Theology and Historical Reality: A Christian Vision for the Dynamic Age

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Acknowledgements

List of Abbreviations

AAS - *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Acts of the Apostolic See)

AGI - Artificial General Intelligence

AI - Artificial Intelligence

ANI - Artificial Narrow Intelligence

ASI - Artificial Superintelligence

BCI - Brain-Computer Interface

CCC - *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

CUDB - Concrete Universal Dynamic Being

DS - Dynamic Superorganism

DT - Dynamic Transcendentals

LXX - Septuagint

NBIC - Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology, and Cognitive science

PFC - Prefrontal Cortex

ST - *Summa Theologiae*

UBI - Universal Basic Income

WTA - World Transhumanist Association

Table of Contents

Premise to the Textbook

This textbook is conceived for my Students of Theology and Historical Reality, born from a decade of teaching and a profound affection for those I have had the privilege to guide. My primary motivation is a deep concern for their real good—not merely their academic success, but their flourishing as persons fully alive, aware of their place in the grand narrative of salvation. Therefore, this volume does not pretend to be an exhaustive survey of the entire theological field. Instead, it focuses with intention on two critical and interconnected areas: theological anthropology and the nature of Historical Reality.

Our goal is to provide you with the essential interpretative tools—drawn from theology, philosophy, and a critical engagement with the human sciences—to better understand the world you inhabit and your unique, unrepeatable role within it. The path to a meaningful and joyful life is one of alignment with God's loving plan. This requires, first, a clear understanding of who we are as human persons. To this end, we will place the perennial wisdom of the Church in a constructive and critical dialogue with contemporary psychological and neuroscientific insights. We will explore how revealed truths about our creation, fall, redemption, and ultimate destiny are both challenged and illuminated by modern understandings of the brain, behavior, and the self.

Our inquiry will follow a deliberate sequence. We begin with the foundational principles of theological inquiry, grounded in a realist philosophy that affirms our capacity to know the truth. From there, we will explore the human person's innate quest for happiness, comparing theological beatitude with psychological theories of well-being. We will analyze the structure of free and responsible action, considering the insights of neuroscience on determinism and volition. We will examine the role of our emotions and passions, placing the Thomistic account in conversation with affective science. Finally, we will investigate how habits—virtues and vices—shape our character, linking the moral tradition to the concept of neuroplasticity and psychological habit formation. We will see sin as a turning away from our true end, the law as a guide back, and divine grace as the force that heals, elevates, and perfects our nature.

Having established this robust and interdisciplinary anthropological framework—rooted in St. Thomas Aquinas and developed by thinkers like Don Tommaso Demaria—we will then apply this lens to the pressing issues of our age. We will analyze the rise of Artificial Intelligence, the ambitions of Transhumanism, the future of work, and the subtle but powerful forces of psycho-politics and technocratic governance.

The connection between these two parts is vital. It is only by first grasping the multifaceted truth of our own nature—as revealed by God and explored in dialogue with science—that we can rightly orient the powerful new technologies and navigate the complex social currents that define our time. My hope is that this journey will not only equip you intellectually but will also empower you to live more consciously and fruitfully as a co-creator with God, participating with joy and confidence in His ongoing work of bringing all things to completion in Christ.

Author's Note: It is appropriate to clarify that the philosophical system of Don Tommaso Demaria, used here for its remarkable capacity for analyzing Historical Reality, constitutes a specific speculative proposition. While proving to be a precious instrument in the service of theological reflection, it does not represent an official doctrine of the Catholic Church, as philosophical systems do not fall under the direct purview of Church doctrine.

Section I: Theological Anthropology

Chapter 1: Foundations of Theological Inquiry

Introduction: Embarking on the Theological Journey

Welcome to the fascinating study of Theology. This initial chapter is designed to equip you with essential tools for your journey. We will lay the groundwork by defining theology, understanding its vital connection to philosophical thought, and examining a crucial philosophical divergence—idealism versus realism—that profoundly impacts how we approach questions of being and knowledge. We will then explore the realist ontology of a towering figure, St. Thomas Aquinas, before introducing the compelling thought of Don Tommaso Demaria SDB.[1] Demaria's work offers a "realistic-dynamic metaphysics" crucial for understanding our contemporary world, particularly his analysis of the profound societal shift from a "static-sacral" to a "dynamic-secular" mode of existence. This initial exploration will equip us with the fundamental concepts and historical perspectives necessary for a deeper engagement with theological questions in the subsequent chapters.

