

Flirting with Metaphysics: ties between anthropology and sexual
ethics in Thomas Aquinas

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Thomas Aquinas uses his anthropology to structure and support his sexual ethic. Due to the shape of his thought and the place humanity occupies in his system, anthropology is intimately connected with metaphysics. This produces the conclusion that ethical discussions should be open to metaphysical content in both the study of Aquinas and Christian thought in general. Without the intellectual context of his anthropology and the metaphysic in which it arises, Aquinas' sexual ethic will not be fully understood or appreciated. This suggests that anthropology and metaphysics will naturally arise and obtrude in any discussion of sexual ethics.

The argument is established by close analysis of Aquinas' understanding of sexual difference and of marriage to pick out concepts Aquinas has transferred from anthropology. The main sources are his larger works of *De Sent*, *SCG* and *ST*, although other works are cited as well. The focus throughout is on the intellectual connections between metaphysics, anthropology, and sexual ethics. Historical context and development of Thomas' thought will be noted where relevant but not discussed.

The analysis begins with the most abstract level of Aquinas' anthropology and its source in his general metaphysic. Each chapter becomes more specific and more inflected by human sexuality: from humanity, to humanity in various states, to male and female, to married humans. Chapter five turns abstract and synthetic once more to isolate the metaphysical concepts of existence-realisation and intellect which are crucial to Thomas' sexual ethic. Chapter six develops the final implications of the thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Catena Aurea Matthew</i>	<i>Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia</i>
<i>Compendium</i>	<i>Compendium theologiae ad fratrem Reginaldum</i>
<i>De anima</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de anima</i>
<i>De ente</i>	<i>De ente et essentia</i>
<i>De principiis</i>	<i>De principiis naturae ad fratrem Sylvestrum</i>
<i>De sep</i>	<i>De substantiis separatis</i>
<i>De unitate</i>	<i>De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas</i>
<i>De veritate</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate</i>
<i>De Sent</i>	<i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i>
<i>SCG</i>	<i>Tractatus de fide catholica contra Gentiles</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
<i>Super I Corinthos</i>	<i>Expositio in Pauli Epistolas</i>
<i>Super De anima</i>	<i>Sentencia libri De anima</i>
<i>Super Ephesians</i>	<i>Expositio in Pauli Epistolas</i>
<i>Super Ethics</i>	<i>In decem libros Ethicorum expositio</i>
<i>Super John</i>	<i>Expositio in evangelium Joannis</i>
<i>Super Matthew</i>	<i>Expositio in evangelium Matthaei</i>
<i>Super Politics</i>	<i>In libros Politicorum expositio</i>

Fain wouldst thou know with what plants is enflowered

This garland that encircles with delight

The Lady fair who makes thee strong for heaven.

Of the lambs was I of the holy flock

Which Dominic conducteth by a road

Where well one fattens if he strayeth not.

He who is nearest to me on the right

My brother and master was; and he Albertus

Is of Cologne, I Thomas of Aquinum.

Paradise X

Dante Aligheri

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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Impetus for thesis

The Western world is experiencing a state of cultural turbulence in the area of sexual ethics. This turbulence is remarkable for its pervasiveness, its expression in concrete laws and policies, and its tedium. The tone of these ongoing disagreements is mutual incomprehension. Ideas and categories do not seem to be shared between the parties. It is difficult to discuss a topic when words have different significations for various people. I do not present this observation as a piece of scholarship. It is only the impetus for this thesis. What intellectual connective tissue is beneath these arguments about sexuality? How does the skeleton of sexual anthropology shape the muscles of sexual ethics?

Thomas Aquinas is an ideal case study. The distance between him and the present is an advantage in this case. He wrote before the existence of many philosophical and cultural structures which define the contemporary West. Since the terms and categories of the present are contested, it is useful to approach sexual anthropology and ethics through a substantively different vocabulary.

Aquinas' vocabulary on this topic is wide and deep. He wrote extensively on anthropology, using the resources of both theology and philosophy. And he discussed sexual ethics in many places, through the lenses of virtue and moral analysis. He is also a fountain of inspiration for subsequent Roman Catholic and much Reformed theology. He is connected to the present in ways that make him significant, but distant from the present in ways that make him a useful contrast.

0.2 Argument

I argue that Thomas Aquinas' sexual ethic needs the context of his anthropology and metaphysics to be fully understood. He articulates his sexual ethic using concepts which are prominent in his anthropology, but which have a wider meaning and use in Aquinas' general understanding of created existence. Aquinas positions human beings in a nexus of metaphysical categories: form and matter, intellectual and sensual, immortal and mortal. Humans are implicated in many aspects of the universe. Aquinas' anthropological concepts are detailed along a lattice of metaphysics. The use of these concepts in sexual ethics must carry metaphysics along with it, or Aquinas' view of humanity will be crassly abstracted. These anthropological-metaphysical concepts structure Aquinas' articulation of sexual ethics. Their presence provides underlying assumptions which allow him to make certain ethical distinctions. They are attachment points, from which his sexual ethic applies force in various directions; like bone providing anchor points for muscle and ligament. The role of these concepts in Aquinas' sexual ethic suggests that ethical discussion must be open to metaphysical content – in both the narrow case of Aquinas' work and the wider case of Christians engaging in ethical debate.

0.3 Method

The argument is developed by analysing Aquinas' synthetic understanding of human sexuality and its moral use. It is primarily a sympathetic reading of his complete thought, with an eye to tracking concepts and their effects from one topic to another. The key sources are texts where Aquinas was directed towards the topic of anthropology or marriage, either by his own design or that of a work being expounded. These include book four of *De Sent*,
2

parts one and two of *ST*, book three of *SCG*, and selections from his biblical commentaries.

Other minor works and commentaries on Aristotle will be used to clarify Aquinas on specific points. *ST* receives a majority of references due to its mature precision and comprehensive scope. It is not treated as defining Aquinas' 'true' thought. Possible developments in his thought will be mentioned where significant. However, the overall approach is synthetic rather than diachronic.

This thesis is restricted to the realm of Aquinas' ideas. His thought will be analysed in its historical context, but not primarily as a product or resource of history. This thesis unfortunately lacks the space to consider the impact of forces such as Aquinas' movement between teaching posts, his order's position within medieval politics, the dissemination of new texts, and his tense relationship with the fervent supporters and opponents of Aristotle. This thesis is focused on connections between ideas rather than the people and circumstances who generated them.

Because Aquinas' anthropology is deeply embedded in his wider view of the universe, the thesis begins by describing how the full picture of his anthropology emerges from the nature of creation (chapter one) and from the course which creation has taken (chapter two). Chapter three explores where sex difference and sexual desire are located within Aquinas' view of a human being. Chapter four moves to the application of anthropological concepts in Aquinas' sexual ethic. Since he does not concede any morally sound sexual act outside marriage, analysis of his view on moral sexuality is structured around the natural, remedial, and sacramental aspects of marriage. Chapter five moves backwards to point out how concepts from the first three chapters resurface in sexual ethics, with chapter five developing some implications of these concepts being carried from metaphysics to anthropology to ethics.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Aquinas' anthropology depends upon his wider metaphysic. He describes the human being using metaphysical categories such as essence, existence, substance, form, and matter. He expects the reader to be familiar with these terms from their use in general medieval theology and philosophy. But the sense he gives to these terms can be somewhat altered from their origins.¹ Aquinas' metaphysic is peculiar and individual in many ways. It is therefore necessary to describe the central features of his metaphysic in order to give an accurate account of his anthropology.

Anthropology and metaphysics are especially bound together for Aquinas by the place humanity occupies within his view of creation. For Aquinas, the human being is the only creature that is both intellectual (that is, spiritual or immaterial) and corporeal. It is a special case which includes all the possible metaphysical properties of a created being. He refers to humanity as the highest animal and the lowest intellect. This is an approach to anthropology built upon overlapping metaphysical categories. We cannot understand what Aquinas sees

¹ For examples see:

David B Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 44-45.

Daniel John O'Connor, *Aquinas and Natural Law* (London, Melbourne, Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), 24.

Thomas Joseph White, "Imperfect Happiness and the Final End of Man: Thomas Aquinas and the Paradigm of Nature-Grace Orthodoxy," *The Thomist* 78, no. 2 (2014): 254.

Reza Rezazadeh, "Thomas Aquinas and Mulla Sadra on the Soul-Body Problem: A Comparative Investigation," *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011): 416.

Juan Jose Sanguinetti, "The Ontological Account of Self-Consciousness in Aristotle and Aquinas," *The Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 2 (2013): 317.

For a good summary of the present state of scholarship on Thomas and his historical context, see Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), 14-85.

when he looks at a human being unless we understand what he sees when he looks at different kinds of created existence.

I begin in section 1.1 by describing Aquinas' anthropology as it emerges from key elements of his metaphysic. I will order these elements from the most general which apply to all created beings, to more specific elements that apply specially or only to humanity. Some concepts will be treated out of strict order for the sake of clarity.

Once the anthropology is established, in section 1.2 I will detail how it operates in human actions such as sexual activity. In the next section, 1.3, I consider how sexual desire relates to human actions. Modern sexual desire is an alien concept to Aquinas' thought. I analyse human sexual desire using Aquinas' own conceptual framework, as three different types of human appetite, before synthesising a description of what Aquinas thinks about sexual desire in general.

1.1 Anthropology and metaphysic

1.1.0 Order of being²

The order of being is a differentiation of ontological value according to their participation in divine intellect or act.³ Unformed or prime matter is the least valuable, moving upwards to inanimate substances, then vegetable and animal life, then humans, and finally angels. God is

² This section is strongly influenced by Blanchette's discussion of order of being: Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 29-64.

³ Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2006), 131-32.

in a sense at the apex of the order⁴ but is separate from it⁵ and directly creates the whole order.⁶ Humans occupy a liminal position in the order.⁷

As composites of intellectual form and physical matter, we are the lowest of the intellectual creatures – since all angels are pure form. As animals with an intellectual form or soul, we are the highest of the material creatures. ‘Highest’ is a value judgment, since the degree to which a thing manifests form indicates its level of ontological value.⁸ Although form is not always composed with matter, it is always composed⁹ (save in God).¹⁰ It is always composed because essence – a thing’s definition – only becomes real when connected with existence.

⁴ Marika Rose, "The Body and Ethics in Thomas Aquinas' 'Summa Theologiae'," *New Blackfriars* 94, no. 1053 (2013): 544.

⁵ Rahim Acar, *Talking About God and Talking About Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions*, ed. H Daiber and D Pingree, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science Texts and Studies* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 205.

⁶ Blanchette, 29.

⁷ Rose, 545.

⁸ Blanchette, 59.

White, 260.

Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 400.

⁹ Vivian Boland, "Kenny on Aquinas on Being," *New Blackfriars* 84, no. 991 (2003): 393.

¹⁰ Najeeb Awad, "Thomas Aquinas' Metaphysics of Relation and Participation and Contemporary Trinitarian Theology," *ibid.* 93, no. 1048 (2012): 658.

See also Burrell, 49.

1.1.1 Existence and essence

Aquinas distinguishes between the essence¹¹ of a thing, its abstract definition or nature,¹² and its existence.¹³ For example, every human is an instance of the same human form.¹⁴ But this abstract human nature does not have substantial existence.¹⁵ The actual existence of any human requires a movement from possibility to reality, from potency to act.¹⁶ This movement is supplied by God as the act of being which unites essence and existence in one existing thing. The essence is only logically prior, in much the same way as form is logically prior to matter in section 1.1.3 below. An individual instance of an essence begins to exist at the same time as its individual.

The essence of an individual thing is contrasted with its accidents. Essence is what is proper to a thing when it is realised in the individual: a human will have two feet, a certain arrangement of joints, walk upright, and so on. When humans lack any of these things, we describe them as ill or injured. They are not fully realising their essence. The shape of their haircut is an accident: hairstyle does not bring individuals closer to or further from human essence. Hair shape is an accident, but number of legs is part of the essence. This essence is realised through a concept called the act of being.

¹¹ Thomas uses essence, form, and nature somewhat loosely – see O'Connor in this footnote. I will use form to describe the idea of a being, essence to describe the complete explanation of a thing including its designated matter, substance to mean an individual complete thing, and nature to describe the complete state of being of a thing of a certain kind.

O'Connor, 15.

¹² John F Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, Monographs of the Society for Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 104.

Stephen L Brock, *Action and Conduct: Thomas Aquinas and the Theory of Action* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 126.

¹³ Joseph Owens, "Aristotle and Aquinas," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39.

¹⁴ Sanguineti, 332.

¹⁵ Wippel, 109.

¹⁶ Sanguineti, 557.

1.1.2 Act of being

Aquinas explains the existence of created things with the concept 'act of being.'¹⁷ Act is the movement from potency or possibility to actuality or existence. Act of being is the act God imparts to an essence to move it from possibility to act or existence.¹⁸ It is a creature's participation in God's action. But this participation is sharply limited by the difference between creatures and God. Aquinas contrasts the essence-existence composition of created things with God, whose essence and existence are identical: God necessarily exists, and necessarily exists in unchanging perfection.¹⁹ God is pure act with no unrealised possibility. His essence and existence are identical rather than forming an essence-existence composite. God imparts act of being to individual instances of an essence. Existence is a singular affair. The strength or progression of a creature's act of being determines the degree to which its essence achieves existence. For Aquinas, goodness and existence or act are convertible.²⁰ Things are good to the degree they have existence or are 'in act.' God's complete existence is another way of describing his perfect goodness.

A creature's action of existence is not abstract being; it is conditioned by its essence. The act of being is not received by an abstract essence or by existence in general, but by a couplet of

¹⁷ *ST I-75-1-c*.

Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L K Shook (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1961), 197.

Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Mediaeval Philosophy Augustine to Scotus*, vol. 2, Bellarmine (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1948), 332.

¹⁸ Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans, 2012), 270.

¹⁹ John F Wippel, "Aquinas' Route to the Real Distinction: A Note on De Ente Et Essentia," *The Thomist* 43, no. 2 (1979): 287.

²⁰ *ST I-5-1* and 3, and *I-II-18-1c*.

Note *ST I-5-1ad1*, which gives the kernel of Thomas' metaphysic.

essence and individual existence.²¹ An individual creature's goodness is not general becoming but manifesting more of its given nature. A human five stories tall is not a greater human but a monstrous human, for a human's essence does not extend to that size. And a statue of a human is not a human, for it does not have the kind of relationship with matter that a human form does. This point will be developed in section 1.1.4, where I discuss designated matter. The manner of human existence – our existence as individual substances – is shaped by the realisation of the human form in matter. I therefore turn to examine human composition as form and matter.

1.1.3 Form and matter

A form is the intellectual idea of a kind of creature.²² Some forms are realised in matter; these are composed substances (composed of both intellect and matter).²³ Other forms are not composed and have no physical matter. These are called simple or separated substances²⁴ – angels, for example.²⁵ Separated substances have no bodies and, for reasons which will be become clear in section 1.2, therefore cannot perform a sexual act or experience sexual desire for a specific person. The only exception is the human soul which, between death and the general resurrection, is a quasi-separated substance. Since Aquinas' sexual ethic is concerned

²¹ Copleston, 2, 334.

²² For Thomas' view of form and matter, see *De ente* and *De principiis*, *passim*.

²³ *De ente* 14

²⁴ Dezhi Duan and Dunhua Zhao, "On Thomas Aquinas' Doctrine of Materia Signata," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 4, no. 4 (2009): 557.

²⁵ Rose, 543.

Separated substances still have a kind of composition, existing in the medium of substance or existence. See *De sep* VIII:39-45.

with behaviour before death, this thesis will regretfully exclude the question of whether humans remain sexual beings when we are bodiless souls.²⁶

Forms do not have any existence apart from their individual realisations.²⁷ The form of a human being is distinct from each individual but can only be found in those individuals. This is an Aristotelian approach to forms which places the individual at the centre of creation rather than the universal. This can be seen in Aquinas' epistemology. Human understanding operates by taking an individual, separating it from accidental details, and finding the form that structures its existence.²⁸

The process of human knowledge is therefore a constant movement from real substances or individuals to intellectual forms. But an individual instance of a form is not a truly existent thing. Its reality comes from the act of being, and its individuality comes from the designated matter of the form-matter complex (described in 1.1.4 below). Only in separated substances is there individuality without matter; and this is individuality between kinds, where each angel has a different form and is a kind or species of one. Humans are composed substances. Our subjective 'I' is a unified form-matter composite. We can survive the loss of matter but are incomplete without it.

Though it does not individuate, form is the defining element of a human being. It gives the shape and order that arranges matter into a coherent substance or body. Designated matter is designated as such by the form. This logical priority is not ontological priority. The form

²⁶ Though the answer is likely no, given *ST I-77-8c*. A firm conclusion would require defining whether sexual desire can be without any sensitive component and still be sexual in nature.

²⁷ Robert Pasnau, "The Unity of Body and Soul," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 166-67.

Jordan Bishop, "Anthropology and Ethics: The Thomistic Vision," *New Blackfriars* 55, no. 649 (1974): 248.

²⁸ Anthony Kenny, "The Nature of the Intellect," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 178-83.

Jason T Eberl, "Aquinas on the Nature of Human Beings," *The Review of Metaphysics* 58, no. 2 (2004): 343.
Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 378.

does not exist before it begins to be realised in matter; act of being comes to form and matter at the same time, and the individual instance of form begins to exist alongside its matter.²⁹

Form and matter are temporally equal parts of the human quiddity or essence or substance. Though Aquinas uses these terms to refer to what is fundamental in a creature's existence, but not with technical precision. Essence sometimes means form and sometimes means the complete realised creature. I will refer to this second idea as substance. A composed substance exists in matter. Matter specified by an individual form is called designated matter, and it is key to Aquinas' understanding of individuality.

1.1.4 Designated matter

Aquinas defines corporeal individuality through designated matter.³⁰ The form of a human being is shared between all humans. But we can speak of a specific human because the human form is realised in *this* matter; and this matter is identified or 'designated' by this instance of human form.³¹ Individuality is produced by a reciprocal relationship between form and matter. One form produces one species, realised in an individual member of the species. Human individuality involves no formal difference between people; it is produced by the localised realisation of form.³²

²⁹ Horst Seidl, "The Concept of Person in St Thomas Aquinas: A Contribution to Recent Discussion," *The Thomist* 51, no. 3 (1987): 452.

³⁰ *De ente* 23

³¹ Seidl, 453.

Eberl, 347.

Pabst, 202.

³² *De ente* 24-26, 45.

Since individuation is a product of the form-matter relationship, forms without matter cannot be individually differentiated.³³ Forms that realise their essence without matter (such as angels) cannot be a species with a variety of members. The form cannot vary, otherwise it would not be a species at all. And the matter cannot be designated by the form (and reciprocally identify a concrete instantiation of the form), for separated substances are not ordered towards corporeal matter.³⁴ The composition of form and designated matter allows a creature to have a form in common with something else while being an individual substance.

The matter that belongs to a substance is defined by the form that it receives through being that form's designated matter. A human being's matter takes human shape because of the human form. This relationship of particularisation is not equal because the form is logically prior to its matter, and the designation of the matter depends upon the form.³⁵ Though unequal, the individuation is reciprocal: this form is realised in this matter. Aquinas uses designated matter to explain how substances with the same form can be different, such as human beings:³⁶

It is clear, therefore, that the essence of man and the essence of Socrates do not differ, except as the non-designated from the designated. Whence the Commentator says in his considerations on the seventh book of the *Metaphysics* that "Socrates is nothing other than animality and rationality, which are his quiddity."

³³ *De ente* 93.

³⁴ This indicates that whatever immaterial matter or medium is, it functions very differently to matter and does not allow for designation. Thomas does not really explore this area. See *De sep* XVIII.

³⁵ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 196.

³⁶ Individual differences cannot be effects of form. John Finley, "The *Metaphysics* of Gender: A Thomistic Approach," *The Thomist* 79, no. 4 (2015): 596.

The essence of the genus and that of the species also differ in this way, i.e., as the non-designated from the designated, although the mode of the designation differs in each case. Whereas the designation of the individual with respect to the species is through matter determined by dimensions, the designation of the species with respect to the genus is through the constitutive difference which is taken from the form of the thing.³⁷

A species is distinguished from the rest of its genus by its designated form, and an individual of that species from the rest by its designated matter. Being here or there, or having a different skin colour, is a property of this designated matter. It does not derive from a formal difference. It is a characteristic that can be legitimately predicated of the composite person (or substance) but not of the human form (or soul).³⁸

Just as there is no abstract human matter, there is no abstract human action. Everything is done by a body specified by this soul, or a soul realised in this body. This unity of identity allows the corporeal powers to shape the disposition of the immaterial powers without overruling them. Through designated matter the human body can define the existence of the human person and affect the soul. For example, a human's intellect is affected when they are in pain or hungry. Act of being allows Aquinas to describe matter influencing an intellectual form – such as a human soul – without destroying the hierarchy of being.³⁹

³⁷ *De ente* 24-25.

³⁸ Brock, 19.

³⁹ Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, 90.

1.1.5 Soul and body

The human soul, as an intellectual substance,⁴⁰ can exist separately from the body – but not properly so.⁴¹ As part of a composed substance, as a form ordered towards matter, the soul only reaches its intended realisation when it is united to its body.⁴² The soul is not a detached form but the form of a body, ordered towards material existence. Human beings are therefore both material and immaterial. Aquinas sees humans as straddling two tiers of the hierarchy of existence: the highest corporeal substances and the lowest immaterial substances.⁴³ It is inherent to the essence of the soul that it cannot be fully itself without a body.⁴⁴

In the preceding paragraph I have used ‘form’ and ‘soul’ interchangeably. And this is appropriate; its propriety is a key structural element in Aquinas’ anthropology. The rational soul of a human *is* the human form.⁴⁵ Aquinas directly applies the metaphysical properties of a form to his analysis of the human soul.⁴⁶ He assumes that the act of knowledge is definitive of humanity – a commonplace in his context. Hence the form which defines an individual human must be a principle of knowledge: a rational soul.⁴⁷ Aquinas’ anthropology is shaped by his assumptions about the purpose or defining action of a human.

⁴⁰ White, 261.

⁴¹ *ST* I-75-2ad4.

Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 189-91.

Brock, 22.

Rezazadeh, 420. Though note that Rezazadeh is incorrect in stating that for Thomas, the soul cannot exist apart from the body; see the assumptions in *ST* 1-76-1ad6.

⁴² John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 66:6 390.

⁴³ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 376.

