

Original Sin and the Anthropological Principles of *Humanae Vitae*

MATTHEW LEVERING

Ave Maria University

Ave Maria, Florida

IN *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II develops *Humanae Vitae*'s insights regarding embodied human personhood.¹ In particular, John Paul points to the difficulty of “maintaining the adequate relationship between that which is defined as ‘domination . . . of the forces of nature’ (HV, §2) and ‘self-mastery’ (HV, §21). . . . Contemporary man shows the tendency of transferring the methods proper to the first sphere to those of the second.”² This tendency could be averted, he suggests, by means of a deeper appreciation of the body’s teleological ordering, which he calls the “language of the body.”³ Original sin has distorted this language, turning the “relationship of reciprocal gift . . . into a relationship of reciprocal appropriation.”⁴ This distortion has not wholly corrupted the body’s language, however. The body remains ontologically “oriented from within by the ‘sincere gift’ [*Gaudium et Spes*, §24] of the person.”⁵ Because of human body-soul unity, human bodily and spiritual teleology constitute a unity.

¹ See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). For further discussion see John M. Grondelski, “Karol Wojtyła on *Humanae vitae*,” *Angelicum* 81 (2004): 51–63.

² John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 630–31 (General Audience of August 22, 1984). For investigation of the roots of this situation as regards contemporary bioethics, see Vincent Bourguet, “Bioéthique et dualisme ontologique,” *Revue Thomiste* 97 (1997): 619–39.

³ Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 631.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 260 (General Audience of July 30, 1980).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 188 (General Audience of January 16, 1980).

Like *Humanae Vitae*, John Paul's presentation of the "language of the body" has persuaded relatively few. In the fallen world, the body seems so often to speak the language of "appropriation" rather than "gift," the latter seeming to be the province of the spirit. The human spirit's capacity for intelligence and freedom seems to be the source of hope for liberation from the tyrannical structures instantiated by bodiliness as we experience it in our lives. By technologically mastering the body, we hope to produce a world of physical and emotional fulfillment, rather than of physical and emotional pain. Thus theological dissenters from *Humanae Vitae* generally appeal to progress in "physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions" (*HV*, §10). As the encyclical observes, "It is also asked whether, in view of the increased sense of responsibility of modern man, the moment has not come for him to entrust to his reason and his will, rather than to the biological rhythms of his organism, the task of regulating birth" (§3).⁶

Because of this association of bodiliness with oppression, the role of the body has become suspect not only with respect to the moral life, but also with respect to the theology of the Cross, sacramental theology, eschatology, and so forth. The interconnectedness of doctrine thus requires that *Humanae Vitae* be discussed in the context of other central Christian doctrines.⁷ As a step in this direction, the present essay explores the links

⁶ *Humanae Vitae* goes on to note that "the Church is the first to praise and recommend the intervention of intelligence in a function which so closely associates the rational creature with his Creator; but she affirms that this must be done with respect to the order established by God" (§16). Quoting from *Gaudium et Spes*, §§52 and 51, the encyclical also offers "encouragement to men of science, who 'can considerably advance the welfare of marriage and the family, along with peace of conscience, if by pooling their efforts they labor to explain more thoroughly the various conditions favoring a proper regulation of births.' It is particularly desirable that, according to the wish already expressed by Pope Pius XII, medical science succeed in providing a sufficiently secure basis for a regulation of birth, founded on the observance of natural rhythms. In this way, scientists and especially Catholic scientists will contribute to demonstrate in actual fact that, as the Church teaches, 'a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to the fostering of authentic conjugal love'" (§24, cf. §27).

⁷ David Matzo McCarthy argues that *Humanae Vitae* "is a statement about the very meaning of our nature and the continuity of our natural life with our supernatural fulfillment. The encyclical is not an argument from nature as much as a proposal about our nature from the givens of our true end. To speak of nature in this way is to make a claim about what binds us in human solidarity" (McCarthy, "Procreation, the Development of Peoples, and the Final Destiny of Humanity," *Communio* 26 [1999]: 698). This teleological understanding of nature enables McCarthy to describe natural law not as "generated from a disinterested, general point of view

between *Humanae Vitae* and the doctrine of original sin. After first summarizing the principles of *Humanae Vitae*, I examine in detail Thomas Aquinas's account of Adam and Eve's sin, especially as regards soul-body unity. I suggest that the the doctrine of original sin and the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* rely upon the same anthropological principles.

The Anthropology of *Humanae Vitae*

Humanae Vitae argues that "one must necessarily recognize insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions" (§17). Earlier the encyclical states that

to make use of the gift of conjugal love while respecting the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not to be the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator. In fact, just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, with particular reason, he has no such dominion over his generative faculties as such, because of their intrinsic ordination towards raising up life, of which God is the principle. (§13)

But, one might ask, what does it mean to say that human beings have only a limited dominion over their "generative faculties as such, because of their intrinsic ordination towards raising up life"? Why should human freedom be limited by an "intrinsic ordination" belonging to the body's generative faculties?

The encyclical's answer is that although human rationality frees human beings to choose how to "use" our bodies, our bodies are not mere instruments. Just as the soul has an innate teleological ordering toward truth and goodness (a teleology that can, to varying degrees, be frustrated), so also the body has an "intrinsic ordination" toward "raising up life." This "intrinsic ordination" is not something that the human spirit freely elicits in the body through an act of humanization. On the other hand, neither is this "intrinsic ordination" uninformed by the soul. Instead, the ordination of

(in Kantian fashion)" but as "an account of human solidarity in terms of God as beginning and end" that therefore "depends (whether explicitly or not) upon an understanding of human unity in creation and our eschatological communion" (ibid., 716). By contrast, a contraceptive culture orders itself toward consumption rather than toward the communion of persons (most fully and concretely expressed in hospitality to children). McCarthy's article shows the value of reading *Humanae Vitae* in the broader context of human fulfillment, to which context original sin (as the distortion of such fulfillment) belongs. For work in a similar direction, see Richard R. Roach, "More than Integration: The CTSA Report on Human Sexuality," *Communio* 5 (1978): 182–201.

the body accords with the soul's teleological ordering thanks to the work of God in creating human body-soul unity.

