

# The Disabled in Locke and Aquinas: Impediments to Economic Liberty or Contributors to the Economy of Salvation?

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ABSTRACT: While both the late-seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke and the thirteenth-century thinker Thomas Aquinas believe that the rational human soul must be directly created by God, the two men define freedom in fundamentally different ways, which in turn influence their differing conceptions of the human person. By defining freedom primarily as the ability to overcome inconvenience and uneasiness and by defining personhood in terms of being able to rationally engage in political and economic activity, Locke's approach lends itself to neglecting (and in some cases perhaps even ending the existence of) disabled and infirm individuals as well as possibly certain unborn offspring. They are regarded as lacking freedom in being unable to overcome uneasiness. Their existence seems an inconvenience that hampers the freedom of others. By comparison, Thomas regards all human offspring as being necessarily persons. Whatever their disabilities, their nature orients them toward eternal communion with God and others. Locke divides the social and religious ends of human persons, with socio-economic considerations driving his understanding of personhood in both cases. By comparison, Aquinas conceives of both social and ecclesial life as being infused by sacramental participation and as thereby oriented toward eternal sacramental communion with God. In his case, through the sacraments, all people – including the disabled and the unborn – are not only oriented toward their own salvation but play a profound (if in some cases inscrutable) role in the salvation of the whole world.

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WHILE ENLIGHTENMENT CONCEPTIONS of the human person differ significantly from classically Christian conceptions, one finds even among Enlightenment thinkers some theists who agree with classically Christian thinkers that the capacity for rational reflection requires an act of direct creation by God. For example, the empiricist philosopher John Locke contends that insofar as we have never observed unthinking matter to produce consciousness, and insofar as we observe that everything that comes into existence has a cause, we must conclude that consciousness is brought into being by a cause that is itself conscious, uncaused, infinite, eternal, and so on (God).<sup>1</sup> Locke is a good example to consider because his notions about personhood in terms of self-consciousness are highly influential in modern thought<sup>2</sup> as are his analyses of freedom and rights, especially in relation to private property and democratic self-government).<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Aquinas maintains that the uniquely immaterial process of forming universal concepts *via* abstraction (which requires transcending particular sense experiences and, by extension, particular bodily states)<sup>4</sup> requires specifically immaterial souls to be directly created by God, as opposed to coming into being through the ordinary processes of procreation.<sup>5</sup>

Despite sharing with Locke the view that the rational soul must be directly created by God, hylomorphists like Thomas avoid the tendency of many moderns, including Locke, to regard “sensation” as a kind of “mental” (though

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<sup>1</sup> John Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, ch. 10, especially §§4-6 and 9-11.

<sup>2</sup> For Locke’s discussion of personhood and personal identity in relation to memory, sense experience, and reflective acts, see his *Essay* II.27, §§7-28. It should be noted that Locke in these sections insists on distinguishing the terms and concepts of “person,” “human being/man,” and “immaterial (or spiritual) substantial soul,” such that personal identity is explicitly distinguished from bodily identity and sameness of soul.

<sup>3</sup> For Locke’s relationship of one’s thoughts to the relationship between bodily activity, property rights, and the origin of society and government, see his *Second Treatise of Government*, especially chs. 5 and 7. While Locke does not expressly link his view of the mind-body relationship to his political view, one can draw the inferences easily enough (e.g., we exhibit a unique internal control over our own bodily actions through our thoughts and will, with these actions then being linked to labor and property rights, and from here the need for society and government). Beyond this, Locke’s treatment of personal identity addresses the link of personhood to legal and moral status and responsibility, e.g. II.27 §18 and §26.

<sup>4</sup> *Summa theologiae* I.75.2.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., *Summa contra gentiles* II.86-87.

not necessarily “self-conscious”) activity.<sup>6</sup> This prompts Descartes, for example, to deny non-human animals sense experience at all<sup>7</sup> while moving empiricists like Locke to parse out distinctions between “consciousness” and “self consciousness” to avoid construing animals as persons.<sup>8</sup> For hylomorphists, on the other hand, “sensation” is a physical process.<sup>9</sup> This is unproblematic for them insofar as they understand that *no* matter exists without being enabled to function according to some formal cause (for living things, “souls”) that determine the species essence and specific functions (including

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<sup>6</sup> Contemporary discussions, for example, often address the difficulties “qualia” (e.g., sensory experiences of particular tastes, smells, tactile impressions, sounds, and visual inputs) pose for providing “reductionistic” materialist accounts of “consciousness.” This then prompts further discussions as to whether one can retain a physicalist account of “mind” only by expanding our conception of matter to include mental states that qualitatively differ from other physical dimensions, or the possibility that certain non-conscious material events, in seemingly *ad hoc* fashion, prompt certain conscious experiences according to particular “psychophysical laws.” See, for example, David Chalmers’s rejection of reductionistic materialism in favor of more expanded physicalist accounts in his paper “Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism” (2013) made available at <http://consc.net/papers/panpsychism.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part 5.

<sup>8</sup> Precisely speaking, Locke does not clarify whether or not animals experience “consciousness” as such. However, *contra* Descartes, he does acknowledge that animals can have “ideas” of sense, while being different from persons in lacking “general” or “abstract” or “universal” ideas (e.g., *Essay* II.10 §10, and II.11 §7 and §§9-10). Even so, in his discussion of personal identity in II.27, he directly ascribes animal identity to the continued organization of various biological functions that constitute a continuous biological life (as he does for his account of biological *human*, as opposed to *self* or *personal* identity; see *Essay* II.27 §5 on identity in animals, §§6-7 on the identity of human being [“man”] vs. “person,” and personal identity §§9ff).

<sup>9</sup> Insofar as matter is purely passive, with merely the potential to be actualized as a specific kind of thing (substance) by a formal principle (formal cause) itself is immaterial, matter cannot exist purely by itself. Accordingly, because form acts on matter to determine its various biological and sensory functions, for hylomorphism sensation is construed as a “physical” process, albeit one made possible by the necessary presence of form. Form and matter do not naturally exist separately, however, but are principles that together constitute one material substance. In living beings, this formal principle is also called *soul*. Nevertheless, Thomas adds that the soul of rational creatures, because of its ability to form multiple universal concepts, is able to transcend the limits of, and thus subsist apart from, matter (*Summa theologiae* I.75.2 and 6). Such a state, though, is contrary to the soul’s proper operation, which is to serve as the formal cause of both intellectual and bodily operations (I.76.1 and I.77.3-4).

life and sensation) of creatures.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, modern thought (especially empiricism) typically rejects formal (and thus final causes) as empirically unobservable metaphysical conjectures.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, it thinks of matter in more “reductionistic” terms.<sup>12</sup>

While the issue of whether sense experience counts as a physical process or as something pertaining to immaterial “consciousness” might seem like a question of purely metaphysical interest, its moral implications begin to emerge when one examines the significance of this question in relation to Locke’s and Aquinas’s differing conceptions of “personhood” and “freedom.” These considerations also prompt the question of God’s purpose in creating human beings with rational souls. For Locke, humans are given rational souls for the sake of being economically productive, with their personhood (or lack thereof) being defined accordingly. Aquinas, on the other hand, regards all those who are of human origin as having rational souls, making them persons and thus ordering their entire being (whatever their natural limitations) to the ultimate end of achieving eternal communion with God and others.

With these topics in mind, the first section of this essay compares the two thinkers’ views on freedom, with the subsequent section examining how their respective views influence their understanding of who counts as a person with

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<sup>10</sup> For an the elucidation of this point, see the immediately preceding footnote.

