, do not possess a likeness to God

⁵⁶ *STh*, 1.93.1, *reply* 3.

⁵⁷ *STh*, 1.93.2, *response*.

⁵⁸ *STh*, 1.93.2, *reply* 4. Aquinas writes “inasmuch as all things, as being, are like to the First Being; as living, like to the First Life; and as intelligent, like to the Supreme Wisdom.”

⁵⁹ *STh*, 1.93.2, *reply* 1.

that is according to image.⁶⁰ For Augustine, the capacity to reason called ‘mind’ is what distinguishes the human being from all other animals. Aquinas’s view is different. For Aquinas, reason does not distinguish or separate human beings from other animals; rather, reason specifies human beings as animals: ‘Reason is the form that animal takes in the human being.’⁶¹ The human being bears a likeness according to image, and that image is the condition of our capacity to participate in the knowledge and love of God.⁶²

The Patristic consensus that Aquinas is reflecting here is not that the human being surpasses all other animals in the *manifestation of reason*

⁶⁰ *STh*, 1.93.2, *response*.

⁶¹ O’Callaghan makes this point when he writes “Human life is not ‘in reason’, but ‘according to reason.’ Reason does not distinguish us *from* animals. It specifies us *as* animals; it specifies the form that animal life takes in us. Similarly, understanding does not distinguish the image in us *from* a vestigial likeness found in our existence and animal life, it specifies the likeness of our existence and animal life; it specifies the form that that likeness takes in us—an *imago Dei* ‘according to’ our rational nature” (O’Callaghan, “A Test Cast,” 135).

⁶² C.f. *STh*, 1.93.6, *response*. Aquinas writes “we may observe this difference between rational creatures and others, both as to the representation of the likeness of the Divine Nature in creatures, and as to the representation in them of the uncreated Trinity. For as to the likeness of the Divine Nature, rational creatures seem to attain, after a fashion, to the representation of the species, inasmuch as they imitate God, not only in being and life, but also in intelligence...Likewise as the uncreated Trinity is distinguished by the procession of the Word from the Speaker, and of Love from both of these...so we may say that in rational creatures wherein we find a procession of the word in the intellect, and a procession of the love in the will, there exists an image of the uncreated Trinity, by a certain representation of the species. In other creatures, however, we do not find the principle of the word, and the word and love.”

(although this is ordinarily the case, at least for a brief moment).⁶³ Rather, the consensus view he takes up as his own is that the human being surpasses the beasts of the field on account of being created in the image of God, which is a likeness capable of knowledge and love of God. As creature, the human being bears a likeness to God; as a particular kind of creature, the essence or nature of the human being is of a particular kind; our nature is reason, we have a rational soul. The substantial form of the mortal rational animal is a likeness according to 'image', *according to reason*.

Although the rational soul of the human creature is made for ensoulment in a body, the fact of the rational soul and its status as image is in no way contingent upon the operational integrity of the designate matter. Nevertheless, the operational integrity of particular bodily organs is, for Aquinas, a condition of our capacity to understand our sensory experience of the world and to act in response to what is understood (i.e. coordinated impressions perceived by way of sensory experience and ordered in the corporeal organ).⁶⁴

⁶³ Isaiah 40:8; James 4:14. ...*a flower quickly fading, a wave tossed in the ocean, a vapor in the wind...*

⁶⁴ C.f. *STh*, 1.85.7, *response*; 1.85.1.

In Q.1.93.4, response, Aquinas explains why every human being is the image of God. Specially, every human being bears a likeness to God according to image, which is our incorruptible capacity to participate in the knowledge and love of God as rational animals.⁶⁵ Aquinas designates three states or degrees of relational intimacy between God and the image of God.⁶⁶ On the presumption that every human being exists as the image of God, Aquinas stipulates the discrete perfections of the human being as the image of God.

First, the human being is the image of God according to the first perfection, which is a natural aptitude that “consists in the very nature of the mind [mens].” Augustine, we have seen, understands the ‘mind’ to be the essence of the human being, and the activity of mind in the ‘inner man’ to be the image of God in the human being. Aquinas, however, is not using ‘mind’

⁶⁵ *STh*, 1.93.4, *response*. Aquinas explains that since “man is said to be the image of God by reason of his intellectual nature, he is most perfectly like God according to that in which he can best imitate God in his intellectual nature.”

⁶⁶ *STh*, 1.93.4, *response*. Aquinas writes “the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually and habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory. Wherefore on the words, “The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us” (Psalm 4:7), the gloss distinguishes a threefold image of “creation,” of “re-creation,” and of “likeness.” The first is found in all men, the second only in the just, the third only in the blessed.”

in this way.⁶⁷ In *De Veritate*, Aquinas rejects the Augustinian thesis that the mind is the essence of the rational soul.⁶⁸ For that reason, in Q.93.4, Aquinas's use of 'mind' is best understood as a synonym for 'intellect,' which is the highest power of the soul.⁶⁹ Because the human being is the image of God by reason of its intellectual nature, 'the natural aptitude for understanding and loving God' that Aquinas is describing is the activity of that nature in the mortal rational animal—it is the substantial existence of the human being.

This does not mean that to exist as a human being is *ipso facto* to understand and love God. What it does mean, however, is that insofar as a human being lives, she or he is capable of the knowledge and love of God. The human being 'happens' by way of a cooperation of human reproductive

⁶⁷ For an account of why 'mind' can only mean 'rational soul' in Q.93, see O'Callaghan, "A Test Case," 107-118.

⁶⁸ *De Veritate*, 10.1, *response*. Aquinas writes "The term mind (*mens*) is taken from the verb measure (*mensurare*). For a thing of any genus is measured by that which is least and first in its genus, as is clear from the *Metaphysics*. So, the word mind is applied to the soul in the same way as understanding is. For understanding knows about things only by measuring them, as it were, according to its own principles... the human soul reaches the highest level which there is among powers of soul and takes its name from this, being called intellective or, sometimes, also understanding and mind, inasmuch as from the intellective soul such power naturally arises, as is proper to the human soul above other souls. It is clear, then, that in us mind designates the highest power of our soul. And since the image of God is in us according to that which is highest in us, that image will belong to the essence of the soul only in so far as mind is its highest power. Thus, mind, as containing the image of God, designates a power of the soul and not its essence. Or, if we take mind to mean essence, it means it only inasmuch as such a power flows from the essence." See *STh*, 1.77.1; 1.79.1; 1.82.3; c.f., O'Callaghan, "A Test Case," 125-127.

⁶⁹ See O'Callaghan, "A Test Cast," 117.

faculties with a direct creative act of God—God’s involvement in every human ‘beginning’ is a completion or perfection of that particular human being. For Aquinas, this means that the natural aptitude for knowledge and love of God is not a static potentiality of the rational soul, waiting to be actualized in a well-formed body; rather, this essential aptitude for the knowledge and love of God is the activity of the rational soul as the substantial form of the body. This is what it means for the human being to *be* the image God. This active aptitude is a constitutive aspect of the first perfection of the human being, and it is not impaired by original sin.

Second, Aquinas indicates that the human being is the image of God according to the second perfection. This consists in the conformity of grace, likeness in virtue, and is only in the just by “re-creation.” Like the first perfection, this too is an act of God. In particular, by God’s grace the human being is restored in friendship with God, drawn toward the dynamic life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For Aquinas, this happens at baptism, when God elevates the natural aptitude of the human being for knowledge and love

above its natural condition; drawing the new-creation towards participation (albeit imperfect) in the knowledge and love of God.⁷⁰

Third, the human being is the image of God according to the final perfection. This consists in the healing of the wounds of original sin upon the body. It is the magnification that Aquinas calls 'beatitude' (the perfect happiness of our supernatural union with God). Aquinas associates this third state *only* with the bodily resurrection of believers.⁷¹ Here, the image of God in the human being is caught up in the blessed movement of knowing and loving God perfectly. This image consists in the beatific vision, the likeness of glory, found only in the blessed.

In concise terms, on the presumption that the mortal rational animal is the image of God according to the substantial form of its essential nature, Aquinas designates distinct ways that particular human beings are the image of God in *Q.93.4*. First, in the natural aptitude for knowledge and love of God, common to all human beings, which is the creaturely existence of the human being made perfect in the 'consummation of nature.'⁷² Second, in the imperfect

⁷⁰ C.f., *STh*, 1-2.110.1, *response*.

⁷¹ *STh*, 1-2.4.5, *response*; c.f., *CT*, §109, §173. The one exception is the Blessed Mother.

⁷² That is to say, the consummation that is the continuing existence of creatures, by God's ongoing creative activity.

knowledge and love of God (actual and habitual), only in the righteous, which is the re-creation of the human being made perfect in the ‘conformity of grace.’ Third, in the perfect knowledge and love of God, only in the blessed (i.e., the saints), which will be the glorified likeness of the human being made perfect at the end of the world in the ‘consummation of glory.’ In even more concise terms, the perfection of nature, the perfection of grace, and the perfection of glory—each of which are gifts from God to the human being.⁷³

For Augustine, those who lack the full use of reason always actively image God, but in a deficient or imperfect way as compared to those who have the use of reason. Nevertheless, such persons bear the image of the dynamic life of the Trinity—insofar as the image of God always knows, loves, and understands itself *as self*.⁷⁴ Aquinas takes as his own Augustine’s animated insistence that newborns, the cognitively impaired, the comatose, and the insane all reflect the dynamic life of the Trinity. However, Aquinas affirms Augustine’s core intuition in terms different than Augustine.

⁷³ *STh*, 1.73.1, *reply 1*. Aquinas writes “The first perfection is the cause of the second, as above said. Now for the attaining of beatitude two things are required, nature and grace. Therefore, as said above, the perfection of beatitude will be at the end of the world. But this consummation existed previously in its causes, as to nature, at the first founding of the world, as to grace, in the Incarnation of Christ. For, “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). So, then, on the seventh day was the consummation of nature, in Christ’s Incarnation the consummation of grace, and at the end of the world will be the consummation of glory.”

⁷⁴ *De Trinitate*, XIV.13; cf., XIV 6-8, 18, 19.

On this difference between Augustine and Aquinas, it is helpful to compare the three classes of persons Aquinas identifies in 93.4, *response* with the three classes of persons identified in 93.8, *reply 3*. In the *response of article 4*, Aquinas distinguishes between ‘all human beings’, ‘the righteous’, and ‘the blessed.’ Here the governing rubric of the distinction is ways that the human being can imitate God in its intellectual nature, an imitation of knowledge and love. Aquinas identifies three ways: by a natural or essential active aptitude; by an imperfect activity; and by a perfect activity. As already, explained, this distinction corresponds to the three perfections of the human being.

In the *reply 3 of article 8*, Aquinas revises and develops Augustine’s account of the image of God in human beings who lack the use of reason. Aquinas distinguishes between ‘those who lack the use of reason’, ‘sinners’, and ‘the righteous.’⁷⁵ The governing rubric, taken from Augustine, is how the

⁷⁵ *STh*, 1.93.8, *response*. Aquinas writes “The meritorious knowledge and love of God can be in us only by grace. Yet there is a certain natural knowledge and love as seen above. This, too, is natural that the mind [i.e., intellect, the highest power of the soul], in order to understand God, can make use of reason, in which sense we have already said that the image of God abides ever in the soul; “whether this image of God be so obsolete,” as it were clouded, “as almost to amount to nothing,” as in those who have not the use of reason; “or obscured and disfigured,” as in sinners; or “clear and beautiful,” as in the just; as Augustine says.” [dicendum quod meritoria Dei cognitio et dilectio non est nisi per gratiam. Est tamen aliqua Dei cognitio et dilectio naturalis, ut supra habitum est. Et hoc etiam ipsum naturale est, quod mens ad intelligendum Deum ratione uti potest, secundum quod imaginem Dei semper diximus permanere in mente, sive haec imago Dei ita sit obsoleta, quasi obumbrata, ut pene nulla sit, ut in his qui non habent usum rationis;

'natural active aptitude' of the intellect to imitate the processions of the Trinity, by knowledge and by love, *is perceived in another or how that essential activity might seem to an observer*. Aquinas identifies three ways this natural aptitude might appear to an observer: as useless, invisible, and utterly non-existent (lack of reason); as darkened and deformed (sinners); or as clear and beautiful (the blessed).

The complementarity of these two lists is important. For it is one way to avoid a serious misreading of Aquinas on the relationship between the image of God and cognition. An example of the sort of reading of Aquinas we are keen to reject, on this particular point, makes claims of the following kind: the human being is image of the Trinity only "when the intellectual nature is engaged actively in knowing and willing"; the "image of the Trinity exists in an imperfect way when the human mind has only habitual knowledge and love...in a state of bare potency"; the "image only exists in a complete and fulfilled way when the mind actively knows and wills and consequently gives rise to an inner word and love that reflect the processions of the Trinity"; and

sive sit obscura atque deformis, ut in peccatoribus; sive sit clara et pulchra, ut in iustis, sicut Augustinus dicit, XIV de Trin.]; c.f., *STh*, 1.45.7.

“Man is made to the image of God according to his *acts* of understanding and loving.”⁷⁶

In contrast to the above formulations, Aquinas is doing something very different in Q.93. Specifically, Aquinas interprets Augustine’s remarks from *De Trinitate*, XIV, 6 (in 93.8, ad 3) as aesthetic judgments concerning impairment of the second perfection as a consequence of original sin. At the same time, Aquinas appropriates and develops Augustine’s principled affirmation that the image of God cannot be annihilated or impaired to the point of stasis. The development consists in the identification of the image of God with the immaterial and incorruptible activity of the rational soul as substantial form of the human body—the existing human being, the moral rational animal.

In the third *response* of *article 4*, Aquinas accounts for the failure to recognize the essential activity of the *imago trinitatis* in the human being on aesthetic terms. It is not the case, for Aquinas, that some human beings are more the image of God than others. Rather, for Aquinas, every human being is

⁷⁶ D. Juvenal Merriell, C.O, “Trinitarian Anthropology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Peter Wawrykow, 123-142 (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 130, 131 [emphasis original]. It is worth noting that in Merriell’s analysis of question 93, he makes no mention of Aquinas’s remark on ‘those who lack the use of reason’ in *STh*, 1.93.8, *response*.

the image of God, without defect—although, in particular instances, appearances can give a misleading impression. Moreover, there is reason so believe on Thomistic grounds that the observer who looks at a fellow human being and only sees *inactive, imperfect, incomplete, unfulfilled, bare potency*—a defective image of God, an essentially defective human being—for Aquinas, the observer who sees only defect might be morally vicious.⁷⁷ Specifically, those who see other human beings as essentially defective may have, on Aquinas’s terms, what Kevin O’Reilly describes as an ‘affective moral disorder’; the perception of the beautiful as ugly, due to poor moral and aesthetic formation.⁷⁸ The lives of those who ‘lack the use of reason’ are not

⁷⁷ We are not suggesting that this is the case for either St. Augustine or with Merriell.

⁷⁸ See Kevin E. O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception: A Thomistic Perspective* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 74. O’Reilly outlines what he takes to be the principal themes for any inferential reconstruction of Aquinas’s ‘embryonic aesthetic theory’ (*STh*, 1.39.8): the unity of human nature, the three formal criteria of beauty (proportion, integrity, and clarity), and the dynamic interplay of *visio* and *claritas* in the unified operation that O’Reilly calls *aesthetic perception*. His goal is to outline a Thomistic theory of virtue aesthetics. *Clarity* is the capacity of the thing to communicate or express or show its objective proportion and integrity. The objective *claritas* of a thing must be actualized in the subjective *visio*. Thus beauty has a double aspect, and the subjective *visio* implies that the nature and status of the human agent—the one who perceives—is pertinent to questions of aesthetic perception (28). The key Thomistic axiom for O’Reilly is *visio in actu est claritas in actu*. In sum, the subject must see (*visio in actu*) in order to experience (*claritas in actu*) the objective beauty of a thing. So, ‘beauty’ or ‘ugliness’ is both the result of receptivity and activity. A habitus makes what is agreeable (truly good) seem good (affective inclination) to a subject; correspondingly, it makes the truly bad seem (affectively bad/ugly). Virtue is to find pleasure (affective) in what is agreeable (i.e., what is truly and objectively good) (67). Affective inclination is a tradition disciplined partiality, acquired through habituation into the communal practices corresponding to what is good and true (79, 82). Because affectivity limits and controls what sensory information is relevant to the cognitional

tragic; rather, in the light of grace and by the hope of glory, Aquinas helps us see what we otherwise would not, in order that we might recognize through the prism of time redeemed, the life of a mortal rational animal who is capable of friendship with God.

3.6 *Conclusion*

Aquinas uses Augustine's formulation of the immortal and ineradicable activity of the *imago trinitatis* to reconfigure Aristotle's notion of the rational soul. Aquinas then uses the association of the image of God with the incorruptible and immortal rational soul to move beyond the limitations of Augustine on the mind.

Augustine's account of the image of God in those who lack the use of reason, even assuming their baptism, does not hold forth much confidence for the virtue and vocation of such persons. The purpose of those whose minds are woefully impaired, on Augustine's terms, can be little more than the demonstration or witness to God's goodness ('monstrosity' revised and

deliberations of the intellect, choice is influenced by the connatural inclination of the subject. Hence, a better affective inclination, means that one will have a better grasp of reality (73). Likewise, impaired affective vision (*visio*) means a poor grasp of reality and, for those capable of voluntary acts, leads to moral viciousness and an 'affective disorder' — which is to say, perceiving the ugly as beautiful or the beautiful as ugly (74).

redeemed)—a vocation, no doubt—but their capacity for virtue and potential for the human good (and, therefore, their discipleship) is correlative to the activity of the mind. Because their mind is limited, their progress in virtue and toward the human good is limited in this life.