⁴⁴ Hence the soul cannot escape passions. *ST* I-II-22-1c.

⁴⁵ Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: A Guide & Commentary* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 128-30.

John W Cooper, *Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans, 2000), 11-13.

⁴⁶ E.g. *ST* I-75-4c and -5c.

⁴⁷ On this point Thomas explicitly rules out Averroes’ less individual account of intellect. *ST* I-76-1c.

The human form functioning as soul gives a further character to its relationship with its proper matter. The soul-body relation arises from the form-matter relation but is not identical with it. As I described in section 1.1.3, he understands the soul as the human form realised in matter as a body.⁴⁸ The soul is not a discrete part of a human or a part of the body.⁴⁹ It is the cause and ordering principle of the complete human being. The relationship between soul and body is like that between a musical composition and the musicians performing it: the composition is only intellectually present, and yet it is being brought into existence.

For Aquinas, the human soul is an intellectual principle: it is ordered towards understanding universal truth.⁵⁰ A human being is concerned with apprehending the greatest truth. Our purpose is intellectual and spiritual. But the intellectual principle of our soul is received into matter. Not all the powers of the human being are material, but our powers are always the powers of a material being, and therefore involve matter at some point. There is no abstract intellectual truth except as abstracted from created substances. The human movement toward universal truth happens in and through matter.

Aquinas' analysis of the soul's various aspects is patterned after Aristotle's understanding of the human being.⁵¹ Aquinas describes various souls or powers within a human which are concerned with different objects. But this multiplication of souls is a distinction within a single form rather than an actual multiplication – at least for Aquinas.⁵² The human

⁴⁸ *De unitate* 27-28.

ST I-76-1c.

⁴⁹ Adam Wood, "The Faculties of the Soul and Some Medieval Mind-Body Problems," *The Thomist* 75, no. 4 (2011): 622.

⁵⁰ *ST I-76-1c.*

For a useful description of Thomas' anthropology, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, 276-78.

⁵¹ *ST I-78-1c.* But note that Thomas reconciles his own structure with Aristotle's by carefully defining Aristotle's terms.

⁵² Blanchette, 200.

Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, 278.

intellectual soul is not ontologically distinct from the sensitive soul (ordered towards corporeal goods) or the vegetative soul (ordered towards instinctive goods such as food and water). The intellectual soul contains these lower souls within it as a square contains a triangle:⁵³ truly containing all that they are within a greater identity. When Aquinas speaks of an intellectual soul at one point and a sensitive soul at another, he is referring to a single intellectual soul acting in various capacities.

Table 1 Powers of the soul

Soul	Proper end	Apprehends through	Action
Intellectual	Universal good	Understanding	As moved by will
Sensitive	Perfect good	Judgment of reason	As permitted by will
Vegetative	Natural good (nutrition etc)	Human nature (instinct)	Direct effect of nature

The human soul or form is one thing, and it is realised in matter to form one individual substance. This unity means that all three souls are contingently relevant to every human action. Not all the souls are involved in every action. But every soul is a potential capacity for action in the person performing an action. The soul is a single thing and can only do one thing at a time. As we shall see in section 1.3.2, this capacity for diversion is an important way one of the souls can influence the actions of a person.

⁵³ *ST I-76-3c.*

1.2 Human action

Aquinas' understanding of human action is outlined in *ST I-II-7* to 17. Its broad outlines are as follows:⁵⁴ the intellect apprehends an object in the world as something that is desirable in some respect, analysing the object with the intensity and standards which the will moves the reason to apply.⁵⁵ The will intends that object as an end of action.⁵⁶ If the means are in doubt the will moves the reason to take counsel about possible means and judges their goodness. Then the will chooses the means that appears the best,⁵⁷ and consents to that means as desirable. Finally, the will uses its powers in execution of the means.⁵⁸

Table 2 Process of human action

Action	Role	Power
Apprehension	Discern good in object	Reason
Intention	Move towards object as end	Will
Counsel	Consider possible means	Reason
Judgment	Determine the goods of possible means	Reason
Choice	Move towards a means for the sake of the end	Will
Consent	Move towards that means as good in some way	Will
Use	Move external powers to accomplish means	Will

⁵⁴ See the followed detailed accounts of human actions:
Brock, 127-98.

Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 240-63.

Stephen J Loughlin, *Aquinas' Summa Theologiae: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 140-54.

⁵⁵ *ST I-II-15-3c*.

⁵⁶ *ST I-II-8-2c*.

⁵⁷ *ST I-II-8-3c*.

⁵⁸ The will's internal act of use is identical with the action of the external powers. Brock, 180.
Loughlin, 145.

Any human action is a result of close and complex interplay of reason and will, like the gravity well of a binary star system.⁵⁹ Given the singularity of the soul, will and reason are capacities of the soul as it relates to two different ends: good for the will, and truth for the intellect.⁶⁰ There is a reciprocal relationship of condition: the reason can only understand when it is directed by the will, and all objects of desire for the will have been judged as desirable by the reason.

The relationship of causation is not reciprocal: the will moves the reason, but the reason cannot move the will except insofar as it presents the object.⁶¹ Aquinas does not have an intellectually determined account of human choices. Human actions are primarily acts of will or desire that are conditioned by the reason and the corporeal powers. Aquinas emphasises the importance of right knowledge for good action. But the will is the mainspring of human actions, as it seeks and applies knowledge.

It appears that the process is purely intellectual and that the sensitive and vegetative souls have no part in human actions. But this process of reason and will occurs within a composite being whose single intellectual soul includes vegetative and sensitive aspects. These aspects are realised in corporeal actions and presuppose corporeal powers. A human being can only properly exist in a body. Proper human existence includes the corporeally ordered souls.

Human actions occur in the context of the lower souls. As a result, the vegetative and sensitive souls can influence human acts.⁶²

⁵⁹ Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids and Leicester: Wm B Eerdmans and Apollos, 1994), 118.

⁶⁰ *ST I-II-9-1c*.

⁶¹ *ST I-II-9-3ad3*.

⁶² Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 240-53.

1.2.1 Threefold soul and acts

The vegetative soul does not contribute a power of human action in the same sense as the sensitive and intellectual souls. This is because the vegetative soul is instinctively and directly drawn to natural goods. It operates according to the order with which God imbued human nature.⁶³ The will does not command the vegetative soul to act.

The sensitive soul is concerned with material and composite substances. It desires them and motivates action towards them.⁶⁴ Because the corporeal world is made of such substances, all material human action occurs through the sensitive soul. It therefore has a more significant effect upon human actions than the vegetative soul. Aquinas explicitly assigns the sensitive soul some ability to dispose the will.⁶⁵ And it does this through its appetite for substances, built upon the judgment of the reason.

The object of the sensitive soul is something good; not a universal or abstract good, but a corporeal or sensible substance in which some universal goods are found. This recognition of a sensible good does not occur through instinct (as with the vegetative soul) but through the judgment of the reason. It considers what universal goods are present in the sensible object being considered. The reason is immaterial and can only interact with what is immaterial – phantasmic forms which have been abstracted from a sensible substance and are present in the imagination.⁶⁶ The sensitive soul is a corporeal power⁶⁷ dependent on the incorporeal reason, which in this life equally depends upon the bodily power of imagination.⁶⁸

⁶³ Patrick Lee, "The Relation between Intellect and Will in Free Choice According to Aquinas and Scotus," *The Thomist* 49, no. 3 (1985): 331.

⁶⁴ *ST I-81-1c*.

⁶⁵ *ST I-II-77-1c*

⁶⁶ Joseph G Trabbic, "The Human Body and Human Happiness in Aquinas' "Summa Theologiae", " *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1041 (2011): 558.

⁶⁷ *ST I-II-17-7c*.

⁶⁸ *ST I-84-7c*.

The intellectual soul's proper object is intellectual good. Aquinas subdivides the intellectual soul's power into intellect and will. The object of the intellect is knowledge of substances, as in its role in the sensitive soul. The intellect differs from the apprehension of sensible things because it considers them under the aspect of universal good. Though it can consider material substances, it judges them on their possession of immaterial qualities. The intellect desires universal truth.⁶⁹

The will (or intellectual appetite) is drawn to the intellect's idea of good. To put it in Aquinas' terms: the proper object of the intellect is the appetible good, and the proper object of the will is that idea of appetible good.⁷⁰ Aquinas considers the will to be a lower power than the intellect because the will has the idea of an appetible good as its object.⁷¹

Aquinas distinguishes between two forms of human will: internal and external.⁷² The internal will is the intellectual inclination or appetite itself. It cannot be determined by external forces.⁷³ The external will is the inclination being carried out through bodily members that the will moves. And this can be prevented or altered by external forces.⁷⁴

The next three sections will explore the interaction between each of the three appetites and the will. In each case, we will close by examining the relationship's role in a morally sound instance of sexual desire. Aquinas defines evil as a privation of being – a reduction in the degree to which a creature's essence is in existence.⁷⁵ Human evil is human declension from human nature. It will be more efficient and productive to describe a morally sound instance of

⁶⁹ *ST I-II-2-8c.*

⁷⁰ *ST I-82-3c.*

⁷¹ *ST I-83-3c.*

⁷² *ST I-II-6-4c.* A similar distinction is made in *De Sent IV:26-1-1c.*

⁷³ *ST I-II-6-4c. Super Ethics III 1-388 and 2-400-405.*

⁷⁴ See the excellent treatment of the will in Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

⁷⁵ *ST I-49-1c.*

sexual desire, rather than articulate the many ways in which sexual desire can be defective. This somewhat anticipates the contents of chapters two and three. Worked examples of how these appetites relate to sexual desire will clarify which aspects of anthropology are relevant to sexual ethics.

1.3 Appetites and the will

1.3.1 Vegetative appetite and will

Sexual desire involves vegetative power in some sense.⁷⁶ The vegetative appetite is ordered towards what is naturally beneficial: food, drink, warmth, the propagation of the species, and so on. It is ordered towards these things in general. The vegetative appetite does not desire any individual substance except by that substance's participation in the subject's natural goods.⁷⁷ For example, the vegetative appetite does not desire magnificent food because it tastes exquisite, but only because it is nourishing. The appetite does not perceive the food as a sensible object. Instinct apprehends the food as nutritive. There is no interpretation of the object by the reason. There is only an application of instincts that come from the creature's form.⁷⁸

Aquinas associates sexual appetite with human nature. It is not essentially a result of the Fall, though it has been affected by sin. Procreation is a natural good for the human species. An instinctive appetite for sex, a kind of automatic pattern-matching for a sexual partner, is part of human nature. But Aquinas maintains an important difference between sexual appetite and other vegetative drives.⁷⁹ Procreation is not connected with the life of the individual.⁸⁰

Aquinas uses this to argue that sex is ordered towards the common good of children.⁸¹

It is impossible for sexual actions to arise from the vegetative appetite alone. This is because human actions occur on the level of sensible objects. This requires the involvement of reason

⁷⁶ Eric M Johnston, 'The Biology of Woman' in *The Thomist* 77:4, 607.

⁷⁷ *ST I-II-17-8c*.

⁷⁸ *ST I-II-17-8c*.

Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 271.

⁷⁹ E.g. *SCG III:122 to 125*.

⁸⁰ *SCG III:122-4*.

⁸¹ *SCG III:122-4 to 9*.

and will, as detailed above in 1.2. The vegetative appetite does not command either reason or will. Its judgment or apprehension of a natural good is by instinct rather than through reason. And this apprehension is automatic rather than commanded by the will. Although the vegetative appetite can influence human action, it cannot cause it. For these reasons it plays a minor role in Aquinas' analysis of sexual actions and in this thesis.

Aquinas does not seem to ascribe much moral weight to the vegetative appetite.⁸² This does not mean that it has no connection with moral action. Human actions and habits can encourage vegetative appetites to be immoderately strong or weak. And the will can be immoderately influenced by vegetative appetite. This interaction with the lower appetites will be explored in section 1.3.3. A sound movement of sexual vegetative appetite is not determined by the appetite itself, but the context of prior choices in which the appetites arises, and the relationship between the higher powers and the lower appetite.

1.3.2 Sensitive appetite and will

The sensitive appetite is moved by corporeal substances which are apprehended through the senses.⁸³ Like the vegetative appetite, the sensitive is moved by material substances rather than immaterial ideas. Unlike the vegetative appetite, the sensitive is moved by an aspect of the object itself rather than some other good present in the object. The sensitive appetite is particular:⁸⁴ I am moved by the appearance or taste of this apple, rather than being

⁸² For example, it does not even receive its own question in the treatise on man (ST I-75 to -102), while sensuality does receive a question and the will has two.

⁸³ Davies, 139.

⁸⁴ Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 445.

instinctively moved by the nourishment that can be obtained through the apple. Instead the sensitive appetite depends upon the apprehension of the reason.

Aquinas explicitly addresses the effect of the sensitive appetite on the will in an article of *ST*.⁸⁵ Because the sensitive appetite is singled out for discussion, this sub-section can contain more engagement with a single primary source than has been possible so far. Aquinas rules out any direct influence of the sensitive appetite on the will. But he identifies two ways in which the sensitive appetite may indirectly influence human action.

The first type of impediment is diverting attention from the rational powers, rather like diverting a river to influence a hydroelectric dam downstream:

First, by a kind of distraction: because, since all the soul's powers are rooted in the one essence of the soul, it follows of necessity that, when one power is intent in its act, another power becomes remiss, or is even altogether impeded, in its act, both because all energy is weakened through being divided, so that, on the contrary, through being centred on one thing, it is less able to be directed to several; and because, in the operations of the soul, a certain attention is requisite, and if this be closely fixed on one thing, less attention is given to another. In this way, by a kind of distraction, when the movement of the sensitive appetite is enforced in respect of any passion whatever, the proper movement of the rational appetite or will must, of necessity, become remiss or altogether impeded.⁸⁶

This depends upon the soul's singularity. It has one action because it has a singular essence or subsistence rather than a triune. Because the sensitive and intellectual souls are not

⁸⁵ *ST I-II-77-1c*.

⁸⁶ *ST I-II-77-1c*.

separate but in fact one rational soul acting in different capacities, the more it acts in one capacity the less it acts in another. This implies that the human act is simple because the human soul is simple. As one rational soul realised in one body, a human does one thing at each moment. Actions can have complex origins (as Aquinas' anthropology shows) but an action is simple.

The second type of impediment is influence on the intellectual powers which are associated with sensible objects:

Secondly, this may happen on the part of the will's object, which is good apprehended by reason. Because the judgment and apprehension of reason is impeded on account of a vehement and inordinate apprehension of the imagination and judgment of the estimative power,⁸⁷ as appears in those who are out of their mind.

Now it is evident that the apprehension of the imagination and the judgment of the estimative power follow the passion of the sensitive appetite, even as the verdict of the taste follows the disposition of the tongue: for which reason we observe that those who are in some kind of passion, do not easily turn their imagination away from the object of their emotion, the result being that the judgment of the reason often follows the passion of the sensitive appetite, and consequently the will's movement follows it also, since it has a natural inclination always to follow the judgment of the reason.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ The estimative power perceives a sensible object's connection with good and bad. *ST I-78-4c.*

⁸⁸ *ST I-II-77-1c.*

The imagination and estimative power are not themselves the reason. They are two of the four interior sensitive powers,⁸⁹ distinct from the senses but reliant upon them. The intellect in turn relies upon the interior sensitive powers. Being intellectual, the soul cannot directly understand material singulars. The interior sensitive powers store and interpret the forms of material substances. They are powers of the intellectual soul but depend upon material existence to function.⁹⁰ This link with matter is how they are influenced by the sensitive appetite:

Now it is evident that the apprehension of the imagination and the judgment of the estimative power follow the passion of the sensitive appetite, even as the verdict of the taste [*judicium gustus*] follows the disposition of the tongue...

The example here is how the taste of food depends partly on the state of the tongue⁹¹ – temperature, altitude, health, lingering flavours and so on. Aquinas regards taste as a special form of touch localised in the tongue. It is natural for the state of the tongue to affect its sense of touch, and this is the purpose of the example. The sensitive appetite and interior sensitive powers are both localised in the body. The sensitive appetite does not alter the interior powers by directly imposing upon them, but indirectly by altering the context in which they function. As the bodily sense of taste is affected by the state of the tongue, so the imagination and estimation cannot escape the sensitive appetite's disposition towards things in the world.⁹²

The influence is through how the world of sensible things is perceived by the intellect through the interior sensitive powers, and not by direct action upon the will or reason. This

⁸⁹ *ST I-78-4c*.

⁹⁰ *ST I-78-4ad5*.

⁹¹ This is the sense in which Thomas uses *gustus* elsewhere in his works. E.g. *De Sent IV-44-2-1ad4* and *ST II-II-141-5*.

⁹² *ST I-II-9-2c*.

kind of influence-by-context will recur as we consider other ways that components of the human being influence each other.

Both of the means by which the sensitive appetite influences the will depend upon the unity of the human being. The first obstacle of diverting attention requires the soul to be one thing which performs singular actions. And the second obstacle, of influencing the interior sensitive powers, requires the human body as shared context. Aquinas' emphasis on unity allows him to put the will in a state of command over the sensitive appetite without ruling out influence in the other direction.

Though Aquinas often quotes Augustine to affirm the will's sovereign power,⁹³ he also uses Aristotle to describe the will's power as that of a political ruler rather than an absolute despot.⁹⁴ A ruler may be disposed towards one choice or another by their subjects while retaining their superior power; and in the same way the will can be disposed by the sensitive appetite without ceasing to be the superior faculty.

A morally sound movement of the sensitive appetite towards a sexual object would proceed from the intellectual powers accurately assessing the goods of the object, and that the sexual act is in harmony with human nature and the circumstances of the relationship. One could have a sound desire for your wife or husband, or perhaps someone of the opposite sex with whom marriage is possible. Aquinas considers an appropriate degree of desire for created goods to be natural to humanity and therefore good.⁹⁵ Sexual desire for a sexual partner is

⁹³ E.g. *ST* I-II-15-4s and I-II-74-7ad2.

⁹⁴ *ST* I-II-17-7c and I-II-74-2ad3.

Norman Kretzmann, "Philosophy of Mind," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146.

Steven J Jensen, "Virtuous Deliberation and the Passions," *The Thomist* 77, no. 2 (2013): 204.

⁹⁵ *ST* I-II-82-3 ad1.

good so long as its object is reasonable, and the desire does not pervert the application of reason.

1.3.3 Intellectual appetite

The will and the intellectual appetite are one and the same.⁹⁶ This aspect of the soul has freedom. It does not desire things of necessity. However, its freedom does not stem from itself.⁹⁷ The will desires what the intellect understands as good. The sum process of human decisions is free, but the distinctive parts within that process may not be. Aquinas grounds the freedom of the human will in the complicated existence of ‘good’ and the will’s close relationship with the intellect.

The will is bound to desire the greatest good.⁹⁸ This can only be fulfilled by the infinite and perfect good of direct knowledge of God. But until this good is clearly displayed in the beatific vision, the will tends towards whatever appears to be the greatest good to the intellect. This tendency towards what appears to be good is what creates human freedom for Aquinas, since it is the will which directs the intellect and specifies its judgment about good.⁹⁹

In one sense the will is not free, since it naturally desires the greatest good.¹⁰⁰ It has the limited freedom of choosing what standards it instructs the reason to apply when judging an object. This generates the freedom of human actions. By considering an object according to various aspects, we can alter our perception of its goodness and therefore our desire for it. A

⁹⁶ *ST* I-82-4ad1, I-82-5c, I-83-4c.

⁹⁷ Stump, 208.

⁹⁸ *ST* I-82-2c, I-83-1c.

⁹⁹ *ST* I-II-10-2c.

¹⁰⁰ *ST* I-II-8-1c.

person might choose to consider visual beauty and discard an ugly apple or choose to consider nourishment and eat it. Different judgments produce different acts.

Good is present in creation only with qualifications; but even existence is a good. The standard used by the reason is commanded by the will. And the will is moved by things as the intellect judges them.¹⁰¹ Therefore, a human being can always find a reason or desire or reject something.¹⁰² The will-intellect complex means that humans are free to choose anything – but the choosing occurs through a perception of good. The specific end is up to us, but the general end is not.

The only exception is God. He is pure good without any qualification. Sound knowledge and judgment would This allows Aquinas to maintain both that humans are genuinely free and that we will necessarily and unchangeably desire to know God in the beatific state. Human freedom arises from the way will and reason interact with each other and with imperfectly good objects. But the underlying assumptions change when presented with a perfectly good object.

Much depends, therefore, on the standards that the will moves the reason to apply to a desired object. When the reason errs because of involuntary ignorance, Aquinas considers the will excused for this reason. But he specifically mentions the divine law as something humans are bound to know.¹⁰³ This law is not something given to restrain evil, but the wisdom and patterning that God created in the world.¹⁰⁴ Only the beatified see it directly, but all humans

¹⁰¹ This seems circular, and in fact it is. It drives Aquinas to posit an initial movement of the will by God to escape an infinite regress.

ST I-II-9-4c.

¹⁰² Davies, 141.

¹⁰³ *ST I-II-19-6c.*

¹⁰⁴ *ST I-II-93-5c.*

know it by its effects;¹⁰⁵ and we have a natural inclination to virtue and a natural knowledge of good.¹⁰⁶

Our natural orderings to the divine law are imperfect and obstructed by sin. The original sin of Adam communicates the habit of sin to every human (save Jesus).¹⁰⁷ Its effect is disordered or inappropriate desires for created goods: things which are not God. Every human then performs voluntary acts of sin which deepen our vicious habits and further obscure our inclination to virtue.

The disordered sensitive appetite has been explored in the previous section. But the intellectual appetite's object is not a corporeal good but an abstract good as apprehended by the reason. How is this affected by inordinate desire for sensible things? Although Aquinas describes the habit communicated by original sin as "the disposition of a complex nature,"¹⁰⁸ he considers original sin to alter human nature only in a narrow sense.¹⁰⁹ As we shall discuss in chapter two, the presence of concupiscence is not an alteration in what a human is, but the loss of a grace given to Adam and Eve.¹¹⁰ The defining intellect of a fallen human being has not been altered.

Original sin affects the intellectual appetite secondarily, as inordinate desire for mutable goods leads the will to direct the reason to apply an inappropriate standard. Because of our natural inclination towards virtue, ignorance in moral questions is always voluntary or by negligence.¹¹¹ Although he grants that involuntary ignorance excuses a wrong action,¹¹² for

¹⁰⁵ *ST* I-II-93-2c.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* I-II-93-6c.