<sup>11</sup> In *On the Soul* Aristotle explains why the principle that unifies matter into a specific substance cannot itself have “spatial magnitude,” such that it itself is not empirically observed. The insight, however, is poignant: whatever has magnitude has parts, always prompting the question of what holds the parts together that, if this itself is something physically measurable, must also have parts, and so on *ad infinitum*. Since infinitely regressive explanations explain nothing, we understand intuitively that the principle that explains the specific nature of a material thing cannot itself be something spatial. This is one of several arguments that he provides for the necessity of a formal principle that is not itself reducible to matter, even if it is “material” in the case of non-rational creatures in the sense of only being present in union with the matter it specifies.

<sup>12</sup> In light of previous discussions here, one recognizes that the propensity of contemporary discussions of mind to not recognize form and matter as diverse constituent principles of material entities, and thus to often think of “matter” as a kind of purely “unconscious” “stuff,” raises difficulties in explaining how sensation can be construed as a “physical” process. Likewise, this same propensity is often linked to a relative lack of attention to (or in some cases outright denial of) “abstraction” as a genuinely unique operation that “transcends” bodily states (e.g., *Summa theologiae* I.75.2). As a result, a category of uniquely “mental” activity (including abstraction) is ignored which inclines contemporary discourse to “lump” sensation in with other genuinely rational functions under the category of “mental” and “conscious” activity and “experience.”

basic rights. This essay will assess Locke's largely economic understanding on the ultimate purpose of human existence, then Aquinas's understanding of it in salvific terms, followed by a consideration of the manner in which the disabled and even the unborn might contribute to the economy of salvation, possibly playing a role in God's providential plan in overcoming the fall of the angels, while also interceding for the salvation of others, even if in ways that might be incomprehensible to us.

## I. Locke and Aquinas on Liberty and Freedom

### A. Locke and "Negative" Freedom as Overcoming "Uneasiness"

Though the early editions of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* take the motive for human action and thus the basis for freedom (or "liberty") to be the positive pursuit for "happiness,"<sup>13</sup> his later musings leave him to conclude that what generally moves people more is the desire to overcome "uneasiness."<sup>14</sup>

For Locke, being free does not mean merely being able to act according to one's desire (including the desire to overcome uneasiness). Rather, he insists that freedom also requires that if an agent had a contrary desire – namely, to forbear acting in the way he or she now desires to act, or *vice versa* – he or she must be able to have acted in this way as well.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the ability to act or forbear acting as one desires, without the contrary action also being possible if one had desired that instead, makes the action *voluntary* but not free.<sup>16</sup> Still, this does not undermine the fact that Locke's account of freedom has a negative emphasis on overcoming uneasiness. If anything, it underscores it by suggesting that freedom demands not only that the agent be able to overcome his or her actual uneasiness but also a contrary uneasiness the agent could have had as well.

Lockean freedom, then, apparently means being able to overcome *anything* that could have made one uneasy, even if in a particular case some of these circumstances were not present. On this view, the more theoretical "uneasinesses" one can overcome, the more free the person is. In addition, it seems that in some respects we more fear the loss of freedom as an escape from

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<sup>13</sup> Locke himself in the final edition of the *Essay* comments on his moving from saying in earlier editions that what primarily motivates us is a desire for the greatest perceived happiness, but that his later reflections suggested that instead people are more motivated to overcome undesirable circumstances, than pursue more desirable ones. See, II.21 §35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, §§33-38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, §§10-11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, §§8ff, esp. 15-16.

suffering than we value whatever positive goods we may attain through the use of it.

It is also worth considering the particular connotations of the word “uneasiness.” We associate “ease” not merely with being comfortable but with the lack of needing to exert ourselves to put forth an effort. Interestingly, this means that freedom has as much to do with an ability to engage in activity *per se* as with an ability (whether or not actually exercised) to avoid what subjects us to unwelcome difficulty or discomfort.

#### B. Economic Freedom in Respect to Those Who Pose an “Inconvenience”

One might contest the more “negative” interpretation of Lockean freedom by noting the *Essay’s* insistence that our idea of “liberty” “arises from” a power we reflectively observe “within” our consciousness to initiate bodily motion or thought,<sup>17</sup> which he takes to be the source of our “clearest idea” of “active power.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* describes the state of nature as a condition whereby people have a “perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the [moral] laws of nature.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite these more positive-sounding overtones, it is useful to interpret remarks like those considered in the previous paragraph, particularly those taken from his *Essay*, in the broader context of what Locke writes. Even where we have an idea of an active power to initiate bodily motion, it must be asked what prompts us to act in a given way. In context with Locke’s other statements, the answer to this seems clear: we are primarily motivated to act in order to overcome uneasiness. For example, in chapter two of his *Second Treatise* he declares that we are “forced” to engage in labor by which we establish a right over goods and property in order to meet our natural “wants”<sup>20</sup> and to make it easier to continue to meet them (“convenience”).<sup>21</sup> Chapter seven echoes this theme by explaining that society originates out of an “obligation to meet the needs of necessity” as well as for the sake of (once again) “convenience,” even though this can be rooted to some extent in our natural affinity to socialize with others, particularly as manifested in (but not limited to) the sexual attraction between men and women.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, §7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, §4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 2, §4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, §36.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, §§26, 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, § 77.

Importantly, when Locke *does* seem to offer a more positive conception of freedom, it is specifically in reference to economic rights. As will be addressed in a later section examining Locke's view of the disabled in respect to the economy, Locke holds that prior to entering into society, every man is "free" to order his possessions as he sees fit, while in society one is free to produce as much as can be used without waste.<sup>23</sup> Along with this, because money has no intrinsic value for meeting our natural needs and cannot spoil, we have a right (that is, we are free) to accumulate as much wealth as we can, profiting from the exchange of produced goods and services.<sup>24</sup>

As it turns out, there is an ambiguity in respect to the negative vs. positive aspect of freedom, even in the case of economic activity. For one thing, Locke arguably recognizes a tacit duty for us to be as productive as we can be, such that we are not morally free to abstain from striving for increased production. This is based on his insight that natural resources yield far more productivity and use when "mixed" with human labor and innovation.<sup>25</sup> In this case, there is arguably an indirect "waste" in not enabling these resources to yield their greater potential. If Locke does imply a duty to ever-increase production, then even economic activity can be construed as relieving not only our basic "wants" but also our uneasiness at not fulfilling our calling to make nature ever-more productive (along with establishing economic networks to assure that what is produced can be bought and sold, and hence used). In this case, even in economic activity, positive freedom pertains more to a freedom to choose what is produced and how and by whom than to a freedom to limit production in general. Beyond this, the ever-increasing production of goods and services prompts ever-new desires, thereby constantly increasing a sense of uneasiness and want.

Along these same lines, Locke calls the "conjugal society" of husband and wife (ordered by the "strong natural inclination" toward producing offspring) "voluntary," but he does not say that it is "free."<sup>26</sup> Of course, Locke himself never married and presumably thinks that we are morally free to "forbear" marrying. Even so, he does not say that people, should they choose to marry, are morally free not to have children. At the same time, he explicitly says that

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<sup>23</sup> On not having a right to waste, see *Second Treatise*, ch. 5 §§31, 37-38.

<sup>24</sup> This touches on Locke's views that one is free to accumulate money without limit, since unlike natural goods it cannot perish (be wasted) from disuse and since it has no intrinsic value in meeting our basic needs. See, for example, ch. 5 §§31, 37, 44, 47-50.

<sup>25</sup> *Second Treatise*, ch. 5 §§31, 37 (where he addresses the exponential increase of production through labor).

