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## The Rationality of Motherhood

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# THE RATIONALITY OF MOTHERHOOD

by

Genevieve Kineke

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

For the degree of Masters of Arts in Theology

at

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Feast of the Immaculate Conception

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since my conversion to the Catholic faith almost forty years ago, I have been drawn to the story of creation, wherein God says, “Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness’...God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:26a,27-28a). Specifically, I have been intrigued by two questions: how women image God, and in what way their motherhood contributes to their perfection. A lifetime of anecdotal inputs on this topic combined with decades of catechetical reading, but I still lacked a reliable framework for assembling this information in a meaningful way. Thus I am deeply grateful to the theology faculty at Providence College for introducing me to the Thomistic lens, which ordered and augmented my unwieldy ferrago of knowledge—for the program sweetly illustrated the internal and external principles at the heart of effective teaching that Aquinas offers in the *prima pars* of the *Summa* (ST, I.117.a1). I thank each professor for his or her capable transmission of this treasure, as well as those who were responsible for forming such a reliable and inspiring program. I am also grateful to my family who cheerfully endured my distracted care over the last few years. Their confidence in me and enduring support were both essential to the completion of this project.

*Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus!*

*The LORD God then asked the woman: What is this you have done? The woman answered, "The snake tricked me, so I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the snake: Because you have done this, cursed are you among all the animals, tame or wild; On your belly you shall crawl, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel. To the woman he said: I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You shall not eat from it, Cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return. The man gave his wife the name "Eve," because she was the mother of all the living (Genesis 3:13-19).*

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

In the Biblical account of creation, we read that there is a particular consequence of the transgression of Adam and Eve, in that henceforth childbearing would be for all women the occasion of intense pain (*cf.* Gen 3:16a). Procreation has not only been a source of tremendous suffering for women, but maternity—both the physical vulnerability it causes and the shame of barrenness when she is not fruitful—has stood as the justification for disparaging and marginalizing women through much of history, revealing the multilayered truth of the text. Only through the revelation of redemption in Christ, which itself began with a pregnancy, did this specific task begin to be properly understood. Beyond the value that motherhood adds to the family and wider community, the Church teaches that there are particular graces attached to it, for Paul writes in his first letter to Timothy that despite the great tribulations concomitant with childbearing, the woman can be saved through it (*cf.* 1 Timothy 2:13-15). Since both men and women are made in the divine image, with each bearing a rational soul, and the Catholic understanding of redemption requires that persons respond freely to the gift of grace, motherhood as a response to that invitation must manifest the rational nature of woman in some form. In this regard, I hereby ask "How is motherhood rational?"

To answer the question, I will ground this work in the theology and metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas, which rests on his explanation that both men and women are hylemorphic creatures—composed of rational soul and material body. Although the Judeo-Christian account allows that the human person has a nature wounded by sin, Aquinas is clear in showing that the underlying nature is not destroyed, rather the rational soul allows a person to perceive his supernatural end as a proper finalisation and fulfillment of his natural inclinations.

This paper will engage three different views, each suggesting that women's rationality differs from that of men, and I argue that, primarily, at the heart of each of these errors is a toxic mind-body duality that undermines the human integration that Christ came to reveal. But an additional problem with each of their views is a truncated and one-dimensional understanding of rationality that incorporates neither natural law at its foundation nor wisdom as its broadest extension. Ultimately, I conclude that broadening rationality to include both has profoundly impacted and enriched the Church's understanding of motherhood, thanks to Aquinas.

The three interlocutors—being only a fraction of the myriad approaches to motherhood as an option for women—were chosen for how they represent a perfect triad of opposing views, with disparate points of overlap grounded in entirely different mindsets. In response, I will show how Thomas's application of Aristotelian principles will restore a proper view of the body in light of our supernatural end. Specifically, I will outline how a rational soul first informs the body, and then orders and perfects human actions. Given a proper hylemorphic understanding of the human person, I will show specifically how motherhood is rational, and that the subjectivity of the mother is never lost—rather that she is engaging in an act that has the potential not only to perfect herself, but also to positively influence the common good—with the Virgin Mary standing as the most perfect example.

*Some men are mad enough to suppose that even a woman can offer them an insult. What matters is how they regard her, how many lackeys she has for her litter, how heavily weighted her ears, how roomy her sedan? She is just the same unthinking creature—wild and unrestrained in her passions—unless she has gained knowledge and had much instruction.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Chapter Two: A Brief Overview of Ancient Theories of Female Rationality**

Before looking at how various feminists and some traditional Catholics relate reason to women, it will be helpful to consider briefly how the perceived differences between men and women impacted ancient civilisations. Since details related to human reproduction illuminated the key distinction between the sexes, and because generation was essential to the health and well-being of a culture, a major theme among religions was the association of women with fertility cults. Some of the fertility goddesses included Freyja in Norse mythology, the Greek goddess Demeter, Asherah (mother of the Canaanite god Baal), and Lakshmi, who was revered by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains.<sup>2</sup> In recognising that fertility rites were meant to produce both healthy children and abundant crops, whether the woman's fertility was a source of power over man or a cause of her subjection mattered less than the fact that her biological capacity to bear new life allowed for a one-dimensional view of femininity.

As the interactions among Greek gods and goddesses became more psychologically complex, fertility alone was downplayed and sophisticated storylines prevailed. Philosopher Genevieve Lloyd reminds us that these divine personalities were less a product of revelation than an inspired projection of the myriad characteristics discerned among contemporary men and women, among whom divine beings were thought to interact regularly. Thus, as the Greek religious construct moved away from the simplistic power of former fertility cults, Euripides, in particular explained that the shift illustrated the "triumph of the forces of Reason over the

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<sup>1</sup> Seneca, "On Firmness" in *Moral Essays* (New York:CP Putnam's Sons and Wm Heinemann Ltd., 1928) XIV, 1. P. 89.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Macy Roth, "Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility," chapter found in *Reading the Body: Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record*, Alison E. Rautman, ed. (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 1999) found online at <https://as.nyu.edu/content/dam/nyu-as/faculty/documents/RothFatherEarthMotherSky.pdf>. Egyptian myths associated male gods with fertility rather than anything female, but this relates to the usual passive principle attributed to women, who for that reason were thought to have little to do in initiating new life. Moreover, many androgynous actions complicate and confuse the stories.

darkness of the earlier earth mysteries”<sup>3</sup>—reason clearly being confined to discursive logic alone. Unfortunately, despite this evolution Lloyd posits that the goddesses themselves never entered fully into that rational sphere. In shaking off the power of the older Delphic oracles, she explains, “reason leaves behind the forces associated with female power. What had to be shed in developing culturally-prized rationality was, from the start, symbolically associated with femaleness.”<sup>4</sup>

The deeply influential Pythagoras, Greek philosopher and mystic, created a “table of opposites” which included form and formlessness, a category wherein he associates maleness with clear activity and rational thought, and the feminine with “vague and indeterminate” passivity—the former clearly being superior.<sup>5</sup> Surely, inaccurate biological facts were a driving force in assigning to the man sole responsibility for creating new life, as outlined by Aeschylus in

*Eumenides*:

The mother to the child that men call hers  
Is no true life-begetter, but a nurse  
Of live seed. 'Tis the shower of the seed  
Alone begetteth. Woman comes at need,  
A stranger, to hold safe in trust and love  
That bud of her life—save when God above  
Wills that it die.<sup>6</sup>

Echoing this very image, is it any wonder that Plato (428-355BC) would subsequently attribute to Socrates in *Menexenus* the claim that “for the woman in her conception and generation is but the imitation of the earth”?<sup>7</sup> Although Plato furthered the discussion surrounding form and formlessness, with that statement he shows that “the darkness of the earlier earth mysteries” couldn’t be entirely overcome, and such thinking has deeply influenced the discussion until this very day. Moreover, Sister Prudence Allen, in her exhaustive study of how the ancients viewed

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<sup>3</sup> Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, quoted in Lloyd, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Menexenus*, found on Gutenberg.org (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1682/1682-h/1682-h.htm>).



women, explains that Plato reduces woman to “an abstract cosmic female principle.”<sup>8</sup> She quotes from his work, *Timaeus*:

[The woman] is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which go into and go out of her are the likeness of eternal realities modelled after the patterns in a wonderful and mysterious manner.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually the form-formless dichotomy was shaped into a form-matter distinction, and Plato cast form as the rational aspects of the universe and matter as irrational and indeterminate. As Lloyd explains, “the relationship of the world-soul to the world is mirrored in that of the rational soul to the body which is subject to it.”<sup>10</sup> The predominant principle at play is still the superiority of activity over passivity, again related to male and female respectively, but the difference between Plato’s cosmology and others that followed (specifically that of Aristotle) concerns the nature of “form” itself. The key to Plato’s theory is that a world of forms transcend our own world, containing the essence of things, and are only appropriated by individuals to varying degrees. Man, whom he believed to be the active rational principle of life, can appropriate forms more perfectly than the woman, specifically because of her passive role in procreation and how it ties her to matter.<sup>11</sup>

There is another essential aspect to Platonism that will impact this topic. It must be kept in mind that the theory of the transcendence of form led its adherents to consider the substantial form less wedded to the particular matter in which it was instantiated than to the ideal to which the object conformed. This, combined with (or leading to) Plato’s belief in reincarnation, required him to posit that the soul existed apart from the body, and since a single soul could attach to both males and females over time, it had no inherent sexual identity, leading Allen to conclude:

the identity of a woman or man comes from their mind (or soul) and not from their body. The material aspects of generation, which played such a crucial role on the cosmic level of male and female identity, have no role at all on the level of actual human existence.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Prudence Allen, RSM, *The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750BC-AD1250* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997). p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> Lloyd, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Plato’s cosmology can be found in *Timaeus*, and reference to matter and form specifically in par. 51b7–e6. Although his theory of forms shifted somewhat over the course of his life, forms as ideas were always separate from actual things, as explained here: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-timaeus/>

<sup>12</sup> Allen, p. 61.

Although such a dichotomy between the mind and the body might lead one to suggest that the body hardly matters (and Plato did truly wish both men and women to pursue wisdom), the cosmic principles still required that women were more bound by their materiality because of pregnancy. This Plato confirms when, in his insistence that the body must be overcome in the pursuit of higher truths, he admits it was harder for women who are fundamentally weaker, and by suggesting in *Timaeus* that cowardly or unrighteous men would be punished in their next life by being incarnated as women.<sup>13</sup> In sum, Lloyd concludes: “This Platonic theme recurs throughout the subsequent history of western thought in ways that both exploit and reinforce the long-standing associations between maleness and form and femaleness and matter.”<sup>14</sup>

Such is the philosophical inheritance passed on to western civilisation; having begun with venerating women for their fertility, it subsequently lifted that capacity out of its mere matter and joined it to a cosmic form that transcended human generation. It was in this milieu that the Christian message spread, sometimes accommodating these premises and often challenging them, trying to establish a fundamental equality between men and women while grappling with both the material and spiritual aspects of reproduction. It wasn't until Aquinas (d. 1274) applied the Aristotelian prism to Christian revelation that human rationality and freedom could be understood in their richest, most complete sense.

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<sup>13</sup> Allen, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd, p. 5.

*Concerning times and seasons, brothers, you have no need for anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief at night. When people are saying, "Peace and security," then sudden disaster comes upon them, like labor pains upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness, for that day to overtake you like a thief (1 Thes 5:1-4).*

### **Chapter Three: Three Views of Pregnancy**

While almost every aspect of the Catholic faith has been disputed over the millennia, it wasn't until the 20th century that critics honed in on the foundational principle: "male and female He made them" (Gen 3:15). The perennial tension between man and woman has been a topic discussed since antiquity, but while previously the debates addressed how society ought to be structured to accommodate the perceived differences, post-modernists went deeper because of two foundational changes: the first being the near ubiquitous access to technology separating sexual intimacy from its procreative aspect, and the second, following in swift order, being widespread rejection of the moral restraint that had previously tied sexual intimacy to life-long unions. This rejection was justified by insisting that the long panorama of theological treatises, legal codes, and social arrangements were merely a series of social constructs—based on carefully crafted myths, and reinforced by tradition and language—collectively meant to benefit men and oppress women. Thus, Christians found themselves on the front lines of a vicious assault against the most conventional pieties, and the attack that launched a systematic deconstruction of the very ideas of male and female couldn't help but to recalibrate the value and meaning of motherhood.

Motherhood has always been highlighted as the nexus of asymmetry between the sexes, but while previous generations had simply accepted it as a phenomenon to be managed, the cultural and technological changes that swept through Europe and North America in the 20th century upended the usual assumptions. The wider acceptance of women living independently while engaging in uncommitted sexual relations have combined to allow women to reject motherhood entirely.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, several interesting arguments have challenged its very rationality as an endeavor—by those both inside and outside the Catholic Church. This paper

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<sup>15</sup> Presently, women can reject motherhood by accessing contraceptives, sterilization procedures, and abortion, all of which are widely available. While these options are certainly not new (with myriad cultures also having countenanced infanticide when needed) they are not only accessible but rarely discouraged.

will begin by comparing and contrasting three disparate points of view which highlight how pregnancy—an apparent biological process—specifically relates to our rational nature.

*Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)*

While the vast majority of early feminists in the 18th and 19th centuries accepted the premise that pregnancy was a fact of life that had to be respected, by the 20th century the renowned philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, explosively insisted that motherhood itself was *the* cultural construct that had to be rejected if women were to be the protagonists of their own lives. Her ground-breaking work, *The Second Sex* (1947), attacks motherhood from many angles—cultural, sociological, psychological, and biological—and she insists that motherhood is a biological trap that forces women to “sacrifice their individuality,”<sup>16</sup> that the woman is “first violated ... then alienated,”<sup>17</sup> while pregnant “she seems possessed by outside forces,”<sup>18</sup> and most importantly, since her body is designed to harbour “foreign life,” she cannot simply inhabit her body as a man can. “From puberty to menopause she is the principal site of a story that takes place in her and does not concern her personally ... Her body is an alienated opaque thing; something other than her.”<sup>19</sup>

While she acknowledges a wide range of psychological reactions that women exhibit during pregnancy—from joyful anticipation to deep anxiety and anger—de Beauvoir stresses, echoing Aeschylus, that “she does not really make the child: it is made in her; her flesh only engenders flesh: she is incapable of founding an existence that will have to found itself.”<sup>20</sup> De Beauvoir goes so far as to insist that it is “rather horrible that a parasitic body should proliferate within her body,” and its growth will haunt the mother with images of “swelling, tearing, hemorrhages.” The child is not only an alien force drawing his existence from her very flesh, but alienates her as well from who she could otherwise be, reducing her to “plant and animal, a collection of colloids, and incubator, an egg...a passive instrument of life.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 539.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 538.

While later generations of feminists have excoriated de Beauvoir for being reductionist in her insistence that the body itself continues to define women, Julie K. Ward reminds us that de Beauvoir spoke of “body” in two different ways. In the Cartesian view, the above account of pregnancy offers an example of the body as *res extensa*, which traps women and alienates them from their actual selves; but her second use of “body” is the social construct defining motherhood—the conventions that she believes have been hijacked by “patriarchal forces” to prohibit women from pursuing meaningful activities.<sup>22</sup> After lamenting the woman’s physical weakness compared to men, her ignorance of the wider world, and her inferior abilities to persevere, de Beauvoir concludes, “This means that her individual life is not as rich as a man’s.”<sup>23</sup> In what does “richness” consist? She explains:

The worst curse on woman is her exclusion from warrior expeditions; it is not in giving life but in risking his life that man raises himself above the animal; this is why throughout humanity, superiority has been granted not to the sex that gives birth but to the one that kills.<sup>24</sup>

Here we hold one essential key to her thesis. Despite the importance of reproduction to the survival of any species, and how essential it is for sustaining any given human culture (as exemplified by the widespread fertility cults mentioned above), de Beauvoir claims that since, biologically, a species maintains itself only by re-creating itself, the woman’s “natural function” of mothering, even though a “vital process,” has no transcendent meaning nor does it produce anything new: it is “nothing but a repetition of the same Life in different forms.”<sup>25</sup> She only grants value to the work of men, which “shapes the face of the earth, creates new instruments, invents and forges the future.”<sup>26</sup> As long as a woman must give birth, she is “riveted to her body like an animal,”<sup>27</sup> which “does not provide her reasons for being, and these reasons are more important than life itself.”<sup>28</sup>

Michele Schumacher summarizes the two-front battle inherited by those inspired by de Beauvoir’s view of pregnancy:

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<sup>22</sup> Julie K. Ward, “Bouvoir’s Two Senses of ‘Body,’” found in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, Margaret A. Simons, ed. (University Park, PA: Penn State Press: 2010), p. 225.

<sup>23</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 46.

<sup>24</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 74.

<sup>25</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 74.