¹⁰⁷ *ST* I-II-81-1c.

¹⁰⁸ *ST* I-II-82-1c.

¹⁰⁹ Observe the careful definitions in *ST* I-II-82-4c.

¹¹⁰ *ST* I-95-1c.

¹¹¹ *ST* I-II-76-2c.

¹¹² *ST* I-II-76-3c.

Aquinas such ignorance can only really extend to circumstances of an act and never to the principles of goodness.¹¹³

The intellectual appetite is moved by intellectual objects: universal goods which are abstract and immaterial.¹¹⁴ Humanity or beauty could be an object of the intellectual appetite, but not Socrates or the beauty of an individual. This appetite is not capable of desire for a specific human as a sexual partner. It could desire a material substance or act because of its association with an abstract good. The intellectual appetite could be moved by a sexual partner or sex with a certain person because the sexual act with that person contains some aspect of universal good. The intellectual appetite can be involved in sexual desire, but not for reasons grounded in a sexual partner.

In summary, the intellectual appetite's relation to sexuality is indirect, motivated by universal goods, and secondarily affected by sin. Considering this, a morally sound movement of the intellectual appetite towards a sexual partner is not disposed by vegetative or sensitive sexual appetites beyond their natural significance. And such an appetite will be for a universal good, with sexual acts chosen as a means by a reasoned process. Desiring sex for the purpose of procreation is an obvious example. The universal good of multiplying and preserving humanity can clearly be achieved through sex. But this is far from the only sound motive Aquinas allows for sex. And we shall see in chapter three that he has a nuanced understanding of how sex should and should not be instrumentalised.

¹¹³ *ST* I-II-6-8c.

¹¹⁴ *ST* I-80-2c.

1.4 Conclusion

A human being is an intellectual form ordered towards understanding truth, united to matter and realised in a body by the act of being it receives from God. The body and soul together constitute the essence or substance of a human. The soul's three powers each relate to the process of sexual desire in a different way. The vegetative appetite is entirely outside human control. The sensitive appetite follows the good that the judgment of reason identifies in an appetible object. And the intellectual appetite follows the idea that is best and most in harmony with created essences.

Human sexual desire has elements of instinct, concrete personal attraction, and intellectual attraction towards a situation or course of action. The whole human being is involved. And because the human being is a singular unity of form and matter, all the powers of the soul have a disposing effect upon desire.

In this chapter we have described Aquinas' sexual anthropology as an outflow of his wider metaphysics and anthropology. We have operated in the abstract, as though nothing had ever interfered with the realisation of human essence. But this has been a distortion of his thought for the sake of clarity. Aquinas' anthropology is concerned with concrete individuals. This also applies in a historical sense. Aquinas does not discuss generic humanity. His anthropology is strongly affected by stages in human existence.

In chapter two we begin to de-abstract Aquinas' sexual anthropology, by considering how it is shaped by the states of integrity, corruption, and grace.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Introduction

In chapter one, we explored the fundamental aspects of Aquinas' anthropology. Species is determined by form within Aquinas' metaphysics. Speaking of a human species or a common human nature requires an identity of form. All possible humans will therefore have some characteristics in common – those derived from form. We can speak of an abstract “Thomistic anthropology.” And I judged it prudent to do so, for the sake of clarity and an orderly succession of ideas.

But this simplifies and somewhat distorts Aquinas' understanding of human beings. He did not allow a ‘pure’ human nature that could be defined and described without reference to divine grace.¹¹⁵ The human form, or essence, is not the only factor in human existence.

Human nature refers to the human substance, the form fully realised in matter. And what is realised in matter exists in time and history. The historical “proper accidents”¹¹⁶ of a human substance are also part of anthropology.

The historical properties of humanity are the states in which human nature has and will be realised. For Aquinas these are the states of innocence, corruption, grace, and beatitude. They

¹¹⁵ The topic of pure human nature's possibility for Thomas is an ongoing issue in scholarship. I take the view that for Thomas, human nature is intrinsically ordered towards receiving and seeking grace, and without it we have only a defective existence. Defending this position is outside the scope of this thesis. See the following for useful summaries of the debate:

Peter F Ryan, "How Can the Beatific Vision Both Fulfill Human Nature and Be Utterly Gratuitous?," *Gregorianum* 83, no. 4 (2002).

Raymond Moloney, "De Lubac and Lonergan on the Supernatural," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 3 (2008).

¹¹⁶ To use a Thomistic term which Finley applies to sex difference.

Finley, 589.

Sex and history are very different things metaphysically, but both are properties of a human substance which cannot be isolated to form or matter. This raises interesting possibilities for theologically and metaphysically approaching topics such as intersexed individuals and gender dysphoria through the doctrine of providence rather than through the doctrine of creation.

are marked by different relations to grace. The possession and loss of original justice define the states of innocence and corruption. Healing and elevation of corrupted humanity through sanctifying grace together define the state of grace. And finally, the unhindered knowledge of God defines the state of beatitude.

These different relationships with grace realise human nature in different tones or keys of human substance. In this chapter I will briefly explore the effect of each state upon human nature and how they illuminate Aquinas' whole anthropology. I proceed in historical order: innocence, corruption, grace, beatitude. Relevant effects upon human action or human sexuality will be noted as they arise.

2.1 State of innocence

Humanity was created in the state of innocence. This state is not defined by a difference in form or matter: it is an historical or supernatural state rather than a metaphysical one. The contrast between the four states of this chapter is between phases of humanity's relation to God and grace rather than four distinct kinds of humanity. God created the first humans in a state of grace with original justice. Original justice is a kind of grace which kept the reason subject [*subdebat*]¹¹⁷ to God. And the effect of this was to keep the lower powers of the soul subject to the reason.¹¹⁸ To use the concepts of chapter one: original justice resulted in a power of the intellect over the vegetative and sensitive appetites.¹¹⁹ It makes sense that a

¹¹⁷ *ST I-95-1c.*

¹¹⁸ *Super Ephesians 5-9.*

¹¹⁹ *ST I-94-4c.*

single grace effects these different subjections, if you recall that for Aquinas there is a single soul which exercises all the different powers of the soul.

This unity of the proper relations between the souls is demonstrated when all of them are degraded once the intellectual soul ceases to be subject to God.¹²⁰ Aquinas gives a good summary while discussing whether Adam could have been deceived:

This is clear also from the very rectitude of the primitive state, by virtue of which, while the soul remained subject to God, the lower faculties in man were subject to the higher, and were no impediment to their action.¹²¹

Original justice empowered Adam and Eve to desire each thing according to its nature and considering its creation by God as the perfect good.¹²² The first humans had sensitive appetites, but only of the kind and degree proper to human nature and possible without any evil present.¹²³ The passions that alter nature or impede the reason were entirely absent.¹²⁴ In the state of innocence, original justice meant that human desires were a level foundation for right human action; they were always appropriate in their direction and intensity. But now we live on a see-saw, with our desires unbalancing our existence at every turn.¹²⁵

Original justice alters the power of the will over its own natural desires, rather than directly affecting the scope of its desires. Otherwise humanity could not have exercised genuine free will in the state of innocence. Human nature already has desires that are determined by human nature: the vegetative appetites, which are directed to abstract natural goods grasped by instinct. If concrete human desires were instinctive, it would remove the role of the

¹²⁰ *ST* I-95-1c.

¹²¹ *ST* I-94-4c.

¹²² *ST* I-II-83-2 ad2 and I-95-1c, *Compendium* 195.

¹²³ *ST* I-95-3ad2.

¹²⁴ *ST* I-95-2ad2, *Compendium* 186.

¹²⁵ *Compendium* 192.

intellect in discerning sensible goods. And this would remove the relationship between will and intellect upon which Aquinas rests human free will¹²⁶ – which would make the choice to fall logically impossible.

Original justice bore our innocent will towards reasonable desire rather than directly impressing reason upon the will's desires. The will is sovereign (though not despotic).

Human reason is the instrument through which humans understand the nature of the things around them, but it is the will that desires rightly or wrongly. Misreading Aquinas' view of original justice as only or primarily concerned with our intellect leads to a view of Aquinas that is further from Augustine's theology than is really the case. Aquinas and Augustine would agree that the pre-eminent human faculty is will or intellectual desire. The main power involved in human action remains the will; it is only that Aquinas emphasises the will's action and freedom as a reasoned operation.¹²⁷

To return to original justice itself: its ontological effect of immortality was conditional upon the subjections of the soul. But those subjections did not in themselves grant immortality. Aquinas derives the immortality of innocent humans directly from original justice.¹²⁸ The single grace gave both immortality and subjection to God but was lost on the rejection of one component – subjection of the intellect to God. Aquinas often links the soul's control over the body with both immortality¹²⁹ and incorruptibility.¹³⁰ But human immortality in the state of

¹²⁶ *ST I-83-3* and 4.

¹²⁷ Note that *ST I-95* begins "We next consider what belongs to the will of the first man, concerning which there are two points of treatment: first the grace and righteousness of the first man, second the use of righteousness as regards his dominion over other things." This strongly links will with righteousness and distinguishes the chapter on will from the preceding chapter on Adam's intellect. See also *ST I-94-4c*, *I-II-82-3c*, *I-II-83-3s*.

¹²⁸ *ST I-97-1c*.

¹²⁹ *ST I-97-1c*: "This entirely agrees with reason; for since the rational soul surpasses the capacity of corporeal matter, as above explained, it was most properly endowed at the beginning with the power of preserving the body in a manner surpassing the capacity of corporeal matter."

¹³⁰ *SCG IV:86-1*.

innocence came from original justice directly and was not only a logical result of the soul's subjection to God.

Original justice is not part of the human form, or a hypothetical human essence which manages to include all the various states. But it does shape God's creative will for humanity – as the name suggests. It can be distinguished from the nature with which the first humans were made, the nature which they share with humans now. But the proper relationship between body and soul, sense and reason, depend upon the grace of original justice. As I will show in sections 2.3 and 2.4, the re-ordering of humanity involves a grace which includes original justice while surpassing it. Humanity can only reach its end of direct vision of God through God's assistance.

And this is not only a consequence of sin. Divine assistance is necessary because of the nature of the God-creature relationship – even in the state of integrity.¹³¹ The operation of human nature cannot be separated from grace. The grace of original justice is a vital aspect of our concrete individual existence, in either its absence or presence. It would be a methodological error to attempt to analyse any natural human power without reference to grace – including sexuality.

We have seen that the state of innocence consisted of the will's greater ability to bring the passions in line with reason. Exploring this greater consonance showed us two main points: firstly, that the will is the sovereign power for Aquinas as for Augustine;¹³² and secondly, that appropriate human existence is essentially connected with divine grace or help. When such help is absent the will's sovereignty is exercised defectively. We now turn to this humanity

¹³¹ *SCG* III:147-6, *ST* I-95-1ad6 and I-97-1c.

¹³² Though it can only act in the context of the reason, as discussed above and in chapter one. Thomas' understanding of sin is quite different in emphasis to Augustine's. I am only pointing out that a contrast between Augustine as concerned with will and Thomas as concerned with reason is untenable.

deprived of original justice. That means humanity as we usually encounter it: in the state of corruption.

2.2 State of corruption

For Aquinas, Adam is the first principle of human nature. His sin belongs to all human nature. His sin's guilt and associated loss of original justice is attributed to all humans. Aquinas uses the analogy of a part of the body sinning. Even though it only acts according to the higher corporate reality of the human will, the limb is rightly included in the guilt of sin.¹³³ The question here is how other humans are linked to Adam. Though Adam is an instantiation of the human form like every human being, he is also a higher principle of humanity. Aquinas does not explore this connection in detail. It seems to be connected with the biological transmission from Adam of the disposition for matter to receive the soul.¹³⁴ Since Adam's soul was no longer subject to God, he passes on a disposition in the same direction.

This illustrates the full meaning of 'essence' and 'nature' for Aquinas. The human form has not changed, for that would constitute a new species. What has altered is the realisation of the human form in individuals.¹³⁵ Human nature in the full sense is everything to which the form is ordered when it receives concrete existence. Due to Adam's sin, human nature is deprived of the soul's submission to God and associated supernatural help. But the human form

¹³³ *Compendium* 196.

¹³⁴ *ST I-II-83-1ad3*.

¹³⁵ See the distinctions Thomas draws in *ST I-II-85-1c* and *-4c*.

remains unaltered. This allows Aquinas to speak of all humans in all states as members of a single species, while attributing vastly different modes of living to the states.¹³⁶

The state of corruption does not affect the general shape of human actions (which was described in 1.2). Fallen humans retain the ability to control individual desires and avoid individual sins. If we did not then each sin would be unavoidable and therefore, according to Aquinas, not even a sin. What we have lost is a wider meta-ability to order our desires according to reason. Aquinas develops several aspects of this disorder in *ST*: from desiring an unreasonable end,¹³⁷ to desiring with too great or too little intensity,¹³⁸ to failing to control the lower powers,¹³⁹ to culpable ignorance or misunderstanding of good.¹⁴⁰

The intellect is the root of good and evil in every aspect of corrupted human action. The bonding agent for Aquinas' moral analysis is the intellect's relationship to God. This can be expressed as either desiring the ultimate good which is vision of God¹⁴¹ or adhering to God's will as revealed in both universal and particular goods.¹⁴² The will should sovereignly decree what is reasonable. It should do this based on a sound judgment by the reason about the good of an object in the context of the divine will. And fallen humanity *can* do this in individual cases. But for innocent humanity, ordering itself by reason was a given in every case.¹⁴³

Aquinas' definition of corruption is human existence (and therefore action) without divine grace. And this extends beyond moral action into ontology itself. The human rational soul is

¹³⁶ See how he describes human actions being affected by their circumstances in *ST* I-II-18-3c.

¹³⁷ *ST* I-II-18-5c and -19-2. Note the incorporation of circumstances into a good end in -19-2ad2.

¹³⁸ *ST* I-II-24-3ad1.

¹³⁹ *ST* I-II-24-1c.

¹⁴⁰ *ST* I-II-6-8c, -19-5c and -6c.

¹⁴¹ *ST* I-II-19-9c.

Rose, 544.

¹⁴² *ST* I-II-19-10c.

¹⁴³ Not in the sense of original justice being part of the human form, but in the sense of original justice constituting the whatness or manner-of-existing (quiddity) that Adam and Eve possessed. This is closer to essence as I defined the terms in note 11.

ordered towards perfect good, which is God. But created powers cannot cause a divine effect. Though human beings are naturally ordered towards perfect good, we cannot reach it without grace.¹⁴⁴

Without divine help, humans are not just morally but metaphysically and teleologically frustrated. We share a form with humans as they were first created. But our nature – form specifically realised in matter and time, without the grace of original justice – is fundamentally flawed. I now turn to God’s merciful instrument to heal corrupt humans: the gift of justifying grace, which brings humans into the state of grace.

2.3 State of grace

A human being enters the state of grace through a gratuitous¹⁴⁵ infusion¹⁴⁶ of justifying or sanctifying grace from God.¹⁴⁷ It both restores human nature (undoing the privation of original justice) and exalts it.¹⁴⁸ Aquinas describes justifying grace through the complementary lenses of ontology and of virtue. Ontologically, the infusion of grace adds the work of the Spirit as a divine principle within the human being. In terms of virtue, the infusion literally in-forms the human being with the form of the love of God (charity).

¹⁴⁴ *ST I-II-114-2c, SCG IV:150-6.*

¹⁴⁵ O’Connor, 9.

Davies, 153.

¹⁴⁶ *SCG III:150.*

¹⁴⁷ Justification and sanctification are not explicitly separate concepts for Thomas. For a summary of Thomas’ view in its medieval context, see Alister E McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification: The Beginnings to the Reformation*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 41-45.

See also the links between justifying grace and marriage in Paul Gondreau, "The Natural Ordering to Marriage as Foundation and Norm for Sacramental Marriage," *The Thomist* 77, no. 1 (2013): 48-57.

¹⁴⁸ *ST I-II-109-9c.*

2.3.1 Justifying grace and ontology

Aquinas stresses the distinction between original or ‘natural’ human faculties and virtues and those that justifying grace adds.¹⁴⁹ This raises the question of what Aquinas means by calling original justice a grace, if he both considers original justice central to the state of innocence and distinguishes between that state of innocence and the state of grace.¹⁵⁰ I pointed out in section 2.2 above that a return to the state of innocence would not be enough to lead us to beatitude. Even Adam in the state of innocence required grace to merit eternal life:

Man without grace may be looked at in two states, as was said above: the first, a state of perfect nature, in which Adam was before his sin; the second, a state of corrupt nature, in which we are before being restored by grace. **Therefore, if we speak of man in the first state, there is only one reason why man cannot merit eternal life without grace**, by his purely natural endowments, viz. because man’s merit depends on the divine pre-ordination.¹⁵¹

In the highlighted sentence Aquinas is discussing humanity in the state of integrity. “Divine pre-ordination” here could be interpreted as the original justice Adam received. But the context suggests divine pre-ordination is separate and beyond original justice. By speaking of the primitive state, original justice is presupposed. “Natural endowments” cannot mean nature apart from original justice. That would be the state of corruption. Adam’s natural endowments in this case include the grace of original justice. But Adam was not created with

¹⁴⁹ Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies, Critical Essays on the Classics (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 232.

¹⁵⁰ For a useful precis of nature-grace relationship in Thomas, see Reinhard Hutter, "The Virtue of Chastity and the Scourge of Pornography: A Twofold Crisis Considered in Light of Thomas Aquinas's Moral Theology," *The Thomist* 77, no. 1 (2013): 6-8.

¹⁵¹ *ST I-II-114-2c*. Emphasis mine.

divine pre-ordination in the same manner he was created with original justice – the pre-ordination is a separate and higher grace.

In the quote just above, Adam's state is contrasted with the sanctifying grace that accomplishes beatitude in humanity. If we define grace more narrowly as the grace that enables humanity to reach beatitude – justifying grace – Adam was not created with grace. All the effects of justifying grace are gratuitous in a higher sense: not producing original justice-assisted innocent nature but rather producing supernatural nature and works. Grace and nature can accommodate a range of meanings for Aquinas. In this case, grace means ordination to an ontological elevation which is necessary for the human being to achieve and merit beatitude.

2.3.2 Justifying grace and merit

Supernatural works in the state of grace merit beatitude congruently and condignly. These two senses of merit were vital to medieval parsing of human involvement in the complex of justification and sanctification. Human works of graced free will have congruent merit.

Though not worthy of beatitude in abstract justice, such works are rightly shaped to receive a reward from God, since it is just for God to reward someone who does what they can according to their virtue.¹⁵² These works truly (condignly) merit beatitude because of the presence of the Spirit and resulting union with God. Actions or states exceeding natural endowments require a divine principle.

In explaining justifying grace, I deploy words like justify, merit, deserve, and right. In contemporary usage these carry the meaning of obligation within a relationship. And this is included in Aquinas' understanding of justice. But there is also an ontological aspect of

¹⁵² *ST* I-II-114-3c.

proportion and suitability. When Aquinas rules out whether a human can be the cause of justifying grace, he does so on metaphysical grounds: that a finite cause cannot generate an infinite principle.¹⁵³ Aquinas' explanation of grace is shaped not only by his understanding of God, but also by his understanding of creation.

This connection between justice and reality means that Aquinas can accommodate natural and supernatural capacity within the same Aristotelian concept of virtue.¹⁵⁴ The natural virtues or habits are dispositions of human powers towards their exercise in accord with right reason.¹⁵⁵ Natural human powers do not relate to beatitude. This is a difference of end and origin rather than of being something opposed to the natural virtues.¹⁵⁶ The infusion of grace shapes the existing virtues of someone in the state of grace and creates new virtues that cannot exist without grace.¹⁵⁷ These are called the theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. They direct us to our supernatural beatitude while the non-theological virtues direct us only to our connatural end.¹⁵⁸

Virtues are central to Aquinas' practical analysis of human goodness. The creation of theological virtues is unsurprisingly central to his description of justifying grace. But this grace is not defined as the creation of virtues. The infusion of grace does not directly terminate in the powers as creating virtue, but in the very nature of the soul.¹⁵⁹ It parallels the state of original justice in that it works from the top down by reforming and (unlike original justice) elevating the soul. Justifying grace creates virtues but is prior to and above them.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ *ST I-II-112-1c* and note -2ad2.

¹⁵⁴ Kent, 226.

¹⁵⁵ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 261.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 338.

¹⁵⁷ *SCG IV:151* to 153.

¹⁵⁸ *ST I-II-62-3c*.

¹⁵⁹ *ST I-II-110-4c*.

¹⁶⁰ *ST I-II-110-3c*.

Aquinas connects the essence of grace and its virtuous effects through the principal theological virtue of charity.¹⁶¹

2.3.3 Charity

Aquinas describes charity as a kind of conformity to what is reasonable: to loving God,¹⁶² to humanity's purpose,¹⁶³ and to the perfect state of the affections.¹⁶⁴ Love shapes the apprehension and appetites of the lover.¹⁶⁵ Loving God, who is the perfect good, will bring a human being towards perfection of apprehension and appetites. The metaphysical cause of sanctifying grace, refracted into the complete human substance, produces a moral effect.

Charity is the form that allows the will to turn to God in accordance with reason. It is the highest theological virtue because it concerns God directly; it is an umbrella for rectitude in all powers and acts. This life involves movement between the habit of charity¹⁶⁶ and lacking it; between the states of corruption and of grace.¹⁶⁷ Whenever a person turns away from God as their ultimate end (mortal sin)¹⁶⁸ they leave the state of grace and must return to sanctifying grace. The soul vacillates. When the soul is subject to God, the acetylene torch of sanctifying grace directs the heat of charity into the soul.

Even while remaining in a state of charity, grace continues to be involved in moving the person to act and to remain in grace. Speaking generally of creation, everything needs God's help to act. But fallen humanity in the state of grace particularly needs it due to the corrupted

¹⁶¹ I shall use the word charity to mean human love for God caused by justifying grace. Thomas often uses *caritas*, *dilectio*, and *amor*, as interchangeable synonyms; e.g. *SCG* III:151 and 152-1.

¹⁶² *SCG* III:151para2.

¹⁶³ *SCG* III:151-para3 and 5.

¹⁶⁴ *SCG* III:151-para4 and 6.

¹⁶⁵ *ST* I-II-28-2c and I-II-28-5c.

¹⁶⁶ *ST* I-II-88-1ad2.

¹⁶⁷ *SCG* III:156 and 157.