Augustine does not use the term *amentia* (mindlessness) in reference to human beings, because such a being would not be human. Such a person would lack what is essential to human nature. Therefore, for Augustine, there can be no *amens*; and he denies the possibility of mindlessness even in those for whom we could not imagine otherwise. In contrast to Augustine, Aquinas does not hold the activity of the mind to be essential to the human being. In particular, Aquinas accepts in principle that a human being can be born absolutely “mindless” (the *amens*); in the same way, for example, that physicists accept in principle that matter can be cooled to a temperature of absolute zero (0K or -273.15° Celsius).⁷⁹ Just as the speculative presumption of the state of absolute zero enables physicists to make inferential judgments about the nature of matter and thermodynamics, so too does Aquinas’s speculative presumption of the state of *amentia* enable him to make inferential judgments about human nature and human well-being.

⁷⁹ C.f., *STh*, 3.68.12 and 3.80.9.

Aquinas agrees with Augustine that the unified act called mind (reformulated by Aquinas as a synonym for immaterial and incorruptible intellection) is present in all living human beings. However, Aquinas's identification of the subsistent rational soul and not the activity of the mind as the essence of human nature has advantages. One important advantage is the absolute seriousness of Aquinas's account of how vulnerable the human being is to damage, dysfunction, and decay after the Fall. And, yet, those advantages follow from a continuity of judgment that Aquinas holds in common with Augustine about the human being and image of God. Specifically, both Augustine and Aquinas affirm the humanity of persons who lack the use of reason, and that they bear the image of God. Both affirm, moreover, the ultimate perfection of such persons, insofar as they are baptized, in the beatific vision. The advantage of Aquinas's account over Augustine's is on the grounds of the virtue, moral perfection, and human flourishing of those who lack the use of reason *in this life*.

For Augustine, the perfection of the image of God in the human being is a process of overcoming the constitutive and operative impediments that prevent us from becoming who we are meant to be. Following Aristotle, to a certain extent, Aquinas presumes that those who lack the use of reason—in the various ways and degrees—are capable of a natural perfection in virtue in

this life that is correlative to their condition (by way of baptism). Said differently, constitutive and operative limitations cannot effectively impede a human being's perfection in virtue—the ability to perform a morally good act. However, these limitations can affectively condition how the circumstances and intent (the end sought) inform the object of a moral act.⁸⁰

For Aquinas, the perfection of the image of God in the human being—a likeness according to image, perfected in virtue—takes the natural aptitude for friendship between creature and Creator, and the graced actualization of that aptitude for that friendship as its measure. It is not a matter of overcoming our constitutive and operative limitations; rather, it is a matter of created rational animal cleaving to its Creator. Our constitution as mortal rational animals is such that no operative limitation of the second perfection can impair such a cleaving, which is the work of grace at baptism—when faith, hope, and love are infused; and, for Aquinas, even in the case of the *amens*, when the intellectual virtues wisdom and prudence are infused. This cleaving to God, moreover, is an active imitation of God on the part of the

⁸⁰ This is the reason why the 'madman' is such an important figure in Aquinas's account of the virtues. See M. V. Dougherty's *Moral Dilemmas in Medieval Thought: From Gratian to Aquinas* (Cambridge University Press; 2011). 112-146. There is certainly a good conversation to be had regarding intrinsically evil acts and the moral culpability of cognitively impaired and mentally ill persons. However, such an engagement will take us beyond the principal concern of our present study.

immaterial and incorruptible rational soul. What this means is that the baptized *amens*—the absolutely mindless human being—can realize the twofold end of the human being—virtue in this life, the beatific vision in the life to come.

At the beginning of Part 1 we made the claim that, for Aquinas, the human being is the image of God in all its activities. Specifically, we remarked that activities like speaking, eating, defecating, singing, and reading are all rational acts when they are performed and experienced by the rational animal. And this not because these activities are considered, but because these are acts of a rational animal, the image of God. These claims, of course, are particularly relevant to our understanding of the moral significance of cognitive impairment. Specifically, the significance of the body in the perfection of human activity towards the realization of our proximate and ultimate happiness.

**Part 2: The Created Rational Animal: The Second Perfection & Operative
Limitations**

4 A Thomistic Theology of Disability & Cognitive Impairment

There are for Aquinas many things we can provisionally know about human nature as such. However, for Aquinas, all that we might know about the perfection of the human creature as the image of God obtains theologically only when it is understood in light of God's revelation in Christ. This is the heart of Aquinas's account of corporeal infirmity and human perfection: In Christ, God has done for us what we are not able to do for ourselves—the gratuity of grace—and this is accomplished and conferred in a manner that does not destroy human nature, but, rather, is perfective of human nature. In this chapter we will proceed as follows. First, we will depict Aquinas's understanding of the significance of corporeal infirmity within the sweep of redemptive history. Second, we will formulate a Thomistic metaphysics of evil suffered. Third, on Aquinas terms, we will outline discrete forms of corporeal infirmity. Forth, we will attend to the profound weakness, physical disability, and cognitive impairment characteristic of the condition called *amentia*.

4.1 *Corporal infirmity within the History of Redemption*

Humanity is created for friendship with God, where 'friendship' is understood as a relationship of likeness between the image of God and the

Triune God.⁸¹ For Aquinas, Christian reflection on the corruptible flesh begins with the rational creature as one ordained to live in a state of grace, yet as one who is likewise implicated in the effects of original sin and the drama of redemptive history.⁸² Coordinate with humanity's self-separation from God at the Fall was the loss of 'original justice' or right relationship with God.⁸³ In the ordinary act of sin, humanity ruptured the harmony of our friendship with God. As a consequence, we lost God's sanctifying grace, which is the elevation of the rational creature above the condition of its nature into a participation in the divine life. According to Aquinas, the common heritage of all human beings in relation to the withdrawal of sanctifying grace is called 'original sin.'⁸⁴ As a consequence of that impaired relationship with God, without exception, every human being needs the divine help of restorative and sanctifying grace in order to attain perfect happiness.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *STh*, 2-2.23.1 and 2.

⁸² *De Malo*, 5.5, *sed contra*.

⁸³ *De Malo*, 4.8.

⁸⁴ *De Malo*, 4.1, *response*.

⁸⁵ *De Malo*, 5.1, *response*. Aquinas writes, "rational creatures surpass every other kind of creature in being capable of the highest good in beholding and enjoying God, although the sources from their own nature do not suffice to attain it, and they need the help of God's grace to attain it. And we should note regarding this point that every rational creature without exception needs a particular divine help, namely, the help of sanctifying grace, in order to be able to attain perfect happiness...But in addition to this necessary help, human beings needed another supernatural help because of their composite nature, for human beings are composed of soul and body, and of an intellectual and sensory

The salvation wrought by Christ on the cross resolved and restored what was lost at the fall: original justice and the unmerited gift of grace. In Christ, we are made friends with God. The spiritual wound of original sin, the disorder of the soul, is healed in the sacrament of baptism; moreover, baptism entails the hope for bodily resurrection—the consummation of glory—when the wounds of original sin upon the body will be healed.⁸⁶

nature. And if the body and the sense be left to their nature, as it were they burden and hinder the intellect from being able freely to attain the highest reaches of contemplation. And this help was original justice, by which the mind of human beings would be so subject to God that their lower powers and their very bodies would be completely subject to them, nor would their reason impede them from being able to tend toward God. And as the body is for the sake of the soul, and the senses for the sake of the intellect, so this help whereby the body is under the control of the soul, and sense powers under the control of the intellect, is almost a disposition for the help whereby the human mind is ordained to see and enjoy God. And original sin takes away this help of original justice...”

⁸⁶ *CT*, §160. Aquinas writes “For the same reason that God, in restoring the risen body, does not reclaim all the material elements once possessed by man’s body, He will supply whatever is wanting to the proper amount of matter. Nature itself has such power. In infancy we do not as yet possess our full quantity; but by assimilating food and drink we receive enough matter from outside sources to round out our perfect quantity; nor on this account does a man cease to be the same individual he was before. Surely, then, divine power can do the same thing much more easily, so that those who do not have sufficient quantity may be supplied from outside matter with whatever was lacking to them in this life as regards integrity of natural members or suitable size. *Consequently, although some may have lacked certain of their members during this life, or may not have attained to perfect size, the amount of quantity possessed at the moment of death makes no difference; at the resurrection they will receive, through God’s power, the due complement of members and quantity.*” Emphasis mine; c.f., *STh*, 3.69.3, response; *CT*, §158.

4.1.1 *The disorder of the soul in relation to the body*

In the state of original grace, the body was elevated with the soul in a praeternatural cooperation of knowledge and love in response to God's goodness and beauty.⁸⁷ However, wounded by sin, the broken relationship between creature and Creator impaired the orderly operation of the soul in relation to the human body.⁸⁸ In Aquinas's understanding, the breach of this immaterial relationship led to a material disorder (a disorder of the faculties and powers), insofar as the soul lost the supernatural means to govern the human body towards proximate and ultimate goods.⁸⁹

When humanity lost the divine help of supernatural grace, the human body could no longer operate according to its grace elevated nature. As a consequence, the corruptible faculties and organic systems of the human body were made susceptible to damage, dysfunction, and decay. Wounded by sin, the human being retains all the endowments and powers proper to its nature. Nevertheless, these endowments and powers are retained and passed on in a

⁸⁷ *STh*, 1.97.1, *response*; *STh*, 1-2.81.2, *response*.

⁸⁸ *De Malo*, 5.1.

⁸⁹ *STh*, 1.76.5, *reply 1*. Aquinas writes "before sin the human body was immortal not by nature, but by a gift of Divine grace; otherwise its immortality would not be forfeited through sin"; c.f., *STh*, 1-2.81.5, *reply 2*.

state of disorder.⁹⁰ For Aquinas, there is a variety of ways that the 'lower powers and properties' of particular human beings can be in a state of disorder in relation to the 'higher powers and properties' of their essential nature.⁹¹ These *operative limitations* unequally affect particular bodies and are identified as 'weaknesses' insofar as the body is not subject to its governing

⁹⁰ *De Malo*, 5.2, *response*.

⁹¹ *De Malo*, 5.4, *response*. In *STh*, 1-2.81.3, *reply 1*, Aquinas writes "In accord with the Catholic faith, we undoubtedly need to hold that death and all such ills of our present life are punishment for original sin. But we should note that there are two kinds of punishment: one, indeed, as a penalty for sin; the second as something concomitant...For God bestowed on human beings in their original condition the help of original justice, which preserved them from all such ills. And the whole human nature was indeed deprived of that help because of the sin of our first parents...And different ills result from the privation of this help, and different persons have these deficiencies in different ways, although they equally share the moral fault of original sin....For inasmuch as an offspring is part of its father regarding the body that it takes from its father but not regarding its soul, which God directly creates, it is not improper that an offspring for the sin of its father suffer corporeal punishment but not spiritual punishment, which belongs to the soul...But the very fact that human beings are in such a condition that such ills or deficiencies help them either to avoid sin or develop virtue is due to the weakness of human nature, which weakness results from the sin of our first parent. Just so, the fact that the body of a human being is so disposed as to need surgery in order to cure it belongs to its weakness. And so all these ills [and deficiencies] correspond to original sin as a concomitant punishment." Aquinas continues, in the same question, "Original justice, although it belonged to the soul, preserved the proper relationship of the body under control of the soul. And so bodily ills properly result from original sin, which took away original justice" (*DE MALO*, 5.4, *reply 7*). In his *Summa*, Aquinas writes "Original sin is taken away by Baptism as to the guilt, in so far as the soul recovers grace as regards the mind. Nevertheless original sin remains in its effect as regards the [means of transmission], which is the disorder of the lower parts of the soul and of the body itself, in respect of which, and not of the mind, man exercises his power of generation. Consequently those who are baptized transmit original sin: since they do not beget as being renewed in Baptism, but as still retaining something of the oldness of the first sin."

power.⁹² Moreover, these ‘afflictions’ of the corruptible body are experienced as evil and are proper objects of fear.⁹³

For Aquinas, this material disorder of the body in relation to the soul is passed from parent to child in a manner that coincides with, but is not constituted by, the biological transmission of life from parent to child.⁹⁴ Most directly, the wounds of original sin that are passed from parent to child radically impair each individual’s ability to attain the good proportionate to

⁹² *De Malo*, 3.9, response. Aquinas writes “we need to understand the term weakness. And we should understand the term by analogy to bodily weakness [infirmittatis corporis]. And the body is weak when a fluid is not subject to the governing power of the whole body. [...] we should note that some bodily changes restrict the exercise of reason, so that reason either considers nothing at all or cannot freely reflect, as is evidently the case with those asleep and the insane [*dormientibus et phreneticis*].”

⁹³ *STh*, 1-2.35.1, reply 3.

⁹⁴ *STh*, 1-2.81.1, response. Aquinas writes “Since the body is proportionate to the soul, and since the soul’s defects redound into the body, and vice versa, in like manner, say they, a culpable defect of the soul is passed on to the child, through the transmission of the semen, albeit the semen itself is not the subject of the guilt. But all these explanations [as to how the original sin of our first parents could be transmitted biologically to their descendants] are insufficient. Because, granted that some bodily defects [*defectus corporales*] are transmitted by way of origin from parent to child, and granted that even some defects of the soul [*defectus animae*] are transmitted in consequence, on account of a defect in the bodily habit [*corporis indispositionem*], as in the case of idiots begetting idiots [*fatuis fatui generantur*]; nevertheless the fact of having a defect by the way of origin seems to exclude the notion of guilt, which is essentially something voluntary...Therefore we must explain the matter otherwise by saying that all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, inasmuch as they have one common nature, which they receive from their first parents...In this way, then, the disorder which is in this man born of Adam, is voluntary, not by his will, but by the will of his first parent, who, by the movement of generation, moves all who originate from him, even as the soul’s will moves all the members to their actions. Hence the sin which is thus transmitted by the first parent to his descendants is called “original,” just as the sin which flows from the soul into the bodily members is called ‘actual’”; c.f. *De Malo*, 4.6, 8.

human nature, which includes the orderly operation of the bodily faculties related to the natural good of the human creature. Nevertheless, original sin did not destroy the capacity of the human being to be moved by grace toward its ultimate good, which is beyond and above human nature: that is, our perfect creaturely participation in the knowledge and love of Triune God.

4.1.2 *The integrity of the soul in relation to the body*

The human body is configured by a rational soul and, as such, the body is always in a state of potency in relation to the soul; a subjectivity that does not exist on the part of the soul in relation to the body.⁹⁵ Among other things, this means that no organic or operational impairment of the body can ever impair the principal operation and flourishing of the rational soul in its communication with God and imaging of God.⁹⁶ The perfect happiness and ultimate flourishing of the human being does not consist principally in goods of the body.⁹⁷ Because the rational soul is created for embodiment and perfected in operation by way of the body, in a narrow sense the natural

⁹⁵ *STh*, 1.76.6, *response*.

⁹⁶ *De Malo*, 5.1, *response*; *STh*, 1.76.3, *reply 1*; 1.76.1.

⁹⁷ *STh*, 1-2.2.5.

flourishing of the human being can be constrained (but not impaired) by a corporeal infirmity.⁹⁸

After the Fall, all biological material, as is passed on from the parents, exhibits some measure of defect or damage.⁹⁹ Likewise, for Aquinas, the faculties of the human body (i.e., bodily organs), by way of which the rational soul operates, can be impaired or wholly dysfunctional. Aquinas amplifies this Aristotelian description of the corruptibility of the human body. It is not that some or even most human bodies are defective or damaged, and thereby impair the coordinated operation of the soul in relation to the body, which Aristotle thinks. Even more, for Aquinas, after the Fall all human bodies *qua* finite organic systems, are *per se* susceptible to corruption and deterioration (defect and damage), and likewise the operations or faculties of every particular human being are in some way impacted owing to the disordered relation of the soul and body.¹⁰⁰ Aquinas understands the rational faculties of

⁹⁸ The distinction between 'constraint' and 'impairment' will be developed and discussed in chapter 5.

⁹⁹ *De Malo*, 4.1, *response*; c.f., 4.6, *response*.

¹⁰⁰ C.f., *STh*, 1.75.6.

every human being to be in some way impaired, though not necessarily in the same way or to the same degree.¹⁰¹

Regardless of the nature or degree of impact with respect to life, sensation, or cognition (and there is always some measure of effect—either directive in one sense or another, or seemingly distortive), for Aquinas, what is never effected is the principal operation of the rational soul.¹⁰² Moreover, although the ultimate end and flourishing of the human creature in the beatific vision of divine glory requires the body, for Aquinas the perfection of the human being is not determined by goods or ills experienced in the body. Aquinas writes “neither ultimate happiness nor ultimate misery consists in the goods or ills of this life.”¹⁰³

No degree of dysfunction or disorder of the ordinary operations proper to the human being can ultimately impair the self-communicating intercourse between God and the image of God, which is our natural aptitude for knowledge and love.¹⁰⁴ Communication between God and the image of God is

¹⁰¹ *STh*, 1.101.2, *reply 1*. Aquinas writes “The corruptible body is a load upon the soul, because it hinders the use of reason even in those matters which belong to man at all ages.”

¹⁰² *De Malo*, 7.7, *response*.

¹⁰³ *CT*, §173.