<sup>26</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 74.

on the one hand, against nature and the argument for biological determinism—or the reduction of woman to what lies within the realm of her body and its working—and on the other hand, against cultural determinism—or the pressure to live up to a culturally promoted ideal of womanhood, orchestrated largely by men of a macho mindset seeking to keep woman in her place within a man’s world.<sup>29</sup>

This perceived loss of individual freedom resulting from pregnancy leads de Beauvoir to claim its irrationality on two levels: the lack of creative, intellectual work involved, and the perverse value attached to the phenomenon, which she insists was invented by the patriarchy for its own selfish reasons.

### *Julia Kristeva (1941- )*

Myriad criticisms of de Beauvoir’s work followed, and many worried that, by envying the work of men and thereby adopting the “male” hierarchy of values, the distinct value of women would be dismissed—not only by men, but by women themselves. To this end, we now turn to the work of Julia Kristeva, who flatly rejects de Beauvoir’s view that masculine accomplishments ought to be the benchmark of value in a society. She agrees that the wider culture has always embraced motherhood as a means of marginalising women from the public sphere, but, believing affectivity to be diametrically opposed to the intellect, Kristeva sees the irrationality of women—which she equates with affectivity—as a necessary counterweight to the sterile, non-affective rationality of men. Ultimately, she laments the power of men to have arranged society in such a way as to prioritize logic over a broader form of wisdom.

Regarding pregnancy, she echoes de Beauvoir’s lament about the loss of agency by offering her own graphic depiction:

Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. ‘It happens but I am not there,’ ‘I cannot realise it, but it goes on.’ Motherhood’s impossible syllogism.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Michele M. Schumacher, “Woman’s Self-interest or Sacrificial Motherhood: Personal Desires, Natural Inclinations and the Meaning of Love,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 77, Number 1, January 2013, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> Julia Kristeva, “Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini,” found in *The Portable Kristeva Reader*, Kelly Oliver, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). p. 303. It should be said from the outset

Thus, from the outset we see that agency and subjectivity will continue to predominate the conversation, despite the rejection of de Beauvoir's attack on biological determinism. Political Scientist Linda M.G. Zerilli, who specialises in the areas of gender and sexuality, has carefully weighed the work of de Beauvoir and Kristeva, and reminds us that the latter has moved the pregnant woman away from being what the former claims to be an irrational animal without meaning, to, in her own curious words, "the threshold between nature and culture, biology and language"<sup>31</sup>—which makes her a cipher of sorts. While Zerilli shows that both thinkers agree that "the maternal body is the site of a radical splitting of the female subject,"<sup>32</sup> the new essential question is how to define the process. Most feminists see that motherhood cannot be rejected out of hand as oppressive, but neither is it to be welcomed on "masculinist" terms—meaning having either less value than other endeavors or a hyper-valuation beyond the woman for society itself. This is where Zerilli indicates that the "political space" inherent in pregnancy is well-defined by Kristeva as "a state beyond representation, an unsignifiable space in which the mother-to-be may trouble the word but at the unspeakable price of losing her own relationship to language."<sup>33</sup> "Unsignifiable space" seems to be shorthand for a phenomenon that evades logic, and refuses even to be categorised for fear that it will be a means to corner women—either by men or society in general—into losing their autonomy.

Rather than simply accepting pregnancy and motherhood as a natural event, Kristeva poses a question: "What does this desire for motherhood correspond to?"<sup>34</sup> With the emphasis on affectivity and personal experience, we see why she describes pregnancy as a "threshold," for there is no assumption that pregnancy itself signifies *anything*. Kristeva uses "enlightened humanism" as a tool to liberate the body from any received meaning. She insists, still, that "the mother as subject is a delusion,"<sup>35</sup> and Zerilli explains that this is both because of the mother's inability to describe the process of pregnancy (since it is unsignifiable space) and her refusal to

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that many insist that Kristeva did not call herself a feminist, and it must be granted that feminism as a whole includes such a vast array of thought that internally each person had to establish his particular beachhead against the larger, often inchoate movement with many contradictory arguments. From this distance, and for the sake of this paper, I will loosely lump de Beauvoir and Kristeva into the wider movement while showing the tremendous disparity of their views.

<sup>31</sup> Linda M.G. Zerilli, "A process without a subject: Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva on maternity." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 18(1) 1992, p. 297.

<sup>32</sup> Zerilli, p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> Zerilli, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> Zerilli, p. 114.

<sup>35</sup> *The Portable Kristeva*, p. 242.

allow the child to define—or change—her status.<sup>36</sup> Zerilli further notes that Kristeva dismisses any suggestion that a mother is a rational agent in pregnancy, quoting her dismissal of that possibility as an “existential myth,”<sup>37</sup> for her pregnancy is “the site of the collapse of all oppositions and the confusion of identities.”<sup>38</sup>

This brings us to a key difference between the two views. Whereas de Beauvoir sees that the woman is ensnared by a biology that forces her to exist at the level of an animal, both distracting her from accomplishing things of value and isolating her as “other,” Kristeva refuses to define pregnancy as a trap. For her it merely creates a situation that transcends language—or as Zarelli describes it, “a less rigid experience of psychic and corporeal boundaries, and more fluid conception of identity.”<sup>39</sup> It must be stressed that Kristeva does not posit motherhood as a net good, for it remains undefinable and actually blurs the identity of the woman as subject. It is this “confusion of identities” which places the event in the hands of the woman to embrace or reject, and then subsequently attach to it any meaning she wishes.

Here again, we have the question of the rationality of the subject, which both de Beauvoir and Kristeva find missing in the biological process, but while the former is angered at the loss of the mother’s voice, the latter revels in the situation as a singular way of being—and specifically a way of *not being a man!* Neither will allow that pregnancy is simply a biological referent, nor will they assign any concrete sociological value. Rather, both insist that it remains a phenomenon with no fixed value, and women will benefit only by undercutting the collective pressure that society places on them to bear children. Although both de Beauvoir and Kristeva agree that woman represents mystery, chaos, and an inchoate symbol of fertility, de Beauvoir laments the long-standing patriarchal trap, while Kristeva—embracing woman as the epitome of intuition and sensitivity—prefers to rejoice that woman is the antithesis of logic and rationality.

*Gertrude von le Fort (1876-1971)*

Lest one dismiss the frustration of feminists as misguided or ill-informed, there are indeed those within the Catholic Church who have zealously promoted a view of womanhood rife with

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<sup>36</sup> Zerilli, p. 120.

<sup>37</sup> Zerilli, p. 298.

<sup>38</sup> Zerilli, p. 126.

<sup>39</sup> Zerilli, p. 131.



troubling suppositions, one example being the poetically distilled “eternal woman” myth—and often it is such unbalanced views that rightfully draw the ire of those who bridle at the error. The German freethinker Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) was inspired by many elements of Greek philosophy mentioned above in Chapter One. Thus he incorporated them into his romanticised view of the differences between men and women, with the former epitomising action and the latter contemplation. While this might seem somewhat incongruous (since women might not be considered well-suited for contemplation because of their debased tie to matter), it was still quite consistent with the public-private dispersal of responsibilities—the public requiring reason and strength, the private dependent on quiet virtues of the heart. (Thus we see that the contemplation he had in mind was neither academic nor sophisticated.) His stress on woman’s call to motherhood as a hidden task subordinated to the good of others was subsequently baptised by Gertrude von le Fort, a German convert to the Catholic faith. Born in Westphalia in 1876, this avid student of history, philosophy, and theology entered the Church in 1925, and wrote prolifically on the importance of the gift of motherhood—both physical and spiritual. Her 1934 work, *The Eternal Woman*, is a paean to femininity that stresses not only the elements that she considers essential to femininity, but that womanhood itself transcends the individual person and is itself an eternal good.

Von le Fort begins with the premise that motherhood is key to the fulfillment of all woman:

The motif that is basic to all that comes to pass through woman is in the highest measure fundamental also to woman’s function of giving birth ... Conception and birth are the hour and the mystery of life, which means that they are in the hour and the mystery of woman.<sup>40</sup>

Here we see that pregnancy is immediately identified with mystery. While it remains to be seen whether mystery is *ipso facto* antithetical to rationality, her insistence that it can never be fully explained coincides with Kristeva’s view of its inchoate nature. As for de Beauvoir’s concern that the task of pregnancy has little individualistic value and is suborned in a sea of anonymity, von le Fort doubles down:

On earth the mother is the image of endlessness; centuries pass over her joy and her sorrow and leave no trace behind. She is ever the same, the boundless abundance, the

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<sup>40</sup> Gertrude von le Fort, *The Eternal Woman* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2010), p. 68. It must be acknowledged that because of her understanding of Catholic theology, her respect for motherhood included spiritual motherhood, which was not only naturally related but superior. We can only surmise that it would be equally irrational because the biology of the former guides the expression of the latter.

silence, the immutability of life itself, in its power of conceiving, of bearing, of bringing forth. In this she is comparable only to the fruitful womb of the earth.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, the closer she is to the earth, the more feminine she is, as von le Fort insists on using the familiar Platonic form: “The defection of woman [meaning her moral failing] is not really that of a creature falling earthward; it is rather a descent away from the earth insofar as the earth itself signifies something womanly, something that awaits in humble readiness.”<sup>42</sup>

So positive is the woman’s humble passivity through motherhood that it even allows her to transcend the material world: “The mother as such does not bear the individualising marks of the person, nor does she carry the stamp of an epoch. With her every temporal program ends, since time itself has no power over her ... as mother she conquers time.”<sup>43</sup> This certainly adds a metaphysical twist to de Beauvoir’s thesis about the powerlessness attached to childbearing, but remains to be seen how this power—contemplative or otherwise—relates to the woman’s rational nature.

What von le Fort does insist upon is that whatever power accrues to the woman, it is not personal. Her call to earthy silence should be, rather, an anonymous manifestation of a “primal mystery.”<sup>44</sup> Her qualities are not her own because she is not an individual but a symbol:

Just as the meaning of the symbol does not necessarily coincide with the empiric character or condition of the individual who for the time being is its bearer, so also the essential quality that it designates is not restricted to the individual in question.<sup>45</sup>

Here we find that the anonymity that flows from humility, according to von le Fort, is necessary to the flourishing of the sign:

As woman primarily denotes not personality but its surrender, so also the endurance that she is able to give to her descendents is not self-assertion, but something purchased at the expense of submerging herself into the universal stream of succeeding generations.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> von le Fort, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> von le Fort, pp. 12-13.

<sup>43</sup> von le Fort, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> von le Fort, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> von le Fort, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> von le Fort, p. 22.

There are clear indications that Platonic forms lay the groundwork an ideal motherhood, leading von le Fort to posit: “When the woman seeks herself, the metaphysical mystery is extinguished, for in uplifting her own image she destroys the one that is eternal...to seek its *reason* in the contradiction between the senses and the spirit is of no avail.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the feminine form, which is so bound up with motherhood, appears to transcend not only the woman, but time itself—hence the concept of the “eternal woman.” Here, Goethe’s pagan imagery is baptized and wedded to the Jungian archetype prevalent in her day:

We cannot grasp the metaphysical except under the veil of form, hence necessarily in the place where we find ourselves confined again to the lower level of the temporal and the relative. It is only in great art in its supreme moments of inspiration that is capable of proclaiming under a transitory form the things that are unchanging.<sup>48</sup>

It is not only the form that is unchanging, but some spell touches the very woman through her childbearing, so that the power of surrender initiates her into a divine mystery:

The mother is the timeless woman, for she is immutable. Her love does not develop, for the immutable does not increase. From the first moment it is there. Mother love cannot be augmented, since this would imply that one it was less great. ...As at the hour of birth, the mother stakes her life without reserve for the child, so after its birth her life no longer belongs to herself, but to the child. The timeless woman is she who has become engulfed in the stream of the generations; the maternal woman is the one who has submerged herself in the child. Of her Friedrich Hebbel writes:

She has borne a child  
To loftiest joy and deepest grief,  
And now she is completely lost  
In its mute loveliness.<sup>49</sup>

It is unclear how motherhood can circumvent the entire process of perfection (foundational to the Christian life) and simply be a channel of perfect love. Nor is it at all explained how the biological process is rational, other than achieving a transcendent good through the physical submission to another. Psychiatrist Karl Stern claims that this submission “occurs before there is conscious reasoning.”<sup>50</sup> Through his reading of the work of von le Fort, he suggests that while

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<sup>47</sup> von le Fort, p. 12, emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup> von le Fort, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> von le Fort, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Stern, *The Flight From Woman* (St Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1985), p. 19.

men solve their problems rationally, “woman, wherever she is different from man, ‘acts and reacts out of the dark, mysterious depths of the unconscious, i.e. affectively, intuitively, mysteriously. This is no judgment of value but a statement of fact.’”<sup>51</sup>

Here we come to the full import of suggesting that the holiness of women is innately tied to a “mysterious” biological process, as Stern extrapolates from von le Fort’s thesis:

The more a man is, the more he is filled to the brim with rationality. Everything he does and achieves, he does and achieves for a reason, especially for a practical reason. A woman's love, that divine surrender of her ultra-inner being which the impassioned woman makes, is perhaps the only thing which is not achieved by reasoning. The core of the feminine mind, no matter how intelligent the woman may be, is occupied by an irrational power. If the male is the rational being, the woman is the irrational being.<sup>52</sup>

As profound and laudatory as may be the idea that woman is a powerhouse of surrender, the logic relies on creating for woman an irrational path of salvation, which mandates that her contribution be entirely passive—for she is beholden to an eternal symbol within “the divine order” to which she gives flesh, as von le Fort explains:

The individual carrier, therefore, has an obligation toward his symbols, which remain above and beyond him, inviolate and inviolable, even when he no longer recognises their meaning, or when he has gone so far as to reject or deny them. As a result, the symbol does not disclose the empiric character or condition of the one who for the time being is its bearer; but it expresses his metaphysical significance. The bearer may fall away from his symbol, but the symbol remains.<sup>53</sup>

While von le Fort relishes this obligation as a path of holiness, an observer might be horrified to see that there is something more important than the perfection of the human person at stake—for the true goal, truth be told, is to manifest an abstract, impersonal form to the world. It might be defended by insisting that conforming to the archetype is the surest path of holiness, but it seems a circuitous route at best, and even runs the risk of seeing the archetype as an intermediary between God and the woman.

Thus we have three conflicting views of femininity which, for profoundly different reasons, agree that motherhood is not rational. Simone de Beauvoir decries female biology which undermines

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<sup>51</sup> Stern, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Stern, p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> von le Fort, p. 3.

her as a subject and interferes with her ability to fulfill a rational life of unique purpose; Julia Kristeva sees motherhood as equally subjectless but prefers feminine irrationality to the sterile rationality of men; and Gertrude von le Fort embraces the anonymity of motherhood as a suprarational symbol, which blazes a path to holiness by swallowing the subject in an eternal form. Astoundingly, none of these women stop to define rationality beyond a concept vaguely related to discursive reasoning, and none take time to enfold female affectivity into a deeper form of wisdom, which Aquinas defines as the perfection of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> Each assumes her reader will associate it with thought patterns or philosophies—de Beauvoir ties it to the secular pursuits of men which women must enter to find value; Kristeva laments its stifling effect on the intuitive empathies of women which are a valuable corrective to the world of men; and von le Fort sees it as entirely unrelated to the material world, touching on divine wisdom but in a prerational way.

The work which follows must show that the work of the mind and the work of the body are intricately related, that motherhood is entirely rational, and that women and men can collaborate on a universally valuable endeavor in ways that benefit each other, the child they create, and the larger community. Essential to the project is to heal the unfortunate mind-body duality that persists to this day—a duality that undermines the richness of the embodied wisdom on offer.

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<sup>54</sup> *ST*, II-II.45.3.

*Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth (Genesis 1:26-28).*

## **Chapter Four: Hylemorphism**

The question at hand concerning motherhood and specifically how it relates to rationality can only be adequately answered with a proper anthropology that builds on the premise that the human person is a hylemorphic composite of body and soul.<sup>55</sup> H. D. Gardeil argues that this anthropology is far superior to the Platonic forms of old, as well as the newer bifurcation of the human person that sprang from the work of Rene Descartes (1596-1650).<sup>56</sup> Gardeil argues that the toxic errors borne of the mind-body duality inherent in both systems lead one to believe that the body's relationship to the soul is only accidental, that the body is a mere instrument, that the person bears only an ephemeral tie to the world, and that there is little transcendent value to bodily experience.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, the topic at hand requires reliable fundamental principles capable of explaining two things: first, how a creature can grow and change without losing its essence, and secondly, what moral import its natural processes might bear (and any privations thereof), because certainly the views of the three women outlined above—while each lacks a

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<sup>55</sup> The body and soul conform to the Aristotelian notion that “corporeal things of a natural kind are composed of two principles of a corporeal being, matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphe*)—primarily to explain the reality of change, what the ancients called the processes of generation and corruption.” Nicanor Austriaco, OP, “The Hylomorphic Structure Of Thomistic Moral Theology From The Perspective of a Systems Biology” (Doctoral Dissertation found online), p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> While Platonism lends itself to a mind-body dualism that leaves intelligibility to the world of forms, and Plato even spoke of the soul trapped in a body (*Phaedo*), Cartesian dualism (*Meditations*) was of a different sort. As “substance dualist,” Descartes posited that there were two kinds of substance: matter, which was spatially extended, and the mind, which thinks. ([https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/.](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/)) Despite the technical differences, they both served to separate the thinking self from the body, which is antithetical to the substantial unity supported by Aristotle and Aquinas. As for his view of the soul, he wrote: “I was a substance whose whole essence or nature was to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing in order to exist... Accordingly, this I—the soul by which I am what I am—is entirely distinct from the body” (*Discourse on the Method*, Part 4, par. 2).