¹⁶⁸ *ST* I-II-88-1c.

state of human nature.¹⁶⁹ And the mutability of humans in this life means we are always at risk of sin.¹⁷⁰ Declension from charity remains possible until we reach the state of beatitude.

We have seen that in the state of grace humanity is not only healed from the privation of original justice but empowered above the state of innocence. The theological virtue of charity connects the ontological and the moral aspects of sanctifying grace; it makes ordination to the last end synonymous with existence characterised by good acts. Due to the mutability of humanity in this life, humans will move between corruption and grace as they move between loving something mutable as their last end and loving God as their last end. This continues until we reach the state of beatitude, to which we now turn.

2.4 State of beatitude

The state of beatitude is the direct contemplation of the divine essence. Recalling the division between reason and will, beatitude is the knowledge of God in the intellect and the desire for that knowledge by the will. The reception of God in a human intellect does not mean that the beatified see God as he is in himself. They remain finite creatures beholding an infinite good. Beatitude does not fully divinise humanity. But it does far more than removing obstacles to our knowledge of God; it grants a participation in God which allows knowledge of him above our natural powers.

¹⁶⁹ *ST I-II-109-9c.*

¹⁷⁰ *SCG III:155 and IV:71.* In *SCG III:155-10*, Thomas clarifies that he is only discussing the present state of life (*secundum statum praesentis vitae*). The state of beatitude is different.

2.4.1 Beatitude and free will

This construction of beatitude allows Aquinas to maintain that declension from beatitude is impossible without removing free will. Free will is produced by the will directing the judgment to evaluate objects under different criteria. The Fall was a judgment about the relevant goodness of obeying God's prohibition, over against eating from the tree. In the state of beatitude, not only is humanity free from anything that might induce error; but the beatified consider God who is infinitely good.¹⁷¹ No sound judgment could turn their desire from God. And, with sin and corruptibility gone, nothing remains to induce unsound judgment.¹⁷²

The need for incorruptibility is one example that, far from ending the need for ontological connection with God, the state of beatitude heightens it. As creatures the beatified still need God's assistance to act at all.¹⁷³ And they continue to need the divine principle of the Spirit to behold God directly, as this is a vision above the capacities of human nature. Since their view of God is heightened above the state of grace it is logical that the assistance of the Spirit is greater. The perfection of the beatified is not self-sufficiency but delight in their supporter.

2.4.2 Beatitude and bodies

The beatified are still dependent upon God, and they are still bodies. This bodily state has a direct bearing on our overall topic. Aquinas includes the sexual organs in the bodily resurrection but rules out sexual activity in the state of beatitude.¹⁷⁴ The state of beatitude makes no direct contribution to his view of sexual activity. But it shows us that Aquinas

¹⁷¹ Ryan, 719.

¹⁷² *SCG* IV:92-4.

¹⁷³ *ST* I-II-109-9ad1. The general divine assistance to perform any action seems to be in view here.

¹⁷⁴ *SCG* IV:83 and *Catena Aurea Matthew* 18 lectio 3. The *Catena Aurea* does not include Thomas' own words, but we can legitimately expect him to express his own views in the selection of quotations.

distinguishes between the bodily capacity for sexual activity and the sex act itself. The physical capacity is part of being a perfectly embodied human. It follows that for Aquinas eunuchs and the genitally damaged should expect such wounds to be healed in the new creation. But the sexual act will not occur.

In *SCG*, Aquinas' given reason for the abrogation of sexual activity is that it pertains to the corruptible life which has ended.¹⁷⁵ Generation of more humans is no longer suitable for an incorruptible nature in the final state of resurrection, and the sexual act for pleasure without generation would be a vice.¹⁷⁶ He sums up bodily resurrection as the end of the active life and the continuation of only the contemplative.¹⁷⁷ The key point for our purposes is that Aquinas describes physical sexual organs as essential to full humanity but does not consider their use to be essential in the same way. True humanity is necessarily sexual but not necessarily sexually active.

The key point for Aquinas' sexual ethic is that Aquinas considers the sex act to be necessary only on the species level and in this life.¹⁷⁸ Sex is incidental on a personal level and even harmful for ultimate happiness¹⁷⁹ (depending on the act's relation to pleasure).¹⁸⁰ This is a different angle of necessity to many contemporary discussions of sexual ethics, which treat sex as an inevitability or necessity for individuals which needs some common social regulation to prevent harm to these individuals.

Aquinas sees sex as something the common good of humanity requires. It needs personal and social regulation to keep it from undermining individual virtue. His view of sexual activity as

¹⁷⁵ *SCG* IV:83.

¹⁷⁶ Just as it is in this life. See section 3.2 later.

¹⁷⁷ *SCG* IV:83-24.

¹⁷⁸ *Super I Corinthos* 7-316.

¹⁷⁹ *Super I Corinthos* 7-314.

¹⁸⁰ John Giles Milhaven, "Thomas Aquinas on Sexual Pleasure," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 5, no. 2 (1977): 157-59.

finally unnecessary encourages him to see it as a social rather than individual need and good. To speak metaphorically (rather than historically), Aquinas' sexual ethic is a meeting of Aristotle's concern for the common good and the development of virtue with Paul's concern to maximise devotion to Jesus.

I have shown that beatitude ends the possibility of falling away from grace. As a state of fulfilment, it requires bodies but not sexual activity. I will now summarise the key anthropological themes of this chapter, before moving to their specific expression in sexuality in chapter three.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has considered the concepts at play in each of the four states of humanity: innocence, corruption, grace, and beatitude. In each we have observed how the relation between nature and grace changes from state to state. We have seen ample evidence that specific human nature is defined by its relationship with divine grace. The state of innocence showed that the will depends upon grace for ultimately good actions; the state of corruption developed this in terms of a disordered relationship between the powers of the soul. The state of grace showed that grace adds another level to the existing virtue framework; and the state of beatitude showed that sexual activity is not essential to Aquinas' anthropology.

These concepts repeat a similar theme. Rejuvenated human nature means the gratuitous capacity to reach God as our last end. And human conformity to such nature is the source and standard of human goodness. The purpose of humanity unites and governs the shifts in Aquinas' anthropology from state to state. This includes sexuality, which we will now explore in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I explore Aquinas' understanding of human sexuality. My focus is on how his account of human sexual desire arises from his wider anthropology. The fundamental points of Aquinas' anthropology are almost directly relevant to his examination of sexual acts. To provide the material to draw out these connections, I will describe the metaphysical foundations of human sex difference in general, and then of the sexual act. At that point we will have enough grasp of his sexual anthropology to move on to sexual desire.

Aquinas' anthropology does not treat sexual desire as a single monolithic appetite. He unfolds sexual appetite and distinguishes between the roles of the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual appetites. I will therefore describe the sexual operation of these appetites separately, before attempting to connect their roles and discuss Aquinas' view of sexual desire in general. But first, his account of sex difference and the sexual act.

3.1 Femaleness and maleness

Men and women are part of the same species. For Aquinas, this means that they must share a form. The two sexes are not the result of two different forms being realised but the same form being realised in two ways. Aquinas refers to this as ordination to a special form,¹⁸¹ or an inseparable accident.¹⁸² Sex difference is a result of the human form being realised in

¹⁸¹ *De ente* 105.

¹⁸² Finley, 589.

matter.¹⁸³ But it is not an accident in Aquinas' usual sense of the word because it concerns human essence.

There is no abstract human nature; human individuals will always have a sex. Part of the human *essentia* – the composite of form realised in matter, to which the human form is ordered – is to be male or female. Because human sex difference is fundamental or usual to humanity it cannot be accidental in Aquinas' usual sense. Sex is also required for human reproduction, a power natural to all animals including humans. For these two reasons – male/female as essential and reproduction as essential – sex difference is not accidental in individuals. It has some connection with form.

Finley provides a good summary of Aquinas' view: "Gender is an inseparable accident following from matter, though only present when a 'special form' – an animal form – is present."¹⁸⁴ Gender is a special form which is necessarily produced when the human form is realised in matter. The human genders are rooted in an essential difference, not in form, but in the different essences of male and female individuals.¹⁸⁵ Aquinas accepts that some aspects of marriage are socially constructed and vary between cultures. But his overall view of the two genders is that they are a reality intrinsic to being a human individual.

Aquinas' use of the phrase "special form" in *De ente*¹⁸⁶ strongly suggests that although sex difference is a result of matter, it is not an accident derived from form's general mutability but a shaping by some secondary effect of the human form. The abstract human form does not have a sex. It is also ordered to realisation in matter as a male or female individual. To

¹⁸³ Jeremy Miller, "A Note on Aquinas: And Ordination of Women," *New Blackfriars* 61, no. 719 (1980): 187-90.

¹⁸⁴ Finley, 591.

¹⁸⁵ See note 11 for the distinction between form and essence.

¹⁸⁶ *De ente* 105.

use Aquinas' terminology, sex flows from designated matter (the matter that belongs to a human individual). And designated matter has sex not only because it is matter, but because it has been designated by the human form. Sex arises from matter but appears only as part of a form-matter composite.

We have been discussing human sex difference in a way that Aquinas could have applied to any animal with sexual dimorphism. But he connects the relationship between the human sexes with differences between humans and other animals.¹⁸⁷ Reproduction is the sole purpose of other animals. But humanity has an intellectual soul and therefore a higher purpose: that of understanding, ultimately of understanding God. Humanity is divided into two sexes so that reproduction becomes an occasional concern rather than a constant one.

This is more suitable to our intellectual nature as it allows us to not always be involved in the act of generation, but in the higher activity of understanding.¹⁸⁸

Aquinas describes co-operation in domestic life as a difference in sexual relations between humans and animals.¹⁸⁹ This domestic life is separate from lifelong marriage, which is another difference between humans and animals. If we assume that domestic life is ideally a household composed of husband and wife, then it is partly a component within wider human society and partly a result of lifelong marriage. Both sources of domestic life are rooted in the human capacity for understanding. Human society is produced by human reason.¹⁹⁰ And the capacity for understanding also produces the need for raising and educating children, which is one of the principal arguments Aquinas gives for marital union between the sexes.¹⁹¹ Human

¹⁸⁷ *ST I-92-2c*.

Gondreau, 43.

¹⁸⁸ *SCG III:125-4*.

¹⁸⁹ *ST I-92-2c*. Thomas mentions domestic life despite already having mentioned lifelong partnership, implying that it is a distinct concept.

¹⁹⁰ *Super Politics Proemium 4*.

¹⁹¹ *SCG III:122-8*.

reason is also necessary to generate positive human law and to grasp divine law, both of which Aquinas applies to relations between the sexes.¹⁹²

Aquinas treats co-operative domestic life as distinctive to human beings. And this domestic life is largely a product of human reason, for reasons I have just discussed. This practical element of relationship between the sexes depends upon his view that human beings are rational animals. His understanding of human relationships is conceptually supported by his anthropology. This includes both his position for humanity in the order of being (intellectual and material) and humanity's form-matter composition. The former concept makes intellect a core part of human purpose and life; the latter makes the intellect part of generic humanity.

3.1.1 Female and male equality

Aquinas did not consider the female sex to be ontologically lesser than the male. He takes this view only of the begetting of female children, due to his Aristotelian understanding of generation:¹⁹³ Observationally, the male appears to be active and the woman passive in the movement of semen. Although he frames reproduction in Aristotelian terms, Aquinas clearly distinguishes female imperfection in the reproduction from female equality in human nature.¹⁹⁴ Aquinas considers the sexes equal in dignity and integrity in God's vision for humanity.¹⁹⁵ In this he departs from Aristotle.

¹⁹² *SCG* III:123-8.

¹⁹³ *ST* I-92-1ad1.

¹⁹⁴ Michael Nolan, "The Defective Male: What Aquinas Really Said," *New Blackfriars* 75, no. 880 (1994): 159.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 159-61.

Aquinas does consider women naturally subject to men in the context of marriage,¹⁹⁶ attributing this to superior reason in men.¹⁹⁷ This civil subjection comes from the nature of the sexes and is not a result of the state of corruption. But Aquinas repeatedly emphasises that marriage is an authority relation between equals. Aquinas unfortunately believes that women are less rational than men. But he still defines them as fully human and equal in dignity to men.

3.2 The act of sex

Aquinas connects the sexual act with the dual corruptibility and incorruptibility of human beings.¹⁹⁸ It is not a result of the fall, but of human nature's purpose to produce a multitude of human individuals. Aquinas introduces human corruptibility and incorruptibility to give a reasoned explanation of scripture. I note in passing that much of Aquinas' thought flows from explanation of scripture rather than free-floating theological reasoning.¹⁹⁹ Philosophical distinctions such as corruptibility appear to give a reasoned basis for scripture's view of the universe. It suggests that Aquinas is unlikely to have his ethics determined by a wider philosophical position, since his use of philosophy in ethics is not prompted by philosophical concerns. Space prevents this from taking a larger role in this thesis.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ *ST* I-92-2c.

¹⁹⁷ *ST* I-92-1ad2.

Eric M Johnston, "The Biology of Woman in Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 77, no. 4 (2013): 583.

¹⁹⁸ *ST* I-98-1c.

¹⁹⁹ Eleonore Stump, "Biblical Commentary and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 259-60.

Eugene F Rogers, "Aquinas on Natural Law and the Virtues in Biblical Context: Homosexuality as a Test Case," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 27, no. 1 (1999): 34 and 42.

Davies, 199.

²⁰⁰ For an introduction to the relation between theology and philosophy in Thomas, see:

Mark D Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Norman Kretzmann; Eleonore Stump (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Returning to sex and the nature of human beings: in corruptible natures nothing lasts save the common species.²⁰¹ Incorruptible natures last in both their species and their individual instances. Insofar as humans are corruptible, more humans are needed all the time to maintain the species. The direct goal of nature is a mass of individuals; the common species is preserved for the sake of individuals. The sexual act is a divine antidote to corporate humanity's metaphysical susceptibility to corruption.

Aquinas emphasises sex as ordered towards sustaining the species, which in turn is necessary for individual humans to come into being. In a metaphysical sense Aquinas' understanding of sex could be called extremely individualistic. The whole structure of human nature is directed towards individual humans. But not towards human beings as we experience ourselves in this state – towards incorruptible human individuals. This demonstrates a kind of natural order toward deification which may be influenced by Augustine.²⁰²

It is important to bear in mind here that the corruptible-incorruptible distinction is not interchangeable with the material-intellectual distinction.²⁰³ It is true that by nature matter is corruptible and intellect is not. But Aquinas understands humans to be ordered towards an object that nature alone cannot achieve.²⁰⁴ This is knowledge of God.²⁰⁵ Humans need grace to allow them to know God, since the knowledge of an infinite good cannot be proportionate to the power of any created nature.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ *SCG* IV:82-6 and 83-2.

²⁰² For an introduction to this theme in Augustine's thought, see: David Vincent Meconi, "Augustine's Doctrine of Deification," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and David Vincent Meconi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁰³ Blanchette, 125.

²⁰⁴ *ST* I-II-5-5.

Trabicc, 560-61.

²⁰⁵ Marika Rose, "The Body and Ethics in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*," *ibid.* 94, no. 1053 (2013): 544.

²⁰⁶ *ST* I-12-4.

In a similar way, for human nature to realise its direct goal of many individuals, those individuals must have a secure and fully human existence. This means having material bodies without the possibility of corruption. Such material existence is outside the scope of created nature. It must be achieved by the gracious sharing of the divine nature's incorruptibility. Grace helps nature to achieve an end to which it is ordered, but which is beyond its powers. This explains why the sexual act is no longer present in the state of beatitude. Since incorruptibility has been communicated to the beatified, there is no longer a need for preservation of a corruptible common species.²⁰⁷

Aquinas' understanding of the sexual act flows from its purpose in humanity. The act and its purpose are results of God's intellect and will in creating humanity. Aquinas is comfortable describing the purpose of sex within the frame of what can be known through natural reason by observation. But the full meaning of this purpose appears in the context of scripture, of God's purpose in creating humanity, and of Aquinas' form-matter anthropology.

The purpose of the sexual act is not the benefit of the individuals involved, but the common good of the preservation of the species. Aquinas gives an almost zoological argument for this in SCG:

Now, though the male semen is superfluous in regard to the preservation of the individual, it is nevertheless necessary in regard to the propagation of the species. Other superfluous things, such as excrement, urine, sweat, and such things, are not at all necessary; hence, their emission contributes to man's good. Now, this is not what is sought in the case of semen, but, rather, to emit it for the purpose of generation, to which purpose the sexual act is directed. But man's generative

²⁰⁷ SCG IV:83-2 and -8.

process would be frustrated unless it were followed by proper nutrition, because the offspring would not survive if proper nutrition were withheld. Therefore, the emission of semen ought to be so ordered that it will result in both the production of the proper offspring and in the upbringing of this offspring.²⁰⁸

This observation depends upon the lens of his anthropology and to some degree on his understanding of the purpose of the universe. Aquinas assumes that every part of the human being has a proper end, and that to fulfil this end is morally good. These assumptions allow him to locate the moral use of semen in begetting children alone.²⁰⁹

Aquinas' natural moral reasoning on this matter is also shaped by his understanding of how an end (a formal cause) is realised.²¹⁰ The form is not realised when suitable matter begins to be informed – that is, when a child is born. It is only realised when the form is fully in act in the matter – when the child has reached physical and mental maturity. As a result, the morality of a sexual act does not only depend on it being conducive to conception, but to the full process of raising a child.²¹¹ This emphasis upon the complete development of the child is decisive for much of Aquinas' following argument.²¹² And he does not consider children in the abstract, but as parts of society.²¹³

²⁰⁸ *SCG* III:122-4.

²⁰⁹ Eric Johnston, "'Natural' 'Family' 'Planning' and Thomas Aquinas' Teleological Understanding of Marriage," *The Thomist* 79, no. 2 (2015): 270-72.

Elizabeth Keiser, *Courtly Desire and Medieval Homophobia: The Legitimation of Sexual Pleasure in Cleanliness and Its Contexts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 98.

²¹⁰ He does not use the term formal cause in the paragraph, but it fits the manner of his reasoning. The final cause of begetting children is the same as all human individuals: ultimate happiness, which is knowledge of God.

²¹¹ Keiser, 96.

²¹² E.g. *SCG* III:122-6 and 8.

Johnston, 289-97.

²¹³ John P Yocum, "Sacraments in Aquinas," in *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. John Yocum Thomas Weinandy, Daniel Keating (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 175-76.

These points are not directly stated in *SCG* but assumed as a metaphysical framework understood by the reader. This shows that Aquinas has his whole anthropology in mind when constructing arguments based on observation of nature. Because these arguments are deeply connected with the intellectual nature of humanity, they are not simple extrapolations from animal behaviour. The animality of humans is different because it is intellectual. This difference is an attenuated version of the difference between human intellect and divine intellect. There is similarity, but the ontological conditions of the higher mode of existence also create change. Aquinas does not only reason from animal sexuality upwards to human, but from human intellect down to human sexuality.

3.3 Sexual desire

The contemporary understanding of ‘sexual desire’ cannot be directly mapped onto a single component of Aquinas’ anthropology. The unity of the human form, or the soul, is vital to his anthropology. A single intellectual substance governs the whole person. But that substance operates according to the different kinds of being that the human being contains; that is, according to different degrees of relation to the body (hierarchy of being once again).²¹⁴ Humanity as a body has a vegetative soul, as a composite of body and form has a sensitive soul,²¹⁵ and as a form has an intellectual soul. There is no single faculty of desire: there are the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual appetites. We must consider how each of these appetites can take part in the desire for sex. Once we have done this, we will re-assemble them in section 3.3.4 to give a complete account of human sexual desire.

²¹⁴ *ST I-78-1c.*

²¹⁵ *ST I-77-8c.*

3.3.1 Vegetative sexual appetite

We have already discussed the vegetative appetite in section 1.3.1. It desires the natural goods of a living thing.²¹⁶ Importantly for our topic, the vegetative appetite is drawn to natural goods through human nature without need for deliberation.²¹⁷ The goods to which human nature is ordered do not seem to be altered by the Fall.²¹⁸ It is the strength of the vegetative appetite relative to the will which is corrupted, not the appetite itself. The vegetative appetite can desire things connected with human sexuality according to reason, even after the Fall. Within Aquinas' account the state of corruption seems to have little effect on the ordering and exercise of the vegetative appetite itself.²¹⁹ The pattern of relation between vegetative appetite and will is a different matter.²²⁰

The sexual act is different to other natural goods because it is directed towards the well-being of the whole species rather than the individual.²²¹ Aquinas understands both human and animal procreation to be a natural good worthy of pursuit by individuals.²²² This means that the sexual act, as the good of the species in general, is an object of the human vegetative appetite.²²³ Procreation is a duty laid upon corporate humanity rather than upon every individual human.²²⁴ But every human, though not necessarily bound to procreate, is an

²¹⁶ *De Anima* II:4 Lectio 7-312.

²¹⁷ *Super De anima* II:IV-7-317.

²¹⁸ *ST* I-78-2.

²¹⁹ *ST* I-II-17-8c and -8ad3. In this instance Thomas only claims that the vegetative or natural appetite is only within the command of reason. Given his broader understanding of sin this distances the vegetative from the effects of sin, which in ad3 Thomas explicitly centres in the sensitive appetite.

²²⁰ *ST* I-78-1ad3 and ad4.

²²¹ *SCG* III:122-4.

²²² *SCG* III:127.

Johnston, 607.

²²³ *Super De anima* II:IV-7-312.

²²⁴ *ST* II-II-152ad1.

instantiation of the human nature for whom procreation is a natural good. The ability of humans to understand themselves as individuals and distinguish between individual and species goods does not remove their vegetative appetite's natural desire for the good of the species. Every person's vegetative appetite desires sex.

However, the vegetative appetite has limited relevance to sexual desire for a specific object. Aquinas barely raises the vegetative appetite when discussing causes of sin; he is much more concerned with sensible objects drawing the will away from the perfect good.²²⁵ This is an argument from silence and must be treated with caution. But it directs our attention toward something that is not an argument from silence: that the vegetative appetite cannot directly dispose the will towards sensible objects (such as other humans).²²⁶

The vegetative appetite is unable to do this because it involves no apprehension of sensible objects or judgment about what goods are present in them. The natural instincts of the human animal recognise a natural good and move the vegetative appetite towards it.²²⁷ A human does not recognise a natural good using reason, as we do when we apprehend a sensible object as containing good using our own reason. The vegetative appetite may dispose the will *towards* an object, but it does not dispose towards it *as* a discrete object that can receive human action.