<sup>26</sup> *Second Treatise*, ch. 7 §§77-78.

men and women alike are “free” to divorce once their children reach an age of economic self-sufficiency, at which point they are capable of freely ordering their own possessions.<sup>27</sup>

While the relevance of these considerations to Locke’s attitude toward the disabled might be difficult to discern at first, it becomes clearer when the above points on Locke’s economic and political views are taken together. These points could also apply, though perhaps less evidently, in cases of “inconvenient” pregnancy in respect to abortion (touched upon later), and the terminally ill (in the case of those considering euthanasia). To explain, these points raise the question as to whether for Locke there is a tacit moral obligation to work toward ever-increasing production and wealth as well as to produce children for the sake of further increasing production (at least for those who marry). If this is the case, then the fact that some of the disabled will never be able to attain economic “freedom,” with their lives even posing an “inconvenience” to themselves and the productivity of others in this regard, raises question as to whether “freedom” encourages refusing such care or ending the life of such individuals.

In support of the above conjecture, one notes that Book III of the *Essay* defends nominalism and rejects our ability to know real species essences. Locke himself disputes to what extent certain disabled offspring can reasonably be regarded as “human” and/or “persons” in the first place, inquiring about whether they should be “determined to life or death,” and asking whether killing them would really be a case of “murder” [sic].<sup>28</sup> Some of these matters will be touched on shortly in the next section, which compares Lockean and Thomistic conceptions of personhood. Similarly, he declares in the *Second Treatise* that God gave the world “to the rational and industrious.”<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere he adds that the presumption of equality between persons both in the “state of nature” and society stems from others having the “same advantages of nature, and use of our abilities,”<sup>30</sup> which obviously would preclude at least some of the disabled.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., §§82-83.

<sup>28</sup> Both citations in this sentence arise in Locke’s rejection of essential realism and defense of nominalism, which maintains that “species” are simply based on categories we invent based on features we decide are most convenient to use for purposes of language and classification. See, for example, his *Essay*, Book III, ch. 6 §27. See also III. 3 §14.

<sup>29</sup> Ch. 5 §34. In fairness, it should be noted that he is speaking here of the rational and industrious in contrast specifically with the quarrelsome and the envious, and not with those lacking capacity for labor or reason.

<sup>30</sup> See §4.



Having examined Locke's emphasis on freedom as the ability to do and forbear doing what is needed to overcome "uneasiness," along with its application to economic activity, it is time to compare these ideas to Thomas's much more positive conception of freedom, which is exemplified not in the maximization of economic pursuits but in an orientation toward eternal communion with God and the saints.

### C. Aquinas on Positive Freedom as Pursuit of Eternal Communion with God

Unlike Locke's more negative understanding of freedom as a freedom *from* what is deemed undesirable more than a freedom *toward* what is desirable, Aquinas grounds freedom of the will in the necessity of all creatures desiring or acting toward God as universal good.<sup>31</sup> Of course, only creatures with a rational nature are said to be free. This is true in that freedom requires both an ability to conceptualize "good," understood as that which fulfills a creature's proper nature (in the case of rational beings, culminating in the eternal contemplation of God as the source of all being and hence goodness)<sup>32</sup> as well as to judge between various courses of action in discerning what facilitates or hinders the fulfillment of our nature.<sup>33</sup>

There is obviously a stark contrast between conceiving of freedom primarily in terms of eternal beatitude and of at least equally (and arguably most attentively) in terms of economic activity and overcoming temporal uneasiness. To be fair, Locke himself acknowledges the reality of heaven and defends liberty also in terms of religious practice and belief (for example, in his *Letter Concerning Toleration*). Still, even here, Locke's empirically-backed mind-body dualism (touched upon later) sets up a divinely-sanctioned implicit equality between economic and eternal interests. Just as God gives us reason to understand and worship Him, He gives us our bodies as the first instance of private property in order to materially produce and profit.<sup>34</sup>

To return to Aquinas, though technically the exercise of free choice of the will requires the use of reason, it will be shown next in the discussion of his view of personhood that, unlike Locke's view, all human offspring have a rational nature, even if they suffer cognitive impairments that render them unable to exercise reason. Thus, while these individuals might not have freedom of the will or a concept of God, they are still ordered toward God and

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, *Summa contra gentiles* III.17.

<sup>32</sup> This refers to the beatific vision. See, for instance, *Summa theologiae* II-II.2.8 and 3.8.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., *Summa theologiae* I.83.1.

<sup>34</sup> *Second Treatise*, ch. 4 §27.

eternal beatitude through their rational nature. Moreover, the final section of this essay will consider ways in which their non-rational functions, insofar as they are linked to a rational nature, presumably still enable them even in this life to experience God, and definitely participate in ways known to us, as well as perhaps others we can only guess at, to the economy of salvation.

The significance of the differing conceptions of freedom for Locke and Thomas to the issue of disability becomes clear when we consider the relationship of these views to their differing conceptions of “personhood” and “rights.” Accordingly, these conceptions for each thinker will now be addressed.

### III. Personhood in Locke and Aquinas

#### A. Thomistic Hylomorphism and Personhood

Aquinas offers the classic Boethian understanding of person as “an individual substance of a rational nature,”<sup>35</sup> with human persons being substances whose personhood is expressed through a specifically human nature (as opposed to, say, an angelic nature). What is important to note here is that on the Aristotelian-Thomistic conception of substance, a substance’s nature is determined by its form (soul).<sup>36</sup> In this case, a being who has a human form is by definition a person, even if one has a material defect (such as in the brain) that inhibits the rational operations of the soul from adequately manifesting themselves. (There is a possible distinction here between merely biological and personal humanity that will be addressed later.)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Summa theologiae* I.9.1.

<sup>36</sup> One should be clear that form does not refer just to external shape, or even inner structure, but to an active principle that develops matter into a specific kind of body, with species-specific functions and natural capacities. Hence, a being (substance) has the form it does even prior to the matter having yet developed these features, and thus prior to the actual manifestation of these species operations; it is what causes the creature to develop in a manner that enables it to eventually function in this way, presuming this development is not hindered by external circumstances (or material impediments, as discussed in the next note below) which themselves cannot be ascribed to the form itself.

<sup>37</sup> Technically speaking, because Aquinas maintains that the rational soul must be directly created by God and cannot come to be through procreation as it does for non-rational creatures, it is theoretically conceivable that a purely biological, non-personal human being could come into existence through procreation alone, to which God does not “infuse” a rational soul. Later in this essay, however, it will be shown why this possibility can be practically ruled out on teleological grounds, once it is understood that the purpose and thus presumably character of sensitive (and its requisite nutritive) functioning of human biological nature differs from that of other animals, in being

For example, in *On the Soul*, Aristotle (on whom much of Aquinas's philosophy is modeled) expresses the view that the soul of a blind person still has an end of providing sight, even if it cannot manifest this capacity.<sup>38</sup> In the same way the incapacity of elderly persons to remember does not come from the soul but from a deterioration in the physical organ (e.g., the brain), which works in conjunction with the soul's rational powers.<sup>39</sup>

To explain, the matter that receives a given form and is thus actualized as a body of a specific kind must be properly predisposed to receive such form. For Aquinas, matter is regarded as consisting of a mixture of basic elements (fire, earth, water, and air), each of which is comprised of "contrary" qualities that dispose the element to move toward various "natural places."<sup>40</sup> For example, the element of "fire" is comprised of dryness (as opposed to moistness) and heat (as opposed to cold). This combination accounts for the disposition of fire to move upward (as opposed to downward) in a contained (as opposed to dispersive, or outward) manner. Air is moist-hot and moves upward and outward. Water is moist-cold and moves downward and outward. Earth is dry-cold, moving downward in a contained manner. These qualities and dispositions can be further analyzed into differing passive and active tendencies (e.g., moistness makes things moist, while dryness receives moistening, while outwardness actively disperses the element, while being contained inclines it to passively remain in its current state until some contrary force disperses it).