This approach undergirds *Humanae Vitae's* insistence upon "the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning" (§12). Paul VI explains that "the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new lives" (§12). It "capacitates" husband and wife not in a sense that applies only to fertile couples, but "according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman" (§12), whether or not they at the time have the capacity for fertility. These "laws" that capacitate human beings "for the generation of new lives" belong to the body's teleology. The "inseparable connection" between the unitive and procreative aspects of the conjugal act results from the inseparability of the body's teleology from that of the soul. In the conjugal act, spiritual (unitive) self-giving and bodily (procreative) self-giving are joined.

It follows that as regards Paul VI's affirmation that "each and every marriage act [*quolibet matrimonii usus*] must remain open to the transmission of life" (§11), this openness cannot be that of the soul *over against* the body. Likewise the unity of spiritual and bodily teleology enables one to understand Paul VI's appeal to the notion of the "gift of self." As Paul VI states,

this love is total, that is to say, it is a very special form of personal friendship, in which husband and wife generously share everything, without undue reservations or selfish calculations. Whoever truly loves his marriage partner loves not only for what he receives, but for the partner's self, rejoicing that he can enrich his partner with the gift of himself. (§9)

By contrast, the rejection of *Humanae Vitae* flows from a view of the body as proto-human.⁸ Russell Hittinger points out that the pro-birth

⁸ Paul VI writes, "It can be foreseen that this teaching will perhaps not be easily received by all: Too numerous are those voices—amplified by the modern means of propaganda—which are contrary to the voice of the Church. To tell the truth, the Church is not surprised to be made, like her divine founder, a 'sign of contradiction,' yet she does not because of this cease to proclaim with humble firmness the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical. Of such laws the Church was not the author, nor consequently can she be their arbiter; she is only their depositary and their interpreter, without ever being able to declare to be licit that which is not so by reason of its intimate and unchangeable opposition to the true good of man" (*HV*, §18). Sensitive to the charge that the Church thereby impedes the human progress allegedly made possible by contraceptive sexual intercourse, the encyclical goes on to say, "In defending conjugal morals in their integral wholeness, the Church knows that she contributes towards the establishment of a truly

control argument of the Majority Report of Paul VI's Commission hinges on this negative view of body, behind which stands a longstanding debate about "the scope of human dominion in the light of Genesis and natural law."⁹ Quoting the Majority Report, Hittinger observes:

The majority argued that "what is given in physical nature" reflects an order of dynamisms and processes that it is the duty of human agents to "humanize and bring to greater perfection." . . . The majority averred that the inherent finalities, which Genesis says are "good," permit us to conclude that their negation is a "physical evil." But the humanization of nature can permit, and perhaps require, a negation of pre-moral goods for the affirmation of what is specifically human in marriage.¹⁰

As Hittinger goes on to show, this depreciation of "'what is given in physical nature'" fits within the Enlightenment evacuation of normative content from the notion of "human nature." For the various versions of Enlightenment "negative anthropology," human nature can only be known in its "proto-human" material, which then "must be tamed, shaped, and humanized."¹¹ Unable to arrive at a normative endpoint, this humanization of the body ensures that "human nature" cannot be reified beyond history's

human civilization; she engages man not to abdicate from his own responsibility in order to rely on technical means; by that very fact she defends the dignity of man and wife" (ibid.).

⁹ Russell Hittinger, "Human Nature and States of Nature in John Paul II's Theological Anthropology," in *Human Nature in Its Wholeness: A Roman Catholic Perspective*, eds. Daniel N. Robinson, Gladys M. Sweeney, and Richard Gill, L.C. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 18. See also Michael Waldstein's introduction to his translation of John Paul II's *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 1–128, where Waldstein remarks of the project of Francis Bacon: "Authority over nature belonged to the human race before the fall, and it is to this primeval condition that Bacon intends to return, undoing the consequences of the fall as far as possible" (ibid., 37). Drawing upon the work of Charles Taylor, Waldstein goes on to point out that late-medieval nominalism "eliminated from nature precisely those features that resist its subjection to power, namely, a strong teleology and formal causality" (ibid., 38). Regarding the majority report, Waldstein points out the same problem as does Hittinger: "The 'Majority Report' of Paul VI's birth control commission (intentionally leaked to the press in 1967) is unequivocal in its support for the Baconian program, unequivocal in identifying this program with the divine will. 'The story of God and of man, therefore, should be seen as a shared work. And it should be seen that man's tremendous progress in control of matter by technical means and the universal and total "intercommunication" that has been achieved, correspond entirely to the divine decrees.' It would be difficult to formulate a more unqualified allegiance with the Baconian program" (ibid., 100).

fluid “experimental constructions of what is indeterminate in the original of nature.”¹² On this view, the rational powers of the human person remain always free to construct anew what it means to be human, unimpeded by the bodily mechanisms that natural science studies. The implication is that the Creator made human bodiliness so that human rationality could re-make it in accord with the demands of rational freedom. It follows that the teleological ordering that belongs to the human body is disjoined from the human spirit’s free dynamisms.