The vegetative appetite can incline the will towards sexual desire for another human. But the object of the vegetative appetite is not the other human as a concrete and specific object, but

²²⁵ E.g. he mentions and de-emphasises the vegetative in *ST* I-II-30-1 and I-II-77-6c.

²²⁶ *ST* I-II-17. We have already discussed this in section 1.3.1.

²²⁷ Thomas seems to discuss the vegetative and sensitive appetites together as general passion in *ST* I-II-22-3c: "This corporeal transmutation is found in the act of the sensitive appetite, and is not only spiritual, as in the sensitive apprehension, but also natural."

only as an instantiation of the natural good of sex. In contrast, the sensitive appetite always relates to substances that can be possible recipients of action.

3.3.2 Sensitive sexual appetite

The sensitive appetite was discussed above in section 1.3.2. To summarise, the sensitive appetite desires concrete individual substances.²²⁸ This desire is based upon the presence of universal goods within those substances. The sensitive appetite always comes from a judgment about a substance as possessing some good. This is like the vegetative appetite's attraction to natural goods.²²⁹ The difference is that the vegetative appetite is drawn directly through instincts imprinted in nature, while the sensitive appetite is mediated and acts in the context of a prior judgment by the reason.²³⁰

The sensitive appetite's role in sexuality comes closest to what is usually meant by the English phrase 'sexual desire.' Human beings are substances that can be the subject of the sensitive sexual appetite. The sensitive appetite desires this person, not another good that may be achieved through them. But this act of specific desire depends upon the reason's judgment about the presence of universal goods. The sensitive appetite is the aspect of Aquinas' sexual anthropology most connected with actual human beings rather than their goods or uses. And Aquinas considers precisely this aspect to be directly shaped by the interaction between human reason and the metaphysical arrangement of the universe.

²²⁸ Lee, 331.

Copleston, 2, 377-78.

²²⁹ *ST I-78-1*.

²³⁰ *ST I-81-3*.

The universe is forms realised in matter; forms both universal (goodness, light, beauty, weight) and specific (human, fish, fir tree, obsidian). As we discussed much earlier in chapter one, specific forms are not separate from matter which then take on corporeal existence.

Form and matter come into existence together through the act of being.²³¹

Human reason understands by a process of abstracting these forms from their realisation as form-matter composites. We must begin with sense data about concrete substances, since that is the makeup of the universe.²³² The reason considers not the individual substance, but its phantasm – the body’s memory and imagination representing the sense data about the substance.²³³ And then, by focusing on one part of a substance’s phantasm, the reason considers the substance apart from its individuality.²³⁴ This illustrates an important principle for Aquinas, which separates him from Plato:²³⁵ the senses and mind do not directly interact with substances or with forms, but with an impression of a substance or an idea of that form.²³⁶ He calls these sensible or intelligible species.

Sensitive sexual desire is a reverse of this abstraction. Once reason’s pendulum has swung up to the level of abstracted form, the sensitive appetite’s pendulum can swing down to the level of a form present in a substance. Aquinas summarises this process:

But it must be noted that, since every inclination results from a form, the natural appetite results from a form existing in the nature of things: while the sensitive appetite, as also the intellectual or rational appetite, which we call the will, follows from an apprehended form. Therefore, just as the natural appetite tends to

²³¹ Pabst, 202.

²³² *ST I-85-1c*.

²³³ *ST I-84-7c*.

²³⁴ *ST I-85-1ad1*.

²³⁵ *ST I-85-1ad2*.

²³⁶ He shows that the intellect cannot directly understand individual matter in *ST I-86-1c*.

good existing in a thing; so the animal or voluntary appetite tends to a good which is apprehended. Consequently, in order that the will tend to anything, it is requisite, not that this be good in very truth, but that it be apprehended as good. Wherefore the Philosopher says (Phys. ii, 3) that “the end is a good, or an apparent good.”²³⁷

The sensitive appetite is the closest approximation of our modern understanding of sexual desire for another person. It has a powerful effect upon human will by shaping our perception of what we desire.²³⁸ When Aquinas discusses distorting passions that lead to wrong human actions, he is generally referring to the sensitive appetite.²³⁹ His main understanding of sin is ordinate attachment to mutable goods;²⁴⁰ and such goods can only be desired by the sensitive appetite. But the sensitive appetite cannot directly move the human will.²⁴¹ For this reason, the choice to act wrongly cannot begin in the sensitive appetite. To consider the motive force of human actions we must turn to the volition, or intellectual appetite.²⁴²

3.3.3 Intellectual sexual appetite

The intellectual appetite is drawn to abstract and immaterial goods. Its end is some aspect of being in general. It can be drawn to the sexual act,²⁴³ but not because of the sexual act itself.²⁴⁴ We saw earlier that the vegetative appetite can desire sex by itself because it is a

²³⁷ *ST* I-II-8-1c.

²³⁸ *ST* I-II-9-2ad2.

²³⁹ *ST* I-II-75 to 77.

²⁴⁰ *ST* I-II-82-3c.

²⁴¹ *ST* I-81-3c.

²⁴² *ST* I-80-2c and I-II-77-6c.

²⁴³ *ST* I-78-1c and I-80-1ad3.

²⁴⁴ *SCG* IV:83-11. The intellectual appetite is fulfilled in the state of beatitude, which Thomas explicitly says is not concerned with bodily pleasures.

power of the body joined to the soul.²⁴⁵ It is concerned with natural goods about which the will cannot make decisions.²⁴⁶ The intellectual appetite, on the other hand, is concerned with immaterial matters. It cannot be moved by a material object. This is evident from the account of sensitive and intellectual appetite that Aquinas gives.²⁴⁷ It is also an implication of Aquinas' hierarchy of being, in which the immaterial is always above and governing the material.

The intellectual appetite has a role in sexual desire because the human being can understand its own nature. A human can understand sexuality's place within human nature. This includes the fact that certain immaterial goods are realised through sex. To rephrase Aquinas in an Augustinian style, the intellectual appetite can desire the proper use of corporeal things. This happens when the will moves the reason to understand nature and act accordingly.²⁴⁸

An intellectual appetite for sex will always be directed towards some immaterial end separate to sex itself. The intellectual appetite is not drawn to an abstract good that informs the object (as the sensitive appetite is). An immaterial good cannot be present in matter; if it were realised in matter (as the human form is) it would not be an immaterial good. The intellectual appetite concerns matter as a tool and medium. Only the intellectual appetite can do this, because only the intellectual soul receives immaterial goods. This does not mean that the intellectual appetite is detached from the universe of material things. It desires them through

²⁴⁵ *ST I-II-17-9c*.

²⁴⁶ *De Anima II:3 Γ Lectio 5-285*.

²⁴⁷ *ST I-80-2*.

²⁴⁸ It is important to remember that Thomas considers all three appetites to be potential powers of the same substantial form distinguished by their objects. They are not three ontologically separate faculties or abilities. Copleston, 2, 376.

If this is forgotten, it is possible to misread Thomas as teaching a strongly neo-Platonic dualism and sublimate his strong Aristotelian emphasis on individual substances.

reason as components ordered towards certain purposes. Substances are desired for goods, but not as goods.

The intellectual appetite is like the vegetative, in that it interacts with sexuality because it concerns what is suitable for human nature. But the intellect deals with being in general. Unlike the vegetative appetite, the intellectual does not directly desire what is suitable for individual life. It apprehends something as good for an individual because it is good for humans in general.²⁴⁹ The intellectual appetite has a different commonality with the sensitive appetite: it exists in the context of the exercise of human reason.²⁵⁰ The intellectual appetite is specified towards a particular object by the reason presenting that object.²⁵¹

Before I proceed to describe a morally sound operation of this appetite in sexual desire, it is necessary to clarify its relationship with the reason. The account of human action presented above in section 1.2 showed that the will (or intellectual appetite) commands the reason to evaluate an object and determines the method of evaluation. Since all objects other than God are imperfect, practically speaking the will can always accept or reject a non-God object.

Does this mean the will is arbitrarily free but imprisoned in logic?²⁵²

Aquinas' account of human freedom can be described as determined or arbitrary, depending on the element examined. This is a logical consequence of his Aristotelian view of causation.²⁵³ Nothing in the universe exists in an undetermined state, not even the human will. It must have an end and in this sense the will is completely bound to seek good. Since

²⁴⁹ O'Connor, 17.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 51-53.

²⁵¹ *ST I-II-9-1c*.

²⁵² As argued by: O'Connor, 49-56.

²⁵³ See especially the method of argument in corpus of *ST I-II-9-1* and *-2*.

good is always partial this side of beatitude, the will is completely free in terms of its specification to concrete goods which can lead to action.²⁵⁴

This does not mean all objects are equivalent. Various factors can influence the reason to give a misleading report, as I have explained above. This shows the prison of logic: the structure of human freedom means that every immoral act involves self-deception or ignorance. None of this is a problem for Aquinas. His purpose for human freedom is beyond natural capacities. A human will which is entirely free in terms of this universe but bound to seek beatitude suits his anthropological project perfectly. And he would be, I imagine, nonplussed by the idea that reason's involvement limits human freedom. Humans are rational creatures and will always act as such in accord with our nature. The intellectual appetite is free inasmuch as it has a plurality of objects, and not free inasmuch as it is one subject driven by one cause.

The intellectual appetite should be attracted towards the sexual act insofar as it leads to its proper natural goods: the common good of humanity, begetting of children, education of those children, and loving unity of the couple. It would be inordinate and sinful to desire other goods, or to desire these goods out of proportion. Reason could cause an inordinate intellectual desire by not understanding human nature, or through a failure of judgment regarding the degree to which these goods inhere in an object. The will could cause an inordinate desire by neglecting to sufficiently move the intellect to produce correct understanding or judgment.

²⁵⁴ Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," 210-15.

3.3.4 Synthetic sexual desire

We have explored Aquinas' own categories of vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual appetites. Now we can describe how they function together in something like the modern sense of sexual desire for another human being. For Aquinas, 'sexual desire' occurs in different senses.²⁵⁵ Firstly, the desire for the sexual act that stems from being an instantiation of the human form. This desire is a movement of the vegetative appetite and is not sufficient cause for any human action. The vegetative appetite is not directed towards concrete substances which can be objects of action.²⁵⁶ Secondly, this vegetative appetite coexists with sensible sexual desire for a specific human being who is judged as containing some mutable good. This is an act of the sensitive appetite since it consists of the will being moved by some sensible object as apprehended by reason.

Thirdly, the intellectual appetite or will can desire the sexual act because certain goods accompany it. The good motivations for sex that Aquinas mentions – procreation and charity – are not directly desired by the vegetative or sensitive appetites. The ends of procreation and marital love are abstract goods which are not included in the act of sex. They are effects and implications of sex. Rather than an urge fulfilled in the act of sex (vegetative good) or a good residing within the sexual partner (sensitive good), procreation and charity are immaterial. Aquinas' licit ends for sex treat it as one part within human life rather than its own end. These immaterial and holistic goods are only directly desired by the intellectual appetite. They are then included in the reason's assessment of a sensible object – since all external human actions concern a sensible object. The intellectual appetite is involved in sexual desire to the degree that it wills sex because it leads to other goods such as love and children.

²⁵⁵ For an outline of Thomas' view of human sexuality, see Milhaven.

²⁵⁶ Brock, 19-21.

We can observe the different effects of the different appetites when Aquinas discusses whether the sexual act is always a sin. He distinguishes between sex within marriage that seeks procreation or justice towards the partner, and sex that has other motivations.²⁵⁷ This shows that different motivations for sex produce morally different acts despite identical physical circumstances. Though Aquinas does not necessarily have the vegetative-sensible-intellectual distinction in mind here, he demonstrates that distinctions of motive are key to his view of sexual desire.

He continues with this theme in *Super Corinthos* by distinguishing between concupiscence (or strong sensible desire) which is content with your spouse, and concupiscence which settles for your spouse as the most convenient means of sex.²⁵⁸ This focuses the moral question on, not only the judgment made about the sexual partner, but the perception from which that judgment is formed. The limiting of sexual desire to your spouse could occur because of a high judgment about the goods present in them or because of a strong habit towards respecting marriage. In either case we see that Aquinas' understanding of a good sexual act involves deep analysis of not only the object, but the driving forces, of sexual desire.

I have shown that morally sound sexual desire has several aspects. Reasonable degrees of vegetative and sensible appetite are necessary conditions. The overarching and sufficient condition is a good immaterial end moving the intellectual appetite or will. Aquinas' apparatus for moral analysis of sex reaches into the internal causes of each act. In chapter four we will see this apparatus put to use, when his discussion of marriage follows his the same analytical path deep into the human heart.

²⁵⁷ *Super I Corinthos* 7:1-9-329, *ST* II-II-153-2c.

²⁵⁸ *Super Corinthos* 7:1-329.

3.4 Conclusion

Aquinas' understanding of human beings as unified composite material and intellectual creatures strongly shapes his understanding of sexual desire. Aquinas connects the existence of human sex difference at all to humanity's intellectual purpose of knowing God. The wider non-procreative purposes of sexuality (unitive, domestic, and sacramental) depend on human reason. He uses the child's need for intellectual education as a key argument in *SCG*'s discussion of marriage. His understanding of humanity as both corporeal-corruptible and immaterial-incorruptible underlies the reason for the sexual act. And this understanding produces the threefold distinction of appetites through which Aquinas analyses sexual desire.

Aquinas' sexual anthropology is shaped by his general anthropology at every turn. The consistent trend is for the human capacity for reason to be central to his understanding of sex. But the intellectual and the physical are not divided from each other. Aquinas retains his emphasis upon human beings as single composite substances. He considers human sexual desire as an appetite that involves all levels of body and soul – and yet sound human sexual desire seems to be determined by the role of the intellectual appetite. Considering the intellectual appetite takes us into the realm of Aquinas' sexual ethics. And this is the topic of our next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Introduction

I could caricature Aquinas' sexual ethic as 'don't have sex outside marriage.' Like most caricatures, this exaggerates a true feature. Marriage is the centrepiece of Aquinas' sexual ethic. Sex is designed for marriage – not only as a matter of human law or divine command, but as a matter of original human nature. All sex that occurs outside matrimony fails to respect human nature and seek the good of humans.²⁵⁹

The mere fact of marriage does not excuse any sexual act. Medieval theology generally treated sex within marriage as a venial sin excused by the marriage bond.²⁶⁰ The intense pleasure of the act was associated with the disordering effect of the Fall. But Aquinas takes a slightly different view of the relationship between human rationality and virtuous behaviour. A passion that impedes reason is not inherently wrong. It can be good if sought according to reason – otherwise it would be a sin to go to sleep. Edging slightly towards Abelard's view that sexual pleasure was innocent,²⁶¹ Aquinas thinks the intense pleasure of sex is not evil because it is natural and existed in the state of innocence.²⁶² Therefore, it can be used in a reasonable way.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Jean Porter, *Natural & Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Ottawa and Grand Rapids: Novalis and Wm B Eerdmans, 1999), 190.

²⁶⁰ Dennis P Hollinger, *The Meaning of Sex: Christian Ethics and the Moral Life* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 49.

²⁶¹ Porter, 191-94.

²⁶² Paul J Cornish, "Marriage, Slavery, and Natural Rights in the Political Thought of Aquinas," *The Review of Politics* 60, no. 3 (1998): 551.

In this he seems to have altered his thought since *De Sent* IV:26-1-3ad3; but see also *De Sent* IV:32-1-5requaest1.

²⁶³ *ST* II-II-153-2.

Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, 281-82.

This acceptance of sexual pleasure as essentially good sets Aquinas apart from many of his contemporaries and from Augustine and Aristotle.²⁶⁴ And it produces a more fine-grained examination of human motives. All sex outside marriage is sinful; but there are plenty of sinful ways to treat sex within marriage, both mortal and venial. What defines the good or sin of married sex is its ordering towards its naturally intended end. In order to differentiate between sin and virtue even within marital sex, Aquinas must specifically describe the end of sex.

4.0.1 Three aspects of marriage

Aquinas understands marriage in three ways: as an office of nature, as a remedy to sin, and as a sacrament of the church. These three aspects are explicitly identified in *De Sent*. They are still present in the background of *ST* and *SCG*. Marriage begins as an office of innocent human nature. Through human history, it gains new application and significance without the essence of marriage changing.

The two kinds of new aspect – remedy and sacrament – are very different. At least in Aquinas' early *De Sent*, there is a serious difference between marriage as a remedy and marriage as a sacrament. Marriage is a remedy for sexual concupiscence because it is ordered towards education of shared children. This point will be explored in section 4.2. No divine institution or action of positive law is necessary for marriage to be a remedy.²⁶⁵ The marriage law added through Moses adds further laws to marriage. These additions are not the cause of

²⁶⁴ Eric Fuchs, *Sexual Desire and Love: Origins and History of the Christian Ethic of Sexuality and Marriage*, trans. Marsha Daigle (New York: The Seabury Press, 1983), 125-34.

Michael Nolan, "Aquinas and the Act of Love," *New Blackfriars* 77, no. 902 (1996): 125-26.

²⁶⁵ *De Sent* IV:26-2-2c.

marriage becoming a remedy to disordered sexual desire. Positive law does not alter the essence of marriage, its concrete character for human beings; it only adds regulations that assist marriage to achieve its purpose.

Jesus institutes marriage as a sacrament of the church. Marriage is a sacrament because the relation between man and woman habitually signifies the union between Jesus and his church. But this signification as an instrument of grace is not essential to marriage. It is created by divine institution. This institution is what confers absolute indissolubility upon marriages contracted within the church.

To sum up: the three aspects of marriage have three different origins. The office of nature arises from how God has made human beings – specifically human sexuality. The office of remedy arises from the structures of the office of nature lived out by fallen humans. And the office of sacrament arises from an act of divine power, attaching to the corporeal relations inherent to marriage without arising from marriage itself.

The first two aspects are entirely conditioned by human nature, whereas the sacrament only finds human nature appropriate. In all three cases nature is a vital concept for Aquinas' view of appropriate human sexuality. Aquinas' understanding of nature is far from the modern meaning. I will therefore briefly unpack what nature means to him, before discussing the three offices of marriage in detail.

4.0.2 Aquinas' understanding of nature

Human nature does not mean only the instincts of human beings. The modern connotations of 'nature' obstruct our understanding of Aquinas at this point. He has a much more complex

understanding of what humans naturally want and do than their bare drives to eat, drink, sleep, and have sex. He fully accepts Aristotle's understanding of humans as naturally social. Human nature includes how the relationships and desires that form when humans lives together. For Aquinas, the abstract human nature capable of sensible action is always considered with respect to a hypothetical society.²⁶⁶ This means that his analysis of human marriage will always be influenced by its interaction with the wider society and species. A hypothetical marriage must be grounded in some context for the hypothetical to be useful.

Human sexuality is naturally ordered towards the voluntary society of marriage.²⁶⁷ The goods of human sexuality are only fully realised in the context of marriage. Aquinas does not move from human sexuality in general to sexuality as specifically expressed in marriage. Such a move would not be from general to specific for him, but from unnatural to natural. Marriage is natural and therefore all expressions of human sexuality stand in some connection to marriage – either as fulfilment or declension.²⁶⁸ For this reason, this chapter will address Aquinas' sexual ethic by exploring the three offices of marriage. These offices and their implications will address all of Aquinas' sexual ethic.

4.1 Marriage as natural

In several places, Aquinas argues that sex is good because it is part of the human nature God created. Nothing created by God can be evil – therefore it is good. This is an unexceptional

²⁶⁶ E.g. his immediate turn towards effects on the next generation in *SCG* III:122-6 and use of command by another in *ST* I-II-1-2ad1. These are only two examples; they could be given in the dozens.

²⁶⁷ *SCG* III:122-8, *Super I Corinthos* 7-316.

Thomas Petri, "Marriage and the Conjugal Act According to Thomas Aquinas," in *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body* (Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 279-80.

For the broader scholastic background to this view, see Porter, 189-96.

²⁶⁸ See the method of justification in *SCG* III:122-125 and *ST* II-II-153.

Petri, 287.

view. Where Aquinas stands out, as I noted in 4.0, is his acceptance of the intense pleasure of sex as foundationally good.

Aquinas considers marriage to be a matter of natural law. This means that its essentials are built into human nature. These are morally obligatory and the same in all cultures or times. However, Aquinas does recognise that custom or law (human or divine) can alter how marriage is expressed and realised. The advent of sin gives marriage the new dimension of remedying and excusing disordered sexual desire. This is a change in how marriage relates to the human being rather than in marriage itself. The divine institution of marriage as a sacrament of the New Law does seem to add meaning to sacramental marriages.

Alterations in positive law will be covered later in this section. Marriage as a remedy to lust will be covered in 4.2 and marriage as a sacrament of the church in 4.3. But the underlying office of nature does not change. Since Aquinas describes marriage as the only ordered expression of human sexuality, it could not change without a change to human sexuality, which would in turn require such an alteration of human essence that it would constitute a new kind of being.

Aquinas' explanation of the natural law of marriage is remarkably similar across his works that provide a detailed explanation of the topic.²⁶⁹ Sex is ordered towards maintain the species through procreation.²⁷⁰ Humans are rational animals and require not just generation

²⁶⁹ *De Sent* IV:26-39, *SCG* III:121-129, *Super 1 Cor* 7 lectio 1, *Super Matthew* 19.

²⁷⁰ Porter, 198-200.

Colleen McClusky, "An Unequal Relationship between Equals: Thomas Aquinas on Marriage," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2007): 1.

Michael Zuckert, "The Fullness of Being: Thomas Aquinas and the Modern Critique of Natural Law," *The Review of Politics* 69, no. 1 (2007): 45.

For a critical evaluation of Thomas' assumption here, see Gerald J Massey, "Medieval Sociobiology: Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Sexual Morality," *Philosophical Topics* 27, no. 1 (1999): 74-84.

but upbringing and education. A male is needed for help and education,²⁷¹ so male and female need to form a long-term partnership. Male desire to raise his own children means that the partnership should be sexually exclusive – and this exclusivity also binds the man, otherwise marriage would be unequal. This concern for equality and justice between the two parties of marriage is not created by revealed divine law. It is rooted in human nature itself, and Aquinas sometimes refers to it as natural equity.²⁷² Sexual activity is naturally ordered towards producing children – what Aquinas calls procreation or the act of generation, which in turn depends upon the sex act. Children are the chief end of marriage. And Aquinas’ sexual ethic rests on what is good for children. But he does not treat them as biological realities (as non-rational animals), but as rational creatures. Unlike animals, human children need not just food and protection but also education.²⁷³

This shared work of upbringing and education is what binds the two sexes together. The shared domestic life of a married couple is closely associated with the specific work of education. Such education takes a long time, because developing prudence through instruction and correction takes a long time. And it is appropriate for the relationship that depends on such work to be lifelong. The demands of educating children make marriage lifelong. Human marriage is like some animal behaviours, which Aquinas often references. But human marriage is distinctively different from animal coupling because of the needs of rational offspring.