Obviously, this rather primitive physical account would have to be revised considerably to accommodate the understanding of various subatomic realities known today (e.g., electrons, bosons, quarks, leptons, and so on), with their various charges, spins, orbitals, and such. Even so, the basic insight that diversity within physical reality still entails various kinds of interactions, including attractions, resistances, and distinct kinds of activity that differentiate these presumably fundamental notions. Accordingly, a basically Aristotelian notion of form, and in most cases a form/matter distinction, is still applicable, which determines the conditions in which certain kinds of composite beings come into or go out of existence. Of course, this likely does not impact reality concerning fundamentally immaterial formal principles, such as rational souls

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ordered toward rationality.

<sup>38</sup> *On the Soul* I, ch.4. Thomas echoes the idea that disability in manifesting reason is the result of defects in the requisite matter and not the rational form itself. See *Summa theologiae* I.91.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> See Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, Book II.

(unless perhaps one adopts some form of metaphysical idealism), the relevance of which will be addressed below.

In the above account of material elements, hylomorphism maintains that a given quantity of matter is susceptible or insusceptible to “receiving,” and thus being actualized by, specific forms based on the elemental mixture (and all of the concomitant dispositions) of that matter. Consequently, individual physical differences between particular members of a given species are accounted for by different elemental proportions of the receptive matter of each member, with given species-forms being capable of actualizing matter only comprised of a given range of elemental proportions. Hence, what we term “disabilities” can be accounted for by the receptive matter having an elemental proportion capable of being actualized enough to sustain basic life, while being inadequate to properly manifest certain functions typically ascribed to that species. The key here, however, is that these “privations” (i.e., lack, or inhibitions) of function come from the matter receiving the form, and not in any way from the actualizing capacities of the form itself.

It is critical to recognize that the above explication mandates that because living substances are defined as being members of a given species based on the form that actualizes them, a disabled individual is just as much a human being (and human person) as a “highly functioning” human. More importantly, a human being with significant cognitive impairments (even to the point of unconsciousness) still has a rational nature (and is thus a human *person*) just as much as human beings who readily exhibit rational abilities.

The human personhood of disabled individuals is also indicated by the fact that in hylomorphism, biological offspring are understood to have the same form (species nature) as their parents (in the case of animals) or progenitors (in the case of plants). This is reasonable insofar as the insight that nature is orderly requires that this order be perpetuated in a discernible way. Clearly, procreation evidences a fundamentally important functional similarity (species nature) between the two (in the case of animals and humans) creatures able to together produce a new life, as well as between them and the new life they produce. Once again, this underscores that a severely physically or cognitively disabled human offspring would still be a human person with a rational soul.

For Aquinas, non-rational creatures receive their form directly from the procreative/progenitive activity of the parents/progenitors, but the specifically immaterial transcendent capacity of the human soul to know universal concepts (which, as universal, transcend particular sensory experience of particular members of given species) requires that rational souls be immediately and

directly created by God.<sup>41</sup> Even so, it must be remembered that in hylomorphism, knowledge of universals requires rationally abstracting from particular sense experiences, which requires the physical operation of the brain and sense organs.<sup>42</sup> Hence, while human rational functions are designed to *move beyond* particular physical acts and bodily states, they are also designed for their activity to be initially dependent upon physical processes. In addition, the rational soul is still intended by God to be the formal cause of *all* our human functions, nutritive and sensitive as well as rational.<sup>43</sup> As noted previously, this underscores that whatever inability cognitively disabled persons might have to convey a capacity for abstract thought, this arises from an impairment of their receptive matter, constituting an aspect of their body (such as the brain), and is not the result of a deficient soul, which in itself is ordered toward rational functioning (albeit with the aid of a properly disposed body).

For Aquinas, there is also no good reason to suppose that human offspring lacking evident rational capacities might have failed to receive a rational soul from God (and thus be only a biological but impersonal member of the human species), on the speculative grounds that they lack properly disposed matter needed for receiving rational form.<sup>44</sup> This is true for a number of reasons.

First, the Christian traditions that practice infant baptism regard any human offspring as subject to baptism (thereby indicating their status as persons) and thus suitable for inclusion in sacramental life. Aquinas, for example, explicitly states that the cognitively impaired, even if they are adults and unable to express the desire themselves, can be baptized with the permission of their caretakers.<sup>45</sup> This position contrasts with Locke's own ambivalence about whether severely malformed human beings, particularly those significantly cognitively impaired, are fit to receive baptism.

Second, while Aquinas maintains that a person's guardian angel is not assigned until birth,<sup>46</sup> early thinkers like Anselm<sup>47</sup> and Bonaventure<sup>48</sup> hold that

<sup>41</sup> *Summa theologiae* I.90.2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, I.79.4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, I.77.4.

<sup>44</sup> See n37 of this essay.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, III.68.12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, I.113.5.

<sup>47</sup> Technically, Anselm says that the guardian angel is assigned at the moment the soul is joined to the body, whenever that is. See Joan Carrol Cruz, *Angels and Devils* (Charlotte NC: TAN Books, 1999), p. 141.

<sup>48</sup> Bonaventure specifically states the guardian angel is assigned at conception. See David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York NY: Oxford

a guardian angel is assigned at the moment of conception. While this view would not necessarily indicate that the product of conception is being regarded as a “person” at this point, it arguably strengthens the likelihood of this assessment, and at minimum it would emphasize God’s intention to regard human offspring at any stage as being oriented toward salvation. With regard to Anselm, the point at which a guardian angel is assigned could have implications for God’s providential plan concerning the fall of the angels. This issue will be considered in greater detail later.

Beyond this, theological appeals to sacramental practice and guardian angels aside, even from a philosophical perspective, Aquinas holds that the infusion of a rational soul occurs at a relatively early stage of prenatal development. Accordingly, even mid- and late- term pre-natal offspring, let alone any who are born, would have reached a stage whereby they would have received this infusion.

Philosophically speaking, one must also remember that while both humans and certain other sentient creatures have sense-based memories, human sentience is not just oriented toward sensual enjoyment for its own sake or facilitating biological survival but is uniquely ordered toward providing phantasms that serve the higher purposes of abstraction and concept-formation. As Thomas himself declares, “the proximate end of the body is the rational soul and its operations.”<sup>49</sup> It can therefore be expected that at the point when humans are capable of sensation (which is well before birth), they have already met the conditions established by God for providing them with a rational soul. Hence, the memories of other sentient creatures presumably are not formed and processed in a way that is suitable for the infusion of a rational soul. This seems clear, for the failure of such creatures to receive a rational soul would amount to their memories being left fundamentally unable to serve their potentially highest purpose.

In respect to the infusion of the rational soul, the above assessment suggests that a soul capable of human sentient functions (which, unlike rational functions, could possibly be accounted for through procreation<sup>50</sup>) nevertheless occurs in such a way that it disposes human beings uniquely toward developing

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Univ. Press, 1998), p. 161.

<sup>49</sup> *Summa theologiae* I.91.3.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas is clear that, at least for non-human creatures, nutritive and sensitive souls come into being through procreation (e.g., *Summa contra gentiles*, III.88, pghs. 2 and 3), with this presumably also being the case in his scheme for the emergence of the biologically human nutritive and sensitive soul. However, as discussed earlier, he insists that the rational soul must be created directly by God, given its power to move beyond sense-based phantasms to the formation of abstract concepts.

memories suitable for aiding intellection, whether or not this development is somehow materially impeded.