Against this disjunction, *Humanae Vitae* affirms the unity of spiritual and bodily teleology in the human person. The encyclical refuses to split the body’s “intrinsic ordination” from that of the spiritual powers of the human person. At the ontological level, the soul does not have to claim the body for God through “humanization.” Rather, the “intrinsic ordination” of the body forms a unity with that of the soul in the self-giving movement of love. Far from being impediments, human bodily structures are instructive in the task of understanding human fulfillment. Either the Creator made the human being as a body-soul unity, or the “human” is the realm of rational freedom that operates above and upon a proto-human substratum of bodiliness. *Humanae Vitae* opts for the former alternative.

Adam and Eve’s Sin

What is the relationship of soul and body in the doctrine of original sin? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes original sin’s character as

¹² Hittinger, “Human Nature and States of Nature in John Paul II’s Theological Anthropology,” 19. Hittinger adds that “the anthropologies that assign man dominion over proto-human material are not merely a curious chapter of the Enlightenment. It is true that for thinkers such as Hobbes, Rousseau, Kant, and Feuerbach the state-of-nature scenarios were devised for a purpose of showing the basis of the civilizing mission of the state. The transition from animal to man, from laws of nature to the sovereignty of law, correlate with the movement from pre-political to citizen. Here, we can pass over the interesting question of how the ‘state of nature’ could prepare the way for such different programs of political power, from class dictatorships to republican regimes. The key point for our purposes is that after the Second World War the myth of origins was released from its earlier function of justifying the state, and turned toward the sovereignty of the individual. . . . Given the radical indeterminacy of human nature, the Enlightenment theorists tended to conclude, all the more reason for the civilizing task of the state; the contemporary mind concludes, all the more reason for individual liberty. As the French philosopher Pierre Manent puts it, human nature is a cipher, an ‘efficacious indetermination’ allowing a zone of liberty in which the individual can ‘affirm himself without knowing himself.’” Ibid., 20, citing Manent’s *The City of Man*, trans. Marc A. LePain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 129.

an active spiritual deformation: “man *preferred* himself to God and by that very act scorned him. He chose himself over and against God, against the requirements of his creaturely status and therefore against his own good” (§398). According to the *Catechism*, however, this spiritual frustration of the teleology of the human creature is inseparable from the frustration of the *telos* of human bodiliness: “the control of the soul’s spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination” (§400). Original sin causes not only spiritual death but also bodily death, which here “*makes its entrance into human history*” (§400). While the *Catechism* focuses its attention on Genesis, the inseparability of spiritual and bodily teleological frustration appears throughout Scripture, most notably perhaps in the Letter to the Romans: “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:24–25).

As Gary Anderson observes, 1 Corinthians and Romans develop a Christian theology of Adam and Eve’s sin.¹³ The Old Testament, Anderson points out, gives central place not to Adam and Eve’s sin (referred to only once more in the Old Testament, Ezekiel 28) but to the Israelites’ worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32). Genesis 2:7 states that “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” The word “man” here is ‘*adam*’, from the word for the ground, ‘*adamah*’. After the creation of the woman, the collective term ‘*adam*’ becomes the name of the first man, Adam. St. Paul draws especially upon the collective sense of ‘*adam*’. As Anderson explains, “If the first (*protos*) Adam died . . . then all must die through him. Since Christ was the second or final (*eschatos*) Adam, his death and resurrection must also have had universal dimensions.”¹⁴ Paul

¹³ Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 209 (app. A). Following Joseph Blenkinsopp, Anderson comments, “Indeed it is difficult not to see the influence of a theology very similar to that of Deuteronomy. For in that book God sets life and death before the Israelites and the choice is theirs: Obey my Torah and you shall have life in the land; disobey it and you shall die in exile. Eden is Torah in miniature. . . . By placing the story of Adam and eve after the creation account of P, the editor of Torah has said something very profound about the propensity of human nature toward disobedience” (ibid., 208). As Anderson concludes, “What is revealed in microcosm through the nation Israel can be extended, in macrocosm, to all peoples” (ibid., 210).

¹⁴ Ibid., 210. Anderson remarks, “If Paul were to look solely at the central Old Testament narratives about Israel’s proclivity for sin and rebellion, he would not be able

contrasts Jesus' Resurrection with Adam's sin: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:21–22). In Romans 5:12 Paul likewise understands Adam in this collective sense.

Given this background, let us turn to Thomas Aquinas's theology of original sin. To understand what the created order is and how it can be healed—the goal of both the opponents and the proponents of *Humanae Vitae*—we need to reflect further upon what ails the human creature.

Pride or Concupiscence?

Aquinas considers Adam and Eve's first sin to have been the sin of pride. Before arguing for his position, however, he sets forth four alternative construals of the first sin.¹⁵ The first alternative has its roots in Paul's letter to the Romans: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). It would seem, then, that disobedience, not pride, constituted the first sin. A second alternative is the sin of curiosity, because "the serpent" tempted Adam and Eve by promising that "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5), so that they came to think that "the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (Gen 3:6). Third is the sin of unbelief, because Adam and Eve were "deceived" (1 Tim 2:14) or "beguiled" (Gen 3:13) to think of God as selfish, and thus as a mere god rather than as the true good God. Fourth is the sin of gluttony, not merely because "the woman saw that the tree was good for food" and "took of its fruit and ate" (Gen 3:6), but also and more importantly because "the devil in tempting Christ observed the same order as in overcoming the first man. Now Christ was first tempted to gluttony, as appears from Matthew 4:3, where it was said to Him: 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.'" ¹⁶

Of these four alternatives to pride, three have their root in human spiritual powers, whereas one—gluttony—has its root in sense appetites. In explaining his view that pride was Adam and Eve's sin, Aquinas observes that "man was so appointed in the state of innocence, that there was no rebellion of the flesh against the spirit."¹⁷ Recall St. Paul's complaint, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.

to say much about the state of the Gentiles. Paul's turn to the figure of Adam as the parade example of a biblical sinner is not in accord with the basic thrust of the Old Testament" (ibid.).