¹⁰⁴ *STh*, 1.45.7, *response*; 3.4.1, *reply 2*; 3.6.2, *response*; c.f., 2-2.45.5, *response*.

not contingent upon an operational function or sensory faculty of the brain.¹⁰⁵ This is an important argument of Aquinas's that is often overlooked, insofar as it illuminates what of 'nature' must be intact in order to be perfected by divine grace. Baptism elevates the condition of the person whose bodily operations are insurmountably impeded or profoundly impaired to a supernatural status, capacitating a supernatural operation according to the economy of divine grace: the likeness in virtue called faith, hope, and love.¹⁰⁶ In all cases, the activity of the baptized in the imitation of the goodness and beauty of God is hindered, insofar as the human being continues to suffer the corporeal wounds of original sin.

4.1.3 *Operative limitations and the perfection of nature*

Aquinas's account of corporeal infirmity concerns the bodies of particular people who are 'afflicted' with operative limitations. When these bodily impairments are considered in the light of his account of the human being, the image of God, one preliminary point can be made: Aquinas is exceedingly confident that every human being is capable of attaining their ultimate and final good as rational creatures—and this confidence is one that

¹⁰⁵ *STh*, 3.69.4-6.

¹⁰⁶ *C.f.*, *STh*, 3.69.3-4

treats the constitutive vulnerability and dependency of the human being with seriousness, and puts on no sentimental or romantic airs about the various and profound ways the human body can be damaged.

For example, Aquinas recognizes that a profound brain injury will impact the operation of reason—insofar as the immaterial powers of the soul are configured to co-operate with the internal sense organ in the coordinated production and illumination of the phantasm. We have shown that according to Aquinas no impairment of the body can ever disrupt the principal operation and flourishing of the rational soul in its communication with God.¹⁰⁷ Specifically, among the things that cannot be effected is the natural active aptitude of the human being for knowledge and love; and, likewise, the perfection of that natural aptitude in the baptismal reception of

¹⁰⁷ *STh*, 1-2.4.7, *response*. Aquinas writes “For imperfect happiness, such as can be had in this life, external goods are necessary, not as belonging to the essence of happiness, but by serving as instruments to happiness, which consists in an operation of virtue, as stated in *Ethic. i*, 13. For man needs in this life, the necessities of the body, both for the operation of contemplative virtue, and for the operation of active virtue, for which latter he needs also many other things by means of which to perform its operations. On the other hand, such goods as these are nowise necessary for perfect Happiness, which consists in seeing God. The reason of this is that all suchlike external goods are requisite either for the support of the animal body; or for certain operations which belong to human life, which we perform by means of the animal body: whereas that perfect Happiness which consists in seeing God, will be either in the soul separated from the body, or in the soul united to the body then no longer animal but spiritual. Consequently these external goods are nowise necessary for that Happiness, since they are ordained to the animal life. And since, in this life, the felicity of contemplation, as being more Godlike, approaches nearer than that of action to the likeness of that perfect Happiness, therefore it stands in less need of these goods of the body as stated in *Nicomachean Ethics X.8*”; c.f., *STh*, 1.75.6; 3.69.4-6.

consummating grace, because the rational soul, which is the substantial form of the body, is immaterial and incorruptible.¹⁰⁸ That is all well and good with respect to the salvation of a person with a profound cognitive impairment; however, what of their growth in virtue and righteousness?

When particular operations of the body are hindered or impaired, the cooperation between the rational soul and those operations is affected to an equal degree. However, insofar as the particular human being is alive, actively existing as a mortal rational animal, regardless of the degree of impairment, *that capacity for cooperation is never ever annihilated*. For Aquinas, in all cases, the natural aptitude for the human being for knowledge and love of God can be perfected by grace; moreover, in all cases, the consummation of grace perfects whatever capacities persist. Aquinas writes:

grace, as it is prior to virtue, has a subject prior to the powers of the soul, so that it is in the essence of the soul. For as man in his intellectual powers participates in the Divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and in his power of will participates in the Divine

¹⁰⁸ *De Veritate*, 26.10, *reply 1*. Aquinas writes “Just as God is the good and the life of the soul, so the soul is the good and life of the body, but not contrariwise so that the body should be the good of the soul. Now the ability to suffer is a sort of barrier or harmful factor as regards the union of the soul with the body. Thus the body cannot be blessed in its own way while still able to suffer, having a barrier to participation in its own good. For this reason impassibility is a part of the glory of the body. The soul’s blessedness, however, consists entirely in the enjoyment of its own good, which is God. Hence the soul which enjoys the possession of God is perfectly happy, even if it happens to be passible from the point of view of its being united to the body, as was the case in Christ.”

love through the virtue of charity, so also in the nature of the soul does he participate in the Divine Nature, after the manner of a likeness, through a certain regeneration or re-creation.¹⁰⁹

Those who absolutely lack the use of reason and are completely incapable of self-movement (the amens) are, at baptism, supernaturally capacitated such that *from the infused knowledge that they have, God moves them by contemplation to form an inner word, from which they are free to burst forth in spiritual acts of love.*¹¹⁰

For Aquinas, the very structure of our constitution as composite creatures entails that our capacity to perceive, understand, and act requires the corruptible and contingent corporeal faculties of the body. This is how we realize our natural good. Likewise, for Aquinas, it belongs to the very structure of our constitution as composite creatures that the natural aptitude of the human being to be elevated and moved by grace *is not contingent upon the wellbeing of the body.*¹¹¹ Our ability to supernaturally perceive, understand,

¹⁰⁹ *STh*, 1-2.110.4, *response*. “Unde relinquitur quod gratia, sicut est prius virtute, ita habeat subiectum prius potentiis animae, ita scilicet quod sit in essentia animae. Sicut enim per potentiam intellectivam homo participat cognitionem divinam per virtutem fidei; et secundum potentiam voluntatis amorem divinum, per virtutem caritatis; ita etiam per naturam animae participat, secundum quandam similitudinem, naturam divinam, per quandam regenerationem sive recreationem.”

¹¹⁰ *C.f.*, *STh*, 1.93.7, *response*.

¹¹¹ *CT*, §109. Aquinas writes “All this brings to light the different relationship that God and creatures have to goodness. We may examine this difference from the standpoint of the two kinds of goodness discerned in creatures. Since the good has the nature of

and participate in the happiness that is a likeness to Christ, by way of our baptismal incorporation into Christ, cannot be destroyed or ultimately obliterated by original sin or the corporeal wounds of original sin.

According to Aquinas, persons who have even the most profound sorts of cognitive impairment are capable of receiving and responding to the movements of divine grace, operative in the sacraments of the Church. It is in this way that Aquinas grounds his theological understanding of the *amens* (and the doctrinal significance of *amentia*) in the life of the Body of Christ: where damaged bodies and wounded souls are drawn towards their natural and supernatural perfection in Christ, the Crucified One.

perfection and of end, the twofold perfection and end of the creature disclose its twofold goodness. A certain perfection is observed in the creature inasmuch as it persists in its nature. This perfection is the end of its generation or formation. The creature has a further perfection which it reaches by its motion or activity. This perfection is the end of its movement or operation. In both kinds of perfection the creature falls short of the divine goodness. The form and existence of a thing are its good and perfection when considered from the standpoint of the thing's nature. But a composite substance is neither its own form nor its own existence; and a simple substance, although it is its own form, is not its own existence. God, however, is His own essence and His own existence, as was shown above....Likewise, all creatures receive their perfect goodness from an end extrinsic to them. For the perfection of goodness consists in attainment of the ultimate end. But the ultimate end of any creature is outside the creature. This end is the divine goodness, which is not ordained to any ulterior end. Consequently God is His own goodness in every way and is essentially good. This cannot be said of simple creatures, because they are not their own existence, and also because they are ordained to something external as to their ultimate end. As for composite substances, clearly they are not their own goodness in any way. Hence God alone is His own goodness, and He alone is essentially good. All other beings are said to be good according as they participate, to some extent, in Him."

4.2 *Metaphysics of Evil Suffered*

An account of the generically infirm or weakened human body is for Aquinas but one inflection of a broader thesis regarding how Christians use the word 'evil.' For Aquinas, the word 'evil' (*malum*) signifies the undesirable absence or defection of a good that is due (an operative limitation), and the word is used to express all degrees of undesirable privation of a good.¹¹² In the various places he treats evil, Aquinas distinguishes between *malum poenae* ('affliction' or 'evil suffered') and *malum culpae* (evil of fault), which roughly correspond to the contemporary notions 'natural evil' and 'moral evil.'¹¹³

When it comes to corporeal infirmity, it is crucial for Aquinas that the term 'evil' in properly Christian speech does not signify any being or form of creaturely existence.¹¹⁴ Rather, for Aquinas, the evil called 'affliction' is always discussed as parasitic upon a more determinative good.¹¹⁵ It follows from Aquinas's understanding of the goodness of God's creation that insofar as a

¹¹² *STh*, 1.14.10, *response*.

¹¹³ *STh*, 1.48.5, 6.

¹¹⁴ *STh*, 1.48.1, *response*; *CT*, §117.

¹¹⁵ *STh*, 1.49.3; *CT*, §118.

human being exists, that person is good—and any evil suffered in the body by that person is a privation of a relative creaturely good.¹¹⁶

For Aquinas, affliction is the privation of a relative corporeal good, and not the absolute negation of the goodness of corporeality. On that basis, Aquinas carefully distinguishes between *the process* of corruption and *the simple state* of corruption.¹¹⁷ Bodily corruption is a matter of more or less, and not a matter of simple negation. In that way, on Aquinas's terms, a person cannot, in fact 'simply be profoundly disabled.'¹¹⁸ Moreover, for Aquinas, not every defect of good is evil (i.e., a constitutive limitation), but only the privation of a good which is naturally due.¹¹⁹ Because corporeal incorruptibility is not a constitutive good proper to the mortal rational animal, the potential of any particular human being for the perfect actualization of some corporeal capacity is a proximate good, relative to that person's ultimate good.¹²⁰

Aquinas understands the bodily suffering of human beings to be the concomitant consequence of existing as composite creatures (a unity of

¹¹⁶ *STh*, 1.48.6, *response*; 1.48.3, *response*; c.f., 1.5.1.

¹¹⁷ *STh*, 1-2.73.2.

¹¹⁸ Contra Reinders, "Life's Goodness," 173.

¹¹⁹ *STh*, 1.48.5, *response*; *CT*, §114.

¹²⁰ *STh*, 1.5.1; c.f., Reinders, "Life's Goodness," 171-173.

material and immaterial properties) in a good world disordered by sin.¹²¹

Aquinas writes

Original justice, although it belonged to the soul, preserved the proper relationship of the body under control of the soul. And so bodily ills properly result from original sin, which took away original justice.¹²²

In this way, Aquinas affirms that to suffer a corporeal infirmity is to experience evil, while ardently rejecting any suggestion that the person afflicted somehow becomes essentially or inherently 'defective.' The evil suffered in corporeal infirmity does not reduce, destroy, or transform the suffering person's essential nature into something subhuman, marginally human, or non-human. For Aquinas, no corporeal infirmity, even in the case of a profound cognitive impairment, results in an 'anthropological minor-league.'¹²³

For all its implications, corporeal infirmity is not a question of anthropology for Aquinas. Rather, Aquinas approaches the damage, dysfunction, and decay of the human body as having to do with the unambiguously *human* experience of affliction. In Aquinas's way of thinking, affliction concerns the full spectrum of undesirable conditions to which

¹²¹ *STh*, 1.48.2, *response*; 1.48.5, *reply 1*; 1.22.2, *reply 2*.

¹²² *De Malo*, 5.4, *reply 7*.

¹²³ *Pace Reinders*, "Life's Goodness," 181, n.26.

human beings are subject, from pimples to plagues, and Aquinas gives special attention to injury, illness, and what we today might call congenital cognitive impairments and disorders.

Aquinas famously illustrates his understanding of evil (*malum*) and evil suffered (*malum poenae*) by way of the infirmity experienced by people who are blind.¹²⁴ When a person lacks the good of sight, that person suffers evil—that is to say, the privation of a good that human beings ordinarily enjoy (a good that is due to human nature). Aquinas explains that because evil is a privation of a due good and not a thing in itself, the evil called ‘blindness’ cannot entirely destroy the threefold good upon which it is parasitic: the good which is opposed to evil (as sight is to blindness), the good which is the subject of evil (the human being who is blind), and the ultimate good which is the potential of the subject for creaturely perfection (the ordination of the human being who happens to be blind for friendship with God). Aquinas writes

Evil cannot wholly consume good. To prove this we must consider that good is threefold. One kind of good is wholly destroyed by evil, and this is the good opposed to evil, as light is wholly destroyed by darkness, and sight by blindness. Another kind of good is neither wholly destroyed nor diminished by evil, and that is the good which

¹²⁴ *STh*, 1.48.1-6.

is the subject of evil; for by darkness the substance of the air is not injured. And there is also a kind of good which is diminished by evil, but is not wholly taken away; and this good is the aptitude of a subject to some actuality.¹²⁵

Aquinas maintains a commonsense view of corporeal infirmity in that the evil suffered by way of blindness will certainly hinder or impair the realization of one or several proximate goods related to the ‘mode’ and ‘species’ of the person afflicted.¹²⁶ However, no corporeal infirmity can affect the immaterial and incorruptible aptitude of the human being pertaining to our highest good and ultimate end.¹²⁷ For although blindness deprives its subject of the good of sight, the person who is blind continues to exist as a human being, a mortal rational animal, and that person cannot lose her or his essential capacity to respond to and be moved by God’s grace.¹²⁸ For Aquinas, this basic understanding of corporeal infirmity—and the three-fold good of

¹²⁵ *STh*, 1.48.4, *response*; c.f., MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 66-67. In *De Malo*, 1.2 (*response*), Aquinas writes concerning the threefold good of any created thing: “we speak of the good in three ways. For we in one way call the very perfection of a thing good, as, for example, we call accurate vision the eyes’ good, and virtue the good of human beings. In the second way, we call good the thing that has its proper perfection, as, for example, we call good human beings who are virtuous, and eyes that see accurately. In the third way, we call good the very subject as it has potentiality for perfection, as, for example, we call good the soul that has potentiality for virtue, and eyes that have potentiality for accurate vision.”

¹²⁶ *De Malo*, 1.1, *reply 1*; *CT*, §119.

¹²⁷ C.f., *STh*, 1.5.5, *response*.

¹²⁸ *STh*, 1.5.5, *reply 3*.

the human creature upon which *malum poenae* is parasitic—appertains to all manner and degree of evil suffered in the bodies of human beings.¹²⁹

Aquinas vigorously maintains that no measure of bodily affliction can decisively frustrate the natural and supernatural perfection of the human being; including mental illness, profound cognitive impairment, and severe dementia.¹³⁰ Some contemporary readers resist this interpretation of Aquinas. However, in our judgment, such hesitations are rooted in the assumption that, according to Aquinas, those who suffer from these sorts of afflictions in this life are simply and absolutely corrupted—as if, for Aquinas, the good of the body is the final and ultimate good of the human creature.¹³¹ We have shown why such interpretations of Aquinas are untenable. Aquinas’s view is that

¹²⁹ *De Malo*, 5.4, response.

¹³⁰ *CT*, §173. Importantly, Aquinas writes “the goods and ills of this life are found to serve some purpose. External goods, and also bodily goods, are organically connected with virtue, which is the way leading directly to beatitude, for those who use such goods well...Similarly the ills opposed to such goods (such as sickness, poverty, and the like) are an occasion of progress in virtue for some but aggravate the viciousness of others, according as men react differently to such conditions. But what is ordained to something else [i.e., the ills of this life] cannot be the final end, because it is not the ultimate in reward or punishment. Therefore neither ultimate happiness nor ultimate misery consists in the goods or ills of this life.”