Developing these insights further, we now know that human offspring possess unique DNA from the moment of conception. Hence, it is by far most reasonable (as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes)<sup>51</sup> to presume that God does not simply infuse a rational soul into a human creature defined by a special sentient form, but rather infuses the material present at conception with a soul that accounts for the offspring's pre-intellectual nutritive and sensitive functions, along with his or her rational operations. Indeed, Aquinas himself realizes that the rational soul, upon its creation, becomes the source of all of the creature's sensitive and nutritive operations as well.<sup>52</sup> In this case, a human rational form is intended by God to establish human life and presumably to invigorate even nutritive and sentient functions with a special character. This would be true whether or not the recipient matter is properly disposed to *manifest* this special character in a way that is evident to ordinary observation (even though this special character in fact would in some way and to some degree present within these functions).

Put differently, on this view, human sentience is different in kind from the sentient function of other creatures since it arises from a fundamentally different kind of formal principle. Consequently, just as non-human creatures that possess keener vision or hearing than ordinary human beings are not held to be better suited for rational thinking than we are, conversely, disabled persons lacking matter properly disposed to manifest ordinary rational

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<sup>51</sup> See §2270, which discusses abortion. It is clear here that human life is to be protected from conception, and that "from the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person." While there is perhaps the slightest room here for debating whether this unequivocally teaches that the offspring *is* a person at this point, or must merely *be regarded as having the rights of a person*, with the actual ontological status arguably not being absolutely determined, the forcefulness of this statement indicates that such a distinction, if it can be made at all (which is highly debatable), is clearly practically and morally irrelevant.

<sup>52</sup> This point requires some clarification. Aquinas does seem to hold that living beings begin with a nutritive soul, which is then replaced by a sensitive soul, which in the case of rational beings is then replaced by a divinely-infused rational soul. Nevertheless, the substance never has more than one soul/form at a time, so that the totality of its functions at the end of its development are ultimately attributed to the powers of the soul, in union with the bodily body. Because a substance exists through a particular instance of informed matter, there can only be one soul (form) for a substance, or it would constitute multiple substances. See, for example, *Summa theologiae* I.76.3.

functioning should still be presumed to have unique sentient characteristics made present through this rational form. Once again, this is true even if these characteristics do not operate in a way that enables others to discern their fitness for rational functioning.<sup>53</sup> To use an analogy, we know that other people engage all of the time in rational activity in their private thoughts in a way that is totally undetected by others. It might also help to recognize here the Eastern Christian distinction between reason and *nous* in the human soul, the latter signifying a principle that relates to both intellect and sense as an affective “core” (“heart”) that unifies one’s being in relation to God.<sup>54</sup>

#### B. Lockean Personhood as (Economically Productive) Self-Consciousness

In contrast to the classical hylomorphic account, Locke explicitly rejects procreative origin as being the litmus test for determining either personhood or biological humanity.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Locke also distinguishes biological humans from human *persons* (personhood, as noted earlier, being defined purely in terms of conscious capacities and “humanity” in terms of biological features).<sup>56</sup> Locke is a practical nominalist in his approach to biological species. While he allows that God Himself (or “Nature”) might classify individual creatures into species-natures known to Him, we can never be sure that the features (including procreative origin) that we are inclined to notice in categorizing individual creatures under a common species accurately corresponds to God’s own possible classification.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> It is helpful to think of this in light of Jacques Maritain’s insights into the “very peculiar kind of knowledge” present in human affectivity and poetic insight, whereby our rational nature expresses itself in ways that are not “captured” by “understanding and reason” or “intellectual conception,” citing Aquinas’s own account of mystical contemplation of divine things. See, for example, Maritain, “Poetic Experience,” *The Review of Politics* 6/4 (1944): 1944, made available online at <https://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/jm3301.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> For a helpful scholarly overview of the Orthodox conception of *nous* in relation to other human faculties, see an excerpt from the Greek Orthodox theologian Fr. John Romanides, taken from chapter 1 of his *Patristic Theology: The University Lectures of Fr. John Romanides* (Thessaloniki, Greece: Uncut Mountain Press, 2008, pp. 19-23), found at <http://orthodoxinfo.com/phronema/patristic-theology-romanides-chapter-1-what-is-the-human-nous.aspx>.

<sup>55</sup> *Essay*, III.4 §23.

<sup>56</sup> *Essay*, II.27 §9.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., *Essay*, III.3 §13 and III.6 §9. In other places, however, Locke appears to maintain not just that we cannot know real species natures, but suggests even more strongly that no such species “boundaries” exist within nature at all, whether known by us or not. See III.6 §27. In this case, individual things would not have “real essences”



Simply put, as an empiricist, Locke maintains that we cannot grasp “real essences.” As a result, any species classifications we make are only nominal.<sup>58</sup> He further insists that while it is often convenient to assume that a creature born from the sexual union of two other creatures shares a common species nature with its progenitors (and that the progenitors share a nature with each other), this is offset by the fact that the offspring of such sexual unions (and sometimes the sexual partners themselves) may at times lack visible features and capabilities that we typically list as being “essential” to certain kinds of creatures.

For instance, as mentioned previously in explicating Locke’s understanding of freedom, Locke notes cases where people struggle to determine whether an offspring of a human procreative act should be regarded as human if it is malformed in such a way as to lack the clear features or capacities that we typically ascribe to humans.<sup>59</sup> Along these lines, he also cites the absence of evident rationality, such as a cognitive incapacity for language, as making us hesitant to classify such offspring as human beings (let alone persons).<sup>60</sup>

More to the point is Locke’s moral (as opposed to biological) designation of “person.” For him, a creature demonstrating self-reflective reason (to be described momentarily) is by definition taken to be a “self” or “person.” As such, it is the possessor of natural rights and moral standing. In this case, for him it is conceivable that a severely misshapen or incapacitated offspring would not be classified as biologically human even if “it” evidenced rational self-reflection, though it could still be a person with rights without being a specifically *human* person. In practice, though, Locke is inclined to classify rationally self-reflective offspring as both human and persons, such that to some extent his moral classification guides his biology.

In any case, Locke defines a person as “a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing at different times and places.”<sup>61</sup> While at times for him personhood seems to be linked merely to a chain of sense memories, a closer look reveals that the key is not merely possessing such memories (which might apply to other

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they shared with other individuals, even if unknowable to us, but would have truly individual “real essences” which we do not know, even in respect simply to their individual nature.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, §§22-27, especially §26. See also n27.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., *Essay*, III.6 §27.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Essay*, II.27 §9.

impersonal animals as well).<sup>62</sup> Rather, what is critical is the subject's awareness that he or she *is having* current sense experiences, and that these are continuous with conscious experiences taken to have occurred at some prior time. As Locke states, "it is impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving that he perceives," adding: "When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. It is always like that with our present sensations and perceptions. And it is through this that everyone is to himself that which he calls 'self.'"<sup>63</sup> This raises obvious questions as to whether or not certain cognitively disabled individuals would have such "perception of perception" and "reflexive ability" as to have a "self" and thus qualify as persons.

In short, though animals might have strings of memory that influence their behavior, they are not aware of themselves as *having* thoughts that they recognize (or rationally discern) to be continuous with other thoughts, and thus are not self-conscious. Locke's assessment also indicates that severely cognitively disabled offspring likely would not qualify as "persons." In this case, neither rights, nor the freedom presupposed by rights, can be ascribed to them.