1.1. The Evolution of Christian Theological Discourse: A Historical Survey

The term "theology," central to Christian intellectual life, was not initially an invention of Jewish or Christian thinkers. Its origins lie in classical Greek philosophy, notably with Plato, who employed it to denote a rational discussion concerning the nature of the gods. In Plato's Republic, the phrase 'οἱ τύποι περὶ θεολογίας' (hoi tupoi peri theologias) appears, referring to the "patterns on which poets must compose their fables" or, more broadly, the "norms of right speech about the gods."[2]

This usage, identified as the first attested appearance of *theologia* around

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[1] Tommaso Demaria (1908–1996): Italian Salesian theologian and philosopher. He taught theology and social sciences (1940–1979), developed "organic-dynamic metaphysics," and pioneered ecclesiological ideas anticipating Vatican II. Critiquing Marxism and liberal-capitalism as dehumanizing systems, he promoted alternative socioeconomic practices through grassroots education. Despite academic marginalization, his work integrated rigorous thought with spiritual humility.

[2] Plato, Republic 2.379a, in Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vols. 5 & 6, translated by Paul Shorey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0168%3Abook%3D2%3Apage%3D379.

370 BC, signifies discourse related to "the divine realm" or "doctrines of the gods."[3]

Scholarly interpretation of Plato's intent varies, with some viewing *theologia* as akin to a "science of divine things" or "outlines of theology," while others see it more as a specific form of *muthologia* (mythology), or storytelling about the gods. This early philosophical, rather than strictly religious, context is foundational. The adoption of Greek philosophical terms by early Christian thinkers was not merely a strategic move for intellectual legitimacy but also a recognition that these terms were suitable and necessary tools for articulating and developing theological reasoning on divine revelation. This appropriation can be understood within the providential plan of God, which often works through and incorporates human cultures as a means of participating in His overarching plan of salvation. The philosophical frameworks developed by the Greeks, therefore, became an integral part of the intellectual and theological infrastructure for Christian discourse, facilitating a deeper understanding and expression of the revealed truths. Furthermore, the existing ambiguity in Plato's precise meaning—whether leaning towards a scientific or mythological understanding—may have provided early Christians with the necessary flexibility to adapt and redefine the term more readily for their own distinct purposes, guiding it from a general "discourse about gods" toward a more specific rational articulation of Christian faith.[4]

For the Stoics, philosophical inquiry was typically divided into three branches: physics, logic, and ethics.[5] While "theology" was not one of these primary divisions, the study of the divine cosmos, including the nature of the gods, providence, and fate, was a significant component of Stoic physics (*phusikê*).[6] Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism, structured the Stoic curriculum into these three parts, where physics could be likened to the soul of a living being or the fertile land of a field, indicating its foundational role. The Stoic integration of theologia considerations within the broader category of physics underscores a worldview where understanding the divine was part of understanding the natural order of the cosmos. This contrasts significantly with the later Christian elevation of theology to a distinct, often paramount, discipline, highlighting a structural shift in intellectual priorities as Christian thinkers adapted Hellenistic philosophical frameworks to

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[3] Cf. Naddaf, G., "Plato's *Theologia* Revisited", *Méthexis* 9 (1996) 5.

[4] Cf. *Ib*. 13.

[5] Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Volume 2: Books 6-10, translated by Pamela Mensch, edited by James Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), Book VII, sections 39-41 (on Zeno's division for Stoicism). While the provided snippet refers to a general division in 1.18, the specific Stoic division is detailed in Book VII. See also "Stoicism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (Fall 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/stoicism/.