<sup>57</sup> H.D.Gardeil, *Introduction to the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas—Volume Two: Cosmology*, p. 31.

healthy alternative framework—reveal remarkably logical (if diverse) reactions to the long-established but disjointed view of the human person.<sup>58</sup>

Philosophers throughout the ages have been profoundly aware that there is a distinction between one's self-awareness and his corporeal self, but it was the work of Aristotle—newly available to medieval Europe—that allowed Aquinas to synthesize sacred Scripture, sacred Tradition, and metaphysics, thus “[presenting] theology in a clear and an organized manner.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, his theology—while entirely docile to Christian revelation—is augmented by a study of the intelligibility embedded in creation, which submits to various kinds of causality; and therefore reason, when applied to the human person, extends beyond its usual association with empirical sciences and discursive thought.

Foundational to the corpus of Aquinas is his explanation that the soul is the immaterial form of the body,<sup>60</sup> and the principle of life from which knowledge and will flow.<sup>61</sup> It is from these two premises that all we understand about the human person is based, so they must be unpacked in a way that explains the topic at hand. As noted in Chapter I, Plato suggests that there is a world of forms, existing beyond our temporal world, which offers categories of subsistent perfections to which actual creatures conform to greater and lesser degrees. Aristotle keeps the notion of form, but insists that it isn't eternal, nor does it exist beyond the thing itself. Rather, the form is the organising principle that allows the thing to be what it is meant to be. In the case of a human being, the individuating matter—the body—acts as it does according to this governing principle, as Aquinas explains, “for all corporeal nature lies under the soul, and is related to it as its matter and instrument.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Given the societies in which they lived, whose structures conformed to very different principles, it is to their credit that each of the women cited above intuitively understood that much work that is traditionally feminine—particularly pregnancy—could be misunderstood, manipulated, or devalued, even if their responses were wide of the mark.

<sup>59</sup> Pasnau, *The Treatise on Human Nature* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002) p. xii. While the feminists of recent decades have decried this “organized” methodology as patriarchal, sterile, and anti-woman, this paper will show that the synthesis includes and values every “feminine” gift (such as sensory experience and intuition) that they consider marginalized or devalued, if only given a fair reading.

<sup>60</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Ia.75.5 (henceforth ST)

<sup>61</sup> ST, Ia.75.1.

<sup>62</sup> ST, Ia.78.1. For any quotes within the range of Ia75-89 of the *Summa Theologica*, I will be using the Pasnau translation of Aquinas, so that they better cohere with his explanatory notes. As a precaution, it is essential not to think of the body as simply “stuff,” meaning the biological material that constitutes a human being. While it seems to be so, Fr Austriaco explains that, technically “Thomistic matter is not a particular thing but is only a potency to be a particular thing that is present in another particular thing. Thus, properly speaking, Thomistic matter is not a thing. Rather, it is a principle of being by which a thing

### *Vegetative, Sensitive, and Intellective Capacities with the Soul*

With the soul as the organising principle of the body, the nature of the person can be discerned through the operations that are governed and directed by the soul.<sup>63</sup> These operations, or actions, reveal the capacities of the soul, and are distinguished by their objects. The first of the three basic powers or capacities is the vegetative capacity, which directs him to maintain his existence, to grow, and to reproduce. These activities, which are shared by all living things, are restricted to the body united to that soul.<sup>64</sup> Above this lie the sensitive powers, which deal with the various stimuli affecting the body, and these capacities extend beyond the individual, touching on universals related to “every kind of sensible body, and not only with the body united to the soul.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, since humans can extrapolate universals from individual pieces of data beyond sensible bodies, it is evident that the mind is ordered to comprehending reality itself,<sup>66</sup> and here reason is introduced as the intellective power by which the human is able to grasp truth.

While at first glance, the vegetative powers seem to have the most straightforward relevance to pregnancy as a reproductive act; but as a rational animal, all of a person’s powers will have an influence if reproduction is to be fully human. A study of the powers in the sensitive soul reveals just one dimension of the essential bridge between the material world and the intellect, which depends on the organic body for sensory inputs. These sensory representations—called *phantasms*—provide data that would otherwise remain inaccessible to the immaterial mind, allowing the human intellect to know things, which is what it was made for. Beyond the five organic senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell are the additional internal powers of estimation, memory, imagination, and common sense.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, although Thomas settled on naming the four internal senses as such, he was distilling long-standing Greek, Hebrew, and

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exists. Or to put it another way, it is a non-substantial but really existing metaphysical principle of being that is involved in the constitution of a thing of a natural kind.” This matter of potentiality will have a strong bearing on later arguments about inclinations and eternal forms.

<sup>63</sup> *ST*, Ia.76.1.

<sup>64</sup> *ST*, Ia.78.1.

<sup>65</sup> *ST*, Ia.78.1.

<sup>66</sup> *ST*, Ia.79.1.

<sup>67</sup> *ST*, Ia.78.4. While brute animals also have these powers to some degree, they have nowhere near the sophistication that humans have in ordering and processing sense data. Aquinas explains in the corpus that animal perceptions rely more on instinct than actual comparisons, their memories cannot rise to the level of recollections, and the intentions behind their reaction to sense impressions lack thought.



Arabic thoughts on these powers.<sup>68</sup> These capacities allow the person to warehouse experiences in what Thomas describes as “a kind of treasury for forms,” accessible for study or comparison even when the items in question are no longer present to the senses.<sup>69</sup> These impressions are not only the bridge between the person and the world, but are tools turned inwardly to process the workings of the vegetative powers. From sensing pain to assessing comforts, it cannot be stressed enough how these internal senses interact to add depth and meaning to personal experience—both sensory and intuitive—the very topic which permeates discussions concerning how women relate to rationality. Moreover as we look into the workings of the human mind, Thomas shows that this information is essential to how all humans reason, whether male or female—and certainly laying the foundation for showing how rationality will exceed the realm of sterile logic.

The third capacity, that of intellection, is itself an operation of the rational soul fed by the combined inputs of the internal and external senses, and ordered to “the apprehending of intelligible truth.”<sup>70</sup> With Augustine as his primary authority, Thomas posits that “reason, intellect, and mind are one capacity,”<sup>71</sup> explaining further that reason is the systematic progression towards that apprehension, “advancing from one object to another,”<sup>72</sup> and since each of these intermediary objects needs to be weighed in its own right, it is evident that the process of intellectualisation is one of reasoning and the two cannot be separated. To be rational is to engage in what Dionysius describes as a “mental discussion,”<sup>73</sup> and the fodder for this activity is the product of five external senses seamlessly filtered through the four internal senses named above.

The challenge has long been to explain the hylemorphic person as a substantial unity, and in this regard Thomas sought in particular to counter Platonic ideas, which he summarizes: “Plato and his school held that the intellectual soul is not united to the body as form to matter, but only as a mover to movable, for he said that the soul is in the body as a sailor in a boat. In this way the union of the soul and body would only be by virtual contact.”<sup>74</sup> Thomas believes it to be

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<sup>68</sup> Pasnau, p. 282. Some of the interlocutors he has in mind are Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroes, and Galen.

<sup>69</sup> *ST*, Ia.78.4.

<sup>70</sup> *ST*, Ia.79.8.

<sup>71</sup> *ST*, Ia.79.8.

<sup>72</sup> *ST*, Ia.79.8.

<sup>73</sup> *ST*, Ia.79.

<sup>74</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 57.

essential to reject any dichotomy between senses and the intellect. Beyond his most obvious argument that the mind can't operate without phantasms—the species it receives through the senses—he illustrates two additional kinds of integration: first an uninterrupted range from lowest power to highest powers, and secondly a give-and-take that cements the body-soul compound into one substantial being. Regarding the first kind, Thomas explains that even human reproduction, which appears to be strictly a bodily activity, requires another (specifically: a member of the other sex) for its operation, which “approaches the stature of a sensitive soul,”<sup>75</sup> but this is not unique to this one act, “for the highest of the lowest natures touches the lowest of the higher,”<sup>76</sup> a concept that he traces back to Dionysius. There is even in the intellect a stratum from lower to higher reason, ranging from practical understanding of the temporal world to the universal truths grasped through contemplation. Elsewhere, he concludes from this wide-ranging stratum that, “there are, in other words, no gaps in the created world. Instead there is a continuum from the least to the most perfect and complete.”<sup>77</sup>

Regarding the second kind of integration, while there exists no “space” that could separate the mind from the body, the constant interplay among capacities further helps to disprove both the Platonic and Cartesian dichotomies. Thomas explains, “since what has less priority exists for the sake of what has more, matter exists for the sake of substantial form, whereas conversely an accidental form exists for completing the subject.”<sup>78</sup> Therefore, although it was explained above that the substantial form is the source of perfection for all aspects of the person—body *and* soul—the body completes the subject, such that it is also the very means of perfection through its proper operations. Moreover, there is constant internal mediation among the capacities, as they have their own, entwined causal relations.<sup>79</sup> So while the nutritive soul is last in terms of sophistication, it is first in light of its foundational importance for the subject. It begins with life, then growth and health, leading to the generation of more lives—all of which allow the perfection of the senses and a broader and deeper intellect, but conversely the body would neither know how to form itself and process the sensory inputs without the intellect to order and guide its understanding of itself and the world. “So in one way the senses originate in the

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<sup>75</sup> *ST.*, 78.2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.2.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.7.

intellect,” summarizes Pasnau, “whereas in another way the intellect originates in the senses.”<sup>80</sup>  
This interplay is summarized in another way by Rudi TeVelde:

The spiritual soul of man is subsisting by itself, but at the same time the soul is the form of the body, which serves the realization of the proper end of man, that is, the ultimate perfection of his spiritual nature. The body is therefore subordinate to the soul; ontologically speaking, the body exists for the sake of the soul in as much as it enables the realization of man’s spiritual being.<sup>81</sup>

### *Inclination*

As noted above, the two fundamental dimensions of the intellectual soul are knowledge and will, and whereas the body provides the intellect with those phantasms that allow it to know, the will operates through the appetites, by which the intellect moves the body. These appetites reveal how the soul, as substantial form, is in every part of the body entirely, but moreover how the form actualizes all the other powers of the body.<sup>82</sup>

Thomas defines an appetite as “nothing other than a certain inclination towards something on the part of what has the appetite,”<sup>83</sup> and here we begin to see the broadest hints of final causality in the creature, thus it would be helpful to revisit the Aristotelian understanding of that topic, which was essential to Aquinas’ view. Unfortunately, as Austriaco points out, “the mechanical worldview that is prevalent in our own day ... is a worldview that we inherited from the early modern period in the seventeenth century.”<sup>84</sup> This mechanistic view is preoccupied with the study of how material forces and powers relate to motion and activity, focusing on that which is observable and quantifiable; this flattens the inherited explanations—both ancient and medieval—that were entirely comfortable in probing the inner workings of things to surmise their purpose. Citing Aquinas, who offers that “it is said that a cause is that from which existence follows from another” (*de Prin*, 18), Austriaco explains therefore that “within the Thomistic framework, causes explain how a thing comes into being, how it remains in being, and

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<sup>80</sup> Pasnau, p. 270.

<sup>81</sup> Rudi A. TeVelde, “Evil, Sin, and Death: Thomas Aquinas on Original Sin” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Van Nieuwenhove, Rik and Joseph Wawrykow, eds. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press (2005). p. 160-161.

<sup>82</sup> *ST*, I.76.8.

<sup>83</sup> *ST*, I.1.1.8.1c.

<sup>84</sup> Austriaco, p. 15.

eventually, how it ceases to be, by becoming something else.”<sup>85</sup> Therefore, in addition to external mechanical causes, Aquinas’ view depends firmly on the nature inherent in forms as well as agency and ends to explain creation. This will give a coherence to human action on both individual level and within society—coherence which actually expands the rationality of human actions. Specifically, the two appetites that drive action—intellectual (or the will, seeking the good) and sensitive (desiring what is suitable)—are distinct powers differentiated by their objects, and the latter, being less rational, should be directed by the former.<sup>86</sup>

All natural forms contain within themselves causal principles, and natural inclinations accrue from these principles. The four causes—formal, material, efficient, and final—together create an interdependent system or, as Gardeil defines it, “a closely knit economy.”<sup>87</sup> Relating to our discussion, the first two relate specifically to the soul and the body; but understanding inclination requires a firm grasp of the interplay between formal and final causes, the latter illustrating the end (or object) of actions. The actions reveal an obvious relationship between the form which (through the necessary materials) serves an end, although the timeline might lead some to object to how an end (which comes later) can be a cause (which ought to come prior). In this regard, Thomas offers a firm reply: “It should be said that an end, even if it comes last in execution, still comes first in the agent’s intention. And in this way it has the character of a cause,”<sup>88</sup> leading Gardeil to point out an essential truth, “Form and end [as causes] have coincident meanings and what is form in one respect is also end from another.”<sup>89</sup>

All that remains, in this regard, is to emphasize that the end, in itself, is good, as Aquinas explains:

Now as “being” is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so “good” is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of **good**. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of **good**, viz. That “good is that which all things seek after.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Austriaco, p. 15.

<sup>86</sup> *ST*, I.80.2.

<sup>87</sup> Gardeil, p. 70

<sup>88</sup> *ST*, I-IIae, 1.1.r1.

<sup>89</sup> Gardeil, p. 57.

<sup>90</sup> *ST*, I-IIae, 94.2.

This explains the good of creation, for each thing bears within it not only the inclination towards this good, but the actual good itself as cause and ordering principle.

### *Embodied Interiority*

Having established that each thing in the natural world is instilled with its own inclinations, the next consideration is to apply the principle to human beings, whose intellect far surpasses that of other animals and yet whose intellectual capacities are part of a hylemorphic nature. Servais Pinckaers explains that in humans there are five natural inclinations that can be called “primitive spiritual instincts,” which “flow from the essential components of our nature and are linked to the general notions that philosophers call the ‘transcendentals’ or the ‘universal attributes.’” These include the yearning for the good, for truth, for self-preservation, to reproduce, and to live in a society.<sup>91</sup> The first inclination is most important for—rather than creating tension—“it gathers the other inclinations into one dynamic stream,” linking natural law to the eternal law. Pinckaers continues:

Let us note that natural law does not appear as a barrier to freedom, but, in St Thomas, possesses a basically dynamic nature: it proceeds from the natural inclination and yearnings for the preservation of being, the gift of life, the good, truth, and life in society... The natural law and the Decalogue can be ordered to the Gospel Law as to a higher perfection, a total fulfillment.<sup>92</sup>

Understanding the spectrum that includes the natural law inscribed in our being, each person’s desire for happiness, and ultimately the “the fulness of perfection”<sup>93</sup> is essential to showing how rationality permeates all the powers of the body, and harnesses them for the greater good.

The second instinct—the desire for truth—gives rise to a framework for the complex work outlined above, as the body works to distill its impressions into the phantasms that allow the mind to extrapolate the meaning of reality. While consistent debates of past millennia highlight the differences between men and women (a robust debate which continues with no end in sight) the heart of the matter at present may be how each comes to know truth, which in the post Enlightenment view has in one respect largely allowed for the disparagement of women, and in

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<sup>91</sup> Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View* (Saint Augustine’s Press: South Bend, IN, 2001), pp.98-99.

<sup>92</sup> Servais Pinckaers, *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus, eds. (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2005), p. 69.

<sup>93</sup> Pinckaers, *Morality*, p. 98.

another has disparaged wisdom, which can be very difficult to categorise or measure. As much as the devotees of de Beauvoir may envy the scientific materialism discussed in the world of men, or the readers of Kristeva may disparage more logical or dispassionate approaches to life, or the followers of von le Fort may insist that the rationality of the subject is immaterial to her maternal project, suffice it to say—at this point—that they all strongly believe in *something*. None would dispute their mind's inclination to sift through sensory experiences, assemble hierarchies of meaning, and establish the truth as they understand it, proving the accuracy of this transcendental.