The above approach reveals that there is no clear basis in Locke for saying that there is a moral responsibility to care for disabled offspring. In fact, Locke's emphasis on freedom as the ability to overcome uneasiness raises prospects for suggesting that where caring for disabled offspring is an inconvenience, their purported lack of rights might well establish sufficient moral grounds for neglecting them or even ending their life, as touched upon earlier in the section dealing with Locke's understanding of freedom.<sup>64</sup> The exclusion of certain individuals from personhood and social protection is also noted by authors like Stacy Clifford, who discusses at length Locke's exclusion of "ideots" [sic] from the social contract, based on their alleged lack of reason.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> This is touched upon earlier in the introductory section of this essay.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> See n27 and n45.

<sup>65</sup> See Clifford, "Locke, Equality, and Cognitive Disability," found at <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/political-science/graduate/Clifford-Working-Paper.pdf>. Clifford's work is a good resource for seeing Locke's treatment of the cognitively disabled throughout several of his works. Clifford's work also includes a pertinent discussion of Locke's contemporary Thomas Willis's insistence that such individuals were still "educable" and thus should not be regarded as irrational. According to Clifford, while Locke himself was a student of Willis's, he disagreed with his teacher on this point (Clifford, p. 7).

The above discussion reveals that even where Locke declares that “Every one..., when his own preservation comes not in competition, ought he, as much as he can, preserve the rest of mankind...,”<sup>66</sup> these questions remain: (1) Does “mankind” include those who might reasonably in Locke’s view not be classified as human and/or persons in the first place? (2) How is the above requirement to help others when possible to be understood in light of the previously cited statements in the *Essay* insinuating that certain disabled individuals can perhaps be “determined to death” without this constituting “murder” [sic]. Lastly, even if some degree of care is morally warranted for the severely disabled, this does not amount in Locke to them having a *right* to such care (especially given that the *Second Treatise* describes the duty to care for children largely in terms of preparing them to exercise economic freedom). Whatever arguable degree of responsibility he recognizes to care for such alleged “non-persons” is almost certainly mitigated by the extent to which such care renders those recognized as members of society to be inconvenienced, with them thereby having the right to minimize such inconveniences in the name of freedom.

Even worse, Locke’s basis for defining human persons in respect to both their economic and religious ends centers on his economics-focused definition of the human person. This is distinguished from Thomas’s positive conception of freedom and his hylomorphic account of the human person, which enables the social end of humans beings and the end of divine beatitude to be harmonized in a way that is capable of recognizing a profound role for even the severely cognitively disabled in human society and ultimately the economy of salvation.

With these points in mind, it is time to explore in greater detail the implications that Locke’s and Thomas’s views on freedom and personhood have for understanding the contributions of the disabled in human society and, ultimately for Aquinas, the economy of salvation itself. As will be explained, Locke has a bifurcated concept of the human person, rooted largely in his mind-body dualism, that divides persons toward separate economic and “religious” ends. This is problematic in that these dual ends either fail to be meaningfully brought together or, worse, implicitly submit even his theological understanding of human personhood to a worldly economic criterion.

### III. The Disabled and Lockean Economy

#### A. Preliminary Comments on Personhood and Life Issues in Locke

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<sup>66</sup> *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. 2 §6.

On the surface, one can see how Locke's emphasis on freedom as the ability to overcome inconvenience could support a case for both euthanasia and abortion, at least in some cases. Before jumping to this conclusion, however, it should be recognized that Locke himself considers suicide to be morally unacceptable.<sup>67</sup> In addition, he declares at least late-term abortion also to be immoral.<sup>68</sup> Even so, it seems these prohibitions are limited when considered in context with his broader philosophical positions on personhood and economic rights.

For one thing, the old question returns as to whether the prohibitions on suicide and abortion would only pertain to those who met Locke's criterion for personhood. Once again, Locke's openness to possibly determining certain malformed (or cognitively impaired) offspring to death would seem to qualify his views against euthanasia and abortion. Moreover, in the case of euthanasia, Locke's prohibition on suicide is centered on the notion that we are God's property. Coupled with the conjecture considered earlier that we have a tacit God-given duty to ever-increase economic production as well as to produce offspring who will eventually do so, this raises doubts as to whether these prohibitions would extend to those unable to fulfill (or even worse, to hinder the fulfillment of) this obligation.

Even in the case of those who are only physically disabled, having rational self-consciousness would qualify them as persons for Locke, but insofar as they are physically unable to act or forbear acting bodily, it would be difficult in Locke's system to regard them as "free," though perhaps they could still be recognized as having freedom in respect to acts of thinking. Even so, they would presumably lack the economic rights based on an ability to initiate bodily activity. In this case, any duty to care for them would at least be in tension with the inconvenience this care posed on the productivity and freedom of others.

To be fair, in the *Second Treatise* Locke does mention a natural right to life before he lists the rights to liberty and the acquisition of property.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, to the extent that physical incapacities rendered persons "uneasy" (as they almost certainly would), it is conceivable that a Lockean might consider the act of requesting the cessation of their life to be the clearest opportunity they possessed for overcoming uneasiness, and thus for supposedly

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<sup>67</sup> E.g., *Second Treatise of Government*, ch. 2 §6 and ch. 4 §23.

<sup>68</sup> For an extensive discussion of Locke's opposition to at least later-term abortion, see Eric Manchester, "Locke on Bodily Rights and the Immorality of Abortion: A Neglected Liberal Perspective," *Life and Learning* XV (2006): 383-412.

<sup>69</sup> Ch. 2 §6.

exercising their severely-limited freedom.

### B. Locke and Aquinas on the Social Ends of Human Persons

For reasons mentioned in the first section of this work, while both Locke and Thomas are convinced that the rational soul must be directly created by God, it becomes apparent that each understands the significance of this point very differently in terms of the purpose of human activity, which presumably is also reflected in how they understand freedom. Locke takes the purpose of a manifestly rational soul to be twofold: (1) in respect to the body, one's purpose is the magnification of economic benefit (and escape from inconvenience) extending from ever-increasing production (and the exercise of self-governance in preserving one's rights), and (2) in respect to the soul considered in itself, our purpose is to believe in and worship God, with God Himself sanctioning the divide between these interests.

Along these lines, one ascertains that on Locke's view, cognitive disability *doubly* undermines the personhood status of those one might otherwise regard as biologically human (depending upon their other visible features), as this disability inhibits both rational understanding and worship of God as well as productive economic activity. It is not surprising, then, that Locke himself suggests reserving baptism to offspring born of human women (especially with offspring who are physically deformed) that display certain rational abilities.<sup>70</sup> This perspective indicates that Locke's understanding of the purpose of human personal existence not only incongruently (double-mindedly!) makes human beings, so to speak, servants to both God and mammon, but actually inverts Thomas in subordinating theological concerns to economic ones in defining human persons in the first place.

It might be true that Locke can in some sense prioritize the activities of worship over economic endeavors, given that the former is ordered toward our eternal, and not merely our temporal, benefit. Nevertheless, as Locke values maximizing productivity (apart from waste) to itself be divinely ordained in the natural order of things, one can reasonably infer that at least in respect to this life, economic productivity and enjoyment compare favorably to worship as a way of honoring and serving God, even if worship should not be neglected.

Aquinas, on the other hand, defends the less bifurcated view that the purpose of the soul is both to serve as the form of the body and to be that by which we desire to better understand and exist in eternal communion with God

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<sup>70</sup> This is found in the portion of Book III of the *Essay* mentioned earlier where Locke discusses nominalism, and the questions concerning the "determination" of certain offspring toward "life or death." See also *Essay* III.3 §14.

and one another. As explained earlier, human offspring are all informed by a rational soul oriented toward eternal communion with God, ultimately in both body and soul, whether or not they possess the receptive matter needed to manifest rational functions. This also means that even the cognitively disabled are free in a positive sense in that their souls order their entire being toward eternal communion with God, even where they perhaps lack freedom of *will* in being unable to rationally discern, and hence choose, among various means to this end.