¹³¹ *STh*, 1-2.2.5, response; 2-2.55.1, response; contra Reinders, *Receiving the Gift*, 115-119; contra Byrne, *Philosophical and Ethical Problems in Mental Handicap*, 147-8. Eleonore Stump remarks that some readers of Aquinas are unwilling to accept Aquinas’s view that severe bodily affliction cannot decisively frustrate the ultimate good and final end of the human creature (specifically, madness, mental retardation, and dementia). Her assessment is that such a reading is “based on the unreflective assumption that those suffering from these afflictions have lost all the mental faculties needed for moral and spiritual development.” Stump, *Aquinas*, 578 n.59.

there are simply some things the human being cannot lose—among these is our essential aptitude for the conformation by grace to a likeness of virtue and the consummation of glory, our highest good in relation to our Creator.¹³²

4.3 *Individual Differences: Damage, Dysfunction, and Impairment*

When it comes to the broad spectrum of corporeal infirmities that human beings might suffer, Aquinas's terminology is flexible; nevertheless, important distinctions emerge in his thought. Among the most important is Aquinas's basic understanding of what we are talking about when we identify particular the 'disabilities' or 'impairments' of a human body. Aquinas writes

the human body is said to be weak, when it is disabled or impaired in the execution of its proper operation, through some disorder of the body's parts, so that the humors and members of the human body cease to be subject to its governing and motive power. Hence a member is said to be weak, when it cannot perform the operation of

¹³² *STh*, 1-2.110.4, *reply 4*. Aquinas explains that "grace, as it is prior to virtue, has a subject prior to the powers of the soul, so that it is in the essence of the soul. For as man in his intellectual powers participates in the Divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and in his power of will participates in the Divine love through the virtue of charity, so also in the nature of the soul does he participate in the Divine Nature, after the manner of a likeness, through a certain regeneration or re-creation...Since the powers of the soul are natural properties following upon the species, the soul cannot be without them. Yet, granted that it was without them, the soul would still be called intellectual or rational in its species, not because of having these powers actually [*non quia actu haberet has potentias*], but on account of the essence of such a species, from which these powers naturally flow" (Translation amended in consultation with the Cornelius Ernst translation in *Summa Theologica*, v.30 (New York; Cambridge University Press, 2006)). See also *STh*, 1-2.4.5 and 6; c.f., 1.76.1, *response*.

a healthy member, the eye, for instance, when it cannot see clearly.¹³³

Pertinent to the concerns of chapter 5, these distinctions are clearest at those points where Aquinas is keen to reject arguments suggesting that there are types of corporeal infirmity that can annihilate the aptitude of particular human beings for ultimate happiness.¹³⁴ As one aspect of evil suffered, Aquinas accounts for corporeal infirmity in three distinct ways, corresponding to the particular member (or systems) of the body that are rendered weak by

¹³³ *STh*, 1-2.77.3, response. *Dicitur autem corpus hominis esse infirmum, quando debilitatur vel impeditur in executione propriae operationis, propter aliquam inordinationem partium corporis, ita scilicet quod humores et membra hominis non subduntur virtuti regitivae et motivae corporis. Unde et membrum dicitur esse infirmum, quando non potest perficere operationem membri sani, sicut oculus quando non potest clare videre...*

¹³⁴ *STh*, 1-2.4.5, response. Aquinas writes "Happiness [*beatitudo*] is twofold; the one is imperfect and is had in this life; the other is perfect, consisting in the vision of God. Now it is evident that the body is necessary for the happiness of this life. For the happiness of this life consists in an operation of the intellect, either speculative or practical. And the operation of the intellect in this life cannot be without a phantasm, which is only in a bodily organ, as was shown [*STh*, 1.84.6-7]. Consequently that happiness which can be had in this life, depends, in a way, on the body. But as to perfect Happiness, which consists in the vision of God...it is evident that the souls of the saints, separated from their bodies, "walk by sight," seeing the Essence of God, wherein is true Happiness. Again this is made clear by reason. For the intellect needs not the body, for its operation, save on account of the phantasms, wherein it looks on the intelligible truth, as stated [*STh*, 1.84.7]. Now it is evident that the Divine Essence cannot be seen by means of phantasms, as stated [*STh*, 1.12.3]. Wherefore, since man's perfect Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence, it does not depend on the body. Consequently, without the body the soul can be happy."

disorder, damage, or decay. Specifically, instrumental infirmities, external sense infirmities, and internal sense infirmities.¹³⁵

The first type of corporeal infirmity concerns *instrumental infirmities or impediments*, forms of bodily damage, dysfunction, and decay having to do with the proportionality and operational integrity of a particular body part or organic system. For example, both a person with legs described as ‘lame’ (*claudus*) and someone who is described as ‘mute’ (*muti*) have appendages or organs that do not operate as they should.¹³⁶ Aquinas regards the condition of paralysis (*paralytica*) as an instance of an instrumental infirmity.¹³⁷

The second type of corporeal infirmity Aquinas discusses are *external sensorial infirmities* having to do with those sense organs disposed to receive external stimuli. For Aquinas this type is most commonly discussed as the

¹³⁵ Aquinas distinguishes between internal and external senses in *STh*, 1.78.3-4; 1.54.5, *response*. In 2-2.71.2, *response*, Aquinas writes “In two ways a person is [licitly] debarred from performing a certain act: first because it is impossible to him, secondly because it is unsuitable to him: but, whereas the man to whom a certain act is impossible, is absolutely debarred from performing it, he to whom an act is unsuitable is not debarred altogether, since necessity may do away with its unsuitability. Accordingly some are debarred from the office of advocate because it is impossible to them through lack of sense—either interior, as in the case of madmen [*furiosi*] and minors—or exterior, as in the case of the deaf and dumb [*surdi et muti*].”

¹³⁶ *STh*, 1.49.1, *response*. Aquinas writes “In the action evil is caused by reason of the defect of some principle of action, either of the principal or the instrumental agent; thus the defect in the movement of an animal may happen by reason of the weakness of the motive power, as in the case of children, or by reason only of the ineptitude of the instrument, as in the lame [*claudis*]”; c.f., *De Malo*, 3.2, *response*.

¹³⁷ *STh*, 1-2.77.3, *response*.

privation of sight, in the case of blindness (*caecitas*), and as the privation of hearing, in the case of deafness (*surditas*).¹³⁸ With this second class of infirmity, by Aquinas's reasoning, in addition to the bare instrumental infirmity of the sense organ, someone who is deaf (or blind) is additionally hindered in their apprehension of the sense impression corresponding to the ordinary operation of the sense organ, which is sound (or sight).

The third type of corporeal infirmity is the most complex and differentiated for Aquinas, and it pertains to *internal sensorial infirmities*. Internal sensorial infirmities have to do with the organ called the brain.¹³⁹ For Aquinas, the proper operation of the brain is toward the production of phantasms, which are necessary for common sense, the imagination, and the estimative and memorative faculties.¹⁴⁰ Like all bodily organs, Aquinas recognizes that the instrumental and sensorial faculties of the brain are subject to deterioration, damage, and decay. Aquinas writes

In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasms. First of all because the intellect, being a power that does not make use of a corporeal organ, would in no way be hindered in its act through the lesion of a

¹³⁸ *STh*, 1.5.5, *reply 3*; c.f., 1-2.77.3.

¹³⁹ *STh*, 1.78.4, *response*.

¹⁴⁰ *STh*, 1.91.3, *reply 1*.

corporeal organ, if for its act there were not required the act of some power that does make use of a corporeal organ. Now sense, imagination and the other powers belonging to the sensitive part, make use of a corporeal organ. Wherefore it is clear that for the intellect to understand actually, not only when it acquires fresh knowledge, but also when it applies knowledge already acquired, there is need for the act of the imagination and of the other powers. For when the act of the imagination is hindered by a lesion of the corporeal organ, for instance in a case of frenzy; or when the act of the memory is hindered, as in the case of lethargy, we see that a man is hindered from actually understanding things of which he had a previous knowledge.¹⁴¹

Under this third type Aquinas identifies a variety of conditions analogous to what we today might call diseases, disorders, and dysfunctions of a mental, intellectual, or neurological nature. In Aquinas's use, these conditions include, but are not limited to, mindlessness (*amentia*), a generically unhealthy mind (*insanes*), a condition characterized by erratic or irrational behavior (*furiosus*), an unusual alienation from faculties crucial to human cognition (*alienates a mente; alienates a sensibus*), an arrested or seized mind (*captus mentis*), a condition underlying frenzied or wild behavior (*phreneticus*), and a condition underlying lethargic or listless behavior (*lethargicus*).

¹⁴¹ *STh*, 1.84.7, *response*. Aquinas writes "Primo quidem quia, cum intellectus sit vis quaedam non utens corporali organo, nullo modo impediretur in suo actu per laesionem alicuius corporalis organi, si non requireretur ad eius actum actus alicuius potentiae utentis organo corporali. Videmus enim quod, impedito actu virtutis imaginativae per laesionem organi, ut in phreneticis; et similiter impedito actu memorativae virtutis, ut in lethargicis; impeditur homo ab intelligendo in actu etiam ea quorum scientiam praecepit." C.f., *STh*, 1.84.8, *reply 2*.

Aquinas refers to persons who lack sufficient understanding to manage their own affairs (in various ways and to various degrees) as ‘morons’ and ‘fools’ (*moriones* and *stulti*).¹⁴² Aquinas’s use of the term ‘moron’ has no pejorative connotation. By contrast, the word ‘fool’ is variously used technically, metaphorically, and pejoratively. However, it was apparently very important to Aquinas to establish an unambiguous distinction between ‘culpable foolishness’ (the metaphorical use, with respect to a moral evil) and ‘natural foolishness’ (the technical use, with respect to an evil suffered due to an internal sensorial infirmity).¹⁴³

¹⁴² *STh*, 1.23.7, *reply* 3. Aquinas writes “The good that is proportionate to the common state of nature is to be found in the majority; and is wanting in the minority. The good that exceeds the common state of nature is to be found in the minority, and is wanting in the majority. Thus it is clear that the majority of men have a sufficient knowledge for the guidance of life; and those who have not this knowledge are said to be half-witted or foolish [*moriones vel stulti*]; but they who attain to a profound knowledge of things intelligible are a very small minority in respect to the rest. Since their eternal happiness, consisting in the vision of God, exceeds the common state of nature, and especially in so far as this is deprived of grace through the corruption of original sin, those who are saved are in the minority. In this especially, however, appears the mercy of God, that He has chosen some for that salvation, from which very many in accordance with the common course and tendency of nature fall short.”

¹⁴³ *STh*, 2-2.46.2, *response*. Aquinas writes “Folly, as stated above denotes dullness of sense in judging, and chiefly as regards the highest cause, which is the last end and the sovereign good. Now a man may in this respect contract dullness in judgment [*stuporem in iudicando*] in two ways. First, from a natural indisposition, as in the case of imbeciles [*amentibus*], and such like folly [*stultitia*] is no sin. Secondly, by plunging his sense into earthly things, whereby his sense is rendered incapable of perceiving Divine things, according to 1 Corinthians 2:14...and such like folly is a sin.” C.f., *STh*, 2-2.8.6, *reply* 1; 2-2.45.5, *reply* 3; 2-2.46.1, *reply* 4.

Very often, Aquinas generically refers to those who ‘lack the use of reason.’¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Aquinas also uses the term *insania* to describe an unhealthy mental disposition wherein one lapses from a condition of ‘soundness’ of mind to ‘unsoundness’ of mind.¹⁴⁵ It should also be noted, contrary to the common prejudice against medieval psychologies, that Aquinas’s understanding of ‘demon possession’ (*arreptitiis*) is unambiguously distinct from his account of internal sensorial infirmities—that is to say, Aquinas does not confuse the two conditions.¹⁴⁶

4.4 Aquinas’s account of profound cognitive impairment: Amentia

The concept *amentia* is important in Aquinas’s various remarks on how those who ‘lack the use of reason’ participate in the sacramental life of the Church and how those who ‘lack the use of reason’ are, in this life, perfected in the likeness of Christ. *Amentia* is the affliction suffered by a person Aquinas

¹⁴⁴ C.f., *STh*, 3.68.12; 3.80.9

¹⁴⁵ *STh*, 2-2.157.3, *reply* 3. Aquinas writes “‘Unsoundness’ is corruption of ‘soundness.’ Now just as soundness of body is corrupted by the body lapsing from the condition due to the human species, so unsoundness of mind is due to the mind lapsing from the disposition due to the human species [*insania dicitur per corruptionem sanitatis. Sicut autem sanitas corporalis corrumpitur per hoc quod corpus recedit a debita complexione humanae speciei, ita etiam insania secundum animam accipitur per hoc quod anima humana recedit a debita dispositione humanae speciei.*]”

¹⁴⁶ *STh*, 3.80.9, *reply* 2; 1-2.80.3, *response*; 1.115.5; c.f., *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.154.14-15, 16, 23.

calls the *amens*. Of the fifty or so instances where Aquinas directly discusses the *amens*, the term is most often translated into English as ‘imbecile’ and on occasion (confusingly) as ‘fool,’ ‘madman,’ ‘idiot,’ or ‘insane.’ In the various places Aquinas describes the use of the term ‘*amentia*,’ the condition is characterized as a profound impairment of the corporeal faculties necessary for ‘understanding,’ or ‘reasoning,’ or the ‘use of reason’; and the etiology of the condition is variously attributed to congenital dysfunction, direct physical injury, or a general deterioration of brain function (either progressive or sudden).¹⁴⁷ Aquinas’s use of the term and description of the condition is analogous to what contemporary neuropsychologists describe as a profound cognitive impairment. For example, when considering whether ‘blindness of mind’ excuses one from moral culpability, Aquinas writes:

Even as physical blindness is a privation affecting the organ of sight so is blindness of mind a privation affecting the principle of mental sight or intelligence. This is threefold. On is the light of natural reason, and of this, as being of its very nature, a rational soul is never deprived, though sometimes the exercise of its proper act may be blocked, as in imbeciles and the mad [*amentibus et furiosis*], through an impediment of the sensory powers which the human intellect needs for actual understanding; this we have explained in

¹⁴⁷ C.f., *STh*, 2-2.8.6, *reply 1*; 2-2.45.5; 2-2.46.1 and 2.

the *Prima Pars* [87.7, and 8]...The blindness excusing from sin is that which arises from a natural [corporeal] defect of one unable to see.¹⁴⁸

The severity of *amentia* illuminates some of the most important aspects of Aquinas's 'theology of weakness, disability and cognitive impairment'; insofar as *amentia* profoundly affects the operation of faculties necessary for attaining proximate goods proportionate to the nature the mortal rational animal, pertaining to mode and species. Viewed by way of the ordinary operation of human cognition, as Aquinas understands it, the *amens* suffers a corporeal infirmity in which the properties of the human body necessary for the operation of reason (sensation and phantasm) do not cooperate with the immaterial intellect in the exercise of its proper act in relation to the phantasm, which is to understand.¹⁴⁹ What is not hindered in the case of a particular *amens* is her or his active imaging of God (which is an immaterial operation of the rational soul), nor is she or he impeded (as we shall see) from living the human good that follows from the consummation of grace—which is our foretaste of the beatific vision. Aquinas maintains that not even a

¹⁴⁸ *STh*, 2-2.15.1, *response* and *reply* 1. Aquinas writes "Respondeo dicendum quod sicut caecitas corporalis est privatio eius quod est principium corporalis visionis, ita etiam caecitas mentis est privatio eius quod est principium mentalis sive intellectualis visionis. Cuius quidem principium est triplex. Unum quidem est lumen naturalis rationis. Et hoc lumen, cum pertineat ad speciem animae rationalis, nunquam privatur ab anima. Impeditur tamen quandoque a proprio actu per impedimenta virium inferiorum, quibus indiget intellectus humanus ad intelligendum, sicut patet in amentibus et furiosis, ut in primo dictum est."

¹⁴⁹ *STh*, 2-2.15.1.

condition like *amentia* can keep the human creature from responding to God's grace, nor is the condition able to impair a particular *amens* in the cooperative consummation of her or his natural and supernature good as a human being, the image of God.

Aquinas accounts for the experience of living in the condition of *amentia* by way of a broad spectrum of analogous conditions. For example, sleep, temporary bouts of insanity, inebriation, and mental incontinence.¹⁵⁰ Aquinas receives these associations from Aristotle, and like Aristotle is careful to distinguish one from the other. We have already shown, of course, how Aquinas undermines the anthropological and moral implications of Aristotle when it comes to the damaged human body. Nevertheless, insofar as *amentia*, temporary bouts of insanity, coma, and inebriation, etc. appear similar in bodily expression, Aquinas infers that the experience of such conditions may also be analogous. However, for Aquinas, it is nothing more than a guess. Beyond that, Aquinas is profoundly modest and agnostic about what we can reasonably speculate. Simply put, we have no way of knowing from this side of the eschaton, how and what precisely God communicates with a human being whose use of reason is profoundly impaired.

¹⁵⁰ *STh*, 1.84.7, 8; c.f., 2-2.15.1.

5 Cognitive impairment: In the Church & the Life of Virtue

Aquinas's understanding of the human being (created rational animal and image of God) and his account of the perfection of the human being in time (by nature, by grace, and the hope of glory) are the basis for his description of how those who 'lack the use of reason' participate in the life of the Church. We will proceed as follows. First, on the basis of what has been already been shown, we will investigate Aquinas's remarks on Baptism, Eucharist, and Penance and those who 'lack the use of reason.' Second, we will provide an account of the moral significance of profound cognitive impairment.

5.1 *The Sacraments and Those who 'Lack the use of Reason'*

Aquinas is profoundly agnostic regarding what we can reasonably speculate concerning the hidden or inner life of the *amens* in relation to God.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, for Aquinas, the Christian faith entails a primary certainty that God can and does objectively communicate with the human being, including the *amens*, through the sacraments of the Church.¹⁵² On Aquinas's view, the natural and supernatural flourishing of the human being in the fellowship of

¹⁵¹ C.f., *STh*, 1.57.4, *response* and *reply* 1.

¹⁵² *STh*, 2-2.45.5; 2-2.91.2, *reply* 5; 3.69.4-6; *De Veritate*, 11.3.

happiness (including persons with *amentia*) is understood primarily through our membership and participation in the Body of Christ.¹⁵³ For that reason, the sacramental logic of the Christian life is foundational to Aquinas's figuration of the *amens* and it is here that Aquinas's speculations on the moral significance of cognitive impairment are most profound.

5.1.1 *Baptism and 'those who lack the use of reason'*

Aquinas devotes an entire article to respond to claims that the 'insane' and the 'mindless' (*furiosi et amentes*) should not be baptized.¹⁵⁴ The arguments provided are concise: (1) because they lack the use of reason, they cannot have intention, which is required for baptism, therefore they cannot be baptized; (2) because the use of reason is what separates humans from animals, and we don't baptize animals, neither should we baptize those who lack the use of reason; (3) because we do not baptize those who are sleeping and those who are comatose, we should not baptize those who lack the use of reason.

One of the most telling indications of what, exactly, is at stake for Aquinas in this article are the problems he simply refuses to entertain. That is,

¹⁵³ *STh*, 3.73.3, *response*; 3.80.3, 9, 11.

¹⁵⁴ *STh*, 3.68.12.

the presumptions he insists must be taken for granted are often displayed in the category of errors he introduces by way of the objections. Particularly noteworthy is Aquinas's unceremonious dismissal of the second objection, alleging a comparison between those who 'lack the use of reason' and irrational animals.¹⁵⁵ Within the whole of Q.68, the second objection stands out for both its profound rudiment and its disassociation from the rest of the question. Despite these characteristics, Aquinas's response is an important illustration of what must follow from Aquinas's aesthetic revision of Augustine's anthropological anxieties in *STh*, 1.93.8, *reply* 3.¹⁵⁶ In the instance of either a profound psychological disorder or a profound cognitive impairment, to lack the use of reason is always accidental in the human being and the cause is always the result of an intervening impediment of a bodily organ.