Ultimately, as Romanus Cessario explains, “since appetites form a natural part of human life and well-being,”<sup>94</sup> it is increasingly evident how the substantial unity of body and soul cannot be separated if the person is to be happy and flourish. Given the three powers at play in the human person (vegetative, sensory, and appetitive) as well as their myriad appetites, this process lends itself to a carefully created moral framework that weighs how various actions allow (or don't allow) healthy inclinations to be directed to their proper ends. It is on this account that, while the rationality of the intellective power can perceive truth directly, and command the will accordingly, the sensitive powers must be managed differently. This is a key dimension of the constant interplay among the capacities mentioned above, due to the complex causal relations among the diverse powers that will benefit by a hierarchical model of operation. As Cessario explains, “both acquired and infused virtues bring about the ordering of the emotions or passions by what [Thomas] calls the ‘impression of reason’ on the appetites,”<sup>95</sup> from which it becomes obvious that a properly disciplined will impresses reason on the senses, conforming them to higher goods and proper ends. Aquinas (referencing Aristotle) explains:

Now it is evident that in moral matters the reason holds the place of commander and mover, while the appetitive power is commanded and moved. But the appetite does not receive the direction of reason univocally so to say; because it is rational, not essentially, but by participation.<sup>96</sup>

This construct allows for a variety of habits and moral actions directed to a variety of objects, assuring both the freedom of the subject and the layered responses in each situation.

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<sup>94</sup> Romanus Cessario, *Introduction to Moral Theology*, p. 203.

<sup>95</sup> Cessario, p. 203.

<sup>96</sup> *ST*, I-II, 60.1

It is here that one can begin to appreciate the logical consistency of Christian anthropology, by which Cessario explains that “the *imago dei* is impressed on the whole of the human person—*viz.*, the *per se unum* body-soul composite.”<sup>97</sup> Key to this image is the rational nature, which encompasses his natural inclinations as well as his intellectual pursuits. Thus, having laid the essential groundwork showing how all the powers of the soul are intertwined, and despite Thomas’ serious deficiencies regarding biology as it relates to reproduction, it is evident that this approach to human action mandates that pregnancy be far more than a passive biological phenomenon.

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<sup>97</sup> Cessario, p. 103.

*For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of a shoe, the horse was lost. For want of a horse, the rider was lost. For want of a rider, the battle was lost. For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost, And all for the want of a horseshoe nail (proverb from Poor Richard's Almanac, 1758).*

## **Chapter Five: The Rationality of Motherhood**

Having outlined the nature of the hylemorphic person—including the interaction among the powers and capacities of the soul—it has been shown that pregnancy, being a natural process within a healthy body and inclined to a universal good, is from the outset rational by association. But the human soul, as seat of knowledge and will, attaches a far wider range of meaning to its generative powers than mere biology suggests, and with the additional insight offered by Christian revelation, pregnancy can be studied in three specific ways: as one dimension of a complex task—or *munus*—that bears within it a particular end, as the result of a prior free choice requiring forethought and collaboration, and as a profound means of perfection that radiates its goodness to the wider world.

### *The munus of marriage*

Given that the intellective powers are charged with directing all inclinations and activities to their proper ends, it is now possible to consider the first way in which pregnancy is considered rational, that of being the locus of a larger mission entrusted to intelligent persons. The point of a mission is to accomplish a goal, and unless that goal is understood, the intelligibility of each action within the mission cannot make sense—or be gauged in terms of its success. Moreover, given the interconnectedness of the powers, it becomes obvious that no inclination can be weighed in isolation, nor will individual actions reveal their true value apart from the ultimate end of the human person.

When long-standing dualist tendencies were wedded to the reproductive technologies of the mid-20th century, the confusion over the nature of human sexuality deepened precipitously, leading Pope Paul VI to push back firmly with his 1968 encyclical, *Humane Vitae*. In it, he acknowledges the Cartesian premise, which by then had led many to ask if “the time has not come when the transmission of life should be regulated by their intelligence and will rather than



through the specific rhythms of their own bodies.”<sup>98</sup> That Cartesian dualism is further distilled in his summary of its troubling premise: wherein “human intelligence has both the right and responsibility to control those forces of irrational nature which come within its ambit.”<sup>99</sup> Paul VI rejects this line of thought as erroneous,<sup>100</sup> and while the immediate question he is addressing concerns contraception (which, he argues, contributes precisely to the dissolution of responsible behaviour) his response is grounded in an explanation of pregnancy that shows it to be part of a larger, complex task with a particular end attached.

The way that final causality directs things from within towards their own good was outlined above, but while Gardeil was quoted above to show the coincident operations among the causes, Eric Johnston points out that Aristotle, whose template Aquinas used, goes beyond just showing their interrelations. Aristotle establishes a firm hierarchy prioritizing the final cause, which Johnston describes as “the cause that makes the agent, the material, and the form to be what they are.”<sup>101</sup> Thomas rests his authority on this salient text in Aristotle’s work:

This species of cause is most powerful among the other causes, for the final cause is cause of the other causes. For it is clear that the agent acts on account of the end; and similarly it was shown above with artifacts, that forms are ordered to their use as to an end, and materials are to their forms as to an end. For this great reason, the end is called cause of causes (II. *Phys.*, lect. 5).

Moreover, as Johnston points out, “‘end’ primarily encompasses not merely a single act but a chain of events,”<sup>102</sup> and it will become evident that the sequence of these events—which are often complex, and woven throughout a creation ordered to its own good—cannot help but to reveal an inner logic.

Thus, Paul VI sought to impress upon his readers the overarching logic of procreation, which he calls its *munus*. Janet Smith explains that the term *munus* is used 21 times in the encyclical, the first instance being in the opening sentence: “The transmission of human life is a most serious role (*munus*) in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the

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<sup>98</sup> Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter, *Humanae Vitae*, 3. Found online at [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html)

<sup>99</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *Humanae Vitae*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> Eric Johnston, “‘Natural,’ ‘Family,’ ‘Planning,’ and Thomas Aquinas’s Teleological Understanding of Marriage. *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 79.2 (2015), p. 273.

<sup>102</sup> Johnston, p. 274,

Creator.”<sup>103</sup> That one word is translated in *Humanae Vitae* variously as task, mission, duty, responsibility, skill, and function, depending on the context, naturally drawing attention to the linguistic history of the document. Janet Smith explains that the document was originally written in Italian and then translated to Latin, bequeathing to that pivotal text (on which all subsequent translations depended) a word quite challenging to interpret. Given the myriad renderings even within this one document, she notes, “the translation ‘duty’ is not incorrect but inadequate, as is any word, to capture all the important connotations of *munus*.”<sup>104</sup> Despite the negative connotations associated with “duty,” she insists that there is nothing negative about the actual concept, “in fact a *munus* is something that one is honored and, in a sense, privileged to have.”<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, while it can relate to a mission, office, or function—all of which are decidedly neutral in tone—it will soon be shown that the honour is not simply duty-bound but more of a treasured gift.

Johnston points out that Aquinas himself used the term *munus* in relation to marriage in his *Sentences* in responding to the question “whether matrimony is fittingly named.” Johnston explains Aquinas’ assent: “Calling upon the etymology that says *matrimonium* comes from *matris munium*, ‘the duties, or office, of motherhood,’ he writes, ‘since things are for the most part named from their end.’”<sup>106</sup> Moreover, the end extends well beyond the mere bearing and delivery of the child, as Johnson further explains:

Thomas argues that the female plays a twofold role in childbearing: both contributing to the conception of the child and giving nutrition to what is conceived. Thus by introducing nutrition in this context, he makes clear that depositing seed in the womb is not the “end” of sexual activity. The end of the seed is not just conception but a healthy pregnancy — *and after that a healthy upbringing*.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Janet E. Smith, “The Munus of Transmitting Human Life: A New Approach to *Humanae Vitae*.” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, (Volume 54, Number 3, July 1990), p. 387-8.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 388. Linguistic derivatives from *munus* reveal such privileged responsibilities: municipal, patrimony, and munificent (one who gives gifts, honours, etc.) Most interestingly, the word matrimony is also derived from *munia*, which implies the “duty” to be a mother. Smith notes that this is not a new use of the term in this context, for previously it was used eight times by Pope Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*.

<sup>106</sup> Eric Johnston, “‘Natural,’ ‘Family,’ ‘Planning,’ and Thomas Aquinas’s Teleological Understanding of Marriage” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 79, Number 2, April 2015, p. 268. His quote from Aquinas is found in IV Sent., d. 30, q. 1,

<sup>107</sup> Johnston, p. 271, emphasis added.

Because Aquinas' view of reproduction includes child-rearing, Johnston concludes: "Thomas clearly melds the 'natural' ordering of biology with the 'natural' ordering of human actions."<sup>108</sup> Paul Gondreau points out that this reveals our distinctive rationality, for if it is neglected and "human sexuality is ordered exclusively to procreation, we distinguish in no way the meaning and purpose of our sexuality from that of the rest of the animal kingdom."<sup>109</sup> Animals don't have missions, *per se*, which explains the use of *munus* in relation to children—for women, indeed, are giving birth to rational persons who require so much more! Properly speaking, the entire process is permeated with logic, for the decision to bear a child requires a prior decision to create a home wherein a child can successfully grow to adulthood in relationship to both parents.

In this regard, although the sexual organs are naturally ordered to procreation, it becomes clear that the complex *munus* of procreation doesn't begin with their actualization. Rather, pregnancy is situated squarely between the choice of a partner and the decisions needed to provide for the well-being of the developing child, and this sequence of rational acts includes marriage,<sup>110</sup> pregnancy, a safe delivery, good nutrition, education, and a host of other inputs over the years. Johnston explains that collectively these actions should bear a natural rectitude: "This rectitude is defined, not by the outcome of the specific act, but by the way it relates to the longer natural process."<sup>111</sup>

This deepening appreciation for the collaborative task of parenting has led to a call for the ends of marriage to be understood in a fresher way. Janet Smith explains,

*Humanae Vitae* portrays "having children" or "transmitting life" less as the primary end or purpose of marriage than as an essential *munus* of marriage. Again, it is an "assignment" entrusted to spouses and a service that they may perform for God. What is needed here, it seems, is a better understanding of the marital vocation which includes this *munus*."<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Johnston, p. 272.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Gondreau, "The Natural Ordering to Marriage as Foundation and Norm for Sacramental Marriage," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 77, Number 1, January 2013, p. 43.

<sup>110</sup> While there is far less correlation between marriage and childbearing in modern societies, subsequent arguments will show the rationality of this step.

<sup>111</sup> Johnston, p. 276.

<sup>112</sup> Janet Smith, p. 415.

Given the fact that pregnancy has increasingly been misunderstood in the modern world as an atomised incident without a fixed meaning, orienting it firmly as the locus of a larger mission will help to reveal its holistic logic. In this regard, Gondreau suggests that the final cause of marriage be framed in language that prioritizes this comprehensive reality.

As matter is for the sake of form, as the body is for the sake of the soul, as lower is for the sake of the higher, so is human sexuality for the sake of the soul's highest, noblest functions: intellectual knowing and loving. Sexuality implies, then, not only the offering of one's (procreative) body, but the offering of one's entire self in the deepest bonds of knowledge and love, in the deepest bonds of personal communion and friendship.<sup>113</sup>

With hylemorphism as the cornerstone of a healthy anthropology, there is far more respect for the shared task entrusted primarily (for a time) to women, and far less potential for her to suffer a loss of subjectivity within pregnancy, for, as Gondreau points out, "human sexuality, in its primary ordering to procreation as owing to the body, is at the same time ordered essentially to personal, unitive love as expressive of our rationality."<sup>114</sup> The child, in fact, should be a catalyst for deepening this personal bond among those most closely charged with the mission of his formation.

One final, essential element of this larger mission is the relation between one family's successful embrace of the *munus* of reproduction and the wider community. Recall that Pinckaers' list of natural appetites included the inclination to live in a society, which is not just on a primal level of shared needs, but on a richer desire to build communion. This is indicated by the sophistication of all human languages, which allows the meaningful sharing of thoughts and ideas, and the construction of positive laws that safeguard the myriad relationships found therein. The family is essential on the most granular level, Pinckaers explains, since it forms those who will live in the society, including how their very desires are shaped and disciplined:

It is also clear that the other inclinations develop within the context of the family. The family is where the first experiences of life occur. It is where we learn about love and happiness, make our first concrete judgements concerning good and evil, and receive our moral education.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gondreau, "Marriage," p. 43.

<sup>114</sup> Gondreau, "Marriage," p. 43.

<sup>115</sup> Servais Pinckaers, *Morality*, p. 104.

Johnston summarizes the entire argument by positing that “the goodness of society itself is built on the biological substratum of family and procreation.”<sup>116</sup>

The proverb cited at the outset of this chapter is but one paradigm for his deeply-layered truth, which reveals the importance of assuring the rectitude and relationality of each action attached to a complex task. In that regard, pregnancy cannot be isolated—either in essence or in meaning—for it is the result of an intimate act that leads to the creation of a person who will need years of devoted care. Both of these aspects—sexual intimacy and parenthood—mean that pregnancy is grounded in communicative actions that come before and after, each requiring rational decisions. This is at the heart of the *munus* of pregnancy.

### *Pregnancy as a free and rational choice*

It is obvious by now that pregnancy doesn’t happen in a vacuum, nor is it a solitary endeavor. In most circumstances, there was a decision to engage in intimate actions that bore the potential of creating a new, rational soul. Unfortunately, in addition to the reproductive technologies that mask the life-giving capacity attached to sexual intimacy—actually separating in the minds of some young people the consequences of their actions—modern philosophies have confused most people about the nature and purpose of freedom. Only when freedom is rightly understood will the decisions surrounding sexual activities bear a rectitude that conforms to the principles of the human soul.

Servais Pinckaers has worked tirelessly to bring forward the proper Christian understanding of freedom which had been waylaid in the late Middle Ages. Returning to the phenomenon of appetites in the human person and how, when well-ordered, they direct him to the good, Pinckaers notes:

Inclinations, like the natural law, were God’s most precious work in the human person, a direct, unique participation in his own wisdom, goodness, and freedom and the emanation of the eternal law. Saint Thomas’ entire moral theology was based largely on his teaching on natural inclinations and on the freedom for the good that activated them.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Johnston, p. 293.

<sup>117</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 405.

Thus he draws a line from the lowest elements of our nature to our higher appetites, and then continues the trajectory into the realm of the divine—with authentic freedom as the connective thread.

Aquinas' premise that there are no gaps between the irrational and rational powers in a human soul because of the interrelations among the powers and their single organising principle has been illustrated above, as was Pinckaers' point that there is no gap between natural law and the eternal law. Unfortunately, modern thinking has allowed a pernicious gap to separate freedom from rationality—especially that which aligns natural inclinations with their proper [good] ends. Ignoring the truth that knowledge and will derive their powers from the soul as principle, many promote this error, Pinckaers explains, by insisting that “free will [is] the prime faculty, anterior to intelligence and will as well as their acts.” In this construct, which he calls “freedom of indifference” (because of the will’s “radical indetermination”),<sup>118</sup> some suggest that in order for the will to remain free, it must be independent of any influence—whether moral constraints or natural inclinations. John Lamont summarizes this alternative construct, which “is defined by its rejection of St. Thomas's claim that there is something the will wills of necessity, and by its assertion that freedom consists purely in the power to choose between alternatives.”<sup>119</sup>

The source of the error, according to Pinckaers, is William of Ockham, whom he quotes, “For I can freely choose to know or not to know, to will or not to will.”<sup>120</sup> Establishing freedom as prior to knowledge and will not only pits the mind against the body, but derails free will from its innate task to pursue the good. This sheds a fresh light on Kristeva’s question cited above: “What does this desire for motherhood correspond to?” Framing the question this way (with an emphasis on the underlying desire) it becomes evident that when the will is paramount, many believe it can shape reality anew. Pinckaers explains the result of insisting that each action be an atomized, unencumbered event: “The harmony between humanity and nature is destroyed by a freedom that claims to be ‘indifferent’ to nature and defines itself as ‘non-nature.’”<sup>121</sup> This train of thought,

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<sup>118</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 245.

<sup>119</sup> John R.T.Lamont, “Conscience, Freedom, Rights: Idols of the Enlightenment Religion,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 73, Number 2, April 2009, p. 177.

<sup>120</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 331. Pinckaers explains that Ockham's idea was founded on the classical definition of freedom found in the work of Peter Lombard: “freedom of will is the power to reason and to will;” and interpreted by St Bonaventure to mean that “freedom does not proceed from reason and will, as St Thomas said, but precedes them and moves them to act.” (Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 243). What may seem like a small rearrangement in the order of powers creates an explosive difference in moral outcomes.

<sup>121</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 333.

thereby, considers the body not only as an indifferent tool, but its very nature is seen on many occasions as an enemy to be conquered. A rejection of the internal logic of natural inclinations means that their ends are no longer intelligible signposts to natural and supernatural ends. In deconstructing this logical cohesion, Lamont notes, the person is not only indifferent to natural appetites, but stripped of understanding the intelligible motivations for his actions, “because liberty of indifference must retain the power to reject any good at all presented to it by the intellect. The notion of such a power is incompatible with St. Thomas's very first principle of practical reason.”<sup>122</sup>

When freedom is morally indifferent in such a way, each person is invited to determine his own syllabus of meaning unrelated to the inscribed *munus* of human acts, which means that not only does this form of freedom allow for that perennial mind-body duality to emerge, but each person is now isolated in his own construct, unable to share the complex tasks that he is charged with undertaking. Just as he recognizes no moral demands, he cannot impose any on other people, nor can he find a fixed meaning for actions, which leaves each person adrift in a sea of indeterminate paths.