¹⁵ *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 163, a. 1, obj. 1–4.

¹⁶ Ibid., obj. 2.

¹⁷ *ST* II–II, q. 163, a. 1.

For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members” (Rom 7:21–23). Aquinas affirms that original sin brings about this “rebellion of the flesh against the spirit,” so that with Paul we experience “the law of sin which dwells in my members.” Does this mean, then, that original sin has more to do with the bodily appetites than with the spiritual powers? Indeed, in the *prima secundae*, Aquinas defines original sin not as pride but as “concupiscence,” which is indeed rooted in the bodily (concupiscible) powers of the soul. He explains that this definition has to do with the “material” aspect of original sin as a privation in human beings. Employing Aristotelian terminology, he notes that when original sin is considered as to its cause—which exposes its “formal” aspect, its “species” or the kind of reality that it is—then one must begin with the original justice whose opposite is “original sin.”

Original justice may well seem mythological, since we cannot observe it empirically. The philosopher Daniel Dennett, for example, traces human problems to an “Original Sin” caused not by human agency but by “the first macromolecules that have enough complexity to ‘do things.’”¹⁸ These macromolecules unconsciously made the first “mistake,” a “copying mistake” in the code of life. The eventual product of such “copying mistakes” is the human person, who gradually comes into existence

¹⁸ Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 203 and 202. Dennett emphasizes that while there seems to be an extraordinary amount of design and natural teleology involved, in fact there is none: “There is something alien and vaguely repellent about the quasi-agency we discover at this level—all that purposive hustle and bustle, and yet *there’s nobody home*. The molecular machines perform their amazing stunts, obviously exquisitely designed, and just as obviously none the wiser about what they are doing” (ibid., 202). Once the “molecular machines” begin to function, then they can function badly—but even the word “function” seems to Dennett to import a false notion of teleological purpose: “Exactly the same gratuitous predicament faces anyone who, despairing of defining something as complicated as life, decides to define the apparently simpler notion of *function* or *teleology*. At exactly what point does function make its appearance? Did the very first nucleotides have functions, or did they just have causal powers? Did Cairns-Smith’s clay crystals exhibit *genuine* teleological properties, or just ‘as if’ teleological properties? Do gliders in the Life world have the *function* of locomotion, or do they just move? It doesn’t make any difference how you legislate the answer; the interesting world of functioning mechanisms has to start with mechanisms that ‘straddle the line,’ and, however far back you place the line, there will be precursors that differ in arguably nonessential ways from the anointed ones” (ibid., 201). One might respond that this means that there will be teleology all the way down.

filled with all sorts of encoded deficiencies.¹⁹ In Dennett's view there is no "original justice," but instead only a period of time in which "no opportunity for error existed" because there was no genetic copying. By contrast, Aquinas would point out that these macromolecules were not engaged in anything that could be called "sin." Instead, as Aquinas states, the first human beings possessed a will that was already, by its very ontological constitution, drawn toward the good. So long as they did not choose created goods over the infinite good, they had not yet sinned: and in this state of "original justice," God gave them unique gifts, so that they could not crumble spiritually or physically except by freely disordering themselves.

They did so. Aquinas observes that

the whole order of original justice consists in man's will being subject to God: which subjection, first and chiefly, was in the will, whose function it is to move all the other parts to the end, as stated above (I-II, q. 9, a. 1), so that the will being turned away from God, all the other powers of the soul become inordinate.²⁰

This sounds complicated but in fact is not, since examples of harmonious organisms breaking down are commonplace. Think of the smoothly running classroom that falls apart without the teacher, or the well-tended flock that dissipates without the shepherd. The body-soul person is made to be a harmonious organism: the rational appetite forms a unity with the sense appetites or passions, which operate on the borderline between rational and non-rational. The passions assist the rational appetite in attaining desired ends (the concupiscible passions) and avoiding undesirable ends (the irascible passions). Every movement of the rational appetite is accompanied by movement of the appropriate passions. The breakdown occurs when the rational appetite chooses against reason and thereby cannot govern the sense appetites in accord with reason. The rational appetite and the sense appetites then experience the same problem: their volition, which takes place together, is "inordinate," misdirected. In this condition, the human person desires created goods as if they were the uncreated good, and pursues them with unruly concupis-

¹⁹ Dennett states, "Love it or hate it, phenomena like this exhibit the heart of the power of the Darwinian idea. An impersonal, unreflective, robotic, mindless little scrap of molecular machinery is the ultimate basis of all the agency, and hence meaning, and hence consciousness, in the universe" (*ibid.*, 203). He intends to divorce the "little scrap of molecular machinery" which is the source of all meaning and consciousness, from any notion of a Creator.