²⁷¹ *SCG* III:122-6.

McClusky, 2-5. But note McCluskey’s argument that Thomas’ view here is not tenable: *ibid.*, 10-13.

²⁷² *SCG* III:123-3 “...naturalem aequitatem.”

Sexual activity is ordered towards producing children, and marriage is ordered towards the good of children. But that does not mean marriage is strictly defined by children.²⁷⁴ Marriage is a second-order part of human nature. It does not directly emerge from human powers, as eating and bearing children do. But it is carried out and, in a sense, constructed when rational social animals seek the good of their children in accord with human nature. The begetting, raising, and education of children is the end of marriage.

Marriage is structured for the good of children. But it is not constituted by children or dissolved by an inability to produce them. Aquinas emphasises that marriage is a kind of contract. It is an agreement or promise; an act of two human wills. The language of contract is not a metaphor, or not only a metaphor. Aquinas considers marriage to create a binding legal obligation between the two parties. When he discusses husband and wife relationships, it is often in terms of justice: what is owed to the other person.

The strongest example of this justice language is the ‘marital debt.’ This is how Aquinas refers to married couples’ obligation to have sex when the other party desires it. Marriage is ordered towards having children, and children are produced through sex. In contracting marriage, the parties give power over their own body to the other person for the purpose of sex. Aquinas understands the husband to have authority over his wife. But in the area of rendering the debt Aquinas stresses that husband and wife have equal rights to request sex. This equality occurs because husband and wife are equals in contracting marriage, and that contract is defined by giving away power over your body.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ See Porter on distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate forms of marriage. Porter, 205.

²⁷⁵ *Super 1 Cor 7* Lectio 1-322.

Agreeing to marriage is a human act in the full sense: it can only occur between rational animals. Though Aquinas frequently draws analogies between marriage and the mating habits of other animals, he moves to this similarity because of the all-important difference. Non-rational animals are governed by instinct; Aquinas assumes what they do is what is most appropriate for their nature. But humans are governed by will informed by reason. God gives marriage to maintain the proper order of reason over sensible things, which humans can undo and (since the fall) tend to undo.²⁷⁶

Because marriage is an act of will, it is not constituted by sex. However, the sexual act does have an important role. It is the bodily expression of the couple's mutual involvement in an office that is ordered towards children. Some scholars refer to it as the material element of marriage, compared to the formal element of consent. As the material expression of the marriage bond, consummation determines when marriage as a sacrament becomes indissoluble. I will explore its importance more in section 4.3 which discusses marriage as a sacrament.

Marriage's ordering towards children through marital sex is core to Aquinas' sexual ethic. What about couples who are unable to have sex? Aquinas is clear that sex is important to marriage. Impotence is grounds for dissolving a betrothal or for annulling a marriage made in ignorance.²⁷⁷ But he notes in passing at various times that marriage remains even when sex ceases to be possible.²⁷⁸ Aquinas likely does not approve of such a case. But he acknowledges it as a real marriage.²⁷⁹ The sexual act is not required for a real marriage to exist. But it is required to make the marriage not only spiritual but physical; and it is therefore

²⁷⁶ *SCG* III-121-2.

²⁷⁷ *De Sent* IV:34-1-2.

²⁷⁸ *De Sent* IV:37-1-2ad1 and -2ad2.

²⁷⁹ *De Sent* IV:34exp.

required to make a sacramental marriage indissoluble. Aquinas develops the non-sexual aspects of marriage as a particular kind of friendship, which I discuss below in 4.1.3.

Even if sex is possible, there can still be obstacles to begetting children. How does Aquinas assess sexual acts that cannot produce children? In the case of a married couple who are infertile, Aquinas' approach suggests that accidents outside the couple's control cannot influence the moral character of sex.²⁸⁰ This couple's sexual acts may not generate children. But they are still engaging in sex within the natural structure that is ordered towards children. The activity is correct even if the outcome is frustrated.

Sexual acts that intentionally avoid children are a different matter. We must distinguish between marital sex that could produce children save for human intervention (through contraception, sterility drugs, or abortion) and sexual acts that cannot produce children. The former case, which I will call contraceptive sex, Aquinas considers to be morally close to murder. Instead of removing a life which exists, contraceptive sex prevents a life from beginning by frustrating the process that should beget children.

The other relevant category is sexual acts that cannot produce children. These are more serious sins than sex outside marriage. Aquinas describes them as the vice against nature – a category which includes homosexual sex but is not restricted to it.²⁸¹ Aquinas draws a clear distinction between natural and unnatural lust: “The lustful man intends not human generation but venereal pleasures. It is possible to have this without those acts from which human generation follows: and it is that which is sought in the unnatural vice.”²⁸² Sins against

²⁸⁰ *De Sent* IV:32-1-1ad3 and 34-1-2ad4.
Petri, 301.

²⁸¹ *ST* II-II-154-11.

²⁸² *ST* II-II-154-11ad3.

nature are differentiated and more serious because they reject natural human sexuality and its ordering towards procreation and education.²⁸³

To summarise what we have learned about marriage by examining these frustrated cases: the more the intention of a sexual act departs from procreation realised in marriage (the end of sex) the more grievous a sin it becomes. But aspects of sex that are not subject to human intention (such as sterility) do not affect the goodness of marital sex. The sexual act is not part of the essence of marriage, though it is the right activity of that essence. Aquinas uses this distinction explicitly to discuss marriage's relationship with positive law.

4.1.1 Marriage and positive law

Marriage in a specific time and community is shaped by specific human and divine laws. This is called positive law. It has no ability to change the essence of marriage.²⁸⁴ But it can shape how marriage achieves its purposes; how it performs the role that rises out of its essence. To use other Thomistic language, positive law can govern the second perfection of marriage in operation, but not the first perfection of marriage's existence. Aquinas has a complex understanding of how marriage has changed over time through positive law. And this will help us identify the difference between marriage's essence and action.

Aquinas considers the old law's allowance of having several wives, ban on marrying close relatives, and allowance for divorce, to all be a matter of positive divine law. He does not consider each of these variations to be morally equal. He describes them variously as a regulation to help marriage achieve its purposes (ban on relatives), or a dispensation for a

²⁸³ *ST* II-II-154-12c.

²⁸⁴ Cornish, 555.

certain purpose such as avoiding a greater evil (divorce) or achieving a higher good (patriarchs having several wives).²⁸⁵

The framework Aquinas uses to make these judgements is generally what does and does not strengthen the marriage bond. Polygamy and divorce treat the wife as lesser (when marriage should be of equals) and are contrary to natural justice. Though Aquinas does not make his point in this exact form, his argument is that the equality of marriage is a secondary principle that can and should be inferred from the primary principle of marriage itself. Marriage is a relational or social reality rather than a biological one. Marriage may be ordered towards bearing children, but that ordering shapes a relationship that exists independently of children.

The attentive reader may note that I have mentioned divorce as something that husbands do to wives. Aquinas does not consider it appropriate for wives to initiate divorce, as it militates against their subjection to their husbands. Marriage is not a relationship of equals but a political hierarchy with the husband exercising power over the wife.²⁸⁶ This raises the question of in what sense husband and wife are equal. I now consider this question in detail.

4.1.2 Marital equality and subjection

Aquinas distinguishes between civil and servile subjection. The former existed in marriage before the fall. It is a form of social hierarchy; for Aquinas it is as uncontroversial as subjection to rulers (to which he often compares marriage). But political subjection does not

²⁸⁵ Thomas considers some of the patriarchs to have received a dispensation from having one wife in order to build up the people of God. This is a case of God dispensing with a secondary aspect of marriage for a higher good. Because the good is external to marriage, I will not discuss this point further.

For Thomas' view, see *De Sent IV:33-1-1c*.

On how Thomas makes his case, see O'Connor, 76-78.

²⁸⁶ *Super Ephesians 5:8*.

imply a specific difference between ruler and ruled. Civil subjection within marriage arises from the difference between men and women as two sub-types of humans. Women are subject to men in marriage because men have a greater power of reason. It is a natural hierarchy formed by the difference between the two groups.²⁸⁷ But like subjection to rulers, civil subjection of wife to husband is a form of order in which the parties together realise a larger good.

Civil subjection contrasts with servile subjection of wife to husband. This becomes a reality in marriage after the fall.²⁸⁸ This kind of subjection is different because it is not a hierarchy acting together, but simply a hierarchy. One person is subject to another when the other has command over them. For example, Aquinas describes slavery as an impediment to marriage, because a slave is not at liberty to promise the use of their body to another.²⁸⁹ The slave is entirely subject to the master rather than being governed by them in a certain aspect of civic life, as is the case for a subject of a ruler. Since the Fall, the wife's subjection to husband is like a slave's in that she must obey her husband's will even against her own. Aquinas does not describe the political subjection as being replaced; it seems to have shifted into a more absolute mode, which can be justly compared to slavery.

If a wife is always in subjection to her husband, whether civil or servile, how can she be his equal? This question is vital because Aristotelian friendships are between equals. To use friendship as a structure for the nature of marriage, Aquinas must establish equality in marriage. In *De Sent* Aquinas finesses the question of marital subjection and equality by

²⁸⁷ Petri, 289.
Miller, 186-88.
Cornish, 558 note 47.
Johnston, 583.

²⁸⁸ Miller, 188.

²⁸⁹ *De Sent* IV:34-1-2ad4.

distinguishing between two kinds of equality: quantity and proportion.²⁹⁰ Quantity is the magnitude of something while proportion is a kind of relationship between two things.

Aquinas uses the example of two different numbers being doubled. They are unequal in quantity but insofar as they are both doubles, they have an equality of proportion. To give another example, imagine two people employed to cut down trees. One is more efficient and cuts down many more trees in a day's work. The workers are equal in proportion, in their shared purpose and identity as tree-loppers. But they are unequal in their quantitative contribution to tree-logging.

Within marriage, men and women are not quantitatively equal in either the sexual relation or the management of the home. The husband has the active role in sex – which is nobler due to Aristotelian philosophy, as noted earlier. And the husband rules domestically. But husband and wife are equal in proportion in both areas, because they are equally bound to each other.

Aquinas argues from this equality of bond towards Lombard's statement that husband and wife are equal in the matter of asking for sex and receiving it. The marital debt comes from the bond, which binds both equally. Aquinas distinguishes between the actions of a married couple and their bond. This is the distinction between something's essence and its action based on that essence; a distinction which has already been important in the discussion of positive law in section 4.1.1.

²⁹⁰ *De Sent* IV:32-1-3c.

See McClusky, 7-11.

A much sounder explanation of the male-female relationship on Aristotelian lines is given in Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 2003), III.

What is this essential bond? In *De Sent* and *ST* Aquinas emphasises the contractual nature of marriage. In *SCG* and *ST* he also refers to it as a certain kind of friendship. I will now explore what that means for him.

4.1.3 Marriage as friendship

SCG does not discuss marriage in the same detail as *De Sent*. This is partly because *SCG* is arguing towards Aquinas' position from natural reason rather than expounding that position in detail, and partly because *SCG* deals with those aspects of marriage where Aquinas considers the equality almost absolute rather than differentiated. These aspects are the power over the body of your spouse and the relational bond of marriage. Aquinas in turn focuses on these because *SCG* discusses marriage in the context of proving that God orders humanity regarding sensitive desires in a reasonable way. Within the marriage the relevant sensitive desire is usually sexual; sexual desires are governed by the marriage bond; hence Aquinas' theme of absolute equality in the sexual relationship rises to the surface.

SCG differs from the presentation in *De Sent* in that it explicitly describes marriage as a friendship. The understanding of marriage as Aristotelian friendship, likely that of utility, seems to be latent in *De Sent*. But *SCG* moves this understanding to the foreground and makes it part of Aquinas' argument for indissoluble marriage.²⁹¹ To do this he must implicitly relate marriage to the greatest kind of friendship, which in Aquinas' Aristotelian context is virtuous friendship (as superior to the temporary friendship of utility).²⁹² Virtuous friendship

²⁹¹ *SCG* III:121-6.

²⁹² For Thomas' understanding of Aristotle on this point, see *Super Ethics* VIII lectio 3. Massey, 80.

is based on two virtuous people loving each other's virtue and desiring good for the other party through yourself.²⁹³

But this apparent shift in Aquinas' view can be understood in various ways. Some scholars consider Aquinas to have come to a higher view of the friendship involved in marriage. But they acknowledge that Aquinas does not explicitly discuss the character of marriage in *De Sent*.²⁹⁴ It is possible that rather than moving to a higher view of friendship in marriage, Aquinas already considered marriage to be a virtuous friendship at the time of *De Sent* but understood the use of the point at the time of *SCG*. Or he might have considered the different purpose of *SCG* to require more arguments based on natural reason views of relationships.

All this only demonstrates the difficulty of deriving a person's intellectual trajectory from the record of their intellectual history. A series of works with different perspectives does not prove a changing perspective in their author. Aquinas has a higher explicit view of marriage as a natural office by *SCG* but that does not mean he had a lower view in *De Sent*. I do not have sufficient grounds to say that his view of the natural office of marriage as a friendship changed over time. But there is no question that a higher view of marriage is more evident in his later works.

4.2 Marriage as remedy

Humans are not what we once were. As described in section 2.2, the loss of original justice means human desires are disordered. The sensitive desires of the body distort the judgment of

²⁹³ *Super Ethics* VIII lectio 3 1574-1584.

²⁹⁴ *De Sent* IV:26-1.

Petri, 285.

reason. And distorted judgement in turn produces acts of human will which are not ordered by reason. Sexual desire is the exemplary case because the pleasures associated with sex are so strong.²⁹⁵ Aquinas considers the intense pleasure of sex to be part of original human nature and therefore good.

What has changed, and therefore needs ordering, is the context within which sex occurs – with reference to the relationship between the human seeking sex and the pleasure of the act. Desiring sex because of the associated pleasure is always a sin of some degree. The only worthy reasons for sex are bearing children or rendering the marital debt to the other party. All other motivations are disordered in some way. What was needed was some way of perpetuating the species in a way that strengthened order rather than undermining it. And marriage has this function now that humanity is corrupt.²⁹⁶

4.2.1 Marriage as remedy through fidelity

Marriage functions as a remedy for disordered sexual desire because it specifies that desire to one person.²⁹⁷ It orders sexual desire according to reason – not through the judgement of the desirer, but through their contractual circumstances. This is the good of fidelity, where each spouse gives the power over their sexuality to the other party. Aquinas repeatedly emphasises that marriage involves a kind of obligation in the area of sex. To give your spouse access to your body for sex is a matter of justice, and to deny such access is an act of fraud. Marriage's good of fidelity helps order sexuality by establishing a quasi-legal reciprocal duty.

²⁹⁵ Hollinger, 49.

²⁹⁶ *Super I Corinthos* 1-316.

²⁹⁷ *Super I Corinthos* 1-318.

This does not change the nature of marriage. Aquinas refers to marriage as a kind of contract without any sense that it became a contract after the Fall. But this dimension of marriage was latent in application before the Fall. Innocent humanity did not need help ordering their desires. After the Fall, humans do not always act according to reason. We cannot trust ourselves to form and adhere to the natural partnership of marriage. Marriage as a remedy against concupiscence no longer simply is; now it makes contractual demands. But these demands are only the requirements of marriage as an office of nature.

4.2.2 Marriage as remedy based on office of nature

Marriage is a remedy for sexual concupiscence, not because it has grown beyond an office of nature, but precisely because it is an office of nature. Sin is use of a created thing contrary to reason. Sex is meant to be ordered towards begetting and raising children. Marriage is a natural office directed towards the same end. It is not created by having children, but by mutual consent.²⁹⁸ The parties of husband and wife share domestic life.²⁹⁹ This domestic life arises from the shared work of raising and educating children,³⁰⁰ to which marriage is ordered as an office of nature. The ordering towards children, and the shared domestic life it produces, do not arise from an individual couple having children. That is an accidental fact. Accidents are not definitional for any nature or office.

²⁹⁸ Petri, 275.

Porter, 209.

Nolan, "Aquinas and the Act of Love," 117.

Aquinas' view aligns with the French school of the time. See Fuchs, 132.

²⁹⁹ Cornish, 553. Gondreau, 44.

³⁰⁰ Petri, 273-4.

Because domestic life is ordered towards children, sex between wife and husband always happens within a context that is ordered towards children – even when the motivation for sex is not ordered towards children. Marriage provides an overarching structure that directs sex towards its reasonable end of children. The context of marriage provides something of the due circumstances for sex.³⁰¹ Therefore sex with a spouse for the purpose of pleasure is venial sin rather than mortal. Even though such a purpose is not the reasonable end of sex, marriage gives a structure where the reasonable end of sex is never excluded.

However, marriage's provision of structure for sex is not simply giving the right material. Aquinas does not, on the basis that the right structure exists for raising and educating children, say any sex for pleasure within marriage is venial. It is only venial when specifically approaching one's own spouse for the sake of pleasure.³⁰² Approaching your spouse not as the individual married to you but as the most convenient way of finding sexual pleasure is mortal sin. This shows that for Aquinas, the marriage relationship is not about providing a body for having sex without prejudice to any children. Failing to treat the spouse as a spouse rather than an available body negates marriage's excusing effect.

The excusing effect is constituted not by the spouse's mere existence but by recognising them as a spouse while using them for the end of sexual pleasure. Their identity as a spouse comes from the shared life, which is naturally established for children. Human sex acts that seek sensitive pleasure can proceed based on reasoned understanding of the marriage context – or fail to proceed with such understanding. Marriage does not simply excuse venial lust by

³⁰¹ *De Sent* IV:31-2-1c.

³⁰² Thomas usually refers to husbands seeking sex from their wives. Given his strong emphasis that husbands and wives are equal in the matter of sex, it is legitimate to assume he assesses wives' desire for their husbands in the same way.

SCG III:123-3 and 4, *De Sent* IV:32-1-3.

altering the material circumstances. It excuses venial lust by altering the circumstances of the reasoned and willed act.

The excusing power of marriage as a remedy for sexual concupiscence rests upon two things. First, marriage's essential ordering towards children. This shows that the good of children is constitutive of marriage. Second, the role of reason in forming the contexts for human acts. Even the degree of sinfulness for lustful sex in marriage is determined by how they understand their spouse. This shows that marriage is not only bound up with the vegetative and sensitive powers but aims to affect the intellectual power as well.

4.3 Marriage as sacrament

4.3.1 Sacraments in general

Humans are rational animals: corporeal and with physical senses but ordered to the intellectual knowledge of God. God therefore provided physical means for us to move towards knowledge of him. These are the sacraments: physical instruments for applying the benefit of Jesus' death. That benefit is grace. And grace consists in the form of charity (perfect love) which directs the human soul towards the knowledge of God. This form is intensified by taking the sacraments.³⁰³ It is lost when a human departs from charity by committing a mortal sin.

The physical elements of a sacrament relate to one another in a manner which can be analogous to grace. In baptism, the washing with water is like washing with the Spirit. And in

³⁰³ Gondreau, 50.

marriage, the union of husband and wife is like the union between husband and wife. But although God has chosen appropriate things as sacraments, the signification and efficacy of the sacraments comes from God's choice. The physical elements do not necessarily symbolise or convey grace.³⁰⁴

4.3.2 Note on sources

There is less material in Aquinas' writings touching directly on marriage as a sacrament. *De Sent* gives an extremely detailed analysis of marriage, but it comes from early in Aquinas' teaching career and must conform to the structure of Lombard's text. Where his philosophical and biblical commentaries touch on marriage, it is necessarily a brief digression to expand the text. *SCG* deals with marriage directly and at length. But it uses natural reason as its starting point. Although theological categories are used, they are not developed in depth as in *ST*.

Aquinas stopped work before *ST*'s discussion of the sacraments reached marriage. There is plenty of material in which Aquinas references marriage as a sacrament. But a detailed discussion of marriage as a sacrament is lacking. This section will therefore describe Aquinas' understanding of the sacrament from a range of texts rather than citing a clear discussion in *ST*.

³⁰⁴ For a good introduction to Thomas' doctrine of the sacraments, see Yocum.

4.3.3 Sacramental marriage

When performed as a sacrament of the church under the new law of God, marriage communicates the grace of Jesus.³⁰⁵ Aquinas suggests that this grace lets the couple enjoy each other rightly³⁰⁶ and represses concupiscence.³⁰⁷ These are the benefits of justifying grace. Marriage has a shaping effect on how the grace is communicated, but does not alter what grace is communicated. Marriage as a sacrament communicates the grace of Jesus rather than any aspect of itself.

Marriage is distinct from other sacraments in its relation to the grace of Jesus. Aquinas uses the standard medieval distinction between grace as a reality contained in the sacrament and grace as a reality signified by the sacrament. The union between Christ and church is not contained in marriage, only signified.³⁰⁸ This differentiates it from the Supper in which Christ is contained. But Aquinas emphasises a moment later that there is another reality in marriage and not just a signification. From context this second reality is the marriage bond. This reality and the signifying work of the sacrament are congruent in the obligation contracted. The final reality, separate to the sacrament, is the effect of creating the marriage bond.³⁰⁹

To condense these distinctions: the real thing in marriage which represents Jesus and his church is the contracted obligation. Aquinas notes that the symbolic value of sex is different between husband and wife.³¹⁰ Aristotelian philosophy means that the man as active agent has the nobler and greater role in both sex and marital government. But the sacramental quality

³⁰⁵ Petri, 281.

³⁰⁶ *De Sent* IV:26-2-3c.

³⁰⁷ *De Sent* IV:26-2-3ad4.

³⁰⁸ *De Sent* IV:26-2-1ad4. Thomas opposes Lombard on this point. See IV-26 in Lombard's *Libri Quattuor Sententiarum*.

Super John 2:1-338.

³⁰⁹ *De Sent* IV:26-2-1ad5.