Pinckaers insists that within the healthy anthropology of Aquinas lies a different understanding of freedom, which he calls “freedom for excellence” (which Lamont prefers to call “teleological liberty”).<sup>123</sup> In this understanding, “we find a freedom that presupposes natural inclinations and takes root in them so as to draw forth the strength needed for their development.”<sup>124</sup> Since we are inclined towards the good, these inclinations create a reliable trajectory that helps us choose the good when it is within sight. He continues:

The natural root of freedom develops in us principally through a sense of the true and the good, of uprightness and love, and through a desire for knowledge and happiness.

Or again, by what the ancients called *semina virtutum*, the seeds of virtue.<sup>125</sup>

Here, Pinckaers reveals how this trajectory connects the most basic natural functions with the greatest potential for a human person, which is the life of virtue, which points to the most basic theological insight of the Church, that grace builds on nature. As Lamont explains, “The law of nature for St. Thomas works from the inside; the will moves towards the ultimate end, via the

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<sup>122</sup> Lamont, pp. 178-179.

<sup>123</sup> Lamont, p. 178.

<sup>124</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 357.

<sup>125</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 357.

particular goods that participate in it,<sup>126</sup> and hence even the most basic good—pregnancy—is both natural and virtuous.

Since pregnancy is by its nature the means of creating a new and separate person, sexual union is, at its heart, in the words of Chad Engelland, an invitation, because “it invites new life to come to be as its natural result.”<sup>127</sup> Such an invitation inherently bears grave responsibilities, and therefore it stands to reason that its *munus*—its complexity as a task—demands that it be couched in a series of virtuous actions. It is for this reason that the Church explains that freedom, as it relates to procreation, must safeguard the good of the child because of the lifelong relationships that follow. As Engelland explains:

The advent of each child further entwines the personal identities of the father and mother, and familial roles are irrevocable ... Thus the invitation offers to the man and the woman something personal and lasting. Aristotle notes that the child is a good common to each, but this is not specific enough. The child is not just a common good; he or she is a personal good that establishes lasting reciprocal roles between the mother and the father.<sup>128</sup>

Thus it is fitting that the life-giving potential of the sexual union be treated with the seriousness it deserves, as Gondreau explains: “To be genuinely human, our sexuality must share in what is unique and noblest in us; it must be integrated into the totality of our lives as rationally ensouled embodied beings.” This totality requires a lasting vow that comprehends the fulness of these life-long reciprocal relationships, as Gondreau insists further, “human sexuality has but one end, marriage, with its two proximate and complementary ends: the procreative (expressive of the body) and the unitive (expressive of the soul).”<sup>129</sup> Such was the logic of *Humanae Vitae*, which stated firmly: “since the duty [*munus*] entrusted to parents for the good of their children is of such high dignity and of such great importance, every use of the faculty given by God for the

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<sup>126</sup> Lamont, p. 180.

<sup>127</sup> Chad Engelland, “The Personal Significance of Sexual Reproduction,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 79, Number 4, October 2015, p. 619. Engelland is careful to explain that despite the range of possible motives, the logic of their action takes into account the potential life-giving nature of their union.

<sup>128</sup> Engelland, p. 621.

<sup>129</sup> Gondreau, “Marriage,” p. 44.



procreation of new life is the right and privilege of the married state alone, and must be contained within the sacred limits of the family."<sup>130</sup>

Finally this sequence of actions, in order to be the most human [read: rational], should be free in the most proper sense of the word, which must encompass a teleology grounded in eternal goods—making “teleological liberty” a most apt term! With this in mind, Pinckaers calls to mind the Scholastic view, in which sexuality is not limited to the biological realm; for Thomas “it was realized in man in a different and far richer way than in animals, being integrated in the totality of human nature, particularly through its coordination with spiritual inclinations.”<sup>131</sup> Gondreau concurs, showing that a holistic understanding of motherhood upends any notions that in pregnancy a woman hosts an “alien form,” or that it takes place in “unsignifiable space,” or that she undergoes the “submergence” of her very self. It is the exact opposite, for “rationality—by which we mean reason and free-will taken together—is expressive of the form (the soul) in the human being and distinguishes us as humans.”<sup>132</sup>

### *Motherhood as a profound means of perfection*

It is now essential to weave together the threads thus offered, and to consider whether pregnancy is not only rational in itself but is an integral component to one path of moral perfection. If so, then it becomes more than just an intelligible capacity, and even more than a complex mission—it would elevate the task to a path to eternal salvation. Scripture indicates that it is, since in his first letter to Timothy, Saint Paul puts it in just such a context:

Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. But *she will be saved through motherhood, provided* women persevere in faith and love and holiness, with self-control (1 Tim 2:14-15).

If indeed this is so, it would once more highlight the straightforward trajectory that extends from lowest to highest good, seamlessly encompassing both natural law and the eternal law revealed through Christ. Pinckaers, in summarizing what has been assembled thus far, posits this very point:

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<sup>130</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 12. Janet Smith comments, “Here again, ‘duty’ does not seem the proper translation of *munus*, for here *munus* seems to share in the exalted status of a divinely appointed mission we have seen in Vatican II. This meaning is carried over to *Humanae Vitae*.”

<sup>131</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 438.

<sup>132</sup> Gondreau, blue book, p. 48.

That the knowledge and the will precede free will means that they are the source. The free choice will be inspired by natural inclinations or spontaneous aspirations toward truth and goodness that constitute these faculties and flow from the spiritual nature of the person, ordering her to beatitude and in fact to God as her ultimate end. The work of free choice is to place acts which possess the quality of truth and goodness, and which thus lead the human person toward her perfection and beatitude.<sup>133</sup>

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that in the passage of the Epistle cited above, Paul inserts a caveat: “provided ...,” which is entirely in keeping with the understanding of *munus*, wherein the mission of which pregnancy is an integral part includes a complex of decisions, each requiring prudence and righteous intention. When virtue guides the actions in a harmonious order, everyone stands to benefit on a variety of levels.

It is also important to remember that although “the woman was deceived and transgressed” — leading to humanity’s corporate fall from grace—the human person still bore the *imago dei*, although admittedly in an obscured way. Aquinas, in clarifying the effects of original sin, explains that the good in man is three-fold, being composed first of human nature and its capacities; second, the inclination to virtue; and third a right relationship to God. While the disordering of the passions undermined the exercise of virtue (corrupting his friendship with God), the first of these remain essentially good, although “diminished.”<sup>134</sup> Pinckaers explains how this relates specifically to human sexuality:

Sexuality had originated in a primordial inclination of human nature. As such it was the work of the Creator, according to the Genesis account of the creation of man and woman. Therefore, whatever might be the deficiencies caused in the individual person by sin and concupiscence, the seat of unbridled desires, sexuality was recognized as something basically good and a source of moral excellence.<sup>135</sup>

Concupiscence—the deformation of the appetites—is responsible for the confusion over the proper ordering of the reproductive powers. The inclinations, it must be understood, are the middle ground between their roots (human nature) and their end, which is virtue. Since Thomas has shown that the roots remain intact, the deformation must relate to the end, which is

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<sup>133</sup> Pinckaers, *The Pinckaers Reader*, p. 138.

<sup>134</sup> *ST. Iallae*, 85.1.

<sup>135</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 439.

obscured. Thus concupiscence is, in the words of Cessario, “the primal alienation of the human person from God”<sup>136</sup>—that very friendship for which he was created.

In light of the natural inclination to know truth and the confusion with which the human race struggles in that regard, it is important to include an additional translation of *munus* which has a wide application in the life of the Church. Smith points out that “dictionaries for Saint Thomas recommend the translation of *munus* as ‘gift.’”

For Thomas, *munera* are both gifts that men give to God, as a part of their oblations and sacrifices, and gifts that God gives to man, such as an integral nature, and grace, and the ability to prophesy.”<sup>137</sup>

This calls to mind the etymology of “munificence,” based on the same word, and meaning an effusion of gift giving. Thomas himself was generous with the word, applying it to myriad actions of ordinary Christians, with the priesthood itself, and even regarding the Holy Spirit, the great Giver of gifts who is himself a gift to us from the Father.<sup>138</sup> It stands to reason that if God exercises care over his creation, then he will supply the capacities to perform the numerous tasks he entrusts to his creatures.

Here we arrive at the foundational theme permeating Aquinas’ work: that of *exitus-reditus*—such that all causality can be understood as a sweeping motion by which all that is created is meant to return to him. Thus it stands to reason that the gifts that he bestows are innately ordered to perfection, and when used properly constitute a path of reunion with him. This is the last and key definition of *munus*, and Smith points out that the Vulgate uses the same word in many contexts, such as the offices given to Christians for the good of the Church (Eph 4:11); the gift of the priesthood, (2 Tim) and even the Holy Spirit as a gift from the Father to his children (Lk 11:13).

If motherhood is a *munus*, then the “transmission of human life” is both solemn assignment and gift; moreover it cannot be reduced to a biological phenomenon, nor is it something that a woman can define for herself. It is the result of a series of rational choices, bearing long-term implications engaging both intellect and will, and manifests a particular spiritual significance as a means of perfection.

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<sup>136</sup> Cessario, p. 194.

<sup>137</sup> Smith, p. 390.

<sup>138</sup> *ST*, I.38.1; II-II.134.1-3.

The rest of Saint Paul's caveat, "provided women persevere in faith and love and holiness, with self-control," situates this rational act firmly in its proper place, as an expression of faith, which joins one's actions to the saving work of Christ, and charity, which was shown above to link the pregnancy to both the good of the child and the good of the larger community here and in the hereafter. This, in the highest sense, is what Saint Paul meant when he acknowledged child-bearing as a means of salvation, for it is an entirely rational endeavor. Moreover, it highlights that generous way in which God, in his goodness, doesn't wish to save us without us, as *Humanae Vitae* points out:

Truly, conjugal love most clearly manifests to us its true nature and nobility when we recognize that it has its origin in the highest source, as it were, in God, Who is Love and Who is the Father, from whom all parenthood [*paternitas*] in heaven and earth receives its name."<sup>139</sup>

If matrimony by definition is the institution through which a woman becomes a mother, then in doing so she allows the man to be a father, an icon of God himself. In this regard, the message of *Humanae Vitae* closely follows the logic of *Gaudium et Spes*, which states: "It ought to be clear to all that human life and the *munus* of transmitting [life] are not [realities] restricted only to this world ... but that they always look to the eternal destiny of man."<sup>140</sup>

Here, then, is the culmination of the trajectory mentioned above, which Johnston summarizes:

Thomas's easy movement between biological and moral "nature" is perhaps surprising. But his classic presentation of natural law ... similarly defines nature in terms of an interior principle of motion toward an end. God's eternal law is present in creation as the ruling and measuring is present in the ruled and measured: "from his impression they have their inclination to their proper acts and ends," their nature."<sup>141</sup>

It is false, then, to suggest that pregnancy results from the irrational pressure of natural forces, It is meant to follow upon a free and mutual gift of self, which is proper and exclusive to marriage, where the spouses seek to establish and nourish a communion of persons. God the Creator wisely and providently established the family in this way with the intent that he might achieve his own designs of love through human persons—a twofold plan that allowed us first to participate

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<sup>139</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, 8. *Paternitas*, here rendered "parenthood," might more specifically be translated as "fatherhood."

<sup>140</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 51.

<sup>141</sup> Johnston, p. 277, in which he references *Ia-IIae*, I.91.2 of the *Summa*.

in his gift of generation and secondly through it to reconcile what was lost. In this way, not only does he entrust this task to his creatures with the capacity to perform it, but the task is itself a gift that redounds to our own good.

*Feminists are certainly justified in protesting against the depersonalization of women and their reduction to the status of objects. Their attempt to locate the impetus for this degradation within Christianity, however, is one more example of a selective reading of history, based on the myth of total oppression, and filtered through the crystallisation process of the Enlightenment (Fr Francis Martin).<sup>142</sup>*

## **Chapter Six: Response to the Three Views of Pregnancy**

Having outlined the logic of a Catholic anthropology that hinges on a proper understanding of the hylemorphic person, it remains to respond to the three contrary views above. One cannot responsibly dismiss the consistent expression of deep frustration caused by the challenges unique to women's lives, yet neither can we ignore the reasonable and realistic prescriptions of the Catholic Church that have consistently sought to heal and transform them.

### *Simone de Beauvoir: Maternity as Alienation*

Recall that Simone de Beauvoir's primary frustration lay in woman's very capacity to become pregnant, which meant that "from puberty to menopause she is the principal site of a story that takes place in her and does not concern her personally ... Her body is an alienated opaque thing; something other than her."<sup>143</sup> The dualism at the heart of the claim is now obvious, reflecting a combination of Plato's notion that each soul is trapped in a body, and Descartes' claim that the mind is both distinct from and independent of the body. While a woman may indeed be intimidated by the protracted demands of motherhood, it doesn't logically follow that human reproduction creates a "foreign, invasive entity that forces the mother to be a passive instrument of life."<sup>144</sup> This language may certainly resonate with those women who feel trapped by marriage and its demands, but disparaging the children who come as a natural consequence of sexual relations only perpetuates the alienation of family members within an institution that was created precisely for their welcome embrace.

Martin stresses that given the complexities of the industrial age, it is irresponsible to simply blame the Church for repressing women. He explains that the overarching sense of biological

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<sup>142</sup> Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question*, pp. 380-1.

<sup>143</sup> de Beauvoir, pp. 40-41.

<sup>144</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 538.

determinism that so infuriated de Beauvoir—the only value attached to women being their child-bearing capacity—was the long result of overlapping trends that gradually diminished the cultural status and influence of European women over the centuries since the Middle Ages. While *The Second Sex* surveys myriad cultures around the world to see how they framed the maternal task, it was in Europe and America, where a host of concurrent events (from scientific discoveries to geographical exploration) radically affected family life by the time she was writing. The domestic economies that women had previously overseen—encompassing the provision for food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and education, as well as managing the distribution of labour for any number of people from a single family to an entire castle, convent, or village—were outsourced piecemeal until she was left with care of her home and children alone. Cottage industries and participation in local guilds, which had once contributed significantly to women’s economic freedom, were gradually displaced by new forms of mercantile capitalism, and wherever the Protestant revolt took hold, the subsequent destruction of convents (which housed schools) also led to a significant decline in women’s access to education. Previously, those women who didn’t marry were able to contribute to the arts and sciences in monasteries renowned for such skills, and yet these options gradually diminished as well, and the cumulative loss of outlets for the diverse creative gifts of women eventually—understandably—proved stifling.<sup>145</sup>

As the broader Catholic milieu diminished, Martin notes, “it was among the philosophes, particularly Rousseau and d’Holbach, that the ideal of an exclusively domestic role for women was most forcefully articulated.”<sup>146</sup> As economic changes increasingly separated the public and private spheres of life, the contribution that children provided to the health and well-being of the larger community was lost. The value of children seemed to rest in the immediate family alone—both for the work they could do and as a means of maintaining or expanding private property—and if spouses were not chosen in freedom, much of the joy attached to the *munus* of childbearing was lost. Thus, motherhood was increasingly seen by some to be an onerous task

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<sup>145</sup> Martin, pp. 130-141. These trends were uneven and geographically diverse around Europe. There was no singular motivating factor—especially not one that was deliberately anti-woman. The increasing material prosperity that followed from expanding markets profoundly impacted the daily lives of Europeans. Moreover, there was a gradual philosophical shift within the Enlightenment that led to the hyper-rationalism that many feminists railed against, to their credit.

<sup>146</sup> Martin, p. 139. He continues on p. 140: “Rousseau endorsed the Athenian practices of cloistering women, excluding them from public life, and refusing even to dine with them, since he deemed women to be naturally vain, narcissistic, childish, and weak. ‘In the Age of Reason, woman was a being of passion.’” 140. The quote was from Frederic Deloffre’s preface to Terry Smiley Dock’s *Women in the Encyclopedie: A Compendium*.

forced on women by a male-dominated family and endorsed by a male clergy, when in fact the richness of family life had been twisted beyond recognition by the Enlightenment, “with its explicit return to a pagan view of reality and its cultivation of power.”<sup>147</sup>

Hence, de Beauvoir’s charge that motherhood as lived in her time shackled and degraded women, keeping them from meaningful pursuits, is true on some level. Unfortunately, she responds by adopting the same one-dimensional hyper-rational view of the world introduced by the very Enlightenment that marginalized so many of women’s gifts—and yet her prioritization of material enterprises, such as finance, construction, and the sciences, manages to ignore the very material from which a human person is made. Moreover, she ignores the deeper wisdom that aligns bodily realities and natural inclinations with the pursuit of the good, especially the truth that the good of the family hinges on the good of each of its members, and their good redounds to the wider society.<sup>148</sup>

The supreme irony seems to be that de Beauvoir envies those who grant superiority “not to the sex that gives birth but to the one that kills.”<sup>149</sup> Her philosophy, thereby, seems to be a lament over being crushed by the destructive power of others while seeking to harness that very power for herself. Despite her desire to praise men, who “invent and forge the future,”<sup>150</sup> it is extraordinary that de Beauvoir cannot see how much of that future is forged in the wombs of women. Even if one refuses the theological promises attached to childbearing, to insist that the body is merely an instrument to be conquered—with its inscribed meaning ignored and the relationships it engenders insulted—is myopic, destructive, and profoundly unenlightened.