²⁰ *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 3.

cible and irascible appetites. Original sin therefore is not “concupiscence” *per se*, but rather it is concupiscence “so far as it trespasses beyond the bounds of reason.”²¹

Is original sin (“concupiscence”) therefore located primarily in the sense appetites? Aquinas seeks to hold together the rational and sense appetites, so that the body-soul unity of human action remains intact.²² As regards the cause or “formal element,” original sin is the “privation of original justice.” As experienced in the human person, however, original sin appears most clearly in the unruly sense appetites: “the law of sin which dwells in my members” (Rom 7:23). These formal and material aspects cannot be separated. Aquinas points out that “among the inward movements, the appetite is moved towards the end before being moved towards that which is desired for the sake of the end,” and so sin must corrupt the human person, as it were, from the top down.²³ The sense appetites possess their rational ordering through participating in the rational appetite. In the state of original justice, therefore, “it was not possible for the first inordinateness in the human appetite to result from his coveting a sensible good, to which the concupiscence of the flesh tends against the order of reason.”²⁴ Instead the first sin must involve the rational appetite’s ordering toward its end: “man’s first sin consisted in his coveting some spiritual good above his measure: and this pertains to pride.”²⁵ Adam and Eve freely chose themselves above God, through an “inordinate desire for excellence.”²⁶ This choice made by their free will, however, immediately pulled them down rather than increasing their excellence, because of the participation of the sense appetites in the rational appetite.

This helps to explain the complex portrait of Adam and Eve’s sin provided by Genesis. Eve responds to the serpent’s promise that “you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5) with a display of disordered rational and sense appetites: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate” (Gen 3:6). Aquinas observes that sins of the sense appetites followed directly upon the sin of pride: “Gluttony also had a place in the sin of our first parents,” although “the

²¹ *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 3, a. 1.

²² *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 3.

²³ *ST* II-II, q. 163, a. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, ad 3.

sin of gluttony resulted from the sin of pride.”²⁷ Given body-soul unity, once the rational appetite chooses against the order of reason, the sense appetites too lose their rational ordering.

Angelism

The serpent tempted Adam and Eve with two large promises: “You will not die” (Gen 3:4) and “you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Since Adam and Eve’s intellective faculties had not been darkened by sin, Aquinas notes that they would not have thought that they would become absolutely equal to God.²⁸ What kind of likeness to God, then, did they hope to grasp? Aquinas states that “spiritual good, insofar as the rational creature participates in the divine likeness, may be considered in reference to three things,” namely, natural being, knowledge, and power of operation.²⁹ Genesis 3 points to the third kind of likeness, power of operation: Adam and Eve will know good and evil and thereby become wise. Adam and Eve, however, do not aim at wisdom in accord with their human measure. Rather, they aim at a likeness to God as regards knowledge that is proper to the angels. At their creation, angels receive a full participation in God’s wisdom according to their capacity, whereas human beings are created without yet receiving their full participation in God’s wisdom.

In wishing to attain an angelic likeness to God, Adam and Eve wish to be free of spatio-temporal limitations. In light of the promises that they will not die and that they will know good and evil, Aquinas first observes that Adam wishes that “he should of himself foreknow what good and evil would befall him.”³⁰ Adam and Eve seek an angelic knowledge of everything all at once, rather than having acquire wisdom through an embodied, temporal existence. Second, Adam wishes “that by his own natural power he might decide what was good, and what was evil for him to do.”³¹ Adam and Eve do not want to conform their behavior to moral laws inscribed by the bodily mode of existence, just as angels are not subject to norms with respect to eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, and so forth. Third, Adam “sinned by coveting God’s likeness as regards his own power of operation, namely that by his own natural power he might act so as to obtain happiness.”³² Here again Adam and Eve seek to over-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ad 2.

²⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 163, a. 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

come what their bodiliness makes manifest: how could Adam “by his own natural power” attain happiness (“be like God,” Gen 3:5), when happiness requires stability in existence? Adam and Eve’s bodily mode of being underscores contingency and finitude. By contrast, Adam and Eve wish to be the source of their own operation: “You shall not die” (Gen 3:4).

In short, Adam and Eve’s temptation and fall are rooted in the desire to repudiate the givens of their bodiliness. This does not mean, of course, that their pride had solely to do with the desire to rise above bodily existence toward a more “angelic” mode of being, in which they would control their bodiliness rather than submit to its givens. As Aquinas notes, Adam and Eve’s sin of pride is like the devil’s in that “both coveted somewhat to be equal to God, insofar as each wished to rely on himself in contempt of the order of the divine rule.”³³ In their pride, they primarily wished to reject the submission of their wills to God’s *ordo* of love, an order that seemed to them a constraint. Adam and Eve also wished to reject the body-soul unity that constrained them “from below,” as it were. Rejecting God takes the form of rejecting all givens, since all givens come from God.

The Punishment of Original Sin

If original sin therefore displays the body-soul unity of the human person, as well as the human temptation to repudiate this unity and overthrow bodily and spiritual givens, what about the punishment of original sin? Why does a fundamentally spiritual sin receive a bodily punishment, death? Before probing the reasons for this confirmation of body-soul unity, we should ask the question that Dennett would pose: how could death be the punishment of original sin, since death was already a constitutive part of the world millions of years before the first human beings? This objection, in its basic form, is pressed also by Aquinas: “Now death is natural to man: and this is evident both from the fact that his body is composed of contraries, and because *mortal* is included in the definition of man.”³⁴ Moreover, not only human beings but also animals die, and certainly they do not die as the result of an animal “original sin.” Here Aquinas quotes Ecclesiastes 3:19, a text that Dennett could approve: “For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity.”

These objections to the view that death is the punishment of original sin hinge upon the evident naturalness of death. On the other hand,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *ST* II–II, q. 164, a. 1, obj. 1.