³¹⁰ *De Sent* IV:32-1-3c.

first and foremost attaches to the bond of marital obligation. Marriage as an office of nature remains normative for marriage as a sacrament.³¹¹

4.3.4 Indissolubility from sacrament

In *SCG* Aquinas argues for the indissolubility of marriage from human nature as well as from the divine law that establishes marriage as a sacrament.³¹² This appears to conflict with his statement in *De Sent* that absolute indissolubility comes from marriage as a sacrament. It is true that in *SCG* Aquinas treats the lifelong nature of marriage as arising from natural concerns such as knowledge of your own children and faithful love.³¹³ These concerns are established by human and divine law. But the essence of natural law cannot be established or altered by positive law, as discussed earlier. Aquinas' arguments must concern how marriage is made perfect rather than made real.

He explicitly points out that divorce was allowed under the old law in order to prevent a greater evil.³¹⁴ Positive law can outlaw or allow divorce. Indissolubility is part of the second perfection of marriage: not what it is, but what it is when maximally achieving its purpose. The sacramental character of marriage adds a supernatural reason for indissolubility.³¹⁵ This divine positive law is described in parallel with human positive law; but it supplements the deficiency of instinct rather than only developing it: "But if they are divine laws, they not only develop the prompting of nature but also supplement the deficiency of natural instinct,

³¹¹ Gondreau, 51.

³¹² *SCG* III:123.

³¹³ *SCG* III:123 2-6.

³¹⁴ *SCG* III:123-10.

³¹⁵ *De Sent* IV:26-2-1ad1 and *SCG* III:123-7.

Petri, 283.

as things that are divinely revealed surpass the capacity of human reason.”³¹⁶ Marriage as a sacrament has a healing aspect.³¹⁷

Marriage as a remedy involves no change or addition to marriage. It is the office of nature that enables all marriages to bridle lust when sex has a specific intention. But the sacramental aspect involves an addition to marriage: the symbolism of Christ’s union with his church. An addition to marriage cannot be part of marriage’s essence as an office of nature (then it would not be an addition) and cannot alter marriage’s essence (then marriage would no longer be the same thing). Like human positive law, the sacramental aspect is concerned with the substantial existence of marriage rather than its essence. Unlike human positive law, it adds something new by relating marriage to an external reality.

This addition does not directly dignify marriage’s action of sex or raising children, but the foundation of marriage which is the conjugal bond.³¹⁸ Even Aquinas’ brief mention of the sacrament in *SCG*³¹⁹ is in the context of the relationship’s suitability for procreating and raising children rather than the activity itself. This relies on the same implicit distinction between marriage’s existence and its perfection.

There is a possible inconsistency in that the sacrament dignifies the bond rather than sex; why, then, does sex make a marriage indissoluble?³²⁰ Aquinas resolves this by describing marriage before consummation as an imperfect spiritual bond, which is not absolute until the

³¹⁶ *SCG* III:123-7: “Si autem divinae sunt, non solum instinctum naturae explicant, sed etiam defectum naturalis instinctus suppleant: sicut ea quae divinitus revelantur, superant naturalis rationis capacitatem.”

³¹⁷ See also *De Sent* IV:26-2-3c.

Gondreau, 42.

³¹⁸ *De Sent* IV:31-2-2c.

³¹⁹ *SCG* III:123.

³²⁰ E.g. before consummation one spouse may dissolve the marriage by entering religious life. *De Sent* IV:27-1-3-requaest2c.

physical act occurs.³²¹ Though sex does not make a marriage, the ability to have sex is normally necessary. Aquinas distinguishes between the essence (first act) and activity (second act) of marriage. But he still requires the essence to be perfected by action for it to be fully realised. He even explicitly describes marriage before sex as imperfect regarding first existence.³²²

This fits well with his position in *De Sent* that the ability to have sex is normally necessary to contract marriage, since you cannot contract to give something impossible. The exception is where the other party is aware of impotence (or sterility) and still desires marriage, in which case they have other desires than sex or children.

4.4 Conclusions

The strength of Aquinas' view of sexuality is precisely his use of many disparate concepts, subordinated to his wider metaphysic. He always has another angle of attack. Even in this condensed survey, examining Aquinas' understanding of sexuality has meant discussing the concept of nature, procreation, marital sexual obligations, the scope of positive law, different types of subjection, different types of friendship, and the dignifying effect of sacramental institution.

In Aquinas' wider anthropology, there is a bright line running from the creation of humans as rational animals to their fulfilment in knowing the perfect good and delighting in him. I have

³²¹ *De Sent* IV:27-1-3-requaest2.

³²² "...quod conjunctio matrimonialis ante carnalem copulam est quid imperfectum quantum ad esse primum..."
De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2ad3.

not found a similar line in the specific topic of sexuality. But certain points have come to the fore in the course of this chapter – hence the plural title of this section, ‘Conclusions.’

First, I note the distinction between something’s first perfection of existing with its essence and its second perfection of performing its appropriate activity.³²³ This distinction continually recurred in this chapter. It allows Aquinas to describe marriage developing without changing its nature. It is a work-around for his hylomorphic metaphysic, where a thing’s essence is determined by its specific form realised in signified matter. To change the essence would mean changing either the matter (not possible in developing marriage) or the form (which would result in a different thing). The existence-action distinction is not arcane but allows Aquinas to describe given facts of nature in changing social and supernatural circumstances.

Second, I note that Aquinas is more concerned with the marriage relationship than with marital activities. He mainly discusses sex, authority, and property in terms of how they are conditioned by marriage. The bond is the logical ground of these activities. But Aquinas describes this bond in terms of its suitability for begetting and raising children. This shows that he applies marriage’s ordering towards children at the level of essence; it conditions the bond, which in turn conditions activity. Sexuality is always considered in relationship rather than as a pure action. This is another example of the existence-action distinction hovering in the background.

After a non-exhaustive but exhausting look at Aquinas’ view of sexuality, I now turn to how his anthropology formally shapes this view. This takes us to chapter five.

³²³ Explicitly applied to marriage in *De Sent* IV:26-2-4c.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Introduction

I have canvassed Aquinas' sexual anthropology, moving from its context of general metaphysics to sexual difference and its ethical use. Now I narrow my focus to how his sexual ethic applies two anthropological concepts: the distinction between existence and realisation,³²⁴ and intellect as the defining characteristic of humanity.

I argue that Aquinas' use of these concepts shows that his anthropology defines the field of action when he discusses sexual ethics. His arguments and distinctions tend to build upon central concepts within his anthropology. Because his anthropology is derived from his general system of thought – as chapters one and two explored – his sexual ethic has deep connections with his whole system of thought. This thesis unfortunately cannot explore that entire connection. But atomising the material by ethical topic would obscure some important influences. I will point out some examples as I analyse Aquinas' use of the existence-realisation and intellect concepts in certain texts.

Existence-realisation is not a wholly anthropological concept for Aquinas. It is part of his general metaphysic and applies to all created things. But it is most fully developed and applied in his anthropology. Aquinas' human being is a complex beast made up of form and matter, act of being, reason and sense and primal appetite. This complexity does not make humans more noble than simpler creatures.³²⁵ But it evokes Aquinas' greatest powers of distinction. The necessary connection of anthropology and metaphysic will be explored at the

³²⁴ Also called first and second perfections.

³²⁵ Angels are simpler but nobler, since their simplicity comes from being purely intellectual creatures.

end of sections 5.1 and 5.2, insofar as each concept is relevant to that connection. I will now discuss Aquinas' use of existence-realisation in his sexual anthropology and ethic.

5.1 Existence and realisation

The distinction between existence and realisation is a significant element of Aquinas' metaphysic. It frequently recurs in both his anthropology and his resolutions of moral questions. The distinction is simple and intuitive: a thing existing as a thing of a certain kind is distinct from it exercising the powers of its kind. A sick human that cannot move or eat is still a human. But a healthy human that can move and eat is a better human – or perhaps more expressive of full humanity.

The intuitive nature of the distinction obscures the conjunction of metaphysical concepts it requires. Just because a concept feels natural does not mean that the concept is equally available to all intellectual structures. Aquinas can make this distinction because of how certain elements of his metaphysic interact. And his use of it in the area of marriage and sexuality rests upon the broader structure of his anthropology. I will explore its general use first, and then the more specific use in marriage.

5.1.1 General use of existence-realisation

Aquinas often distinguishes between being a kind of thing and realising the potential of its kind. In the general sense, the distinction depends upon two elements in Aquinas' metaphysic: the nature of a thing is specified by its form,³²⁶ and existence is understood as

³²⁶ *De ente* 4 to 9.

specified activity.³²⁷ I will briefly re-introduce these two elements and highlight the points that pertain to this chapter.

First, the type of any existing thing is defined by its form. A form is the immaterial idea or principle of that type. It determines species. In English anything can be *specified* or *specific*. When we talk about a specific pen, we are not only choosing but pointing out a difference between this pen and others. Form powers this separation through definition for Aquinas.³²⁸ It is not entirely responsible for the essence or what-ness of a thing; designated matter is relevant as well, as I discussed in section 1.1.4. But form takes the lead role.

Second, existence is action specified by form (and realised in matter). Something begins to exist through its form receiving the act of existence and thus being realised in matter. For Aquinas, activity is not something predicated of beings that already exist. Activity is existence.³²⁹ The common meaning of ‘action’ is a continuation of the act of existing. Existence is received from God as the act of being, but it is not a passive or external operation. Specified existence is the first action of a thing. Act and existence and form are simultaneous. Hence, Aquinas is sometimes willing to refer to form as the first act of a thing. If you imagine a thing as a line drawn on paper, form is the colour of ink used – present and significant wherever the line goes.

³²⁷ *De unitate* III:64-66, *De ente* 55-56, *ST I*-66-1c.

³²⁸ There are two different kinds of forms that operate in this sense: substantial forms which are realised in matter and define a substance or distinct creature, and accidental forms which distinguish creatures of the same species or non-living artefacts. In this chapter I am concerned only with the first kind of form. Pasnau, 154 and 72.

³²⁹ This point is deeply rooted in Thomas’ doctrine of God – particularly the idea of divine simplicity. I cannot discuss this connection in this thesis. Farthing compares Thomas and Biel on divine simplicity in an illuminating way:

John L Farthing, *Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1988), 10-17.

See *ST I*-3-3 and -4.

The relevant point for sexual anthropology is that existence-realisation supports ontological continuity, and even a kind of identity, between something's specified existence and its subsequent actions. This allows Aquinas to define a thing's actions by its kind. Aquinas can make this action-kind connection without defining a thing's kind by its actions. The activity of a thing is specified by its form rather than by the thing's own activities.³³⁰ In the case of sexual anthropology, this means that all sexual actions are specified by human nature.

The relationship between these two elements and the distinction Aquinas makes is complex. It is helpful at this point to hold Aquinas' view up to the light of a hypothetical comparison. How would the existence-realisation concept be altered if Aquinas adopted a simpler approach to form and action? Say, by removing one of the two elements I have just re-introduced?

We begin with form. If we remove form, then we are left with a continuity of action. One way that we recognise human beings is human actions like language. Without form, maximum performance of actions like language use would become the concept used for identifying humans.³³¹ Humanity would be replicating or participating in this maximum cow-action. Under this view a human with damaged language centres in their brain would be intuitively less human than a human with language. And Aquinas would agree in some sense.

But the loss of form makes it difficult to define the activity of a thing. What is a human action logically prior to humanity? There are few convincing examples. This is because we are no longer considering what humans do. Instead we have the much harder task of describing what

³³⁰ Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, 119.

The activities of a thing do shape it. To give a strong example, a human who has just eaten a poisonous plant is different to a cow that has not. But this is an accidental rather than substantial change; a human's actions can kill themselves but cannot stop themselves being human rather than another kind of thing.

³³¹ If we maintain the rest of Thomas' metaphysics, focused as it is on teleological realisation.

a thing could do to demonstrate or make itself a human. Without specification as an inherent link with action, there is no grounding to make any action a human action.³³² The only action a human can take that ontologically demonstrates its humanity is the act of existing *specified as a human*.

A pseudo-form of maximum human activity has no ontological grounding. Maximum human action must ultimately be clarified as either a principle prior to action (in which case we are back to something like Aquinas' view) or a mental concept for classifying created things. If the latter, we enter the field of nominalism and there is really no such thing as human nature.³³³ This leads to a loss of any sense of kinds as Aquinas understands them. Instead of kinds of things, there would be clusters of greater similarity in actions within a vast spectrum of things. In losing form we have lost the ability to define human actions. Form's role in specifying existence allows Aquinas to consider certain actions to be the proper actions of a kind of thing, without being arbitrary or requiring that those actions be unique to this kind.

We now turn to the other element that supports the existence-realisation distinction, and its hypothetical loss. What would change if Aquinas did not hold a continuity of action between existence and other actions? In this hypothetical a human exists through form. But existing is not an action; human existence and language use are not in continuity. They do not share an ontological register or category. This hypothetical also produces a difficulty in linking human actions with humanity. It is not hard to define characteristically human actions. It is difficult to assess them.

³³² Even if we could identify an action that only humans can perform, we could immediately imagine another animal which shares this capacity but is not a human as we understand ourselves – a human without a sense of humour, for example.

³³³ This would be anachronistic and historically unlikely. Nominalism had not developed in Thomas' period, and medieval nominalism did not strongly intersect with later Thomism. See: Heiko A Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 3 ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 4.

Without form, human actions were required to mean too much; without continuity of action they mean too little. The form specifies a human's nature. Because there is a separation between existing with a certain essence and acting, a thing's actions can express what it is but not alter it. And in one sense this is true. A brain-damaged human is no less human than a healthy human. But a healthy human is better – and it is this sense of 'better' that has been lost. The form-defined existence of a human does not change with its actions. There is no ontological or formal reason for considering one human more expressive of full humanity than another. A human with language abilities may be more useful to others, but that is indifferent to its humanity.

This is not necessarily a problem for metaphysics in general. But it is a problem for Aquinas. The purpose or fitting end of each created thing is bound up with what it is. And nothing is without teleology. Without a continuity of action between existence and later action, it is difficult to see how a thing's form can be teleological and developmental in the way that Aquinas assumes.

Aquinas' relation between existence and realisation uses form and continuity of action. And both are needed to support the ways Aquinas wants to talk about created things. Form is needed to define the activity of a thing. And continuity of action is needed to provide an ontological link between beginning and action. As continuity of action without form is undefined, so form without a continuity of action is lifeless. This shows that the existence-realisation distinction relies upon other concepts to function. In section 5.1.2 I will show how important the distinction becomes in Aquinas' analysis of sexual ethics. And on that basis, I will argue that anthropology shapes the landscape beneath Aquinas' sexual ethic.

5.1.2 Existence and realisation in sexual ethics

The distinction between existence and realisation³³⁴ is an important part of Aquinas' sexual ethic. He often introduces it to support his reasoning behind a moral judgment. To give a non-exhaustive list: he uses it to clarify why an unconsummated marriage can be dissolved by one spouse taking religious vows,³³⁵ why an infertile marriage is truly marriage, why sex outside marriage is a sin for all, why marriage is meant to be indissoluble without always being so,³³⁶ and why marriage is shaped by sex even when no sex is occurring.

The distinction sometimes underlies his argument on a point without being clearly raised; for example, when he explains why a marriage on the condition of contraception is invalid, and why marriage after the Fall is a remedy for sin without any special operation of grace.³³⁷ A relation between existence and realisation may not be essential to his sexual ethic, but it provides a suitable metaphysical operating system. This makes it substantially easier for Aquinas to articulate his sexual ethic. The distinction also helps connect his sexual ethic with his wider view of created existence.

I will now briefly analyse how this occurs in two places where Aquinas introduces the distinction: one from his commentary on the Sentences and one from his incomplete commentary on 1 Corinthians. This will establish that the existence-realisation distinction is not only relevant in the way I argue, but that its relevance spans Aquinas' writing career and occurs in expositions of both theological and biblical texts.

³³⁴ For the connection between this distinction and form-matter, see: Zhao, 553.

Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 376-78.

³³⁵ *De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2c*.

³³⁶ *SCG III:123-10*.

³³⁷ *De Sent IV:26-2-2c* and *31-2-1c*.

Firstly, I discuss one of the minor questions in Aquinas' discussion of religious life dissolving marriage.³³⁸ Aquinas explicitly introduces the distinction between first and second act in answering the final objection in a minor question.³³⁹ The distinction is described as between first and second act. Its use is short and almost offhand. But as Aquinas says, it is brief because the same point has already been made:

The matrimonial union before physical intimacy is something imperfect as regards first being, as was said above, but not consummated as regards second act which is activity; and likewise for bodily possession; and thus it does not have indivisibility in every way.³⁴⁰

'Said above' refers to the leading paragraph of this response, where he points out that sex adds a physical bond to the spiritual bond created by consent to marry.³⁴¹ 'Bodily possession' refers to his second argument that control over the spouse's body is transferred by the act of sex.³⁴² Aquinas considers both these arguments to be forms of the existence-realisation distinction. He does not develop his argument from first and second act because he considers it functionally equivalent to what he has already said.

Aquinas treats a highly specific question of sexual ethics in the response just cited. It initially appears to be a poor foundation for an argument about Aquinas' sexual ethic in general. But his analysis of what elements of the sacrament are present immediately reaches for the existence-realisation distinction – not just once, but in three different forms.³⁴³ And the third

³³⁸ *De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2.*

³³⁹ *De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2ad3.*

³⁴⁰ "...quod conjunctio matrimonialis ante carnalem copulam est quid imperfectum quantum ad esse primum, ut supra dictum est, sed non consummata quantum ad actum secundum qui est operatio; et similatur possessioni corporalis; et ideo nec omnimodam indivisibilitatem habet."

De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2ad3.

³⁴¹ *De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2c.*

³⁴² *De Sent IV:27-1-3-requaest2ad2.*

³⁴³ Spiritual-physical, begun-possessed, and first-second acts.

response demonstrates that he is aware of the underlying similarity between his arguments. Aquinas is content to present essentially one metaphysical basis for analysing the existence of a marriage bond. This could be a result of strong influences or conventions of argument at the time. Even if that is the case, this response still shows that he finds existence-realisation extremely convenient for parsing questions of sexuality and marriage. And that he is willing to let this distinction completely structure his approach to a topic.

*Secondly, I discuss a section on sexual ethics from Aquinas' incomplete commentary on I Corinthians.*³⁴⁴ Aquinas expounds Paul as condemning fornication for four reasons, of which only the first concerns us at present: God ordained the body for the Lord rather than fornication.³⁴⁵ At the close of this argument Aquinas emphasises the temporary nature of human life now:

It should be noted that when speaking above about food and stomach, which pertain to the use of animal life, he said they would be destroyed by God; but now, speaking of the body and of the Lord, he makes mention of the resurrection, because when animal life ceases, the nature of the body will be transformed into something better. Hence it is clear that the body should not be used for fornication, which impedes future incorruption according to Galatians...³⁴⁶

The “animal life” involving food and stomach (and procreation, as Aquinas says elsewhere)³⁴⁷ is ordained for destruction. Its removal is part of the human body’s transformation “into something better” – an incorruptible body suited for the beatific vision.

³⁴⁴ *Super I Corinthos* 6 lectio 3, and 7 lectios 1-2.

³⁴⁵ *Super I Corinthos* 6 lectio 3-297-301.

³⁴⁶ *Super I Corinthos* 6 lectio 3-301.

³⁴⁷ *Super Matthew* 22 lectio 3.

This fits well into Aquinas' distinction between the body as a whole (ordained for the Lord) and the body's parts (ordained for their proper use).

The crucial point for my purposes is that Aquinas *does* affirm that genitals exist for generation according to reason, and that the stomach exists for ordered use of food.³⁴⁸ These are part of the nature of the body which must be transformed later. As an abstracted idea this affirmation is unexceptional. But in the context of Aquinas' metaphysic which assumes continuity of nature for every substantial form, it seems problematic to say that something truly part of human nature will be taken away.

Aquinas' guarded affirmation of eating and having sex can only be coherent with their loss in the beatific state if there is an anthropological framework for something being truly part of a substantial form but becoming inactive as the substance reaches its end. I argue that the existence-realisation distinction undergirds Aquinas' argument at this point.

The language of God's ordination in this section refers to the intended end state of humanity – the beatific vision, as we discussed much earlier in chapter two. The animal life which is expressed in eating and procreating can be easily understood as an initial stage of human realisation, which is superseded by the resurrection. And Aquinas' view that male-female difference continues in the beatified state³⁴⁹ is exactly what we would expect. Sex difference is part of the human form which specifies the act of existing as a human. It is realised partially in the act of procreation and fully in the act of beholding God – which realises the whole human being.

³⁴⁸ *Super I Corinthos* 6 lectio 3-299.

³⁴⁹ *Super Matthew* 22 lectio 3, following Augustine.

It is not clear in *Super I Corinthos* that Aquinas is consciously using the existence-realisation distinction. But I have shown that it is necessary to make Aquinas' argument cohere with other recurring elements of his thought. He used this distinction consciously and diversely in the much earlier *De Sent*. Other uses show that Aquinas did not abandon the distinction between *De Sent* and *Super I Corinthos*.³⁵⁰ It seems highly probable that Aquinas simply does not articulate what is a commonplace distinction for him.

To summarise 5.1.2, then, I have shown that Aquinas often uses the existence-realisation distinction in his analysis of sexual ethical questions. In *De Sent* he used it explicitly, not only as one argument among many but as the anthropological structure underlying the whole response. In *Super I Corinthos* it appeared in the maintenance area of his argument: unseen, but necessary.

5.1.3 Existence-realisation's effect on sexual ethics

Regarding the first argument of this thesis: that sexual anthropology influences what approaches are used in sexual ethics. I have shown in 5.1.2 that Aquinas needs the existence-realisation distinction in order to take the approach that he does on some issues of sexual ethics. This does not prove that he requires the distinction to reach his position on these issues. He does need it to argue for his position in the way that he does. I have shown that this distinction, as part of his anthropology, has a conditional but necessary shaping effect upon Aquinas' sexual ethic.

³⁵⁰ *SCG* III:39-8, *ST* I-77-1c and I-118-1ad4, *De Veritate* 23:4ad7.

His manner of argument by distinction is like an easy path which requires special boots. He doesn't have to take this path, but if he does, he must wear the boots of existence-realisation. This shows that Aquinas' anthropology imposes a certain field of play upon his sexual ethics. In terms of this thesis' original purpose, this suggests that a specific anthropology will tend to encourage or discourage certain approaches to argument about sexual ethics. For example, the continuity between form and action would rule out more existentialist accounts of gender and sex such as Beauvoir's *Second Sex* and aspects of Thielicke's *Theological Ethics*.³⁵¹

I now turn to the second argument of this thesis, that Aquinas' ethical work must be understood in its anthropological context. I have shown in chapters one and two how anthropology emerges from metaphysics. Aquinas' handling of human beings in sexual ethics is closely connected with how he understands the nature of existence. The analyses of *De Sent* and *Super I Corinthos* in 5.1.2 above support this argument in different ways.