### *Julia Kristeva: Maternity as Unintelligible Space*

“Motherhood’s impossible syllogism,” posited by Kristeva insists that pregnancy creates an unintelligible space, not only lacking definition and logic, but displacing the mother from her own

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<sup>147</sup> Martin, p. 142.

<sup>148</sup> Many early American feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Sara Grimke, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, saw the organic nature of society, and believed strongly that the task of creating and forming a rational soul is a worthy project. Thus, they each promoted access to just the sort of education that would allow women to flourish, combining motherhood with other pursuits when possible.

<sup>149</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 74.

<sup>150</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 74.



body.<sup>151</sup> Given the realities of our hylemorphic nature, this cannot be possible apart from poetic license or psychological rambling. Once again, it is the embrace of a Cartesian duality that causes a person to attempt to disengage from the body as an appendage or afterthought, and while the sensations attached to pregnancy may be unfamiliar, there is nothing unintelligible about the process.

Her claim that “the maternal body is the site of a radical splitting of the female subject”<sup>152</sup> is entirely false, for the woman is simply actualizing one of her innate capacities—a phenomenon that follows naturally from sexual intimacy during her fertile phase. Instead of being split, to the contrary, she is now joined by an additional person, whom she has invited by her action, and who will need her physical generosity and wise governance for a considerable amount of time. In fact, her intelligence is more important than before, for Gregory Brown highlights Aquinas’ explanation that young children depend on the rational care of their parents:

For a child is by nature part of its father: thus, at first, it is not distinct from its parents as to its body, so long as it is enfolded within its mother’s womb; and later on after birth, and before it has the use of its free-will, it is enfolded in the care of its parents, which is like a spiritual womb.”<sup>153</sup>

Rather than being divided (split) by pregnancy, a woman’s agency is thereby *multiplied* for the foreseeable future. Having called to mind above the relationship among capacities and appetites, all of which participate in reason, Brown explains that this same concept can be applied to the family as well, in which those less capable are cared for by those who are capable:

Human children have many needs but few capabilities. This is most obvious in pregnancy, when the child is literally enveloped in its mother’s body, from which it receives nourishment. After birth, children still cannot feed, move, clean, clothe, or change themselves. Their parents are, as it were, *provident* for their entire good.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Kristeva, “Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini,” p. 303. The sense of bodily displacement is a frequent complaint of all pregnant women, but the growth of a new person in an extraordinarily confined space, while quite uncomfortable, hardly constitutes the mother being evicted from her own body (however much she might relish the idea).

<sup>152</sup> Kristeva, “Motherhood,” p. 113.

<sup>153</sup> *ST. II-IIae*, 10.12.

<sup>154</sup> Brown, Gregory. “The Spiritual Womb: Thomas Aquinas on Parent and Child.” *The Public Discourse*, 22 June, 2017. Found online at <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/06/19319/> This point underscores the relation between natural law and eternal law, and shows how the natural inclinations point to supernatural ends.

As daunting as this may be, such is human generation, and it is increasingly evident that the natural law mirrors the supernatural world as outlined by Aquinas, who insists that rational creatures participate in the loving design of God. The mother's time, granted, will be split, her resources must be shared, and her confusion may intensify over how to apply her finite energies each day, but she is still there—the same composite creature—only somewhat more tired because of the demands on both body *and* soul.

The greatest shortsightedness in Kristeva's work is the fact that she (like de Beauvoir) relegates rationality to the small realm of discursive reason, which undermines the inherent value of women and their tremendous contribution to the human project. This ignores the long-standing view of human persons being rational simply because of having both intellect and will, which direct their actions. As Aquinas explains:

Now man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions.

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."<sup>155</sup>

Lest one think that women are marginalised in this point, he specifically notes elsewhere,

The image of God, in its principle signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman. Hence, after the words, "To the image of God He created him," it is added, "Male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27).<sup>156</sup>

Despite the links illustrated above, wherein all actions—including reproduction—are rational by participation with the intellect that directs them, in Kristeva's construct, not only is each action detached from any larger project, but the actions of the body are detached from the mind, and even the woman's mind is detached from reason itself, which she laments to be a "masculinist" construct.<sup>157</sup>

Kristeva insists that pregnancy, as "a state beyond representation,"<sup>158</sup> remains incomprehensible because it cannot be expressed adequately in words, and floats beyond the rational world as an experience that each woman can define for herself. Thus, the mother's tie

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<sup>155</sup> *ST*, Ia-IIae, 1.1.

<sup>156</sup> *ST*, I.98.4.a1.

<sup>157</sup> In a fascinating overlap, the masculinist construct is directly related to the question of language made below. Where Kristeva begrudges men for having imposed their ideas on the language that women are forced to use, von le Fort accepts their language in a dangerous way.

<sup>158</sup> Kristeva, "Motherhood," p. 114.

to the child, the father, the larger family, and the community must also remain undefined, apart from the value or construct that the mother alone confers on them. Even that choice is made more difficult because of Kristeva's insistence that the pregnancy isn't a logical sequence of deliberate actions, but the occasion of "the confusion of identities" (126/82).<sup>159</sup> To apply Gondreau's term, this "disembodied anthropology"<sup>160</sup> is a disservice to any woman who is embarking on a challenging task, robbing it of all meaning, and removing all the organic constructs that would both guide her and surround the child with all that he needs to thrive.

Rejoicing in the irrationality of the subject who chooses motherhood on her own terms does no one any favours, for the very intuition and sensitivity that Kristeva insists lie beyond the rational are themselves deeply ordered by reason to the good of the other. Rather than believing women to be the antithesis of a rational society, her natural gifts bring a richness that a well-ordered society requires in order for it to be fully human—and an essential corrective to those who would diminish all that reason encompasses into mere scientific logic applied to a strictly material plane of existence. It is not by accident that the weakest, most vulnerable members of the human community are entrusted to the most sensitive vessels, for such is foundational to the wisdom of the human family, which is ordered to happiness—the first principle of practical reason.<sup>161</sup>

#### *Gertrude von le Fort: the eternal woman*

Now it remains to dissect the impersonal and transcendent passivity that Gertrude von le Fort idealizes in her writing, such that "the mother as such does not bear the individualising marks of the person."<sup>162</sup> Her eternal form certainly appears to be a baptized Platonic form, which eschews any particular rationality, but what is worse, the sign is intended to swallow the individual in its "primal mystery."<sup>163</sup> It is remarkable that von le Fort's insistence that being subsumed into an amorphous, identity-crushing form, "mother," is the ideal goal for women, when it was that very anonymity that horrified de Beauvoir. In this context, one can find

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<sup>159</sup> Kristeva, "Motherhood," p. 126.

<sup>160</sup> Paul Gondreau, "The Passions and the Moral Life: Appreciating the Originality of Aquinas." *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 71.3 (2007), p. .

<sup>161</sup> *ST*, Ia-IIae, 90.2. It may be this very distinction that Pope Saint John Paul II wanted to enfold in his term "the feminine genius."

<sup>162</sup> von le Fort, p. 68.

<sup>163</sup> von le Fort, p. 12.

sympathy for de Beauvoir's fears concerning lifeless maternity, anonymity at the heart of the maternal relationship, and her horror of losing her very self—for this is indeed what the Romantics—whom von le Fort admired, idealized. To the extent that motherhood was ever promoted in this way, one can understand any woman's instinctual abhorrence of being annihilated in the mission.

It was Albert (1206-1280) who first insisted in his commentaries on Aristotle that forms do not exist apart from matter, as Michael Tkacz notes. "The error in question arises out of the Platonic understanding of the subject of natural science as being the eternal subsistent forms rather than the form of the substantial material individual."<sup>164</sup> Although Albert's primary concern was how to catalogue the natural world, the corollary to his injunction is that if one posits that an eternal form exists apart from the individual, subjectivity might indeed become blurred (as de Beauvoir and von le Fort agreed). It is the individuating matter that reveals what is proper to the form, because, in the case of our topic at hand, reducing motherhood to a platonic form means that the individuality of each woman who bears children actually does lose her particular identity.

Before responding to the notion of an eternal feminine form promoted by von le Fort, it must be considered whether what she describes in a Platonic form is justified anywhere in the way that Aquinas explains universals—those ideas that transcend individuals. In other words, could motherhood simply be an idea that exists in the mind of God? To answer this epistemological question, we can consider how Gyula Klima explains Aquinas's view of language, and that, foundationally, speech is an attempt to share one's insight. From the sensory data (explained above in the section on the soul) universal ideas are extrapolated in the intellect and then put into words so that they may be communicated. Even given this process, Klima explains that Thomas still doesn't see universals as Plato did:

Since for Aquinas there are no universal entities as Plato imagined, we cannot explain the universality of our universal words by claiming that they signify universal things. The universality of our words, on account of which they are related not just to one peculiar sort of thing, a universal, but rather to a multitude, indeed, a potential infinity of ordinary things, is a result of our ability to conceive of these things in a peculiar manner, namely,

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<sup>164</sup> Michael W. Tkacz, "Albert the Great and the Aristotelian Reform of the Platonic Method of Division," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, (73.3,2009) p. 399.

universally, and to use the word to express this universal conception, or as Aquinas often refers to it, the universal *ratio* of these ordinary things.<sup>165</sup>

The first irony is that the mental construct is directly related to the rationality of the thinker, and thus in both worlds—Platonic and Aristotelian—even thinking of a universal (such as “woman”) requires rationality. The second is that rather than having “maternity” point to a selfless, fleshless idea to which a woman should conform, it is her body itself which brings motherhood into being. There is no eternal woman, but there are myriad manifestations of womanhood, instantiated realities that require flesh and blood ordered to a “universal *ratio*.” To illustrate this basic point, Klima points to the first part of the *Summa*:

The *ratio* of every single thing is what its name signifies, as the ratio of a stone is that which its name signifies. But names are the signs of intellectual conceptions, whence the *ratio* of any single thing signified by a name is a conception of the intellect that the name signifies.<sup>166</sup>

Aquinas shows that there must be a correlation between the thing signified and how the mind sees it, because, in the words of Klima: “it is precisely the presence of the same *ratio* in the object that renders the conception of the intellect true of the object.”<sup>167</sup>

Despite humans being in the likeness of God through their rationality, God’s understanding is an entirely different plane of knowledge, for where humans passively receive impressions and then catalogue them through some system of judgement, God’s knowledge, which extends beyond himself, is causal, meaning not only that things exist because of being previously—yes, eternally—known by God, but as John L. Farthing points out, “must be exactly coterminous with His creative activity and power.”<sup>168</sup> So divine ideas do exist as part of God’s causal knowledge, for as Farthing explains, “things exist in imitation of their archetypes in the mind of God.”<sup>169</sup> The difficulty arises when one suggests that there is one archetype (or form) for each category of things, which would provide a troubling constraint on God. Farthing continues:

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<sup>165</sup> Gyula Klima, “Theory of Language,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), p. 373.

<sup>166</sup> *ST*, Ia.13.4 (translation provided by Klima).

<sup>167</sup> Klima, p. 374.

<sup>168</sup> John L. Farthing, “The Problem of Divine Exemplarity in St. Thomas,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 49. 2 (1985), p. 184.

<sup>169</sup> Farthing, p. 202.

Hence it is not only being as such whose exemplar exists in the mind of God, but also beings in their distinction from one another. Consequently, just as there are many creatures, so are there many exemplars.”<sup>170</sup>

The breadth of God’s knowing and the right use of species as a category of created things are combined in a way that allows each creature to be perfected in the most rational way possible. This summation offered by Daria Spezzano shows the importance of the divine order and how rational creatures are proportioned to it without losing their essential individuality:

From this act of divine cognition flow the species of all creatures and, in a special way, of rational creatures. In Thomas’ discussion of the divine knowledge and divine ideas in Ia qq14-15, he establishes that God’s causal knowledge of everything in the universe in relation to himself is the source of the universe’s ordered hierarchy; in terms drawn from q13 it could be said that the universe represents him analogically “as many things are proportioned to one” [Ia q14 a6 ad3] ... God, in perfectly knowing his own essence, knows also every way in which creatures can participate in it.<sup>171</sup>

These myriad exemplars give ample room for the range of perfections contingent on the wealth of souls called to participate in the divine goodness. Stepping firmly away from the solitary and abstract Platonic ideal, Farthing summarises: “Since God knows by means of ideas (which, however, are identical with His own essence), there is in God an idea of each thing which He knows.”<sup>172</sup> Moreover, Farthing posits a crucial truth about the particularity of the ideas:

But since no creature imitates the divine essence perfectly, the idea is not the divine essence in its fullness as essence but is rather understood (by God) according to the varying degrees of perfection with which different creatures imitate it.<sup>173</sup>

Essentially, the call to be like God—to exhibit a similitude to his very self—is primarily a call to love, which is the divine essence. Although each woman is invited to love through motherhood (which is both physical and spiritual), it is essential to remember that this form of perfection is inseparable from her hylemorphic composition, and predicated on her individuality. Each woman’s path, with its unique circumstances—especially the inevitable challenges and

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<sup>170</sup> Farthing, p. 204.

<sup>171</sup> Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God’s Grace: Deification According to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015) pp. 87-88.

<sup>172</sup> Farthing, p. 210.

<sup>173</sup> Farthing, p. 205.

sufferings—coalesce with the range of choices constantly offered to allow her choose love and to repent when she fails to love. This cannot conform to a single template, despite the simplicity of God and his mandate. Given this reality, Spezzano explains how rational creatures in particular participate in the divine perfections:

God causally knows them as being capable of some degree of participation in his own self-knowledge and love—in the activities of the divine intellect and will that have God as their object and the divine essence itself as intelligible species.<sup>174</sup>

Furthermore, Spezzano shows that this participation is primarily in the intellect through knowing and willing,<sup>175</sup> and thus perfection results when what the subject wills is closest to the divine idea—not of an abstract idea but a particular and personal idea, as lived in virtuous actions at every turn. And thus, in light of this thesis, the perfection is achieved through love predicated on this rational woman’s choice amidst these concrete circumstances,<sup>176</sup> for motherhood was shown above to begin in the intellect, both in the proximate assent and the remote decisions that pervade around family life.

No doubt reverence for revealed truth guides those who think like von le Fort, but there is no correlation between submitting to what the Church teaches about motherhood and submitting one’s embodiment of motherhood to a universal form—for there is no such thing as disembodied love in the created world. Contrary to von le Fort’s false dichotomy that *a woman must either be herself or a mother*, Thomas insists that her perfection hinges on being both! Moreover it would be absurd to suggest that God prefers the good of the child to the identity of the mother—for in the case of a daughter, it appears that God would love her for herself only until she gave birth to another!<sup>177</sup> The mother is still a daughter to God, and thus she and her children coexist simultaneously in his mind as priceless icons of love—each one bearing a rational soul capable of deeply personal perfection. Unfortunately, in her misguided attempt to baptize both Goethe and Plato, von le Fort replaced the divine idea of each woman with an abstract universal, ignoring the fundamental truth that the finite good of motherhood requires an individual to realize it, a rational mind to embrace it, and a body to bring it about.

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<sup>174</sup> Spezzano, p. 88.

<sup>175</sup> Spezzano, p. 88.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. *ST*, Ia.1.14.6.r3.

<sup>177</sup> Interestingly, this specious argument is used by abortion proponents who suggest that pro-lifers prioritise the child over the mother, falsely accusing them making unborn life sacred while undermining the legitimate needs of the mother.

What remains is von le Fort's sense of mystery surrounding motherhood, and her call for humility. Both of these are noble, and entirely consistent with the Catholic ideal. One can never grasp all that is encompassed in the privilege of co-creating a new immortal soul with God (an act that is collaborative between a man and a woman, and in whose mystery the man partakes equally!) To return to the concept of *munus*, there is a vast mission entrusted to the family which requires tremendous docility to the wisdom of the ages, the teachings of the Church, and the power of grace to direct and perfect our finite efforts. The beautiful relationship between humility and the truth magnifies not only our littleness, but must acknowledge the inherent goods in our creation that God can use for divine ends. Like all virtues, humility guides the appetites, and consequently must operate "according to right reason"<sup>178</sup> in the way mentioned above, the sensitive submitting to the intellective in what is ultimately an "inward choice of the mind."<sup>179</sup>

That said, it must be firmly stated that the leap from humility—recognizing that God can use finite creatures to accomplish divinely-ordered tasks—to anonymity is unwarranted, and frankly unCatholic (as the final chapter will show). The Church doesn't ask its female members to "submerge [themselves] into the universal stream of succeeding generations,"<sup>180</sup> rather the Church boasts of her faithful members and catalogues them in her canon of saints. Their stories are proclaimed to the world, primarily by the children who benefitted from their bodily sacrifice and prudential care amidst particular—concrete—circumstances. Moreover, the very places in which they flourished are sites of pilgrimage and veneration, as are the exact details of their witness. Unfortunately, here it becomes evident that the Platonic ideal of anonymity can swerve precariously close to the stream of Buddhist selflessness, leading to personal dissolution into an amorphous oversoul. This has nothing to do with the ultimate I-Thou relationship that the triune God seeks with each of us who bear his image, as filtered through the particularities of neighbourly love in this life. Any woman might be thoroughly intimidated by pregnancy if she were to be swallowed by the very *munus* entrusted to her, but such is not the case—precisely the opposite is maintained when authentic humility approaches the transcendent mystery.