Aquinas also includes objections that call into question this presumed naturalness. For example, Aquinas quotes Wisdom 1:13, “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living.”³⁵ If “God did not make death,” why did God make bodily creatures subject to the natural decomposition of matter? However one answers this question, certainly it appears that if “God did not make death,” then God also did not make death the punishment for original sin. This view gains further support from Genesis’s teaching that Adam and Eve did not immediately die, but lived on for many years.³⁶

How then could death be the result of Adam and Eve’s heeding the serpent’s promise “You shall not die” (Gen 3:4)? Aquinas adheres to St. Paul’s remark that “sin came into the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom 5:12). Human death could only come “through sin” if God upheld the first human beings in a state of preservation from decay. Surely this supposition proves Dennett’s broader case against Christian faith:³⁷ is this not a “God of the gaps,” who mythologically overturns the laws of nature? One can respond that God, marking the introduction of distinctively human rationality and freedom into the world, ensured that human beings would enjoy the internal harmony and physical integrity that allows for the fullest experience of human freedom.³⁸ In this sense the inauguration of distinctively human rationality and freedom in the world truly is a sacred moment. God enables it to be a true beginning, rather than already being marked by the internal and external degeneration that crimp rational freedom. God does this because he creates human rationality and freedom with the purpose of participating in his life.

³⁵ Ibid., obj. 5.

³⁶ Ibid., obj. 8.

³⁷ Dennett suggests both that religious faith will naturally fade away—“times are coming when they will no longer be viable” (*Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, 514)—and that if they do not naturally fade away, then the non-religious majority will need to ensure that they do fade away: “I know, I know, the lion is beautiful but dangerous; if you let the lion roam free, it would kill me; safety demands that it be put in a cage. Safety demands that religions be put in cages, too—when absolutely necessary. We just can’t have forced female circumcision, and the second-class status of women in Roman Catholicism and Mormonism, to say nothing of their status in Islam. . . . A faith, like a species, must evolve or go extinct when the environment changes. It is not a gentle process in either case” (ibid., 515–16).

³⁸ It is not worthwhile to probe into hypotheticals such as where Eden was located, or how Adam and Eve could have been preserved from the depredations of wild animals or storms, and so forth. Reading too literally, such questions miss the point that the first two creatures to possess distinctive human rationality and freedom were upheld, by God’s grace, in the state of internal justice and physical integrity without which full freedom is not possible.

Indeed, God's gifts to the first man and woman accord with what we otherwise know of God's infinite creative and redemptive love.

Aquinas observes that "God bestowed this favor on man, in his primitive state, that as long as his mind was subject to God, the lower powers of his soul would be subject to his rational mind, and his body to his soul."³⁹ Original sin brings to an end this enjoyment of body-soul harmony, but it does not bring to an end the human person's body-soul unity. On the contrary, death is the result of this unity—although this unity is now revealed in disorder. Original sin alienates the soul's spiritual powers from the life-giving God and alienates the soul's bodily powers from the spiritual powers. Aquinas states that

inasmuch as through sin man's mind withdrew from subjection to God, the result was that neither were his lower powers wholly subject to his reason, whence there followed so great a rebellion of the carnal appetite against the reason; nor was the body wholly subject to the soul; whence arose death and other bodily defects.⁴⁰

Neither the bodily powers nor the spiritual powers can, as it were, separate from the other and blame the other for the disorder. Because of the human person's soul-body unity, once original sin introduces disorder, this disorder infects the whole.

The presence of original sin—both as the lack of original justice and as concupiscence—means that a time will come when the material degeneration of the body causes a rupture with its life-giving form, the soul. This is why we can say that human sin, not God, causes death. After original sin, God does not need to intervene for human beings to deteriorate and die.⁴¹ Adam and Eve's effort to take their lives into their own hands and to rule over all givens has the result that they die in accord with the givens that govern body-soul existence. In attempting to rise to the level of the angels, they instead fall to the level of animals: "death is . . . natural on account of a condition attaching to matter."⁴² As Ecclesiastes says, "All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl 3:20).

³⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 164, a. 1. He discusses this aspect in full in *ST* I, q. 95, a. 1; and I, q. 97, a. 1.

⁴⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 164, a. 1.

⁴¹ Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 5: "Death may be considered in two ways. First, as an evil of human nature, and thus it is not of God, but is a defect befalling man through his fault. Secondly, as having an aspect of good, namely as being a just punishment, and thus it is from God."

⁴² *ST* II-II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 1.

A Punishment for the Soul?

“Dust to dust” does not tell the full story, even if the book of Ecclesiastes sometimes seems to think so. In the context of Adam and Eve’s susceptibility to the serpent’s promise that they would “be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5), Aquinas attends to Genesis’s teaching that God made human beings “in our image, after our likeness” (Gen 1:26). When Ecclesiastes says “all have the same breath” and “all are from the dust” (Eccl 3:19–20), this point comports only partly with Genesis. Genesis distinguishes the human being from the other animals by “the breath of life”: “then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). Likewise, despite Ecclesiastes’s affirmation that “man has no advantage over the beasts” (Eccl 3:19), Genesis suggests the opposite: God gives human beings, created “in his own image” (1:27), “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (1:28). Genesis 2 confirms this portrait by exhibiting man not only as naming the animals, but also as so distinct from the other animals that no animal can truly be a companion to man.

What then does it mean to be in the image of God, radically distinct from the other animals? Since God is not bodily, neither is God’s image and likeness in human beings.⁴³ Death therefore does not entirely destroy the human being; the just punishment of original sin is not annihilation. Aquinas states, “This likeness of man to other animals regards a condition attaching to matter, namely the body being composed of contraries. But it does not regard the form, for man’s soul is immortal, whereas the souls of dumb animals are mortal.”⁴⁴ If death does not destroy the soul, however, how can the punishment of death be a just punishment for original sin, which as we have seen is an act of the soul’s spiritual powers? Why is this not simply a liberation of the soul from the body?