For Aquinas, there are no grounds to compare the condition of human beings so afflicted with the fact that irrational animals do not reason

¹⁵⁵ *STh*, 3.68.12. Aquinas writes "*Objection* 2. Further, man excels irrational animals in that he has reason. But madmen and imbeciles lack the use of reason, indeed in some cases we do not expect them ever to have it, as we do in the case of children. It seems, therefore, that just as irrational animals are not baptized, so neither should madmen and imbeciles in those cases be baptized...*Reply to Objection* 2. Madmen and imbeciles lack the use of reason accidentally, i.e. through some impediment in a bodily organ; but not like irrational animals through want of a rational soul. Consequently the comparison does not hold."

¹⁵⁶ Discussed in chapter 3.

discursively. When a human being does not have the capacity for practical reasoning it is an operative limitation (one of constraint) pertaining to the second perfection of the human being; for the rational soul subsists as the form of the body without defect in every living human being, it is our creaturely likeness to God according to image. By contrast, the creaturely perfection of irrational animals is a likeness by way of effect, and not according to reason—only the human being has a rational soul.

The crucial judgment behind Aquinas's unceremonious reply to the second objection is the anthropological significance of the ordinary ability of the human being to reason practically about ends, and means to ends. Specifically, for Aquinas, it is not the ability to reason practically that separates the human being from irrational animals, as Aristotle thought; rather, for Aquinas, the ultimate difference is the rational soul.¹⁵⁷ Aristotle held that the perfectible human being (the wellborn and well-bred male) could share a form of life with defective human beings—even with the natural slave, who may very well have been a feebleminded Athenian. However, despite Aristotle's 'magnanimous' inclusion of 'half-wits' in the life of the household,

¹⁵⁷ *STh*, 1.93.1.

there was no place in Aristotle's *polis* for someone with a profound cognitive impairment on the order (or functional *disorder*) of *amentia*.

There is no way, on Aristotle's terms, to account for the good of a completely and utterly dysfunctional human being. In fact, Aristotle's rationale for why abortion should be *unlawful* after the detection of foetal movement is of one piece with the reason he wants to avoid the birth of physically deformed and small children (*ἀτελεῖς καὶ μικροὶ τὰ σώματά*) and why he advocates the exposure of absolutely or essentially deformed infants (*πεπηρωμένος*).¹⁵⁸ Namely, the function of the body reflects the formal integrity of the human soul. Thus, for Aristotle, it is perfectly reasonable for the perfectible human being to share a form of mutually beneficial life with one or several defective human beings: the relative functionality and qualified defects of women and natural slaves, for example. He even seems to think that irrational animals have a cooperative function in the *telos* of terrestrial life; that is, as Clark describes, families of profoundly deformed yet functional beings that have achieved some measure of specific homeostasis. However, for Aristotle, because functionality is indicative of formal integrity there is no reason to keep an absolutely defective and dysfunctional infant alive—it is

¹⁵⁸ *Politics*, 1335b 19-23; *NE*, 1099b 19-21; c.f., *Politics*, 1335a 15-17.

certainly a defective human being, but its dysfunction is the measure of its capacity for the enactment of any good, let alone the properly human good.

On the contrary, for Aquinas, it is not a characteristic human function like practical rationality (in either potency or act, or degree of similitude; i.e., in the case of dolphins) that is the principle of distinction between the human being and the not-human. Rather, it is the created rational animal's essential aptitude for knowledge and love that is the image of God in the human being and the highest operation of the immortal and incorruptible rational soul. The human potential for practical reasoning about ends and means to ends is certainly an entailment of the kind of creatures that we are. And there is reason to hold that this potential will be perfected in the consummation of glory, through our imitation of God by knowledge and love; but this characteristic faculty is not the reason why, according to Aquinas, we baptize people with profound cognitive impairments, but not cats.

On the assumption that the primary purpose of the second objection and reply is to indicate what must be taken for granted, the remainder of the article comes into focus. For the principal question is not if people who lack the use of reason are *qualified* for baptism; rather, it is a question of how the Church should administrate the sacrament with respect to this or that particular person who happens to lack the use of reason. What is at stake for

Aquinas is the proper administration of the sacrament, in a circumstance where the individual intent of the communicant is unclear; no other question is being raised. Specifically, the only prerequisite qualification is presumed in the case of those who lack the use of reason: the incorruptible and active aptitude for knowledge and love of God, which according to Aquinas is not undermined by either a profound psychological disorder or a profound cognitive impairment. Likewise, the effects of baptism are presumed: the conformation of grace and the configuration of character to Christ, a likeness of virtue.¹⁵⁹

On the point of administration, then, Aquinas identifies four ways that a person might lack the use of reason. First, those who have lacked the use of reason from birth, and show no sign of recovery. Second, those who were once sane, but who became insane. Third, those who are either insane or 'mindless' from birth, but who have lucid intervals. And, fourth, those who are insane, but are able to understand what baptism is and are able to decide if they want to receive the sacrament.

Lucidity and expressed desire are the key terms by which Aquinas distinguishes between the various conditions. The principal concern is to

¹⁵⁹ *STh*, 3.69.4 and 7.

protect the free choice of those who are capable of deciding for or against baptism. Coordinate with that intent is the recognition that there are mental states and forms of cognitive impairment that can undermine a particular person's ability to follow through with their free intent. For example, Aquinas recommends that those who have had a profound cognitive impairment from birth be baptized in the faith of the Church, under the same logic as the baptism of infants. Namely, the Church acts on behalf of those who are not capable of performing a voluntary act.¹⁶⁰ Those who are 'mindless' (amentes) and who 'absolutely-never' (nunquam) had the use of reason are baptized "according to the Church's intention, just as according to the Church's ritual, they believe and repent."¹⁶¹

Aquinas is clear, however, that the act of the Church must always honor the express intent, insofar as it can be determined, of those who lack the use of reason. Such that if a person who was ordinarily incapable of

¹⁶⁰ *STh*, 1-2.113.3, *reply 1*. Aquinas writes "Infants are not capable of the movement of their free-will; hence it is by the mere infusion of their souls that God moves them to justice. Now this cannot be brought about without a sacrament; because as original sin, from which they are justified, does not come to them from their own will, but by carnal generation, so also is grace given them by Christ through spiritual regeneration. And the same reason holds good with madmen and idiots that have never had the use of their free-will. But in the case of one who has had the use of his free-will and afterwards has lost it either through sickness or sleep, he does not obtain justifying grace by the exterior rite of Baptism, or of any other sacrament, unless he intended to make use of this sacrament, and this can only be by the use of his free-will."

¹⁶¹ *STh*, 3.68.12, *reply 1*.

performing a voluntary act expressed *no desire for Christian baptism* during a moment of lucidity, that person should not be baptized if they regress to an insane or ‘mindlessness’ state; and this, presumably, even if baptism is requested by that person while they are in a state of insanity. Likewise, if during a lucid moment such a person were to request baptism, their intent should be honored—however, Aquinas advises that it is better to wait until a moment of lucidity; unless there is some immanent danger, such as death. Of particular importance is Aquinas’s concern that those who are cognitively impaired, but still capable of self-understanding and reflection “be treated the same as those who are sane, and who are baptized if they are willing, but not against their will.”¹⁶²

There is nothing about the condition of a person with a profound cognitive impairment like the *amens* that would somehow exclude him or her from being brought into the communion of the Body of Christ. In that regard, Aquinas is reflecting the high medieval consensus on *amentia* within the Church.¹⁶³ Likewise, Aquinas presumes the objective effect of baptism upon a person who lacks, or has yet to develop, the use of reason. The effects of

¹⁶² *STh*, 3.68.12, *response*.

¹⁶³ *C.f.*, *Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*, IV, 4.3.1, qc 3; IV, 6.1.2, qc 3, ad 2.

baptism are two-fold in Aquinas's understanding. First, baptism entails the restoration of harmony ('original justice' or righteousness) to the human being in relation to God.¹⁶⁴ Second, in baptism we receive the gifts of supernatural grace and the infused virtues, independent of a particular measure of occurrent awareness, as in the case of children and the *amens*.¹⁶⁵

In *De Malo*, Aquinas raises a set of questions related to the effects of baptism that are particularly relevant to the significance of profound cognitive impairment. Specifically, Aquinas addresses why the bodily disorder consequent upon original sin is not taken away by baptism.¹⁶⁶ That is to say, if the circumstance of disharmony in relation to God is overcome and healed in baptism, why do our bodies continue to suffer the effects of original sin?¹⁶⁷ Aquinas's answer in both *De Malo* and his *Summa* is that because the consequences of original sin experienced in the body correspond to the material donation of the parents in the process of human procreation, the overcoming of those consequences awaits a divine gift of bodily restoration, i.e., the resurrection.¹⁶⁸ Christians are baptized into Christ's passion and the

¹⁶⁴ *STh*, 3.69.1-2.

¹⁶⁵ *STh*, 3.69.4-6, *response*.

¹⁶⁶ *De Malo*, 4.6, *reply 4*.

¹⁶⁷ *STh*, 3.69.3, *reply 1* and *reply 3*.

¹⁶⁸ *STh*, 1.97.1, *reply 3*. Aquinas writes "This power of preserving the body was not natural to the soul, but was the gift of grace. And though man recovered grace as regards

evil we continue to suffer in the body is perfected in and through Christ's suffering.¹⁶⁹ Yet, we are also baptized into Christ's resurrection, of which we will partake when our bodies are restored and raised to their supernatural glory.¹⁷⁰

Aquinas maintains that at baptism God moves a person with a permanent and profound cognitive impairment to a state of justice by a supernatural infusion of justifying grace. The participation of cognitively impaired persons in the life of the Church, by way of baptismal membership, is for Aquinas the normative horizon by which the corporate Church receives and affirms the dignified humanity of cognitively impaired persons. Aquinas understands baptized, yet profoundly impaired persons, to actively participate in the Body of Christ, despite the fact they are not capable of enacting—by way of the body—the knowledge and love coordinate with the conformation in grace and their configuration to Christ's likeness in virtue.

remission of guilt and the merit of glory; yet he did not recover immortality, the loss of which was an effect of sin; for this was reserved for Christ to accomplish, by Whom the defect of nature was to be restored into something better"; c.f., *STh*, 1-2.81.3.

¹⁶⁹ *STh*, 3.69.3, *response*.

¹⁷⁰ *CT*, §168.

5.1.2 Eucharistic Communion and “those who lack the use of reason”

Aquinas’s understanding of how cognitively impaired persons are involved in the Eucharistic life of the Church is comparatively more difficult to parse out than his understanding of baptism. Similar to his treatment of baptism, Aquinas devotes an entire article to the matter.¹⁷¹ For Aquinas, in general practice, a baptized person with an *amentia-like* condition should not be denied Eucharist without cause. Additionally, he provides a case-study rationale for the just withholding of the Eucharist from a baptized Christian who has *amentia*.

Aquinas responds to the claim that those who ‘lack the use of reason’ should not receive the Eucharist.¹⁷² As with his treatment of baptism, the question within which this article is situated is primarily concerned with the reception and the administration of the sacrament. However, there are some important differences. First, in his treatment of baptism, the question of ‘qualification’ was raised only to be dismissed. In his treatment of Eucharist, however, the use of reason and what a person is capable of understanding is the central concern. Second, the formulation of the baptism question focused

¹⁷¹ *STh*, 3.80.9.

¹⁷² C.f., *Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*, IV, 9.1.5, qc. 3.

squarely on the proper administration of the sacrament. By contrast, the formulation of the eucharistic question is focused on the disposition of the recipient; and, from that basis, how the sacrament is to administered.

The objections raise the following problematics: first, a question of ability (i.e., devotion); second, a question of culpability (through an association with demon possession); and, third, a question of fairness (as compared to the very young). The crux of Aquinas's response to the objections is a decree from the First Council of Orange (441) concerning the administration of the sacraments to those with varying forms and degrees of occurrent awareness.¹⁷³ The principal judgment of the Council, provided in the *sed contra*, reads "All things that pertain to piety are to be given to the imbecilic [amentibus]."¹⁷⁴ Aquinas interprets the council judgment to establish that, in particular, the Eucharist must be given to the *amentibus*. The rationale

¹⁷³ Gratian, *Decretum* II, XXVI, VI, Cannon 12. The full text reads as follows: "Sine manus inpositione recedentes de corpore reconcilientur. Item ex Concilio Aurasico. Qui recedunt de corpore penitencia accepta, placuit sine reconciliatoria manus inpositione eis communicare, quod morientis sufficit reconciliationi secundum diffinitiones Patrum, qui huiusmodi communionem uaticum congrue, nominauerunt. Quod si superuixerint, stent in ordine penitentium, ut ostensis necessariis penitenciae fructibus legitimam communionem cum reconciliatoria manus inpositione recipiant. §1. Clericis quoque desiderantibus penitencia non est neganda. §2. Similiter subito obmutescens (prout statutum est) baptizari, aut penitenciam accipere potest, si uoluntatis preteritae testimonium aliorum uerbis habet, aut presentis in suo nutu. §3. Amentibus etiam quecumque pietatis sunt sunt conferenda" (*Corpus juris canonici*, Volume 1. 899).

¹⁷⁴ "amentibus quaecumque sunt pietatis, sunt conferenda"

provided is a hymn from Augustine, cited earlier in Q.79, where the Eucharist is identified as the ‘sacrament of piety.’¹⁷⁵

He begins by identifying three ways that Christians might be said to lack the use of reason.¹⁷⁶ Integral to his response is the distinction between the process of corruption and the simple state of corruption.¹⁷⁷ The first grouping consists of what seems to be a slight to moderate cognitive impairment, one that does not impair a person’s capacity to show devotion to the sacrament. For Aquinas, the Eucharist must not be denied to this class of Christians.¹⁷⁸ The second group can be characterized as having a profound cognitive

¹⁷⁵ *STh*, 3.79.1, *response*.

¹⁷⁶ *STh*, 3.80.9 *response*. Aquinas writes “People are said to lack the use of reason in two ways. One way, when they have a weakened use of reason, as one who is said not to see when he has poor vision. And since such persons can conceive some devotion towards this sacrament, it is not to be denied them. In another way people are said to completely lack the use of reason. Either they never had the use of reason, and have remained so from birth; and in that case this sacrament is not to be given to them, because in no way has there been any preceding devotion towards the sacrament; Or else, they were not always without the use of reason. And when they were in possession of their minds, they showed devotion towards this sacrament; these people ought to be given the sacrament at the hour of death; unless danger of vomiting or spitting it out is feared [Respondeo dicendum quod aliqui dicuntur non habere usum rationis dupliciter. Uno modo, quia habent debilem usum rationis, sicut dicitur non videns qui male videt. Et quia tales possunt aliquam devotionem concipere huius sacramenti, non est eis hoc sacramentum denegandum. Alio modo dicuntur aliqui non habere totaliter usum rationis. Aut igitur nunquam habuerunt usum rationis, sed sic a nativitate permanserunt, et sic talibus non est hoc sacramentum exhibendum, quia in eis nullo modo praecessit huius sacramenti devotio. Aut non semper caruerunt usu rationis. Et tunc, si prius, quando erant suae mentis compotes, apparuit in eis huius sacramenti devotio, debet eis in articulo mortis hoc sacramentum exhiberi, nisi forte timeatur periculum vomitus vel exspuitionis].”

¹⁷⁷ *C.f.*, *STh*, 1-2.73.2.

¹⁷⁸ *Response and reply 1*.

impairment from birth. For this class of believers, Aquinas seems to maintain that the Eucharist should not be given to them for the same reason that the Eucharist is not given to young children, i.e., due to a presumed inability to have devotion to the sacrament. These people are said to absolutely-never (*nunquam*) have had the use of reason—in the same way that ‘cattle never (*nunquam*) had a nature capable of heavenly bliss’ and to the same degree that Christ never (*nunquam*) sinned.¹⁷⁹ In this case, Aquinas reasons, the open cause for withholding the Eucharist is the presumed impossibility of their having ever had devotion towards the sacrament.¹⁸⁰ Aquinas identifies a third group, characterized by an acquired cognitive impairment: On the basis of past devotion, the sacrament should be given to persons with this sort of condition when they are lucid, at the hour of death, and only if there is not danger of the sacrament being vomited up or spit out.

By one reading, Aquinas seems to be advocating that the Eucharist be withheld from at least one class of the baptized. So interpreted, his response could be construed as undermining the normative position established by the Council of Orange. However, when read in context, Aquinas’s position is more complex.

¹⁷⁹ *STh*, 2-2.165.2, *reply* 4; 3.34.1, *reply* 2

¹⁸⁰ C.f., *STh*, 3.80.6, *response*.

5.1.2.1 A Close Reading of 3.80.9

If we are only looking at article 9, the following is unambiguous: (a) The framing question concerns whether or not those who 'lack the use of reason' should receive the sacrament; (b) the *sed contra* establishes a normative judgment and prescriptive practice contrary to the objection, and in favor of giving the sacrament to the *amentibus*; (c) the capacity for 'devotion' and not 'use of reason' is the criterion for either giving or reserving the sacrament.