Thus, in sum, von le Fort's theory of motherhood ignores the essential truths contingent on hylemorphism, putting a wedge between body and soul by its attempt to subsume the concrete experience into a universal idea. Oddly, von le Fort's reduction of motherhood to its physical

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<sup>178</sup> *ST*, IIa-IIae, 161.2.r3.

<sup>179</sup> *ST*, IIa-IIae, 161.2.r2.

<sup>180</sup> von le Fort, p. 22.



component--extending at most to the physical demands made postpartum that allow for humble non-academic service--never engages the highly-rational interpersonal relationship that is meant to grow as the child develops. Her seeming isolation and elevation of the mother's irrational animal soul discourages the mother from a mature application of all her senses--internal and external, leading to a disjointed relationship between intellect and will.

Moreover, fatherhood is ignored in her work altogether. She cannot be a mother without him, and yet just as a deepening, thoughtful relationship with her children is not considered relevant to her motherhood, neither is she called into relationship with their father as a requisite for establishing a stable and loving home--rather his existence seems merely a vague opportunity for a disembodied submission and further oblation.<sup>181</sup> The minute details of these unique and essential relationships are what constitute, in the words of Klima above, the "multitude, indeed, a potential infinity of ordinary things." Persons are not called to abstractions but are known by their specific characteristics. The divine Mind cannot but know that *this* woman, having been embraced by *this* man, gave birth to *this* child--and in that knowledge is his will that each of them respond in multitudinous *personal* acts of love in imitation of his own deeply personal love.

Ultimately, von le Fort's misplaced admiration completes a perfect triad of false approaches to motherhood that are only possible when a proper hylemorphism is ignored. First, von le Fort and de Beauvoir both argue that motherhood leads to a loss of subjectivity, the former lauding it, the latter appalled by it; secondly, Krestova and de Beauvoir agree that motherhood differentiates men from women, the former lauding it, the latter appalled by it; and thirdly, Krestova and von le Fort insist on the incommunicability of motherhood, leading the former to reject rationality as a good, and the latter to reject rationality as a good for women. It is this last point that is so discouraging as an ideal approved of in some Catholic circles. Beyond ignoring the distinct rationality shared by all human persons, such a notion actually undermines the very

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<sup>181</sup> Von le Fort does not ignore the foundational complementarity of man and woman; to the contrary she praises it as essential to human flourishing, yet her accolades reveal an unequal footing in these endeavors. In highlighting how the elevated moral lives of women spur men to better themselves, she notes, "The creative procedure between the individual genius and the woman who cooperates with him repeats itself in all the corporate forms of cultural life" (von le Fort, p. 43). Her wording is specific: a man is a genius when blessed by a woman as muse. Lest one think this is overstated, she insists subsequently that women's creative works may bear only restricted influence in "chosen spheres," for they are usually narrow, one-sided, and "to culture they are of no importance" (p. 45).

*imago dei* in women, and in particular robs them of rationality in the very gift entrusted to them for the good of their souls and the benefit of mankind.

*In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:26-38).*

## **Chapter Seven: The Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

Before considering how the maternity of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, illustrates what is most rational about motherhood in general, it would be helpful to see how each of our interlocutors understood her. To that end, since each of them attempted to use the circumstances in the life of the Virgin Mary to further their arguments, this summary will counter those particular points by showing how the Blessed Mother remained supremely rational in how she lived her divine motherhood.

Having been raised by a devout Catholic mother and educated in Catholic schools, de Beauvoir was certainly exposed from an early age to the story of the Virgin Birth, so there is little wonder that she discusses Mary in her seminal work, *The Second Sex*. The author begins with the work of Augustine, whom she believes to have cemented into Christianity the dark view of woman—first as temptress, and secondly as being more subordinate to her flesh than a man is to his.<sup>182</sup> Her maternal nature and her subservience to man combine to map out a path of holiness,<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 186.

<sup>183</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 189

culminating in her obligation to conceive in a carnal way and deliver the child in pain and humiliation (the birth canal being so close to the excretory organs).<sup>184</sup> Motherhood, as an unalterable tie to the material world, shackles each woman to a path of degradation and oppression.

Interestingly, the Church's suggestion that the Blessed Mother may have avoided both (certainly sexual intimacy but perhaps also the experience of a normal delivery) Mary threatened to occupy a place beyond the normal reach—and control—of men.<sup>185</sup> Thus, de Beauvoir explains that the Church, which required Mary as a woman to model a subservient role, were forced to open her *Magnificat*<sup>186</sup> with a docile acceptance of a “handmaiden's” position.

For the first time in the history of humanity, the mother kneels before her son; she freely recognises her inferiority. The supreme masculine victory is consummated in the cult of Mary: it is the rehabilitation of woman by the achievement of her defeat...Motherhood as a natural phenomenon confers no power.<sup>187</sup>

According to de Beauvoir, there is not only a lack of power but a loss of agency, and despite Mary's extraordinary place in salvation history, her cult is strictly based on her submissive nature. Mary, therefore, is simply an effective religious tool used to tie women through child-bearing to home and hearth for all generations. De Beauvoir summarizes the Church's nefarious plot: “To glorify the mother is to accept birth, life, and death in both their animal and their social forms and to proclaim the harmony of nature and society.”<sup>188</sup>

Kristeva, who was born and raised in Bulgaria by an intensely devout father, is not a believer, but explains that her childhood was “bathed” in the liturgy of the Orthodox Church.<sup>189</sup> Where de

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<sup>184</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 186. For this point, she quotes Augustine who states the bald fact: “*Inter faeces et urinam nascimur.*”

<sup>185</sup> The Catholic Church has dogmatically taught that the Blessed Mother of Jesus Christ was a virgin before, during, and after the conception and birth of her Divine Son, meaning that “that the supernatural influence of the Holy Ghost extended to the birth of Jesus Christ, not merely preserving Mary's integrity, but also causing Christ's birth or external generation to reflect his eternal birth from the Father in this, that “the Light from Light” proceeded from his mother's womb as a light shed on the world; that the ‘power of the Most High’ passed through the barriers of nature without injuring them; that ‘the body of the Word’ formed by the Holy Ghost penetrated another body after the manner of spirits” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, found online at <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15448a.htm>).

<sup>186</sup> The song of praise attributed to the Virgin Mary found in Luke 1:46-55. Her claim indicates her doubt that the Biblical narrative was inspired, but rather was manipulated by men for dubious ends.

<sup>187</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 189.

<sup>188</sup> de Beauvoir, p. 191.

<sup>189</sup> John Sutherland, “The ideas interview,” *The Guardian*, 14 March, 2006 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2006/mar/14/highereducation.research1>

Beauvoir focuses on the *Magnificat* to understand Mary as a cipher for irrationality, Kristeva chooses Saint John's Book of Revelation to illustrate the dichotomy between men and women regarding rationality. The text she marks out is as follows:

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth. ... She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne. The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God (Rev 12:1-2, 5-6a).

To explain why the woman fled, Andrea Nye summarises Kristeva's interpretive logic as follows:

Plato's sun with its remorseless clarity signifies rational order, the systematic arrangements of concepts in logical form, or more recently in semantic theory. The woman can never be the sun but is only covered by it, constrained by it as an alien and restrictive garment forced on her from above. In the story it is the sun that the woman, with her feet on the moon, must cast off. Leaving her son, for whom she has laboured to give birth, to be educated by the authorities above, to be trained in the proper authoritarian modes of knowledge, she must go down to the wilderness to be nourished by the earth.<sup>190</sup>

Here we have as clear a division possible between the rationality of men and the otherness of women, with firm stress laid on how women must flee the rational order for their own good. The nod to Plato as the source of these forms shows how universal the models are, and Kristeva will explain at length in her semiotic theory that since even the logic of language excludes women, and Mary stands as the archetype of the mother whose pregnancy is forever obscured by the inability to articulate feminine experience. The "loss" of the child to "authoritarian modes of knowledge" means she and he will never be able to communicate—despite her suffering on his behalf—for he is a man ontologically unable to understand her earthy existence.

Kristeva takes issue specifically with de Beauvoir's interpretation of Mary kneeling before her son (attributed to her study of a painting of the Nativity by Piero della Francesca) in which she explains that it portrays the defeat of affectivity by intellect. Kristeva believes, rather, that it was an artistic attempt to "consolidate [a] new cult of humanistic sensitivity" wherein some did recognise the maternal humility that found joy in such "'lived' feminine experience" despite the

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<sup>190</sup> Andrea Nye, "Woman clothed with the sun: Julia Kristeva and the escape from/to language," *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 12.4 (1987), p. 664.

inherent masochism required.<sup>191</sup> Kristeva marks Mary's virginal pregnancy—a key element in a myth created and embroidered on for centuries—as a pinnacle of the “bipolar structure of belief,” juxtapositioning logic and love, the word and silence, unity and separation. In this dichotomy, women falls on the side of affectivity, incommunicability, and isolation—all because of her maternal capacity.<sup>192</sup> To be sure, in order to emphasize the gulf between rational men and irrational women, Kristeva relies on a very strong [French] translation of Jesus' words: “Woman, what is there in common between you and me?” (John 2:3-5),<sup>193</sup> but this is necessary to show that the flesh of Mary is irrelevant to a faith built on an intellectual assent.

Von le Fort, being an ardent Catholic, uses the Virgin Mary as lynchpin and model of her thesis that pregnancy is mysterious and pre-rational. While taking no issue with the actual life of the Blessed Mother, von le Fort is quick to point out that she is the sign and model for all people, men and women, and her Immaculate Conception points to the unfallen ideal.

The passive acceptance inherent in woman, which ancient philosophy regarded as purely negative, appears in the Christian order of grace the positively decisive factor.

The Marian dogma, reduced to a brief formula, denotes the doctrine of the cooperation of the creature in the work of redemption.<sup>194</sup>

Although this cooperation is the model for men and women, maternity is the sign of its fruitfulness, as she further explains:

The *fiat* of the Virgin is therefore the revelation of the religious quality in its essence.

Since, as an act of surrender, it is at the same time an expression of essential womanliness, the latter becomes the manifestation of the religious concept fundamental to the human being.... She is the power of surrender that is in the cosmos in the form of the bridal woman.<sup>195</sup>

While the specific arguments are profoundly different, each woman arrives at the same conclusion: that the inchoate submission of Mary to the divine plan indicates that her call to bear Christ required no rational action, and that since she offers so few words in the Gospel accounts, one is obliged to extract from her actions (for example, submission to the Angel, her

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<sup>191</sup> Kristeva, “Stabat Mater (Tales of Love),” found in *The Portable Kristeva*. Kelly Oliver, ed. (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 318.

<sup>192</sup> *Stabat Mater*, pp. 177-8.

<sup>193</sup> *Stabat Mater*, p. 164.

<sup>194</sup> Von le Fort, p. 9.

<sup>195</sup> Von le Fort, p. 9.

flight into the desert, her adoration of the Christ-child) the reality of her situation. De Beauvoir adds to the tale the manipulation of the message by men, which Kristeva affirms because the patriarchal Church's insistence on the alienating use of language, which destroys the essential mystery.

### *The Annunciation*

The most important aspect of the account of the Annunciation (above) is that it is a conversation. There is a greeting, a proposal, a discussion, and an assent, and Aquinas notes how remarkable even the greeting is:

With respect to the first, it should be known that in ancient times it was an especially great event when an angel appeared to men, so that men might show them reverence, for they deserve the greatest praise. It was written in praise of Abraham that he received angels hospitably and that he showed them reverence. But it was never heard that an angel showed reverence to a man until he saluted the blessed virgin, saying reverently, Hail.<sup>196</sup>

While often this salutation is passed over as a normal opening to any rational exchange, Thomas shows that it reveals a singularity in Mary that surpasses Abraham himself, showing that she was worthy of a uncommon courtesy from a divine messenger.

Next, Aquinas looks at the rationality of the rest of the event, which illustrates not only all that has been said thus far about the human person as a hylemorphic being, but particularly the hierarchy whereby the body is created for the soul as its instrument, with the actions it takes being subject to the intellect and will. He explains:

It was reasonable that it should be announced to the Blessed Virgin that she was to conceive Christ. First, in order to maintain a becoming order in the union of the Son of God with the Virgin—namely, that she should be informed in mind concerning Him, before conceiving Him in the flesh. Thus Augustine says (*De Sancta Virgine*. iii): “Mary is more blessed in receiving the [faith](#) of Christ, than in conceiving the flesh of Christ;” and further on he adds: “Her nearness as a Mother would have been of no profit to Mary, *had she not borne Christ in her heart after a more blessed manner than in her flesh.*”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Aquinas, On the Hail Mary, found online <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/saint-thomas-aquinas-on-the-hail-mary-5884>

<sup>197</sup> *ST*, IIIa, 30.1, italics added.

Thus, despite Augustine's purported dark view of women, Thomas relies on him for a profound understanding of the Annunciation as one portion of the greater *munus* of pregnancy, reiterating in his own way that no action is isolated, but first intricately tied to what comes before and after, and second that the body is proportioned to the soul that directs it—and together they are invited to respond to the will of God. Whatever accuracies or inaccuracies may have existed in Thomas' biological understanding of the reproductive powers,<sup>198</sup> the essential point is that after clarifying the mission through a verbal exchange, Mary offered the "free gift of her obedience" culminating in her *fiat* ("Let it be..."). The Incarnation hinged on her intellectual consent, proving that reason, in the highest sense of the word, guided her action.

De Beauvoir's insistence that there was no agency on the part of Mary reveals that she confuses voluntary submission with mandatory submission, an idea unfortunately shared by many. Muslims share the same benighted view because of the Quranic version of the same event, wherein the angel tells Mary:

"Creating a son without a father is an easy matter to Allâh. Allâh will make your son a sign to mankind and mercy and a blessing to those who believe in and follow him.

Creating him is a matter that Allah has decreed; so it will not be blocked or changed."<sup>199</sup>

Here Mary's free will assent is neither requested nor required before the virginal conception of her son, for she (like all) must submit [*islām*] to the unalterable will of a voluntarist god. While at first glance, it may appear that the net result is the same, the Christian understanding of the Annunciation explicitly reveals Mary's free agency in the encounter, and her rational nature—key to the *imago dei* that all persons bear—requires that it be so.

Moreover, given that subsequent events were the result of her response given to the angel, the language she used (both in hearing and speaking) were entirely adequate to accomplish the task, so that she could assent to a mission that would unfold in time. Kristeva's explanation (based on the Book of Revelation) that she fled the world of male dominated language is

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<sup>198</sup> In *ST*, I.92.1 he writes: "Among perfect animals the active power of generation belongs to the male sex, and the passive power to the female." Moreover, Aquinas believed the mother to provide the matter only, while the father provided the active principle. There is no grasp of a sperm fertilising an egg, but conception required combination of male semen with female semen, the outcome (boy or girl) depending on the temperature at the time.

<sup>199</sup> See Surah 3:45-47 and Surah 19:16-22. The importance of this distinction was discovered first hand at Yale University, when a group of women aggressively interrupted a talk by the author as she cited the Lucan account. These Muslima vociferously denounced any suggestion that Mary spoke to the angel.



another flight of fancy that has little to do with the Gospel. Christ, “the Word made flesh,” was indeed entrusted to Mary to guide for his formative years, which she did with the help of Joseph in the bosom of the larger community where they lived—first in Egypt, and later in Nazareth. Such was the expansive *munus* that allowed God to walk among his creatures, after having learned to speak at Mary’s feet.

To expand further on Augustine’s explanation that Mary’s mental conception of the Incarnation preceded the physical event, the Carmelite Alexander Vella gathers together other points made in the Gospel of Luke that amplify this reality. He points out that Mary’s cousin, Elizabeth, after reverencing the extraordinary events related to the unborn Lord, “praises her for believing the word that was spoken to her.”<sup>200</sup> He threads this passage together with the parable of the Sower, in light of Jesus’ response to an announcement family members had arrived to see him:

“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8: 21). Mary and the other relatives of Jesus are here put forward as examples of the seed that fell on good soil. Jesus insists again on this when, as Luke narrates in 11:27-28, a woman in the crowd praised his mother. In replying, Jesus pointed out that true blessedness lies not in his mother’s physical relationship with him, but rather in her hearing God’s word and obeying it.