It is also worth reflecting on how Locke's proof of God hints at the economically-tinged definition of the human person in a way that differs significantly from Thomas. For Locke, God's existence is evident in the need to explain the existence specifically of self-consciousness,<sup>71</sup> conceptualized largely in the same terms as it is understood in defining personhood, which in turn is used to undergird his notion of economic freedom and rights. This differs from the Aquinas's conviction, captured in various ways in other classical proofs of God, that God's existence is evidenced by the reality of any created thing, whether or not it is rational.

Though this cannot be developed in any detail here, the above insight is especially poignant when reflecting on hylomorphism's distinction between form and matter, with matter never being present without form.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, Locke's system lends itself much more to regarding the material world as being created almost entirely for the material benefit of human beings, with minimal if any attention given to respecting all material beings as being oriented through their form toward God, even apart from their usefulness to us, thereby

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<sup>71</sup> *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.10 §§5-6.

<sup>72</sup> To explain briefly, because form is the principle that defines matter according to a species-specific nature, form and matter occur in relation to one another. However, because form actualizes pre-existing matter (which never exists absent of all form), as that which has merely potentiality in respect to a given form, form cannot account for the reality of matter as such, nor (obviously) can matter account for the reality of form. Likewise, finite forms cannot account for the being of a substance, since form is only that which specifies the nature matter that already exists. In addition, insofar as form defines what attributes are necessary for a substance to be of a specific kind, it cannot account for existence as a necessary trait, since obviously finite substance come and go out of existence. Thus, both form and matter need something beyond themselves, which itself transcends the form/matter distinction, to account for the being of each principle, as well as their union with one another. In transcending form and matter, this being must be necessary, beyond definition, infinite, etc., such that it reasonably describes what is normally conceptualized as "God," whose essence is simply to necessarily infinitely exist.

testifying to the reality of God.

Ultimately, Thomism regards persons as having a singular end (eternal beatitude and communion with God and the saints), with other purported ends actually being instrumental to reaching this single final end. In other words, our temporal ends are not truly distinct from our eternal end. Rather, it is intrinsic to our very nature that our temporal ends serve our ultimate eternal end (though this still requires grace for its perfection).

For Thomas, then, our eternal end is not simply for the good of our mind but also of our body, since the proper end of our soul is both to be the form of our body (eventually, our resurrected body), and to, along with our body, be in eternal communion with God. Our mind's initiation of bodily activity, therefore, is not ordered by God primarily toward material productivity and enjoyment, but toward doing those things, which likely *includes* productivity and enjoyment, that facilitate reaching our ultimate end. Even more, our basic bodily activities are subject to the reception of sacramental grace that elevates them toward this eternal end, beyond merely temporal attainments.

In a way, then, even our greatest temporal ends are informed by our reception of supernatural grace moving us toward our supreme end. Accordingly, attaining wealth is not an "end" at all. Rather, we are made capable of materially producing for the sake of providing for a family, accompanied by the sacraments of marriage and the baptism of children, and/or for the sake of living and participating in the various sacraments of the Church. This means that the proper end of even our temporal life is not wealth and enjoyment but sacramental participation, with non-sacramental activities helping us attain this end (realizing that even these activities are blessed and "sacramentalized" by being carried out by one who lives to receive the sacraments).

This further reflects that the end of even impersonal creatures is not simply to serve our temporal interests, as it is for Locke, but to help sustain us for the reception of the sacraments. Indeed, even those creatures we do not use have as a temporal end a participation in God, insofar as they participate in the natural order that manifests the activity and thus reality of God.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, in addition to the Thomistic restraints on how we use even non-rational creatures (i.e., where our use of them does not seem particularly helpful in the realization of our own well-being, ordered toward eternal communion with God), this perspective more importantly emphasizes that cognitively and otherwise disabled creatures of human origin are indeed human persons who have a role in orienting us to our final sacramental end. With this in mind, the final section

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<sup>73</sup> E.g., *Summa contra gentiles* III.17.

of this essay will now elucidate how on a Thomistic account of freedom and personhood, the disabled contribute, rather than impede, freedom by playing a role in the possibility of salvation for both themselves and others.

#### IV. The Disabled and Unborn in the Economy of Salvation

In exploring the ways in which the disabled are not only themselves oriented toward eternal communion with God but participate in the salvation of others, two points will be considered beyond Aquinas's insistence (in keeping with traditional Christian practice) of baptizing even severely disabled infants<sup>74</sup>: (1) How a hylomorphist explication of cognitive disability might provide insight into possible ways certain disabled individuals can uniquely serve as intercessors in the salvation of others, and (2) the possible place of the disabled (and perhaps the unborn) in God's providential plan for offsetting the fall of the wicked angels. While purely speculative, both of these inquiries will hopefully prove themselves worthy of ongoing fruitful reflection.

##### A. Baptism and the Disabled as Possible Amenders to the Fall of the Angels

It has already been noted that traditionally even the disabled are considered suitable for baptism, in contrast to Locke's apprehension about the suitability of this practice for at least the severely cognitively impaired.<sup>75</sup> Beyond this, however, it is important to recognize that baptism does not merely serve the salvific good of the individual who is baptized but plays a role in the priestly and prophetic mission of the entire Church.<sup>76</sup> In this fact alone, the disabled as well as the unborn (eventually), if they are baptized, play a role in the salvation of others.

One might also consider how baptism could play into the providential response to overcoming the fall of the wicked angels. Though this consideration should be regarded as cautious conjecture,<sup>77</sup> it is included as a reminder that each person plays a role not just in the salvation of human beings but in God's providential plan for all creation, including the angels.

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<sup>74</sup> *Summa theologiae* III.68.12.

<sup>75</sup> See n27 and n45.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§1267-71.

<sup>77</sup> The reticence some might have to engage in such heavy conjecture, beyond what is revealed in Scripture or formal doctrine, is understandable. Still, if done cautiously and with sufficient epistemic humility (whereby one is not overly committed to their conclusions), there is still a place in Christian tradition for such conjecture. For a helpful study of the history of disputes about the legitimacy of "angelology" as philosophical inquiry. See David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 75-92.



Though this point does not pertain to Thomas, it is in keeping with his predecessor Anselm. In *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*, Anselm reasons that it is likely that God wills that the number of people saved will both match the number of angels who fell, while also attaining a number foreordained by God beyond this.<sup>78</sup> In this case, the baptism of the cognitively disabled would serve the economy of salvation by constituting part of this number.

Continuing this same line of inquiry, one can also raise questions about what role even the unborn might play in the economy of salvation. This is especially the case given Bonaventure's and potentially Anselm's view that guardian angels are assigned at conception. Of course, as the unborn cannot be baptized, one cannot go far in pondering what this role might be.

Obviously, one would not want to diminish the horror of abortion, for instance, by surmising that it somehow aided the cause of salvation (for reasons suggested shortly). Nevertheless, one more even more cautious conjecture comes to mind: is it possible that victims of abortion could be saved -- something we do not know, for there has never been a definitive Christian teaching on the fate of unbaptized born or unborn infants, or unbaptized severely cognitively impaired persons of any age, who die<sup>79</sup> -- and thus could contribute to attaining the preordained number of the saved *but* without being able to properly assist in the salvation of others, since in never being born they do not encounter others for whom they could pray or otherwise intend to their good?

As a brief aside, it is worth noticing that the providential number of saved

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<sup>78</sup> See also ch. 18, which is captioned "Whether there will be more holy men than angels."