Given those basic agreements, the question or concern is how Aquinas understands the occurrence of 'devotion' to correspond with the occurrence of the 'use of reason.' Aquinas gives us three ways of thinking about this correspondence in the article. First, in *reply 1* we see that those who lack the use of reason can have devotion for the sacrament, actual devotion in some cases, past devotion in others. Second, in *reply 3* we see that the age of the person is taken to ordinarily correspond to the ability to have devotion (child/adult), in a manner that 'use of reason' does not. Third, in *reply 2* we see that baptized adults, both those 'vexed in body by unclean spirits' and those who are *amentibus*, are not to be denied the sacrament despite vexation—i.e., jolting, shaking or other uncontrolled bodily mannerisms that would suggest a lack of devotion to the sacrament. We can reasonably posit three further observations, based on the replies. It would seem that bare capacity for

devotion is directly coordinate with age; that devotion is something that is present in degrees, correlative with having the use of reason; and that Aquinas's association of infancy and *amentia* on the matter of devotion is conditioned upon both absolutely-never having had the use of reason.

If those observations are correct, the following would seem to obtain. *In principle* someone completely and profoundly lacking the use of reason from birth should not be given the Eucharist (because *in principle* there is no way to know if there is or ever was a preceding devotion); likewise, there is no way to know *in principle* from (1) bodily mannerisms (except for spitting or vomiting), or, (2) from the failure to develop in a manner appropriate to one's age, if there is or ever has been devotion to the sacrament.

In this way, Aquinas affirms the plain sense of the *sed contra* in article 9, while likewise distinguishing between, on the one hand, the case of infants and the case of those who are said to completely lack the use of reason; from, on the other hand, the principled argument about those who are said to have lacked the use of reason, and therefore a capacity for devotion, from birth. The conclusion is this: when it is a matter of principle, we do not give the sacrament to those who are said to have lacked the use of reason from birth; in every other case, unless there is open cause, we do give the sacrament.

In this article, Aquinas has two goals: First, to affirm the customary exclusion of children who have not reached the age of reason and who have yet to show devotion to the sacrament. And, second, to articulate an understanding that fully concords with the Decree from the First Council of Orange.

In order to achieve these goals, Aquinas does the following: First, he distinguishes between, on the one hand, the unique way a newborn lacks the use of reason and, on the other hand, the unequal and various ways that cognitively impaired adults do, in fact, lack the use of reason. The capacity for devotion is for Aquinas the plausible condition for distinguishing between children and those who 'lack the use of reason.' He writes that those "lacking the use of reason can have devotion towards the sacrament; actual devotion in some cases, and past in others." Second, Aquinas sketches how the diverse ways in which adults can lack the use reason corresponds to an equally diverse field of pastoral concerns and responses. In particular, he distinguishes between (1) the life-long privation of the use of reason experienced by some people, (2) those persons who have irregular bouts of 'mental insanity,' and (3) those who suffer from an age-associated *amentia*.

Aquinas clearly holds that some measure of the use of reason at some point in a persons life is necessary for there to be devotion, which makes one

worthy of receiving the Eucharist; on that basis, the capacity to use reason is the customary way that the bare capacity for devotion is recognized in children (*reply 3*).

The central concern for Aquinas in article 9, then, is to show that devotion to the sacrament (and not a particular measure of rational capacity) is the chief dispositional qualification for receiving and consuming the sacrament. Aquinas is clear that devotion to the sacrament is not absolutely contingent upon one's occurrent awareness that the sacrament is being consumed (*reply 1*)—insofar as a dispositional devotion can be presumed for those who do not presently have the use of reason, but have shown devotion in the past. Thus, a manner of understanding a person's dispositional devotion is posited in a way that is not contingent upon a person's present ability to use their rational faculties in the ordinary way.

5.1.2.2 *The context of 3.80.9*

In order to fully understand how Aquinas nuances the provisional conclusions articulated in 3.80.9, *response*, by way of the replies to the various objections, two things must be considered with respect to the Eucharist: (1) the accidents of the sacrament itself (in particular the consecrated host) and (2) the

substantial Body of Christ which transfigures those who partake in Eucharistic communion into members of Christ's mystical body.¹⁸¹

For Aquinas, devotion consists of the very desire to receive and consume the sacrament.¹⁸² Yet, one does not need to consume the accidents of the sacrament to partake in the reality of the sacrament, for a person is changed into Christ and incorporated into Him by spiritual desire.¹⁸³ Just as children are baptized and believe through the Church's faith, so also do children (and, presumably, those who lack the use of reason) 'desire the Eucharist through the Church's intention.'¹⁸⁴

As already established in the preceding articles of *STh*, 3.80, for Aquinas, devotion to the sacrament consists of a spiritual intention to receive the sacramental species of Christ's body.¹⁸⁵ As Aquinas understands it, a person has devotion when she surrenders herself to the service of God.¹⁸⁶ This devotional surrender is an interior act of directed attention toward God, which is ordinarily exhibited in an "exterior humbling of the body" called

¹⁸¹ *STh*, 3.73.3, *reply 1*.

¹⁸² *STh*, 3.73, *response*.

¹⁸³ *STh*, 3.73.3, *reply 2*.

¹⁸⁴ *STh*, 3.73.3, *response*.

¹⁸⁵ *STh*, 3.80.3, *reply 2* and *reply 3*.

¹⁸⁶ *STh*, 2-2.82.1, *response*.

adoration.¹⁸⁷ Thus, by Aquinas's description, a priest has open cause to withhold the Eucharist from a baptized Christian if his or her body does not exhibit signs of interior humility before the sacramental body of Christ, according to the sense of Psalm 120:1-2.¹⁸⁸ Aquinas maintains, nevertheless, that "in simple souls...devotion abounds by repressing pride."¹⁸⁹

The spiritual desire or intention to receive the spiritual food and nourishment of the Eucharist is all that is required to receive the grace of the sacrament. Aquinas, quoting Augustine, holds that "every one of the faithful becomes a partaker of the body and blood of Christ, when in Baptism he is made a member of Christ's body; nor is he deprived of his share in that body and chalice even though he depart from this world in the unity of Christ's body, before he eats that bread and drinks of that chalice."¹⁹⁰ Counted among the faithful, by way of baptism, those who lack the use of reason are ordained and destined to the Eucharist.

So conceived, a baptized member of Christ's body who, from birth, has a profound cognitive impairment in the manner of *amentia* already partakes in

¹⁸⁷ *STh*, 2-2.84.2, *response*.

¹⁸⁸ *STh*, 2-2.82.3, *response*.

¹⁸⁹ *STh*, 2-2.82.3, *reply 3*; c.f., 2-2.83.13, *response*.

¹⁹⁰ *STh*, 3.73.3 *reply 1*.

the substantial reality of the sacrament—regardless of whether or not the material accidents of the sacrament are consumed.¹⁹¹ Specifically, by way of baptism, children and those who lack the use of reason are infused with a spiritual intent and desire to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Aquinas distinguishes two forms of eating that take place when the sacrament is consumed: corporeal and spiritual. Corporeal eating consists of consuming the consecrated host without intent to receive the sacramental species of Christ's body. In that case, for Aquinas, the sacrament is not eaten with a spiritual intent to receive what the Church bestows, rather it is eaten simply as food.¹⁹² (Corporeal eating remains, nevertheless, a rational act; it is an act of the rational animal.) Spiritual eating consists of consuming the sacramental species with the desire or yearning to receive the sacrament.¹⁹³ It would seem to follow that, on Aquinas's terms, those baptized members of the body of Christ who lack the use of reason, nonetheless, can possess a dispositional devotion and spiritual intent to receive the substantial reality of the sacrament; and that such persons may be given the sacramental species—so long as there is no other reason for reserving the sacrament.

¹⁹¹ *STh*, 3.73.3, *response*.

¹⁹² *STh*, 3.80.3 *reply* 2.

¹⁹³ *STh*, 3.80.11, *response*.

Aquinas rightly maintains, however, that there are just reasons for reservation of the sacrament with respect to those who lack the use of reason. For Aquinas, the reasons for reservation of the sacrament are strict. For, he writes, 'a man cannot be saved without desiring to receive this sacrament.' Moreover, he writes that 'a desire would be vain except it were fulfilled when opportunity presented itself.' Further, 'a man is bound to receive this sacrament, not only by virtue of the Church's precept, but also by virtue of the Lord's command.'¹⁹⁴ Two reasons are immediately apparent based on our analysis of 3.80.9, and its context.

Unrepentant sinners are the one, unambiguous exception for Aquinas—they are never to be given the sacrament under ordinary circumstances.¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, at the hour of death, the Eucharist must be given, even to the unrepentant sinner. Aquinas takes the Eucharist to be the right of every baptized Christian: 'For since every Christian, from the fact that he is baptized, is admitted to the Lord's table, he may not be robbed of his right, except from some open cause.'¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ *STh*, 3.80.11, *response*.

¹⁹⁵ *STh*, 3.80.6, *response*.

¹⁹⁶ *STh*, 3.80.6, *response*.

Dementia and ‘vexation by unclean spirits’ did not suffice as reason or open cause to withhold the Eucharist for Aquinas. The custom Aquinas holds forth as normative for the Church was rather to give the Eucharist to those so afflicted, presumably on the basis of a past devotion.¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, fear that the sacrament will be vomited or spit out seems to be an associated concern in those cases, insofar as spitting or vomiting strongly suggests a lack of dispositional devotion and spiritual intent. This restriction is important in Aquinas’s view because a Christian who consumes the Eucharist without devotion or reverence to the real presence of Christ eats and drinks to his or her own condemnation.¹⁹⁸

5.1.2.3 *A pastoral problem; a speculative problem*

Aquinas provides the means for a priest to pastorally assess the eucharistic devotion of someone like the *amens*, about whom the procedural question of 3.80.9 is directly concerned. This is certainly a recognizable pastoral challenge, given the severity of the condition of *amentia*. When it comes to infants, the priest has a measure of certainty that the child has yet to develop the use of reason necessary for devotion—because there is a

¹⁹⁷ *STh*, 3.80.6, *reply* 2.

¹⁹⁸ *STh*, 3.80.4, *response*; c.f., I Corinthians 11:29.

customary developmental progression of the capacity to use reason. However, in contrast to children, the priest cannot depend on age as indicative of whether or not an adult with an *amentia*-like condition is capable of eucharistic devotion. The obscurity of the inner or hidden life of those *who are said* to have lacked the use of reason from birth, on Aquinas's terms, poses a pastoral problem—which is sufficiently complex to warrant both speculative and pastoral consideration. Understood in that way, and when read in light of Aquinas's wider theology of the Eucharist, the implications of 3.80.9 are more easily discernable.

In principle someone who completely lacks the use of reason, from birth, should not be given the Eucharist, because there could never have been an interior act of devotion on the part of such a profoundly cognitively impaired person. Nevertheless, in such a case, there would be no way for the priest to know from the exterior movements of the body if there is or ever was an devotion for the sacrament. As with the comatose and demented elderly, such a 'giving' would occur with the priest directly placing the Eucharist in the person's mouth.

With respect to the pastoral problem, there is no principled way for a priest to know from (1) bodily mannerisms (except for spitting or vomiting) or (2) the manifest failure of one afflicted with an *amentia*-like condition to

develop rational faculties appropriate to his or her age, if there is not and absolutely-never (*nunquam*) was occurrent devotion to the sacrament.

Thus, Aquinas affirms the plain sense of the *sed contra*, and makes the following distinction: On the one hand, there is the *concrete pastoral matter* regarding children and those who variously lack the full use of their rational faculties. On the other hand, there is the *principled speculative concern* about those who are said absolutely-never (*nunquam*) to have had the use of reason from birth. For Aquinas, when it is a matter of *principled speculation*, the priest should not give the sacrament to someone who ‘lacks the use of reason’ from birth; however, in every other case—be it wildly erratic movements or psychological delirium—the priest should give the sacrament to a baptized Christian (unless there is a danger of spitting or vomiting).

Reading 3.80.9 in light of the foregoing, that which constitutes a sufficient lack of the use of reason and is open cause to know *with certainty* that devotion to the sacrament and spiritual intent *do not obtain* is entirely contained with the concern that the Eucharist will be spit out or vomited up. It is clear from elsewhere in Aquinas’s writings that he is not concerned with policing who does and does not have a right to consume the Eucharist,

because all Christians have a duty and right to approach the Lord's Table.¹⁹⁹

If anything, Aquinas is worried that the Eucharist will be placed in the mouth of someone who does not desire the sacrament. Furthermore, under the logic of Aquinas's eucharistic theology, all baptized Christians receive the sacramental grace of the Eucharist during the mass, insofar as they possess an interior devotion to the sacrament. This sacramental grace is received regardless of whether or not the Christian actually consumes the sacramental elements.²⁰⁰

Thinking on Aquinas' terms, it would seem that the custom of the Church which Aquinas is attempting to nuance is to presume that devotion and desire are present in all the baptized. On the basis of these terms, it is difficult to imagine such a level of discretionary certainty on the part of the discerning Church, in the case of a person with a profound cognitive impairment, which would warrant the risk of an unjust reservation of the sacrament. The question is whether or not the principled conditions for withholding the Eucharist can ever, in fact, obtain on Aquinas's terms. We are inclined to think that according to Aquinas we cannot know if those

¹⁹⁹ *STh*, 3.80.6, *response*.

²⁰⁰ *STh*, 3.73.3, *reply 2*.

principled conditions are ever the case.²⁰¹

5.1.3 *Sin, Penance, and Reconciliation: sin and degrees of culpability*

Aquinas stopped working on his *Summa* midway through his treatise on the sacrament of penance.²⁰² Nonetheless, some important inferences can be made about Aquinas's understanding of sin in relation to persons who have a profound cognitive impairment on par with *amentia*. Here also, Aquinas's distinction between the *amens* in principle and the *amens* in pastoral fact is pertinent.

For Aquinas, a person who has a cognitive impairment on par with *amentia* would not be implicated, in the ordinary way, in the reality of personal sin (*malum culpae*).²⁰³ This is the case because in order to commit a sin the intellect and will must be active in the ordinary way. Aquinas understands moral culpability to correspond to what a person is able to understand and thereby enact by way of free will (*liberum arbitrium*).²⁰⁴ This means that in principle a Christian with *amentia* is incapable (*nunquam*) of sin, having been freed from the stain of original sin (by way of baptism) and having been

²⁰¹ C.f., *STh*, 2-2.8.2, *response*.

²⁰² *STh*, 3.84-90.

²⁰³ *STh*, 1-2.76.3.

²⁰⁴ *STh*, 2-2.15.1, *response*; 1-2.88.6, *response*; 2-2.154.5, *response*.

elevated by grace to a supernatural participation in the beauty and goodness of God.²⁰⁵ However, as with the Eucharist, there is a real question on Aquinas's terms if those principled conditions can ever, in fact, be known to obtain.²⁰⁶ Thus, for Aquinas, *those who seem* to lack the use of reason (which is a matter of degree) are obliged like all Christians to partake in the sacrament of reconciliation to the extent that they are able to understand an action as sinful.²⁰⁷

Related to this obligation, Aquinas holds that if a contrite Christian desires to confess and atone for her mortal sin, yet is genuinely impeded from partaking in the sacrament of penance (e.g., due to a profound impairment of the faculties required for communication), in response to her contrition, God's past mercies provide reason to believe that God would absolve her of the spiritual penalties of her self-separation from divine grace.²⁰⁸ Presumably, in the case of profound *amentia*-like conditions, the penitent would desire sacramental absolution for 'inward' or 'hidden' sins.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ *STh*, 1-2.113.3, *reply 1*; 1-2.76.3, *reply 3*; c.f., 1-2.74.5, *reply 1*.

²⁰⁶ C.f., *STh*, 1-2.77.7, *response*.

²⁰⁷ *STh*, 1-2.89.6, *response*.

²⁰⁸ *STh*, 3.90.2, *replies 1,4*; c.f., *STh* (Supplement), 10.1-2.

²⁰⁹ C.f., *STh*, 2-2.54.3, *reply 3*.

5.2 *Cognitive Impairment and Perfection*

5.2.1 *Threefold perfection of the created rational animal*

In his account of the goodness and completion of God's prime creative act, Aquinas identifies three ways of talking about the perfection of the human being. These are ordinarily referred to as the 'first perfection,' the 'second perfection,' and the 'final perfection.'²¹⁰ For Aquinas, the perfections of the created rational animal, the image of God, are perfections in knowledge and love.²¹¹ In concise terms, the first perfection is the actual existence of the human being, including the natural aptitude of human being as the image of God for knowledge and love. The first perfection is not compromised or impaired by the Fall. In contrast, the second perfection (the activity of particular human beings, in view of our two-fold end) is compromised or impaired by the Fall. The aptitude for the perfection of our natural end, a

²¹⁰ *STh*, 1.73.1, *response*. "The perfection of a thing is twofold, the first perfection and the second perfection. The 'first' perfection is that according to which a thing is substantially perfect, and this perfection is the form of the whole; which form results from the whole having its parts complete. But the 'second' perfection is the end, which is either an operation, as the end of the harpist is to play the harp; or something that is attained by an operation, as the end of the builder is the house that he makes by building. But the first perfection is the cause of the second, because the form is the principle of operation. Now the final perfection, which is the end of the whole universe, is the perfect beatitude of the Saints at the consummation of the world; and the first perfection is the completeness of the universe at its first founding, and this is what is ascribed to the seventh day."

²¹¹ *STh*, 1.93.4, *response*.

likeness unto Christ in virtue, is consummated by grace at Baptism. The final end, our ultimate and perfect imitation of God in the beatific vision, by knowledge and by love, follows the healing of the body at the Resurrection in the consummation of glory.

Aristotle held the form (*eidōs*) and function (*ergon*) of the human being to be correlative: A defective form entails limited aptitude for proper function. In that way, according to Aristotle's reasoning, impaired function is indicative of either a natural or unnatural defect. In the cases of women and natural slaves, their allegedly impaired function is an essential defect. If an individual human being (one who has a measure of the human form) cannot actualize its proper function, according to Aristotle, for either natural or unnatural reasons, then that particular human being cannot realize the *telos* of the humanity.