Von le Fort’s admiration for Mary’s “passive acceptance” stretches her submission too far, as though Mary were floating placidly along a lazy river. Vella points out that Luke’s infancy narrative illustrates two encounters that caused Mary to reflect deeply on their meaning: “After the shepherds’ visit, he says that ‘Mary kept all these words and pondered them in her heart’ (2:19), and after the finding of Jesus in the temple, at the very end of the infancy narrative, Luke notes, ‘His mother retained all these things in her heart’ (2:51).”<sup>201</sup> The verb “ponder” is no passive endeavor, as Vella shows:

So Luke pictures Mary keeping in mind words and deeds relating to the mission of Jesus and pointing to his future. It is clearly not just remembrance, the keeping in mind of recollections from Jesus’ infancy to treasure them nostalgically. It is keeping in mind mysterious words, strange deeds and trying to figure out their significance. This is precisely the meaning of the Greek verb that we translate as “ponder”. It is *synballein* in

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<sup>200</sup> Alexander Vella, OCarm, referencing Luke 1:45 in “Mary the Contemplative: A Biblical Perspective,” found online at <http://www.carmelite.org/documents/Spirituality/vellamarythecontemplative.pdf>.

<sup>201</sup> Vella, p. 1.

Greek, a compound word made up of *syn*, meaning “with,” and *ballein*, meaning “to throw.” *Synballein* then, from which our word “symbol” derives, means to throw together, to put together, to combine various things.<sup>202</sup>

What von le Fort calls passivity would far better be termed receptivity, which allows for a fully human response to a challenging proposal. Receptivity gives room to manoeuvre along the lines of what Dionysius called “mental discussion.”<sup>203</sup> This process incorporates words, both those spoken to Mary at given times and the Hebrew Scriptures with which she was abundantly familiar, and yet it also draws on those subtle sensory impressions, the *phantasms* that feed the intellect, no doubt including non-verbal cues and other abstract data that had to be incorporated—thrown together!—in order to enrich and complete the complex intellectual process. Receptivity explains the give-and-take that is possible among thinking persons, and more fully reflects the embodied interiority that led to Mary’s *fiat*—a response that could be revisited and renewed as the consequences unfolded over the years.

All said, Mary’s maternity cannot be used to illustrate any of the three theses concerning the irrationality of pregnancy, rather she proves the exact opposite. The Biblical account, contrary to Kristeva’s charge of emitting “bipolar” images, shows rather that her free will was an essential component, and that her mind kept working as concrete events unfolded. Her use of language may have been minimal (we cannot know) but it was pivotal to Mary’s rational engagement with God’s salvific plan—even if much of it remains profoundly mysterious. If there is one point that is to be retained in faith, it is von le Fort’s supposition that “the Marian dogma, reduced to a brief formula, denotes the doctrine of the *cooperation* of the creature in the work of redemption,”<sup>204</sup> but this cooperation, properly understood, entails a freely offered submission of mind and heart to an intelligible God. Such was the nature of the profoundly personal encounter through which a rational woman was invited to collaborate in the divine *munus*, and by which she responded first intellectually—setting in motion the *reditus* integral to restoring order in creation—before the Word took flesh in her womb.

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<sup>202</sup> Vella, p. 2.

<sup>203</sup> *ST*, Ia.79.8 quoting from Dionysius’ “On the Divine Names,” vii.

<sup>204</sup> *The Eternal Woman*, p. 9.

*“Since the person, an intellectual substance, is a part of the universe in whom the perfection of the whole universe can exist according to knowledge, his most proper good as intellectual substance will be the good of the universe, which is an essentially common good. Rational creatures, persons, are distinguished from irrational, by being more ordered to the common good and by being able to act expressly for its sake” (J.M. Cardinal Villeneuve, OMI).<sup>205</sup>*

## **Chapter Eight: Pregnancy and the Common Good**

In sum, many philosophical and theological influences have coalesced to marginalize the gifts of women over the millennia, due in large part to a misunderstanding of the true nature of their reproductive capacity.<sup>206</sup> The widespread assumption—based on a plethora of arguments—that the material demands of pregnancy serve to distract women from rational tasks has drawn a variety of responses, ranging from rejecting motherhood as a good to rejecting rationality as a good, and yet few have stopped to consider the ways in which motherhood itself is rational. These ways have been outlined above, with stress laid on the hylemorphic nature of the human person, the fact that human inclinations incline to the good, and that the *ratio* of this good is our perfection. Thus, rationality encompasses the entire person, ordering his appetites and directing his inclinations with prudence. The body is proportioned to the soul that directs these inclinations, and virtue assures that even the lowest of natural functions can participate in the highest of rational endeavors, contributing to the perfection of the person.

The premise of this work has never been to assume that all women are called to physical motherhood, nor even that any particular woman would be better served by having children. The purpose is merely to reveal the rationality of maternity. It is in this light that the Scriptural passages “be fruitful and multiply” and “she will be saved through motherhood” combine to show that the Christian reverence for motherhood is consistent with its inherent respect for the free

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<sup>205</sup> J.M. Cardinal Villeneuve, OMI, in the preface to Charles de Koninck’s, *On the Primacy of the Common Good Against the Personalists and The Principle of the New Order* found online at <https://emmilco.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/de-koninck-common-good.pdf>. Villeneuve was archbishop of Quebec from 1931-1947).

<sup>206</sup> This paper seeks merely to remedy those misunderstandings, while acknowledging that much of what women suffer is due to the disordered inclinations to lust and power.

will component in salvation. One last argument will show how that maternity is not only a form of personal perfection but one that is effusive, radiating to enhance the common good.

To revisit Pinckaers' five natural inclinations, those he calls "primitive spiritual instincts,"<sup>207</sup> it is now appropriate to consider the last, the inclination to live in a society. The inquiry that remains is threefold: to consider maternity as a private good versus a public good, to show how pursuing the common good adds to the perfection of the mother herself, and to gauge the impact of a fully rational maternity on the perfection of the wider community. These are obviously closely related, but it is possible to pull out the threads to find particular answers, especially as they relate to human rationality.

Human persons have always collaborated in society, not only on the material level, but also to share ideas and experiences.<sup>208</sup> Because of their rationality, which inherently inclines humans to form meaningful relationships, there is also the universal desire for a friendship, for "friendship, like virtue, clearly transcends the order of material usefulness."<sup>209</sup> Proper friendships are integral to a healthy society, and should be at the heart of family life itself. This was indicated above when Gondreau outlined that marriage has "two proximate and complementary ends: the procreative (expressive of the body) and the unitive (expressive of the soul)."<sup>210</sup> Pinckaers stresses that these two ends should never be rivals: "They should be joined and bonded. The principal end, especially the education of the children, cannot be attained without the mutual cooperation of the spouses, their friendship, and affection."<sup>211</sup> Thomas encouraged friendship within marriage,<sup>212</sup> and its witness to each subsequent generation will foster growth in maturity on the personal level, and facilitate a proper use of freedom in the larger sphere.

In this regard, when a husband and wife cooperate enthusiastically on a variety of levels for the good of their offspring, it means that they have accepted the premise that a healthy family is a

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<sup>207</sup> Servais Pinckaers, *Morality: The Catholic View* (Saint Augustine's Press: South Bend, IN, 2001), pp.98-99.

<sup>208</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 432. These comments are made in reference to Aquinas' *De regimini principium* nn. 741-742. In all honesty, rare to non-existent is the person who lives a totally isolated existence (especially in the modern world), and those who do have not only moved away from those who nurtured them in their earliest years, but have chosen to live without the normal bonds of affection that allow humans to thrive.

<sup>209</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 433.

<sup>210</sup> Gondreau, "Marriage," p. 44.

<sup>211</sup> Pinckaers, *Sources*, p. 446.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *IV Sent.* 27.1.1 and *ST Suppl.* 42.2.

rational good. The *munus* as they understand it has allowed the parents to lay the foundation in friendship and to pursue a sequence of rational tasks that will benefit their children. And yet, while it was shown above that maternity is never completely isolated, even a close-knit family that looks responsibly after the myriad needs of its many members might still be, on one level, pursuing a private good, relatively speaking.

Benjamin Smith, after studying the work of Charles de Koninck, summarizes the difference between public and private goods according to Aquinas:

Thomas compares and distinguishes individual and common goods in a variety of ways. The common good is communicable, whereas the individual good is incommunicable; that is, the individual good is not the kind of good that can be shared. It is private and exclusive. My health is my health and it cannot be directly shared by anyone else; it is not the health of another. To be sure, my health may indirectly contribute to the good of another, but only by occasioning a different perfection. It directly perfects me and no else.<sup>213</sup>

Thus, it is possible that the virtues exercised within the family might be pursued for the good of the family alone, as though their perfection might be achieved on their own terms. What de Koninck first stresses is that, ideally, the good of each layer of society—extended family, neighbours, and state as well—should not be in conflict. In all honesty, there is often a deep apprehension over competing goods, and one discerns an immediate dichotomy between family and stranger, between the manageable and the unwieldy, and between the known and the unknown, and thus, according to de Koninck, the first obstacle to overcome in pondering the world beyond the family is fear that the common good is an alien good (*bonum alienum*).<sup>214</sup> Just as the body and the soul are not rivals, but fitted to work collaboratively, neither is the authentic personal good of one person—or of one family—unrelated to the good of those elements of society that must be shared to some degree.

Within the range of all created things, authentic goods all participate to some degree in the same eternal good, which is God. It is when the parents are able to let go of an exclusive view of their family's interest and weigh their thoughts and actions regarding the other members of the community that the good within the family becomes communicable. When they realize that

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<sup>213</sup> Benjamin L. Smith, "The Meaning and Importance of Common Goods," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 80, Number 4, October, 2016. p. 587.

<sup>214</sup> De Koenick, pp. 21, 35.

each decision has myriad consequences for their neighbours and act accordingly, they will have crossed the threshold into seeing their family as a public good. The Gospel is filled with guidance on this topic, culminating with Jesus' encounter with a scholar of the Law:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” [Jesus] said to him,\* “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36-40).

There is a second obstacle that needs to be overcome in order to incorporate this vision in its truest sense, for it is still possible to consider the good of the other in an imperfect way. For example, a mother can work diligently, not only to see that her child is well-prepared for school but that his classmates have what they need as well, and yet even this isn't necessarily the highest good, given the misplaced object of her hard work. As Benjamin Smith explains:

“the good common to many taken separately is common in the sense that it is multiplied among many. This is not really and truly a common good, but an individual good made common by division into many individual instances. The hallmark of the common good by predication is division and multiplication; the hallmark of the common good by causality is unity.”<sup>215</sup>

To continue with the illustration, the mother—with great exertion—may extend herself in the predominantly material task of seeing that each child has books, lunch money, and ample access to opportunities. The higher challenge is to actually foster unity, seeing beyond a conglomeration of individual goods to a shared, communal good—so that a communion at the deepest level is forged among those who live and work together, not only here on earth, but eternally as well.

This is surely overwhelming to anyone—especially a young, exhausted and overwhelmed new mother! God knows this, but as Janet Smith points out, this is a “free and responsible participation in Christ's mission and a recognition that the invitation to participate in that mission is a gift that entails ennobling responsibilities.”<sup>216</sup> Johnston also ties it together, noting:

Just as man is animal and rational, so marriage is rooted in biology (in procreation) yet reaches far beyond (in education). Marriage is a complete relationship, a relationship of

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<sup>215</sup> Benjamin Smith, p. 592-3.

<sup>216</sup> Janet Smith, p. 387.

equity, friendship, love, *and the common good*, a relationship that reaches beyond merely material provision into the most social concerns of human life.<sup>217</sup>

It is no accident that the word *munus*, heretofore associated with the task of motherhood, is the same word used throughout the Church's history to explain God's invitation to collaborate with him for the good of all. Janet Smith points to one telling example in an encyclical on the Holy Spirit, entitled *Divinum Illud Munus*, written by Pope Leo XIII, the title meaning "That Divine Gift (or Office)." In it he explains that *munus* in the title refers to "the *munus* of bringing men to salvation, which Christ received from His Father and which He transmitted for completion to the Holy Spirit." Smith continues:

He also mentions that the Holy Spirit is invoked in the liturgy as the Giver of Gifts (*Dator Munerum*). The sense of gift, then, is deeply embedded in the Church's use of the word *munus*, which also carries some sense of giftedness by the Spirit.<sup>218</sup>

Here, then we come full circle, in recognizing that the *munus* of motherhood itself is a gift, and one that not only points the recipient back to the giver, but is given with full access to the help of the Giver to make that return possible—not only for herself but others as well. This is but one rich manifestation of the *exitus-reditus* process, which incorporates the free will of the subject to embrace the freely given grace of God to engage in a process of purification. This has been evident to Thomas all along, as Benjamin Smith points out:

In the *Prima secundae*, Thomas distinguishes the real common good in just this fashion. In question 90, article 2, he famously argues that all law is ordered to the common good rather than the individual good. In the corpus of the article, he says that because law belongs to practical reason, it must be ordered to happiness, the first principle of practical reason. This conclusion is clear enough, but he immediately goes on to argue that law is ordered not to happiness taken individually, but to the happiness of the whole community, which as we shall see essentially consists of virtuous cooperation.<sup>219</sup>

It is precisely in this virtuous cooperation that a woman is perfected, and pregnancy is a singular way of seeking her own good while contributing to the good of others. In this regard, Benjamin Smith summarizes De Koninck's view of the common good:

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<sup>217</sup> Johnston, p. 297 (emphasis added).

<sup>218</sup> Janet Smith, pp. 390-391.

<sup>219</sup> Benjamin Smith, p. 593.

The common good is not the aggregate or sum of individual goods. An aggregate of individual goods is not really one but simply the adding up of many really different individual goods. By contrast the real common good is one in number and genuinely shared by many. As such it is external to any individual person; it is genuinely the common good of the whole rather than the individual good of the part. It is a shared purpose that unites and perfects the many who pursue it."<sup>220</sup>

To distinguish the particular threads as indicated above, it is not just that the family benefits when the mother works on behalf of their private good, and it is not just that the wider community benefits when she extends herself beyond the family on behalf of communicable goods, it is actually her perfection itself that redounds to their perfection. As De Koninck explains: "Thus one sees that the more a being is perfect, the more it implies relation to the common good, and the more it acts principally for this good which not only in itself but also for the being which acts for it is the greatest."<sup>221</sup>

Here, ultimately, we find the most extraordinary truth about the human person, that the higher the end for which she acts, the more rational the action. Contrary to the three diverse arguments that pregnancy is irrational, it is one of the highest rational actions of which humans are capable, for it has the potential to touch and perfect a wide number of persons, which in essence means that it is a way of deepening the very rationality of the wider sphere. Rather than being incommunicable or subpersonal, it is a mechanism for fostering communication—not only among persons, but also between God and those creatures in his divine image. And rather than demanding that the mother be subsumed by the task, she is asked to use her natural powers for a supernatural end—demanding not dissolution of subjectivity in creatures but a profoundly personal encounter among beloved souls.

This is what embodied interiority was meant to be—a means of unity that perfects all that it touches. A mother's collaborative contribution to the common good, when guided by her rational embrace of the One who gave her the gift, enhances God's own task of unifying souls, as De Koninck explains: "Whence it follows that the good, which has the notion of a final cause, is so much the more efficacious as it communicates itself to more numerous beings."<sup>222</sup> Here,

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<sup>220</sup> Benjamin Smith, p. 598-599.

<sup>221</sup> De Koninck, p. 24.

<sup>222</sup> De Koninck, p. 19.



Aristotle's "cause of causes" is revealed to be God, giver of the capacity for motherhood, which is most rationally actualized within marriage, where one finds, according to Gondreau "the deepest bonds of personal communion and friendship."<sup>223</sup> Motherhood so lived, expresses true teleological liberty—one that radiates rationality and perfection wherever it is found.

Finally, despite the diverse misunderstandings of Mary's motherhood, illustrated above, the Virgin Mary is the most rational of women, specifically through her motherhood. De Koninck reflects on the longstanding Church teaching that her holy life is mirrored in the Scriptural text on wisdom, which includes this portion:

For she is an aura of the might of God  
and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty;  
therefore nought that is sullied enters into her. . . .  
And she, who is one, can do all things,  
and renews everything while herself perduring;  
And passing into holy souls from age to age,  
she produces friends of God and prophets" (Wis 7:25, 27).

In sum, De Koninck posits that Mary's utterly free assent to the invitation to bear the Divine Child allowed her to be "at once an emanation and an indwelling" of divine wisdom, for her collaboration with God radiated a perfection that benefitted the entire created order.<sup>224</sup> And given that Aquinas affirmed that "wisdom is the highest perfection of reason," (I *Ethic.*, lect. 1), it has been conclusively shown that maternity is perfectly rational.

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<sup>223</sup> Gondreau, *Marriage*, p. 43.

<sup>224</sup> Charles d. DeKoninck, "The Wisdom That is Mary," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, Volume 6.1 (1943), p. 13.

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