<sup>79</sup> There is not space to pursue this topic here in any detail. There has been in the Catholic tradition a long held opinion regarding "limbo" as a place "between" Heaven and Hell (and distinct from Purgatory) where at least unbaptized infants (perhaps even unborn ones), and presumably unbaptized severely cognitively disabled in general, go upon dying. For a history on this subject, see the entry on "Limbo" in *Catholic Encyclopedia* to be found at [www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org). In any case, no formal teaching about the fate of the unbaptized infants, unborn, or cognitively disabled has ever been definitively established. An International Theological Commission formed in 2007 under Pope Benedict XVI issued a Vatican-sanctioned report entitled "The Hope of Salvation for Infants Who Die Without Being Baptized" which strongly hints at an inclination to move away from the notion of limbo, without formally rejecting this possibility. This document can be found here: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20070419\\_un-baptised-infants\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070419_un-baptised-infants_en.html).

needed to compensate for the fall of the angels is affected by the issue of whether guardians are assigned at conception or birth. As there is a popular tradition that about a third of the angels fell,<sup>80</sup> then if guardians are assigned at conception, given another common assumption that typically an angel never serves as the guardian for more than one human (though they may temporarily assist others, especially at the request of those whose guardian they are),<sup>81</sup> then the number of total angels, including the number fallen, would be greater than if guardianship begins at birth (i.e., since some who are conceived will not be born). This suggests that if the unborn and/or unbaptized disabled are not saved (leaving aside the issue of the baptism of desire), then the death of such persons requires the birth and baptism of even more humans in order for the preordained number to be reached.

On the other hand, even if the unbaptized unborn and disabled can be saved (which is unknown), if they die prematurely they would presumably be limited in their ability to contribute to the economy of salvation in other ways (though the possibility of them interceding after death could not be ruled out). Some reasons for this can be adduced. One would be that the graces received by the community through the baptism of each person would be lacking. In any case, this essay now closes with a brief, though once again admittedly speculative, assessment of how the cognitively disabled might intercede for others.

#### B. The Disabled and Intercessory Prayer

In the earlier explication of Thomas's understanding of the human person, it was explained why it is reasonable to assume that even the nutritive and sensitive operations of a human soul differ from those of non-human animals. To review, this is because these operations are ordered toward contributing to the higher operation of the intellect, whether or not the subject is adequately materially predisposed to manifest these cognitive faculties. Along with this, it was pointed out that because a rational soul is still present, these nutritive and

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<sup>80</sup> This is referenced in various places throughout the Christian tradition, but is commonly ascribed to certain interpretations of Revelation 12:3-9, which speak of about a "third of the stars" being cast down from Heaven along with Satan, with Satan himself being referred to as a star (12:4).

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, questions 4 and 19 in "Commonly Asked Questions" at [https://www.opusangelorum.org/membership/questions\\_answers.html](https://www.opusangelorum.org/membership/questions_answers.html). The group running this site (Canon Regulars of the Holy Cross, some members of the Community of Sisters of the Holy Cross, and members of the Work of the Holy Angels, received an Apostolic Blessing from Pope Benedict XVI, and received an endorsement from the His Excellency the Most Reverend Jeffrey Monforton of Steubenville, OH in 2013, both of which can be found at this site.

sensitive powers might well be “infused” with a rational “residue,” so to speak, that is inscrutable to us. While *per* usual one can only conjecture about the efficacy of these rationally-infused nutritive and sensitive operations, Aristotle offers some insights in his analyses of the relationship between memory, recollection, and intellection in his work *On Memory and Reminiscence* that could be of use here.

To use Aristotle’s own term, intellectually “slow” individuals are typically hindered by being either distracted by excessive or random memories, or by lacking altogether the memories needed to serve as phantasms from which universal concepts come to be present in the intellect *via* abstraction. He suggests that this occurs either as the result of the conditions in the requisite organs, such as the brain, that are either prone to rapid change or undue rigidity (comparing these states to running water or crumbling stucco in the case of transitory thoughts, or hard surfaces in the cases of memory deficiency, which cannot properly receive a sensory imprint from an object).<sup>82</sup>

Keeping in mind that a rational soul capable of abstraction is still present in humans lacking the material disposition necessary for reason to properly operate, it nevertheless seems that rational operation would still be present in some way in respect to whatever memories there were. Consequently, if abstraction is generally aided by numerous and/or particularly poignant memories that can be effectively recalled, one “stuck” in a state of fewer or less poignant (or effectively recollectible) memories would nonetheless likely have these memories vitalized in *some* quasi-rational way.

In addition, through these experiences, this person would also still be oriented toward the beatific vision. At the same time, higher degrees of abstraction typically involve “moving beyond” the particular memories as much as possible, to intently ponder first principles (while always having some need for the phantasms that serve as models). This also raises the possibility that whatever memories persons who are less capable of abstraction on account of diminished recall *do* have would manifest more vitally some kind of quasi-rational non-conceptual (or “pre-conceptual”) “knowing” through their soul’s rational capacities than the “standard” experiences of memories, which would be more quickly ignored or discarded as the rational powers moved on to focus more directly on pondering abstract concepts.

Beyond this, it is conceivable that for certain disabled individuals, some semblance of the awareness of universals might be psychologically associated more poignantly with particular memories or experiences, in that they are less inclined to “move on” in their thinking toward abstract considerations in a way

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<sup>82</sup> Aristotle, *On Memory and Reminiscence* I.7.

that is relatively detached from particular experiences.

For instance, while those of greater intellectual acumen strive to develop an appreciation of the value of human beings in general accompanied by a feeling of goodwill toward humankind in the abstract, those less capable of abstraction might be inclined to concentrate these feelings more intently onto the people and things they personally encounter in their own lives. While they may have little or no understanding of “humankind” or “God” in an ordinary conceptual sense, the people near to them – mama, papa, brother, sister, “nice person who helps me” – are experienced as “their whole world,” with the sense of awe and devotion others have come to associate more readily with thoughts about “God” or “humanity,” many times to the neglect of remembering those around them. Accordingly, in respect to the economy of salvation, while some cognitively disabled persons might not be well-equipped, even after death (in the state of the separated soul, prior to the resurrection),<sup>83</sup> to pray for the “salvation of the whole world,” such people might somehow be better prepared to concentrate their good intentions on those whom they have directly known and loved and who have loved them in return.

As before, one wants to avoid sentimentally assuming that the cognitively disabled are “spiritually better off” in order to comfort ourselves about their condition. Still, at minimum we know that they can be saved. Given this, it seems fair to consider the ways in which they might contribute to the salvation of others in a way that is unique, whether or not “better than,” those of us to whom “more,” in some sense, has been given.

In closing, it must again be emphasized that the conjectures in this section about the manner in which the unborn and/or unbaptized cognitively disabled might participate in the economy of salvation goes beyond what has been revealed to us. With this caution in mind, however, *this* much is known: disabled human offspring are persons, and thus subject to salvation, and hence have a role in the salvation of the world (and certainly so if they are baptized), even if in a way known only fully to God (as is the case for everyone). Thus, to regard them in terms of their limited and perhaps obstructive role in the worldly economic quest for a life of ease, rather than in light of their inclusion

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<sup>83</sup> In his discussion of separated souls, Aquinas suggests that souls naturally retain some trace of sense-memories, though they can be supernaturally infused with additional awareness. Such memory is necessary in part not just to accommodate intercessory prayer, but also to facilitate progress in Purgatory. See *Summa theologiae* I.89.1, 4-6, 8. Though he does not elaborate on how these traces can be accounted for, some reasonable suggestions can be made, such as our abstract awareness that abstract knowledge itself is causally linked to *some* particular sense experiences (which would presumably include some awareness of what was meant by a “sensation”).

and contribution to the economy of salvation, is to regard persons as purveyors of mammon rather than as images of God.