On Aquinas's terms, Aristotle misdescribes the susceptibility of essential human nature to corruption and, subsequently, the significance of impaired function with respect to the *telos* of the human being. As a result, Aristotle's account of the perfection or completion of the human being and our activity toward that end is inadequate. And this is especially true in the cases of persons who are disabled and/or cognitively impaired. Aquinas's account of disability and cognitive impairment is best understood in the light

of what he has to say about the perfection of the human being and as a subversion of Aristotle's metaphysical biology. On the basis of the preceding chapters, we will now outline Aquinas's account.

For Aquinas, the human being is a created rational animal, formed in the image and likeness of God. The subsistent rational soul of the human being has two proper functions or activities: (a) to actively image God and (b) to actively progress towards the perfect realization of the two-fold purpose of the human being.

(a) The first function of the rational soul is to image God, which is our actual existence as rational creatures in relation to the Creator. This first function is the actualized natural aptitude for knowledge and love belonging to every living human being, where the incorruptible rational soul informs designate matter as the substantial form of the human being. As it belongs to the first perfection of the human being, this function of the rational soul cannot be impaired. Not even death can impair our natural aptitude for knowledge and love; strictly speaking, on Aquinas's terms, death is the interruption of a particular *activity* of the rational soul in relation to its body (an activity that belongs to the second perfection), but death cannot interrupt

the rational soul's imaging of God (i.e., the rational soul of each individual human being remains the image of God even in death).²¹² Because it is a proper substance, the immortal and incorruptible rational soul can subsist apart from its body.

(b) The second function of the rational soul is to direct the individual human being toward her or his two-fold end (the second perfection): our proximate (or natural) end (b1) and our final (or supernatural) end (b2). The second function of the rational soul is affected by original sin in two ways: on the one hand, coordinate with our activity toward the perfection of our natural end (or proximate happiness) is the loss of original justice (an immaterial wound)—this wound is the impairment of our creaturely friendship with Creator God and the praeternatural entailments of supernatural grace that follow from that friendship. On the other hand,

²¹² Aquinas infers that when death separates the rational soul from its body it continues to receive from and communicate with God. In such a case, the separated soul is deprived of the ordinary corporeal means of perceiving and understanding the world, which happens by way of the senses—vision, touch, hearing, etc. Nevertheless, according to Aquinas, there is a communication between God and the separated rational soul through the infusion of knowledge, qua supra-sensory perception. Analogously, we can infer that a human soul deprived of an ordinary sensory experience of the world and, thereby, unable to enact the ordinary operations of cognition and choice (due to some sort of impairment of the brain or other bodily function), such a person could receive from God, by way of infusion, this or that perceptive knowledge about the world directly from God. Clearly, we have no way to verify the status of such a speculative gesture. However, it remains the case, in principle, according to Aquinas's way of thinking, that such an infusion of supernatural knowledge is not excluded as a possibility; that is to say, there is no *per se* impossibility of that sort infusion of knowledge.

coordinate with our activity toward the perfection of our supernatural end (or ultimate happiness) and resulting from the loss of original justice, is the multiform unresponsiveness of the body to the desires of the rational soul (which is integral to our perfection imitation of God). We will now treat these activities of the rational soul and their perfection in greater detail.

Regarding the natural end (b1): the perfection of the natural end of the human being is an extension of the first function of the rational soul (an extension of the first perfection). It is the elevation of the natural aptitude of the human being to image of God by knowledge and by love into a supernatural likeness or conformation in christoformic virtue. This likeness is a work of grace and is conferred at baptism. It is the reconciliation of creature and Creator; it is the restoration of our friendship with God; it is the healing of the immaterial wound of original sin. Specifically, original sin affects the perfectibility of human activity toward the realization of our natural happiness—i.e., virtue. Note that original sin affects the *perfection* of natural virtue, not the acquisition and performance of natural virtue as such.

Original sin makes the perfection of virtuous human activity impossible (on the understanding that grace is not prerequisite of natural moral virtue) and unequally constrains the performance of virtuous acts (by undermining the suppleness of the body to the rational desires of the human

soul). At baptism, the effects of original sin upon the perfectibility of human activity toward proximate goods and natural happiness are healed, but the unequal *constraints* pertaining to the suppleness of the body to the desires of the rational soul remain.

These constraints, however, do not impinge on the perfection of the first function of the rational soul in this life (i.e., the state of grace; our friendship with God; and a likeness in supernatural virtue, through the divine infusion of faith, hope, and love). What is unequally and individually constrained is *our growth in the magnitude of our imitation of God in knowledge and love*. What is not impaired by the corporeal wounds of original sin is the continuing conformation or purification of the grace-elevated-individual's activities of faith, hope, and love. In the saints we recognize the exemplary conformation of particular individuals in the activities of faith, hope, and love. This conformation to the likeness of Christ may coincide with a magnanimity of imitation—great knowledge and love, the realization of our hope—but such an association is not a necessary condition for the recognition of Christ in the faith, hope, and love of particular individuals.

Regarding the supernatural end (b2), the effects of original sin are different: The supernatural or ultimate end of the human being is beatification, which is the completed magnification and perfect conformation

of the human being—the image of God—in knowledge and love of God. Beatification follows the resurrection of the body and is contingent upon the healing of the wounds of original sin afflicting the suppleness of the body to the desires of the rational soul. What is unequally constrained of the second function of the rational soul (as we await the resurrection and with respect to the final end) is the growth of individuals in the magnitude of our imitation of God, in knowledge and love of God. Although grace reconciles creature and Creator (i.e., the perfection of the first function of the rational soul; our friendship with God and our likeness to Christ in supernatural virtue), the body continues to bear the wounds of original sin. These wounds variously and unequally constrain the growth of grace-elevated-individuals in the knowledge and love of God. Resurrection is when the constraining wounds of original sin upon the body are healed. Specifically, the constraints upon our praeternatural capacity for the magnanimous imitation of God in knowledge and love are left behind. So healed, the second function of the rational soul with respect to the both the natural and ultimate good of the human being is complete. This is the consummation of our hope, in glory.

In his account of the perfections, Aquinas provides a way for us to understand how those who lack the full use of reason (even a complete and absolute privation of the use reason, as with the *amens*) can have meritorious

knowledge and love of God. In such persons, on the condition of their baptism, the *perfectibility and conformability* of this knowledge and love is no more impaired than the knowledge and love of those who have the full use of their cognitive faculties. What is variously and unequally *constrained* in the case of cognitively impaired persons is the corporeal faculties by which the human being grows in the *active imitation* of God in knowledge and love—the perfection of which, in the magnificent consummation of glory, is the final end of the human being. The constraint of this growth, although unequally experienced, is the common condition of all human beings after the Fall. The baptized await the resurrection of the body, when the consummation of grace inaugurated by Christ at the cross (individually conferred at baptism) will be completed in the perfect magnification of our knowledge and love of God, in the beatific vision of divine glory.²¹³

Aquinas's point is this: On the presumption of baptism, highly intelligent and able-bodied Christians are not more perfectly conformed to Christ's likeness than persons who have profound cognitive or physical impairments. The conformation of a living human being to Christ's likeness in

²¹³ *STh*, 1.73.1, *reply 1*. Aquinas writes “on the seventh day was the consummation of nature, in Christ's Incarnation the consummation of grace, and at the end of the world will be the consummation of glory.”

the immaterial activities of faith, hope, and love is not contingent upon the well-being of the body. However, highly intelligent and able-bodied Christians are comparatively *less constrained* in their ability to imitate God in knowledge and love, and to pursue growth in the magnificence of that imitation. Although, we should add, highly intelligent and able-bodied Christians are no more or no less inclined toward that growth than any other person (that is to say, conformed in the principle of such activity). Only in the rarest of instances in this life (i.e., the saints) does this capacity for a magnanimity of imitation grow to anything more than a dim prefiguring of what Christians anticipate to unfold at the resurrection. This is the case regardless of whether we are talking about the profound intellectual competencies of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross or the profound intellectual and physical dependencies of St Servulus.

That wonderful imitation of God recognized in the saints is indeed a meritorious knowledge and love of God. It is beautiful. This merit is not, however, contingent upon great intelligence or physical wellbeing. Beautiful knowledge and love of God is that rare and glorious imitation of the Beautiful. And yet, as God's strength is made perfect in weakness, we sometimes glimpse in another that rare and glorious imitation of the Beauty of the Cross.

Saint Servulus and others bear witness to the truth of this theological judgment.

5.2.2 *Profound Cognitive Impairment, Virtue, and Friendship*

Aquinas affirms that bodily impairment has no *per se* retractile effect on the proper created subsistence and operation of the rational soul, which is a spiritual principle. It thereby follows that the rational soul of a human being who has a profoundly damaged brain retains in full her or his essential capacities and powers. Because the rational soul is immaterial and incorruptible, the activity of the rational soul in its essential operation (the aptitude for knowledge and love of God) can only be constrained, but not impaired. In the instance of a profound injury or dysfunction of the brain there would be, of course, an impairment of the many other operations of the rational soul in relationship to the body.

In the case of a particular *amens*, for example, her or his body would not be capable of enacting, by way of operation, the immaterial activity of her or his essential nature due to a material corruption or dysfunction of her or his body. Nevertheless, as an embodied creature, in principle, according to Aquinas, the *amens* cannot but obtain some apprehension of the world. What this means is that while the biological aspect of a person's capacity to reason

can be profoundly hindered in its operation, in principle no measure of distortive configuration can exceed that of death.

Aquinas's appropriation and revision of Aristotle and Augustine provides a way for us to understand the relationship between corporeal infirmity, moral virtue, and human flourishing. For Aquinas, the unconsidered acts of persons who 'lack the use of reason' have a moral species, be that the species of rectitude and virtue, or sin and vice; and that because the acts are performed by the created rational animal, the image of God.²¹⁴ In the case of profoundly impaired persons like the *amens*, as shown above, sinful acts that do not ensue from the deliberation of reason are not attributed to the person as sin or vice—rather, they are counted as 'weakness.'²¹⁵

²¹⁴ *De Malo*, 15.2, ad 9. "Since it belongs to reason to consent to an act, as Augustine says in his work *De Trinitate*, there cannot be an act of fornication without the deliberation of reason, except perhaps in the case of one lacking the use of reason...if the cause of such a deficiency of reason is blameless, as is evidently so in the case of maniacs and the insane, then ensuing act of sexual lust or whatever sin are not imputed as sin. [*Si autem causa huiusmodi defectus sit absque culpa, sic actus sequens luxuriae vel cuiuscumque peccati non imputatur ad peccatum, sicut patet in furiosis et amentibus.*]"; c.f., *De Trinitate*, 12.12.

²¹⁵ C.f., *STh*, 2-2.156.1, response. Aquinas writes, "Things are ascribed to their direct causes rather than to those which merely occasion them. Now that which is on the part of the body is merely an occasional cause of incontinence; since it is owing to a bodily disposition that vehement passions can arise in the sensitive appetite which is a power of the organic body. Yet these passions, however vehement they be, are not the sufficient cause of incontinence, but are merely the occasion thereof, since, so long as the use of reason remains, man is always able to resist his passions. If, however, the passions gain such strength as to take away the

The interesting question in the case of the baptized *amens* and those who lack the use of reason is whether acts of moral rectitude that do not ensue from the deliberations of reason are appropriately regarded as righteousness and virtue. *Specifically, can such a person have meritorious knowledge and love of God?* The answer, for Aquinas, is ‘yes.’

For Aquinas the intrinsic principle of a voluntary act is movement for an end that is known or understood.²¹⁶ It is not necessary that this intrinsic principle be the first principle of movement for an act to be voluntary; that is to say, the intrinsic principle of a voluntary act can be caused by an extrinsic first principle.²¹⁷ Unlike irrational animals, the ‘perfect’ capacity to know and desire ends belongs to the essence of the human being—it is the ability to know and recognize an end, and the relationship of means to that end. For Aquinas, knowledge of ends is the condition of the properly human (i.e.,

use of reason altogether--as in the case of those who become insane through the vehemence of their passions--the essential conditions of continence or incontinence cease, because such people do not retain the judgment of reason [*quia non salvatur in eis iudicium rationis*], which the continent man follows and the incontinent forsakes. From this it follows that the direct cause of incontinence is on the part of the soul, which fails to resist a passion by the reason. This happens in two ways, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. vii, 7): first, when the soul yields to the passions, before the reason has given its counsel; and this is called ‘unbridled incontinence’ or ‘impetuosity’: secondly, when a man does not stand to what has been counselled, through holding weakly to reason’s judgment; wherefore this kind of incontinence is called ‘weakness.’ Hence it is manifest that incontinence pertains chiefly to the soul.” Emphasis mine.

²¹⁶ *STh*, 1-2.6.1, *response*.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *reply 1*.

perfect) voluntary act, which is the deliberate choice to move toward the end apprehended.²¹⁸

At baptism, as with all the baptized, God imparts supernatural virtue to those who lack the use of reason.²¹⁹ Although the *amens* is hindered in her *acquisition* of moral virtues like prudence, in baptism (like all Christians) she receives an *infusion* of supernatural habits of moral virtue.²²⁰ In this way, Aquinas soberly acknowledges the profundity of the affliction experienced in the body of the *amens*, as it impairs the development of moral virtue, while concurrently providing an understanding of how the *amens* virtuously participates in the life of the Body of Christ.

Specifically, Aquinas maintains that ‘half-wits and fools’ receive supernatural wisdom and supernatural prudence when they are baptized.²²¹ Additionally, according to Aquinas, those who faithfully bear infirmities of the flesh exemplify the virtue courage and the perfection of that virtue is rooted in the acknowledgement of one’s own infirmity (i.e., weakness) in relation to God, which is the essence of humility.²²² It is unclear what it means

²¹⁸ *STh*, 1-2.6.2, *response*.

²¹⁹ *STh*, 3.69.4, *response*; 2-2.45.5, *response* and *reply* 3; 2-2.47.14, *reply* 3.

²²⁰ *STh*, 3.69.6, *response*; cf., 1-2.113.3, *response*; 1-2.113.3, *reply* 1; 2-2.45.5, *response*.

²²¹ *STh*, 2-2.45.5, *reply* 3; 2-2.47.14, *reply* 3; 1-2.58.4, *reply* 2.

²²² *STh*, 2-2.123.1, *reply* 1.

in practical terms for someone with an utterly debilitating condition like *amentia* to have an infused disposition for moral virtue; nevertheless, Aquinas provides us with the means to speculate.

For Aquinas, the grace and impartation of virtue at baptism—as well as the gifts of the Holy Spirit—cannot be rendered inoperative even in the profound case of the *amens* (one who absolutely does not have the use of reason due to a profound impairment of the cognitive faculties). Such a person lacks the ability to recognize ends and means, and, therefore, like an infant, cannot exercise free-will.²²³ What makes Aquinas’s understanding of free-will and voluntary action interesting in the case of the *amens* is that in baptism, according to Aquinas, God not only imparts supernatural virtue, God also moves the human being to action.²²⁴ God does this “not only by proposing the appetible to the senses, or by effecting a change in [the baptized person’s] body, but also by moving the will itself.”²²⁵

For Aquinas, God’s grace is the extrinsic first principle of an intrinsic principle oriented towards meritorious knowledge and love of God. It is the infusion of a spiritual sense and a spiritual movement, consisting in an

²²³ *STh*, 1-2.113.3, *reply 1*.

²²⁴ *STh*, 3.69.6, *response*; c.f., 3.68.12.

²²⁵ *STh*, 1-2.6.1, *reply 3*.

enlightened knowledge of truth and a fruitfulness which results from the instincts of grace.²²⁶ This is our baptism in the Holy Spirit. So, because it is not contrary to the essence of a voluntary act that the will of one who 'lacks the use of reason' is moved by God, for Aquinas, any act of rectitude or virtue can be properly attributed to a person so afflicted as righteousness or virtue.²²⁷ In other words, on the assumption of their baptism, those who lack the use of reason are not culpable for any sinful or vicious acts that they may commit, insofar as they are incapable of understanding the acts as sinful or vicious.²²⁸ Yet, righteous and virtuous acts are appropriately regarded, on Aquinas's terms, as indications of a meritorious knowledge and love of God in those who lack the use of reason.²²⁹

So conceived, just as the acquired virtues dispose and enable a person to act in accordance with the light of natural reason, which is proportionate to human nature; in the light of grace, the infused virtues dispose and enable a person to act in a 'higher manner' and toward 'higher ends,' in relation to a 'higher nature' which is our progress toward the perfect participation of the

²²⁶ *STh*, 3.69.5, *response*.

²²⁷ *STh*, 1-2.6.1, *reply 3*.

²²⁸ For Aquinas, of course, such a privation of the deliberative faculties would derive from an extreme and profound cognitive impairment, one that did not also entail the complete privation of a person's capacity for self-movement.

²²⁹ *De Malo*, 15.2, *reply 9*.

blessed in the divine nature.²³⁰ For Aquinas, the virtue of those who lack the use of reason, as with all Christians, is not principally measured according to the rule of magnanimity (i.e., the 'great souled' man, which now has a more complex meaning via Aristotle's metaphysical biology). Rather, our virtue is measured for its likeness or conformation to Christ. And it is only on this christoformic basis that the effective grandness in potency and productivity of a moral act can bear the significance Christians call 'holiness.'

On Aquinas's terms, the consummation of grace (and the infusion of supernatural virtue at baptism) can be understood to capacitate someone who completely lacks the use of reason with supernatural knowledge and a supernatural principle of self-movement. This is our baptism in the Holy Spirit. So capacitated, on Aquinas's terms, there is no reason to reject the possibility of a magnanimity of extraordinary knowledge and love in the case of a person with a profound cognitive impairment on the order of *amentia*.