This question returns us to Aquinas’s placement of his discussion of Adam and Eve’s sin under the rubric of the virtue of temperance, whose seat is the concupiscible sense appetite. The soul, which is “the act of a

⁴³ For further discussion of the image of God in the soul, see *ST* I, q. 93, as well as ch. 3 of my forthcoming *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and the Life of Wisdom*. See also Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 80–100; Michael Dauphinais, “Loving the Lord Your God: The Imago Dei in Saint Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 241–67.

⁴⁴ *ST* II–II, q. 164, a. 1, ad 2. For further discussion of the immortality of the soul, see *ST* I, q. 75, a. 6.

body,”⁴⁵ is made for the body, and the body for the soul. The soul alone is not man: “it belongs to the notion of man to be composed of soul, flesh, and bones.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, the soul is inextricably linked to the body, as its “substantial form” inhering fully in the whole body and each part of the body.⁴⁷ How does this understanding of soul-body unity help us? Adam and Eve’s spiritual pride led them to seek a higher mode of existence, and their punishment is a lesser mode of existence. This punishment involves first the suffering and indignity that come with the process of dying. The punishment also includes the loss of the body in death. Ruptured from the body, the soul loses that of which it is the form. Such souls are not angels. Even when separated souls are drawn into communion with God, they are not yet what they should be in the integrity of their proper mode: an embodied form, a soul-body composite that is the whole human person.

In this way, original sin as an act of pride appears yet more clearly in its contrast with humility. Humility, Aquinas says, works “to temper and restrain the mind, lest it tend to high things immoderately.”⁴⁸ As a virtue, it “conveys the notion of a praiseworthy self-abasement to the lowest place.”⁴⁹ Following Origen, Aquinas exhibits Jesus as the preeminent model of humility: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29).⁵⁰ Mary too, as the first of the fully redeemed, models humility: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden” (Lk 1:46–48). Likewise Jesus commands humility for those who will follow him, the new Adam: “Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:4) and “He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt 23:11–12). Aquinas emphasizes that humility means that the human person “must know his disproportion to that which surpasses his capacity,” so as successfully to “moderate” the rational appetite’s desire toward goods beyond one’s capacity.⁵¹ This is what

⁴⁵ *ST I*, q. 75, a. 1. Aquinas goes on to explain that “the soul is said to be the act of a *body*, etc., because by the soul it is a body, and is organic, and has life potentially.” *ST I*, q. 76, a. 4, ad 1.

⁴⁶ *ST I*, q. 75, a. 4.

⁴⁷ *ST I*, q. 76, a. 8.

⁴⁸ *ST II–II*, q. 161, a. 1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ad 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, s.c.

⁵¹ *ST II–II*, q. 161, a. 2.

Adam and Eve, in pridefully seeking an “angelic” mode of existence in which they would have charge over life/death failed to do.

Aquinas urges that humility requires above all “divine reverence, which shows that man ought not to ascribe to himself more than is competent to him according to the position in which God has placed him.”⁵² This means that humility first denotes “man’s subjection to God.”⁵³ In this light Aquinas argues that human beings more easily fall into concupiscence than into pride. Concupiscence bursts upon one’s rational faculties with a powerful surge, whether of anger, lust, greed, jealousy or so forth. By contrast, one’s rational faculties should be well protected against pride. Aquinas points out that one can avoid pride

by considering one’s own infirmity, according to Sirach 10:9, “Why is earth and ashes proud?” and by considering God’s greatness, according to Job 15:13, “Why doth thy spirit swell against God?” as well as by considering the imperfection of the goods on which man prides himself, according to Isaiah 40:6, “All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field.”⁵⁴

One likewise recalls St. Paul’s injunction, “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Cor 4:7).

Powerful though they are, however, these rational considerations often do not sway the will that seeks a good disproportionate to its measure. Love of one’s own excellence to the point of desiring to increase it beyond all proportion leads to a prideful “aversion from God” that is the “most grievous of sins.”⁵⁵ In refusing to be subject to God’s *ordo*, pride subjects the human creature to death and thereby turns on its head whatever excellence the sinner may have had. Despite its gravity, then, there is a ridiculous aspect to the foolishness of pride. Everything good is God’s gift, and to reject this *ordo* is to reject God’s gifting, the entire basis of our excellence. As Aquinas puts it,

We may consider two things in man, namely that which is God’s, and that which is man’s. Whatever pertains to defect is man’s: but whatever pertains to man’s welfare and perfection is God’s, according to the

⁵² Ibid., ad 3. Aquinas points out in ad 2, “It is contrary to humility to aim at greater things through confiding in one’s own powers: but to aim at greater things through confidence in God’s help, is not contrary to humility; especially since the more one subjects oneself to God, the more is one exalted in God’s sight.”

⁵³ Ibid., ad 3.

⁵⁴ ST II–II, q. 162, a. 6, ad 1.