The section from *De Sent*³⁵² showed that there was a meta-structure to Aquinas' response. But he did not explore the metaphysical shape of that response because it had already been presented in concrete arguments. In other words, Aquinas thought the meta-structure was obvious – and it likely would be to someone reading *De Sent* consecutively, who would have already encountered much of Aquinas' general metaphysic.

But Aquinas' ethical material is often separated from its textual and metaphysical setting. The problem is exacerbated by the trend in scholarship, growing ever since Aquinas' day, of specialisation not only in *field* but in *approach*. That is, ethicists generally approach ethics using concepts and content considered appropriate to ethics. Aquinas is working in the field

³⁵¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H M Parshley (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1953), passim. Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, trans. John W Doberstein, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B Eerdmans, 1964), 48-50.

³⁵² *De Sent* IV:27-1-3.

of theology using concepts and content from what he would call philosophy, natural philosophy, and history. And the structure of his wider thought, which connects these approaches, is not incidental to his ethics.³⁵³

Without a grasp of Aquinas' metaphysic, the coherence and unity of his response in the *De Sent* above would be lost. The individual arguments appear quite different and almost unrelated. They have no similarity in terms of ethical analysis of marriage; they are linked by the fact that each argument distinguishes various stages of realisation in marriage. The 'likewise' in the last paragraph would make little sense. Full comprehension of the text requires a grasp of Aquinas' general thought.

Similarly, a reader who knows a moderate amount about Aquinas' anthropology might struggle with the section of *Super I Corinthos*.³⁵⁴ He includes procreation in the animal life of a human, but not in the resurrection body:

It should be noted that when speaking above about food and stomach, which pertain to the use of animal life, he said that they would be destroyed by God; but now, speaking of the body and of the Lord, he makes mention of the resurrection, because when animal life ceases, the nature of the body will be transformed into something better.³⁵⁵

Without a grasp of existence-realisation and the breadth of Aquinas' idea of nature, a reader might conclude that he does not consider humans to be necessarily animals. Grasping

³⁵³ Josef Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 119.

³⁵⁴ *Super I Corinthos* 6-3 to 7-2.

³⁵⁵ *Super I Corinthos* 6-3-301.

Aquinas' position in this matter of sexual ethics requires a knowledge of certain metaphysical concepts.

These sections of *De Sent* and *Super I Corinthos* show that Aquinas cannot be engaged as a resource in ethics without his metaphysics coming along for the ride. This is true in the case of simple comprehension. It would be even more true in the case of learning, application, or sympathetic extension. There is no denaturing or abstracting Aquinas' sexual ethic, any more than one can disguise the origins of a mosaic piece.

5.2 Humanity defined by intellect

'Intellect' could describe several concepts within Aquinas' thought. It could mean that humans are specified by our form, which is intellectual; or that we are defined by a form which originates as an idea in the mind of God; or that we are defined by our ability to think abstractly (what I have referred to as reason). This section is closest to the third option. In this section I analyse not reason alone, but Aquinas' definition of a human as having intellectual capacity. We are intellectual and therefore defined by the exercise of reason and will. This is conceptually broader than reason, though reason will be the main point of analysis.

In the following sub-section 5.2.1, I will analyse the role of human intellect in Aquinas' discussion of sexual ethics. And then in 5.2.2 I will discuss the relevance of this role for the twin arguments of this thesis.

5.2.1 Use in sexual ethics

What role does human intellect play when Aquinas articulates sexual ethics? In this section I argue that the intellectual nature of humanity is central to Aquinas' moral analysis in this

area. He analyses sexual acts and circumstances by considering their relation to the two aspects of intellect. He usually considers either the degree to which something is understood by the reason, or the end to which the will is directed. The intellect takes on the role of a central depot in a supply chain: not everything begins or ends there, but almost everything passes through it. I will discuss two examples: one focused on the reason, and the second on the intellect more generally.

Firstly, intellectual nature appears in Aquinas' assumption that humans can access the natural law through reason. The refrain 'according to reason' or 'ordered by reason' is almost white noise in ethical topics. This is how Aquinas essentially defines the correct way for humans to interact with the universe: as reason dictates. The phrase is expected in any place where he touches on the right use of physical things such as food or sex. Aquinas considers that all human beings have access to intellectual reality. He can therefore assume that the knowledge reached through intellect is at least hypothetically available to all humans. When people act in ignorance of this knowledge, it is some shade of negligence rather than a circumstance without moral weight.

In general, Aquinas holds that most ethical principles can be known through reason.³⁵⁶ In sexual ethics the sacramental nature of marriage is not known by reason. But chapter four showed that marriage becoming a sacrament changed little about it. A new signification was added, and some elements became absolute rather than malleable. Even the addition of indissolubility only makes the natural realisation of marriage explicit. Marriage is not much altered from an office of nature to a sacrament of the church. Aquinas considers almost all

³⁵⁶ O'Connor, 60-75.

principles of sexual ethics to be available to all humans. This shapes the content of his ethic, and how he argues for it in various contexts.

SCG's discussion of fornication and marriage shows how Aquinas applies his assumptions about reason.³⁵⁷ He introduces the position of divine law and supports it through argument from observation, introducing scripture only at the end of each article. And he establishes rather a lot using theologically motivated natural philosophy: fornication is a sin,³⁵⁸ marriage should be indivisible³⁵⁹ and monogamous,³⁶⁰ and so on. This is not an appeal to universal human experience; Aquinas points out societies which do otherwise.³⁶¹ Nor is it an abstract investigation of human nature. Aquinas is clearly arguing towards what he considers the Christian position on sexuality.³⁶²

However, his mediating arguments can only support that position if they are inherently persuasive. They are columns of philosophy supporting a theological-ethical frieze. As such, they show Aquinas engaging with natural human reason; and therefore, they also show what Aquinas expects of human intellect. On one hand, he considers a basic understanding of purpose and goodness to be grounds for deriving marriage as an office of nature.³⁶³ And on the other hand, he considers demonstrating something is part of human nature to also demonstrate that its abuse is a sin.³⁶⁴ Universal accessibility and universal culpability go hand in hand.

³⁵⁷ *SCG* III:122-126.

³⁵⁸ *SCG* III:122-1 to -8.

³⁵⁹ *SCG* III:123-1 to -8.

³⁶⁰ *SCG* III:124-1 to -6.

³⁶¹ *SCG* III:124-4.

³⁶² As explicitly put in *SCG* III:121, though even what Thomas says there has a fair degree of overlap with portions of Jewish and Islamic thought.

³⁶³ *SCG* III:122-4.

³⁶⁴ E.g. *SCG* III:122-5.

The scope of Aquinas' vision for moral agency and ethical consciousness arises from his intellectual anthropology. And this aspect of his anthropology in turn arises from how Aquinas' answer to the soul-body question. Several answers were viable in Aquinas' context.³⁶⁵ He diverged somewhat from all of them by describing the soul as the substantial form of the person. The soul takes double duty: it is the Aristotelian individual form, and the Platonic-scriptural immortal substance.³⁶⁶ Nothing can exist without form; the human form is a rational soul; therefore, Aquinas can assume the ubiquity of reason in humans.

Aquinas' assumption of intellect is also grounded in how he thinks intellect works. For him, intellect is a notional reception of universal forms.³⁶⁷ Absolutely speaking, these forms are most clearly known in themselves. But human beings are suited only to know singular realisations of forms, due to our position in the chain of being.³⁶⁸ Forms are more clearly manifested to humans by their realisation in material substances.³⁶⁹ The human intellect is intended to interact with singular things.

Aquinas' expectation of reason in ethics does not mean contemplation of immaterial realities like the essence of God or geometry. He means the operation of reason in abstracting forms from the concrete singulars we encounter. The right use of anything is defined by its purpose or final cause, which shapes its form. Living as a human, especially among other humans, ought to generate awareness of the human form and purpose. A human in a position to commit sexual sin has all the information they need to construct sexual ethics. Because of

³⁶⁵ Note the positions Thomas interacts with in *ST I-75*, *Quod de anima*, and *De unitate*. Pasnau, 146.

³⁶⁶ *Quod de anima* 1c.

³⁶⁷ Davies, 144.

Herbert McCabe, "The Immortality of the Soul," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield 2006), 200.

Burrell, 148-49.

³⁶⁸ See the difference between angels and humans in *Quod de anima* 18c and 20c.

³⁶⁹ *Quod de anima* 15c and 17c.

Aquinas' metaphysic, there is an essential connection between intellect and moral judgment.

And the same connection can be observed when Aquinas evaluates sexual acts.

Aquinas uses his intellectual anthropology in, *secondly, making intellectual capacity the standard for acts that can be evaluated morally*. I use the word 'intellectual' in its precise sense: the single intellectual soul whose operations are will and reason. Aquinas considers cognition necessary for a human act to have any connection with the will.³⁷⁰ But he does not apply this in a naïve way, as though 'thinking' were synonymous with 'morally free agent.'

As discussed in section 1.2.1, he distinguishes between external and internal actions of the will.³⁷¹ In passing, I point out that this is another form of existence-realisation distinction: the inclination can exist in the soul while being frustrated in its realisation. The point for our present purposes is that the will needs to be freely applied for an action to be voluntary. Free action depends on more than knowledge and clear reason.³⁷²

Aquinas applies this understanding of will to the grounds upon which marriage can and cannot be annulled. Since marriage is formed by consent of the will, an unwilling marriage is not a marriage at all.³⁷³ Consent is not determined by the presence or absence of external factors but their effect upon the will. I note in passing that the steadfast man is defined not by

³⁷⁰ *ST I-II-6-7ad3*.

Interestingly, Pasnau argues quite plausibly that Thomas' view of cognition (receiving and composing forms from the senses) is corporeal rather than intellectual. In that case Thomas is pointing out that the physical mind (what he would call the corporeal powers of the soul) can be in a condition that prevents the higher powers of the soul from acting.

Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 297-305. But for another point of view, see Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God: A Reformulation of Thomas Aquinas* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 37-73.

³⁷¹ Davies, 141-42.

³⁷² Or, if Pasnau is correct, the corporeal cognition.

³⁷³ *De Sent IV:26-1-1 and -1-3*.

lack of fear, but by fearing according to reason – another example of discursive reason appearing everywhere in Aquinas’ moral analysis.³⁷⁴

The key point from Aquinas’ discussion of marital consent in *De Sent* is that compulsion is understood by its conditional effect on the will. Aquinas gives the example of throwing cargo overboard to avoid shipwreck. Absolutely speaking no one wants this, but because of the fear of shipwreck a person might freely choose to do this.³⁷⁵ This ‘mixed violence’ to the will’s freedom exists on a spectrum and is measured by its effect on the will.³⁷⁶ His understanding of what consent is sufficiently ‘free’ centres around the will – the appetite of the intellect.³⁷⁷

But Aquinas’ analysis is not concerned with the interior will. Aquinas considers consent at the level of the commanded or applied acts of the will.³⁷⁸ The interior will is truly free. Yet exterior forces can truly hinder a person’s freedom.³⁷⁹ To return to the discussion of the will’s freedom in 1.3.3, the will can be moved by whatever it wants but not necessarily be able to choose a means toward that end. In matters of sexual ethics, Aquinas treats the range of possibility of the exterior will as a diagnostic for the freedom of the person. He has a concept of practical human freedom which is not determined by the ontology of the interior will.³⁸⁰ To say a person is free to do X implies a certain set of relationships, not only within them, but between them and the world around them. Aquinas’ sense of freedom operates on many different levels of focus.

³⁷⁴ *De Sent* IV:29-1-2c and -2ad1.

³⁷⁵ *De Sent* IV:29-1-1c.

³⁷⁶ *ST* I-II-44-2ad2 and -44-4c, *De Sent* IV:29-1-3requaest1. Also see *Super Ethics* III-1-389 to 391.

³⁷⁷ Seidl, 460.

³⁷⁸ Davies, 140.

³⁷⁹ Loughlin, 142.

³⁸⁰ Stump, "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will," 210.

Bishop, 251.

Loughlin, 139.

This emphasis on the will does not reduce the importance of reason, but further demonstrates that the will and reason are two sides of one intellectual coin.³⁸¹ The will proceeds from an interior principle of knowledge.³⁸² As a result, ignorance can generate an involuntary (morally meaningless) action. But only if you are ignorant of something you are not obliged to know.³⁸³ Culpable ignorance is in turn caused by a prior defective act of the will.³⁸⁴ Mistaken belief is treated the same way, because like ignorance it produces a flawed beginning for the will's consent.³⁸⁵ Reason enables will and will commands reason.

In this section I have argued that the intellectual nature of humanity has a central place in Aquinas' discussion of sexual ethics. Firstly, our capacity for discursive reason draws the boundaries for what humans can know. This shapes how Aquinas argues when he takes a less dependent approach to textual authorities in *SCG*. And secondly, he analyses the moral relevance of circumstances like compulsion by considering their effect upon the will, or upon the reason as beginning principle for the will. I will now detail how these findings support the argument of the thesis, before summarising the course of the chapter.

5.2.2 Intellect's shaping effect on ethics

Intellect is one component of the human being, but also the essence and first act of a human. This allows Aquinas to assume that whatever can be known about the universe through human reason can be known by any individual human being. And it enables him to rule any

³⁸¹ Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 202-07.

³⁸² *De Sent* IV:30-1-1c and *ST* I-II-6-4c.

³⁸³ *ST* I-II-6-8c and -76-2c.

³⁸⁴ *ST* I-II-76-2ad5 and -3c.

³⁸⁵ *De Sent* IV:30-2c.

instance where the will is not operating as not a truly human act, and therefore beyond moral analysis. The recurring phrase ‘according to reason’ is swift but influential – like a bouncer making eye contact with a rowdy patron.

Intellect’s grounding in the substantial form of humanity makes it essential rather than aspirational.³⁸⁶ Aquinas does not believe that all humans can abstract forms from singulars if we only apply ourselves. Humans are intellectual animals. This is an *a priori* for Aquinas’ analysis of human beings and human acts. A human who is not exercising intellectual capacity is not morally defective but existentially wounded, and therefore outside moral analysis. Aquinas’ emphasis on reason is not intellectual in the negative sense – that our access to morality is tied to our capacity for contemplative thought. It is a levelling belief. All humans are intellectual because we are the same species. We share one form, and that form is intellectual.

Aquinas’ intellectual definition of humanity is not (or not only) the result of observing humans. In that case it would be in some sense accidental to his wider system. In fact, it arises from the confluence of several elements of his metaphysic. Aquinas defines humans by intellect for reasons which are deeply embedded in what he thinks about the nature of existence and knowledge. This has been briefly explored in section 5.2.1.

The possession of intellect is not a matter of morality. It is an ontological foundation which makes moral analysis possible.³⁸⁷ Aquinas bases the inherent teleology of our acts in the fact that they are human.³⁸⁸ But not everything done by a human is a human act:

³⁸⁶ In fact it is essential for all persons.

Stanley Rudman, *Concepts of Person and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 139.

³⁸⁷ Compare Porter’s discussion of how scholastic theology approached human nature.

Porter, 77-86.

³⁸⁸ *ST I-II-1-1s.*

Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as ‘the faculty and will of reason.’ Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.³⁸⁹

This shapes the field of ethics by limiting moral agency to intellectual creatures: those that can receive forms in a non-physical manner. It also concentrates moral weight on intellectual creatures. Participation in God is the highest possible end of any creature. It is the only end that is not itself part of creation. This end is only ontologically possible for intellectual creatures, since God is intellectual and cannot physically in-form anything. Therefore, only intellectual creatures can have an end outside creation.³⁹⁰

Aquinas’ ontology inclines his ethics away from giving moral weight to non-intellectual creatures and aspects of creation. He treats what we would call environment issues as attending to the purpose of a thing or as aspects of the common good. Either our reason understanding natural law or human society structures ethics in this area. The simple existence of non-rational creatures does not give them moral weight. To speak simplistically and anachronistically, Aquinas’ metaphysic shifts him away from modes of reasoning such as object-oriented ontology and stewardship of creation.

The intellectual nature of humanity may not be a matter for moral analysis. The exercise of will and reason certainly is. The will ought to command reason to abstract universal forms and accurately cognise the good of substances. And the reason ought to present a true understanding of things for the will to desire. Here Aquinas leans on the existence-realisation distinction which this chapter has already discussed. Simply having an intellect doesn’t mean

³⁸⁹ *ST I-II-1-1c.*

³⁹⁰ *ST I-II-1-8c.*

it is applied or developed to reach its purpose. The teleological nature of existence means that the mere existence of intellect does not suffice for moral analysis. Intellect is only the necessary frame for moral intellectual acts to occur.

5.3 Summary

In this chapter I have made two arguments from the same evidence. First, that Aquinas' anthropology predisposes him to articulate sexual ethics in certain ways. Examples have included distinguishing something's beginning from its realisation, and a concentration of moral attention in intellectual creatures. This predisposition sometimes means that a concept in Aquinas' ethics has deep foundations in his metaphysic. Sometimes it means that a reader needs to know certain metaphysical concepts to fully understand what Aquinas says on an ethical topic. There is a link between metaphysics and ethics through anthropology.³⁹¹

Hence, secondly, the strong connection between anthropology and ethics means that Aquinas' sexual ethic cannot be fully understood without a grasp of his whole system of thought. Anthropology comes from metaphysics. Without a grasp of grand concepts like the chain of being, form-matter composition, and the act of being, we will not be able to understand the full range of influences shaping his sexual ethic. I have analysed the need for metaphysical understanding through two subsidiary concepts: the existence-realisation distinction and the intellectual nature of humanity. Each of these has shown that its necessity for a full understanding of Aquinas' sexual ethic.

³⁹¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Massachusetts and London: Belknap Press, 2007), 183.

In the following brief chapter, I conclude the thesis with some implications for two areas: reading Aquinas' ethical work and discussing sexual ethics in general.

CHAPTER SIX

6.1 Implications for reading Aquinas' ethical work

The chief implication for reading Aquinas' ethics is that we should not. If the goal is to fully understand and apply his contribution to ethics, identifying and reading where his work touches on ethics is likely to obstruct rather than enable. Separating Aquinas' ethical work from his wider anthropology and metaphysic makes it more difficult to understand, not just his thought as a whole, but each individual text. Chapter five examined several texts where metaphysical concepts were key in understanding what Aquinas meant.

Happily, this alienation of Aquinas' ethics is barely a problem in contemporary scholarship on Aquinas. Most works on Aquinas' works and general thought in the last few decades demonstrate awareness of the metaphysical and theological context of his ethical thought. The problem surfaces more often in the realm of ethics. Laudable attempts to extend and apply Aquinas' ethics are sometimes undermined by not appreciating the extent to which Aquinas' metaphysic and anthropology underlie his expressed ethics.³⁹²

This can be avoided by actively placing Aquinas' ethic within its intellectual context. But this is quite a difficult task for pedagogy and scholarship. It is hard to imagine finding room for his entire system within a subject on ethics more generally, or a journal article which wants to use Aquinas' ideas without diving into the distinction between essence and existence. The study of Aquinas is made more difficult by the division of ethics, philosophy, and

³⁹² E.g. the argument that ideas of nature are not critical in Rogers, 45-52. And the assumption of observational naturalism in McClusky, 4.

theology.³⁹³ It is structurally easier for the medievalist to hold the wider picture than an ethicist.

To some degree, I believe this is a solved problem. The best approach to teaching Aquinas is to do what the Dominicans initially failed to do: take one of his major works as a textbook for discussion and read it in sequence.³⁹⁴ *ST* stands out as the obvious candidate, or possibly *SCG*. This would naturally provide the background and inter-connections of his thought. It would also have the minor benefit of exposing students to the usual method of study in Aquinas' day. Unfortunately, this is only possible where significant time can be devoted to textual study. It would be ridiculous to warn ethicists and other specialists off the rich and useful work of Aquinas. They should be expected to invest more time in wider reading of Aquinas, and to be more cautious in generating extrapolations.

6.2 Implications for discussing sexual ethics

In this thesis I have shown that Aquinas' anthropology significantly shapes his sexual ethic. It encourages certain lines of argument and provides the apparatus for certain approaches.

Identifying whether this is true for anthropology and sexual ethics in general is beyond the competency of this thesis. It seems plausible that a system of thought and ethics as developed as Aquinas' will demonstrate some qualities shared with such systems in general. Accepting this as an unproven working assumption, I can draw tentative implications about discussing sexual ethics in general.

³⁹³ Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 11.

³⁹⁴ Davies, 12.

Leonard E Boyle, "The Setting of the *Summa Theologiae*," in *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*, ed. Brian Davies (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 17.

First, sexual ethics are influenced by anthropology. Any thought about sexual ethics must presuppose anthropology. We cannot discuss human sexuality without latent content to the word 'human.' And our underlying anthropology will shape sexual ethics. The direction a system of thought takes on sexual ethics is not free; it is partly determined by other decisions it has made about humanity.

Second, anthropology can have a close relationship with metaphysics. This is particularly the case with Aquinas: his metaphysic is closely connected with his epistemology, and epistemology is hugely significant when humans are defined by intellect. The nature of existence and the nature of humanity are distinct topics. But there can be a tight relationship between them, with ideas in one area immediately influencing the other.

Third, the structure of anthropology will make concepts variously easier or more difficult to use in sexual ethics. Concepts easily used by one party may not be so easily used by another. This can be productive, not only of incomprehension and misunderstanding, but of new lines of discussion. The concepts underneath terms should be uncovered and connected to anthropology. What is consent, for example? What anthropology supports the concept? The same line can be taken on terms such as harm and nature.

Fourth, discussions of sexual ethics will be most productive when they consider causes beyond the realm of ethics. Disagreements may be caused not only by differences in ethics itself, but by differences in anthropology or even metaphysics. It would be unnecessary (and impolite) for every discussion of sexual ethics to devolve into metaphysics. It is equally unrealistic for such discussions to exclude metaphysical and anthropological content. The most fruitful discussions of sexual ethics will not be confined to the one topic; they will include all the questions of existence which underpin matters of ethics.

If the church wishes to speak and be heard on the topic of sexual ethics, we had best be willing and able to talk about what it means to exist, and what it means to be human.

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