The justice of the judge who discerns what is due and the justice of the child who shares her toy are both justice. The gravity of the circumstances and the dignity of the end sought do not increase virtue qua virtue; what is increased is the magnificence of the act as an imitation of God's knowledge

²³⁰ *STh*, 1-2.110.3, *response*.

and love. A person can be virtuous without having the full use of reason, provided that the person so afflicted acts in accordance with the goodness and truth that is understood.²³¹ There are, if we think with Aquinas,

Mountains on the ocean floor...hidden beneath the waves...that only God can see...²³²

Which is to say, on Aquinas's terms, it is possible and likely that some of the most holy acts of knowledge and love in the sweep of redemptive history have been performed by 'morons,' 'idiots,' 'imbeciles,' 'retards,' 'mental defectives,' and 'feebleminded' persons. Heroic acts of virtue, breathtaking in their Christoformic purity and holiness, which we would recognize if only we had eyes to see. That is to say, if we were not so affectively blind to the true and objective beauty of the absolutely wretched of the earth. The conformation in virtue proportionate to the condition of the baptized *amens*— someone with a profound cognitive impairment, who absolutely lacks the use of reason— might look like this:

²³¹ *STh*, 1-2.58.4, *reply* 2. "A man may be virtuous without having full use of reason as to everything, provided he have it with regard to those things which have to be done virtuously. In this way all virtuous men have full use of reason. Hence those who seem to be simple, through lack of worldly cunning, may possibly be prudent, according to Matthew 10:16: 'Be ye therefore prudent [wise] as serpents, and simple as doves.'"; c.f., 2-2.47.14, *reply* 3.

²³² Andrew Peterson, "Mountains on the Ocean Floor" from the album *The Far Country* (Word Entertainment; 2005).

The courage to willingly go into strange and unknown places, trusting in the goodness of your mother. Allowing yourself to fall asleep even though you are unsure of where you are. Being open to a new experience, such as the texture of a new brand of diapers. Remaining calm (not holding your breath) as your father carries you up a flight of stairs.

The justice of looking in the direction of your brother, even when you are angry with him. Peacefully eating the food that is given to you, even if it is not your favorite. Accepting the embrace and care of someone who, for a time, abandoned you, but who is trying to rectify past wrongs. Being attentive to the emotional disposition of others. Giving a dirty look to a bad man...and, yet, showing mercy to someone who has burned every other bridge in their life.

The temperance of chewing slowly. Not grabbing food off the table. Not yelling when you are uncomfortable. Not pushing away an infant or child that is bothering you. Knowing when it is OK to drool and to act like a slob; and when it is not OK. The self-control required of one who understands that it is wrong to urinate while his diaper is being changed. Sitting respectfully and quietly during what seems to be a serious occasion—perhaps a wedding ceremony—not sucking your thumb, not being goofy. Always trying to conduct yourself in a manner appropriate to the circumstances, as you

understand them—that is to say, not merely *acting*, but *being* your mother’s ‘little gentleman.’

The prudence of knowing that some things are good and some things are bad. Loving what is good, and adjusting your actions in accordance with the good that is understood. For example, recognizing and enjoying the presence of children; or shaking your arms to the sound of country music. Recognizing and having a chaste crush on a woman. Cultivating the practice of looking at new people and trying to get a sense of who they are.

It looks like a profoundly disabled man who has absolutely never had the full use of reason, a living icon of human wretchedness, sensing his brother’s voice and...*nothing*. No understanding, no recognition, and no response. And, yet, because he is a mortal rational animal who bears a likeness unto God according to image; and because his aptitude for knowledge and love belongs to the immortal and incorruptible activity of his rational soul; and because he has been baptized in the faith of the Church, receiving the consummation that is grace, a likeness in virtue through the infusion of faith, hope, and love; and because he understands with knowledge that is not his own and loves by a principle of desire that is not his own—because of all this, according Aquinas, his sensing is more than mere sense. His sense experience, even if it is not understood and frightfully dim, is the

experience of a rational creature. And, because he is baptized, on Aquinas's terms, his experience of his brother's voice has a significance that is supernatural in character.

It might be friendship. Not the Aristotelian friendship between two 'non-defectives'; not a thin caricature of intellectualist friendship; and not a notional friendship of 'presence' offered by God through a soulless human body incapable of knowledge, love, or human happiness. No, real friendship; of the sort described by Aquinas in his *Treatise on Charity*.²³³ The kind of friendship that is only possible for creatures endowed with an immortal and incorruptible rational soul, which is the substantial form of the human being, the image of God—our natural aptitude for knowledge and love. It is a friendship based on the fellowship of happiness, which is the consummation of grace; where our creaturely likeness to God precedes and causes a supernatural likeness that we share as members of the Body of Christ.²³⁴ Specifically, by the loving kindness of the Father, through the reconciling gift of Christ Jesus, and in the living fellowship of the Holy Spirit...*my brother is also my friend.*

²³³ *STh*, 2-2.23-26.

²³⁴ *STh*, 2-2.26.2.

The ability to recognize the essential aptitude for such friendship in a person with a profound and utterly debilitating cognitive impairment requires a particular kind of moral formation, and the habituation of the affective inclination (*visio*) by communal practices corresponding to what is good and true. The key Thomistic axiom is *visio in actu est claritas in actu*.²³⁵ In sum, one must see (*visio in actu*) in order to experience (*claritas in actu*) the objective beauty of a thing—or, with respect to our concern, the objective beauty of a human being, the image of God.

5.3 *Mercy, Protection, Guidance, and Care*

Aquinas calls the moral disposition and activity of the recognition(s) just mentioned ‘mercy’ or ‘compassion’ (*misericordia*). The virtue mercy has two aspects, it is both a ‘passion’ and a ‘virtue.’²³⁶ As a passion, mercy is the involuntary displeasure that human beings experience when we recognize the suffering or affliction of another human being. As a supernatural virtue, mercy is the infused disposition to respond to the suffering of another as if the affliction were being experienced in one’s own person. In particular, virtuous mercy seeks to relieve another’s suffering by removing the cause of the

²³⁵ O’Reilly, *Aesthetic Perception*, 37-43.

²³⁶ *STh*, 2-2.30.3, *response*; c.f., MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 119-128.

suffering or by providing what is missing. According to Aquinas, the disposition to mercy is an interior act of charity, which is ordered towards a particular set of external acts. As external act, according to Aquinas, mercy is the greatest of all the virtues pertaining to the love of neighbor.²³⁷

Aquinas calls the acts of merciful or compassionate love of neighbor ‘almsgiving,’ and the particular need we are confronted with in the person of our neighbor determines the alms that are due to him or her.²³⁸ For Aquinas, merciful acts are a matter of moral precept and neglecting to perform merciful acts when faced with human suffering or affliction is a grave mortal sin.²³⁹

On Aquinas’s view, when there is a difference between the actual need and the expressed need, Christian mercy always opts to meet the actual need—insofar as the actual need is knowable. For example, Christians respond to an actual need and not an expressed need when, through the use of physical force, they subdue someone afflicted with an *amentia*-like condition who is irrationally resisting urgent medical treatment.²⁴⁰ Similarly, contrary to the conventional order of justice, a weapon is not to be given to a

²³⁷ *STh*, 2-2.30.4, *response*.

²³⁸ *STh*, 2-2.32.2, *response*.

²³⁹ *STh*, 2-2.32.5, *sc*.

²⁴⁰ *STh*, 2-2.33.6, *reply 1*; c.f., 2-2.32.3, *response*.

person who is caught in a temporary state of ‘madness,’ even if that person is the rightful owner of the weapon.²⁴¹

Aquinas identifies two kinds of need that oblige an act of mercy: Some needs are *corporeal*, such as those needs which arise from sickness, injury, or disability; and other needs are *spiritual*, which affect the soul. Mercy responds to corporeal needs by supplying what is deficient: e.g., to lead the blind, to support the lame, to assist the disabled, and to visit the sick.²⁴² Mercy responds to spiritual needs with an analogous provision of support: to pray for God’s help, to comfort those who grieve or are afflicted, and to relieve deficiencies on the part of the intellect. Particularly noteworthy, Aquinas indicates that if a “deficiency be in the speculative intellect, the remedy is applied by ‘instructing’, and if in the practical intellect, the remedy is applied by ‘counseling.’”²⁴³ Because *amentia*-like conditions impede the operations of practical rationality, Christians are obliged by the precepts of mercy to counsel those who lack ‘sufficient knowledge for the guidance of life.’²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ *STh*, 2-2.57.2, *reply* 1; 2-2.62.5, *obj/reply* 1; 2-2.120.1, *response*.

²⁴² *STh*, 2-2.32.2, *reply* 2.

²⁴³ *STh*, 2-2.32.2, *response*.

²⁴⁴ *STh*, 1.23.7, *reply* 3; c.f., MacIntyre on ‘proxy’, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 130, 138-9, 147-54.

Along those lines, according to Aquinas, it is a mortal sin (i.e., ‘worthy of hell fire’) to call someone any name reserved for ‘natural fools’ (*fatue*).²⁴⁵ A contemporary example of this might be using the word ‘retarded’ as a pejorative epithet. Similarly, Aquinas considers it a mortal sin to mock or to make fun of a person who is in fact a ‘natural fool’ (*stultorum*) on account of their affliction.²⁴⁶ Aquinas maintains that cognitively impaired persons are due ‘greater respect.’ In the case of a ‘natural fool,’ derision is a mortal sin precisely because the person who is the object of the mocking is weak and vulnerable due to bodily affliction.²⁴⁷

Coordinate with the obligation to compassionate care and protection is the enforcement of various political limitations for those who ‘lack the use of reason.’²⁴⁸ For example, people with severe *amentia*-like conditions are debarred from making solemn religious vows and contracting marriage, so long as the state of ‘madness’ or ‘insanity’ persists.²⁴⁹ Similarly, such persons

²⁴⁵ *STh*, 2-2.72.2, *sc.*

²⁴⁶ *STh*, 2-2.75.2, *response.*

²⁴⁷ *STh*, 2-2.75.2, *response.*

²⁴⁸ In assessing Aquinas’s account of political limitations and their enforcement, it is crucial to note the degree and type of impairment that he describes in each instance.

²⁴⁹ *STh*, 2-2.88.9, *response*; *Contra Doctrinam Retrahentium a Religione*, 12; *Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, IV, 34.1, *prologue*; IV, 23.2.2, qc.3, *response.*

are debarred from acting as legal advocate²⁵⁰; have qualified credibility as legal witnesses²⁵¹; and are debarred from some of the works of mercy, such as counseling or teaching.²⁵² Nevertheless, for Aquinas, most of these limitations are provisional, particularized, and are outweighed by necessity.²⁵³

5.4 *Death, Resurrection, and the Life to Come*

Death is the absolute privation of bodily life.²⁵⁴ For Aquinas this means that death is the most severe evil suffered in the body by the human creature.²⁵⁵ Because human beings are composite creatures, Aquinas maintains that the final cessation of the body's operations places the immortal and incorruptible rational soul in an unnatural state of separation from its body.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the human soul subsists, desirously awaiting the resurrection of its body—either united with God, separated from God, or in a state of preparatory purification.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ *STh*, 2-2.71.2, *response*.

²⁵¹ *STh*, 2-2.70.3, *response*.

²⁵² *STh*, 2-2.71.2, *reply 1*.

²⁵³ *STh*, 2-2.71.2, *response*.

²⁵⁴ *STh*, 1-2.73.2.

²⁵⁵ *STh*, 1-2.37.4, *reply 3*; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.48.6.

²⁵⁶ *STh*, 1.89.1, *response*; c.f., *STh*, 1-2.4.5, *reply 2*.

²⁵⁷ *STh*, 1.89.2, *reply 1*; 1-2.4.5, *reply 4*.

There are two matters having to do with disability and cognitive impairment that stand out in Aquinas's speculation on the bodily resurrection of the baptized. First, the glorification of the human creature at the resurrection entails the glorious perfection of the soul as it is united with its body.²⁵⁸ Aquinas maintains that there is an essential continuity between our mortal body and our resurrection body: it is the same body because the rational soul is its substantial form.²⁵⁹ What is different is that the perfection of the glorified soul 'overflows' to the body, perfecting and glorifying the body in its operations.²⁶⁰ Second, Aquinas identifies four perfections which belong only to the resurrected and glorified body: harmonious docility to the glorified soul; flawless expression of the soul's beauty; incapacity to suffer bodily affliction; and perfect responsiveness in movement to the holy intentions of the rational soul.²⁶¹

Aquinas's metaphysical account of the relation between the rational soul and the human body disciplines and directs his speculations into how the corporeal frailties of our present bodies relate to the spiritual bodies of the next life, the life to come. What, if anything, is carried over to the next life?

²⁵⁸ *STh*, 1-2.4.6, *response*; 2-2.18.2, *reply 2*.

²⁵⁹ C.f. Stump, *Aquinas*, 208.

²⁶⁰ *STh*, 3.7.4, *reply 2*; 3.15.10, *response*; *CT*, §167.

²⁶¹ *CT*, §168; Aquinas, *Commentary on I Corinthians*, lect. 6, §980-3.

Considered at the moment of death, at the moment of the separation of that soul from its severely impaired body, we have nothing less than a rational soul which retains its full configuration of powers and capacities. Considered by way of the resurrection, every configuration of each particular spiritual body will, for Aquinas, be different from the mortal and fallible body of this life, while nevertheless having in common with the former body the formal principle of that particular person. So, there will be no 'disability' or 'cognitive impairment' in the life to come. However, the resurrection wounds of Christ do provide a template by which the moral significance of particular disabilities and impairments in this life might be redeemed in the life to come.

6 A Concluding, Unscientific Postscript

We proposed at the outset to see what Aquinas has to teach us about the relationship between the condition of the body, moral virtue, and human flourishing. Over the course of our four chapters we systematically reconstructed Aquinas's theological understanding of corporeal infirmity, physical disability, and the moral life of persons who 'lack the use of reason.'

The fundamental metaphysical assumption of Aquinas is that the body is a function of the soul and an expression of the soul; and insofar as it is a function of the soul, the body is also the communicator of the soul. And in that sense, if there is an impairment in the provided matter, the soul in its subsistence—its subsistence of course not at all impaired, because it is a principle—continues to relate to God, by way of the first perfection, and in the case of the baptized, by way of a supernatural likeness of virtue. This likeness of virtue in faith, hope, and love is a likeness unto Christ, the one true and perfect image of God.²⁶²

Aquinas provides a theologically rich, analytically rigorous, and sacramentally grounded description of corporal infirmity and cognitive impairment. It is an account that might offer guidance to contemporary moral

²⁶² *STh*, 1.93.1.

theologians and ethicists who want to understand the reality of natural love, friendship, and charity in the lives of people who have a profound cognitive impairment. Specifically, Aquinas provides an account of how faithful discipleship, Christoformic virtue, and cruciform love is possible for the kind of beings that we are, our creaturely constitution. Likewise, Aquinas's understanding of the mortal rational animal, the image of God, provides the resources for a serious account of how that life is possible for human beings who continue to bear the wounds of original sin upon the body—that is, to flourish with respect to our natural and supernatural ends.

Within the contours of Aquinas's thought resides a 'theology of weakness, disability, and cognitive impairment.' In addition to his illuminating treatment of the damage, dysfunction, and decay to which we are all subject, Aquinas provides a way for us to understand the theological significance of a serious impairment of the faculties required for the ordinary use of reason. According to Aquinas, an impairment of that sort has no direct implication upon a person's capacity for relationship with God. For the *amens*, as with all human beings, the perfect actualization of his natural aptitude for friendship with God begins at baptism: when she or he is made a member of the Body of Christ and is drawn into the goodness and beauty of Triune God; a likeness of virtue in faith, hope, and love—a likeness unto Christ, the one,

true, and perfect image of God. And, her or his bodily perfection and ultimate happiness is anticipated, as with all believers, through our hope in the promise of bodily resurrection.

Fate is not destiny. Saint Thomas Aquinas helps us recognize our fate—we who are or who will soon become weak, disabled, and cognitively impaired—in the light and the hope of the Divine consummation of nature, grace, and glory. He helps us not only to see, but to recognize that the existence of the mortal rational animal, the image of God, is beautiful. It is the beauty that belongs to the One called Beautiful, the exemplar after whom our likeness seems to be only a shadow. Our infirmities, the evil we suffer, the afflictions of our mortal wretchedness is our fate; but our fate will be made perfect in the light of His glory, through the Beauty of the Cross.

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Biography

Miguel José Romero was born in Colorado (1977). He is Mexican-American. Romero obtained a B.A. from Colorado College in 2000; a M.Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2006; and a Th.M. from Duke University Divinity School in 2008. In addition to his master thesis presented to the faculty of Duke Divinity School in 2008 (“My Brother’s Keeper: ‘Proxy’ in MacIntyre’s *Dependent Rational Animals*”) he has published the following articles: “Liberation, Development, and Human Advancement: Catholic Social Doctrine in *Caritas in Veritate*” in *Nova et Vetera* 8, no. 4 (2010); “Aquinas on the *corporis infirmitas*: Broken Flesh and the Grammar of Grace” in *Disability in the Christian Tradition*, eds. John Swinton and Brian Brock (Eerdmans, *Forthcoming*). In 2008, Romero was awarded the Hispanic Theological Initiative Doctoral Fellowship. In 2012, Romero was awarded the Moreau Post-Doctoral Fellowship at the University of Notre Dame. Miguel is married to Dr. Heather Romero, together they have three children. Romero’s Th.D. dissertation is dedicated to his brother Vicente Juan Romero, who has a profound cognitive impairment.