⁵⁵ ST II–II, q. 162, a. 6.

saying of Hosea (13:9), "Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in Me."⁵⁶

Aquinas's treatment of Adam and Eve's sin under the rubric of the virtue of temperance highlights the ridiculous aspect of repudiating the basis of all one's excellence. Aquinas observes that the virtue of temperance builds upon the natural inclination toward what is good for the human person: "Nature inclines everything to whatever is becoming to it. Wherefore man naturally desires pleasures that are becoming to man which are in accordance with reason. From such pleasures temperance does not withdraw him, but from those which are contrary to reason."⁵⁷ Temperance has to do specifically with physical pleasures, "pleasures of meat and drink and sexual pleasures."⁵⁸ It is precisely in intemperance with regard to physical pleasures that human beings appear most ridiculous, because their animal appetites overcome their rationality, as in the drunkard, the glutton, and the sexually promiscuous person. Sins against temperance are less culpable than other sins, because driven by unruly passions, but they are more "disgraceful." Following Aristotle, Aquinas offers two reasons for this evaluation. First, sins of intemperance tend toward reducing the rational creature almost to a mere animal, and thereby are disgracefully opposed to human excellence. Second, "the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue arises: wherefore these pleasures are described as being most slavish."⁵⁹

Thus Adam and Eve's first sin of pride, which is in a certain sense the "highest" kind of sin (because it seeks, albeit in a disordered way, the highest excellence), has something in common with the lowest or most "disgraceful" kind of sin. By including Adam and Eve's sin under the rubric of temperance, Aquinas shows that the disordered rational appetite is, as far

⁵⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 161, a. 3. Along the lines of this distinction, Aquinas interprets Phil 2:3, "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves." In light of the elements of "his own" that each person possesses, each person must "subject himself to every neighbor, in respect of that which the latter has of God's." *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 1, ad 1.

⁵⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 141, a. 4.

⁵⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 142, a. 4. He adds, "When we say that intemperance is most disgraceful, we mean in comparison with human vices, those, namely, that are connected with human passions which to a certain extent are in conformity with human nature. But those vices which exceed the mode of human nature are still more disgraceful. Nevertheless such vices are apparently reducible to the genus of intemperance, by way of excess: for instance if a man delight in eating human flesh, or in committing the unnatural vice" (ad 3).

as ridiculousness or foolishness goes, like the disordered sense appetite, even though the former aims too high while the latter aims too low. Again one gains an appreciation for the body-soul unity in human action, where the temperate person rejects both angelism and sheer animality.⁶⁰ In sketching each cardinal virtue, Aquinas describes “three kinds of parts, namely integral, subjective, and potential.”⁶¹ The integral parts are the virtues without which one could not embody the cardinal virtue; the subjective parts distinguish, according to the object of the action, the kinds of virtues that the cardinal virtue itself includes; and the potential parts are those virtues which possess the mode of the cardinal virtue, but not its matter. Humility (and its opposed vice, pride) belongs to the potential parts of temperance, because it operates according to the mode of moderating the appetite—although in its case the rational appetite.

Summary

With regard to Adam and Eve’s sin, we have explored four aspects. First, we inquired into why Aquinas identifies “original sin” both as pride and as concupiscence. Original sin as Adam and Eve’s action differs in description from original sin as it is found in us, because Adam and Eve’s act of spiritual pride results most noticeably in unruly passions (“concupiscence”) in us. We emphasized the complex integration of body and soul in original sin and its effects, due to the relationship of the sense appetites to the rational appetite. Second, we noted that Adam and Eve’s pride involves, for Aquinas, a kind of angelism, because Adam and Eve wish to rule over the givens of their existence, including the bodily givens. The knowledge that they seek is the knowledge that the angels receive at creation. Third, we explored the punishment of original sin. Seeking in a disordered fashion to overcome the givens of their bodily existence, Adam and Eve came to experience these givens as punishment. Grasping at a higher mode of existence, they lost the bodily integrity in which God had sustained them in original justice, and fell to a lower mode of existence, so that human beings now live and die more like the other animals. Fourth, we asked whether the soul, separated from the body by the rupture of death, truly experiences death as a punishment. It might seem that the soul finally finds in death its liberation, the angelic life that Adam and Eve were seeking. We observed that death renders the soul less than it should be. We contrasted this with the virtue of humility, to which pride is opposed. Death exhibits the foolishness of Adam and Eve’s pride, by

⁶⁰ Cf. the opening pages of Walker Percy’s *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983).

⁶¹ *ST* II-II, q. 143, a. 1.

deforming the human person in a manner analogous to the animal-like deformations caused by disordered sense appetites for pleasure.

Concluding Reflections

In light of our examination of soul-body unity in Adam and Eve's sin according to Aquinas, what kind of account of soul and body serves human liberation from sin? Specifically, how should we understand human "biological rhythms" (*HV*, §3)? Can human beings heal their families and societies by using their spiritual powers to overrule, through technology, their bodily ordering? Recall the lengthy quotation from *Humanae Vitae* that we discussed in the first section of this essay:

to make use of the gift of conjugal love while respecting the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not to be the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator. In fact, just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, with particular reason, he has no such dominion over his generative faculties as such, because of their intrinsic ordination towards raising up life, of which God is the principle. (§13)

Human bodily powers, just like human spiritual powers, have an "intrinsic ordination." This intrinsic ordination means that "man does not have unlimited dominion" either over his spiritual or his bodily powers. The limits on this dominion come about because God has inscribed in these powers a teleological ordering or "intrinsic ordination." This ordering, as original sin makes clear, is a unified one. In the act of volition of the disordered soul, neither the rational appetite nor the sense appetites move in accord with reason. Instead, just as the rational appetite now tends irrationally toward finite and created goods as its ultimate end, so also "the inordinateness of the other powers of the soul consists chiefly in their turning inordinately to mutable good; which inordinateness may be called by the general name concupiscence."⁶²

The doctrine of original sin thus corresponds to the doctrine taught by *Humanae Vitae*. *Humanae Vitae* upholds the view that human beings cannot seek to overrule the bodily teleological ordering in body-soul actions, to reject the bodily givens, without causing a disorder whose consequences will deform human families and societies. This point, indeed, is the lesson of original sin. N V

⁶² *ST* I-II, q. 82, a. 3.