[6] "Stoicism," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The Stoics included the study of gods, providence, and fate under the heading of physics.

their own ends.[7]

Early Christian writers, immersed in this Hellenistic intellectual environment, adopted and consciously repurposed the existing philosophical term *theologia*. For these thinkers, it evolved to signify the rational articulation, defense, and systematic exploration of the doctrines of the Christian faith. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD) is noted for introducing *theologia* into Christian discourse to refer to "Christian truth claims about God."[8] This adoption was not passive; it marked a transformation in the term's purpose. While Plato's theologia concerned "right speech about the gods" within a philosophical state or as a "science of divine things," and Stoic "theology" was embedded in cosmic physics, the Christian usage rapidly oriented towards apologetics and doctrinal formulation in service of a believing community. This functional shift was crucial, as theology became a vital tool for defining the community's identity, defending it against external criticisms from a skeptical Greco-Roman world, and ensuring internal doctrinal coherence. By the time of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, theology was firmly understood as the "systematic analysis of the nature, purposes, and activity of God."[9]

The intellectual tradition that crystallized as Christian theology possesses profound roots in Judaic thought. This earlier tradition was itself a theology deeply grounded in the concepts of covenant, the Law (Torah), and the authority of prophetic revelation. The Hebrew Scriptures, which Christians would later term the Old Testament, present a rich narrative of God's dynamic engagement with creation and, in particular, with the people of Israel. This "theology of story," chronicling divine action and promise, formed the indispensable backdrop and foundational source for the first Christians.[10] The Christian progressive distinction from Judaism was a complex process of reinterpretation and assertion of fulfillment. Christian theology defined itself significantly in relation to its Judaic heritage, claiming to be its true heir and interpreter, especially through the lens of Jesus Christ. This dynamic of continuity—appropriating the sacred texts and many theological concepts—and discontinuity—reinterpreting them Christologically—is a persistent and defining characteristic of Christian thought. The adoption of the Hebrew Scriptures as their own "Old Testament" was a momentous act of re-contextualization. This "theology of story" was not merely a passive historical

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[7] Cf. *Ib*.
[8] Cf. McGrath, A.E., *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Though*t (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2013), 2.
[9] *Ib.*
[10] Cf. Pelikan, J., *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 13-26. The specific idea of "theology of story" is a common characterization.

backdrop but was actively re-read and re-narrated by early Christians as the predictive and preparatory narrative culminating, in their belief, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, true man and true God, a hermeneutical move central to the formation of a distinct Christian identity and theology.

The early Church Fathers, writing in the initial centuries following Christ, undertook the immense task of articulating Christian beliefs within the prevailing Greco-Roman cultural and intellectual milieu. They vigorously defended the nascent faith against both external pressures, such as state-sanctioned persecution, and internal doctrinal disputes, often termed heresies.[11] This period, from approximately 100 to 600 AD, was one of "great ferment and vitality," during which the fundamental affirmations of Christian dogma emerged from a diverse array of beliefs and teachings. The dual challenge of external persecution and internal heterodoxy acted as a primary catalyst for theological development; doctrinal articulation became not an abstract academic pursuit but a vital necessity for the survival, identity, and cohesion of the early Christian community. Thinkers such as St. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165 AD) and Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 AD) engaged deeply with Greek philosophy. They perceived it not as entirely alien or hostile, but as a *praeparatio evangelica*—a preparation for the Gospel—believing it to contain *semina Verbi*, or "seeds of the Word."[12] Justin Martyr, for example, argued that the same divine Logos (Word or Reason) who became incarnate in Jesus Christ had also scattered "seeds of truth" throughout human reason and philosophy, even among those who lived before Christ.[13] He contended that whatever truths were spoken by philosophers were due to their partial participation in this universal Logos. Clement, in his *Stromateis*, similarly proposed that God provided Greek philosophy to the Greeks as a precursor to faith, much as the Law was given to the Jews, both serving as "tributaries" leading to the river of Christian truth.[14] This perspective represented a sophisticated theological strategy for cultural engagement. Instead of wholesale rejection, these Fathers found a way to affirm elements of truth in pagan philosophy by attributing them to the universal activity of the Divine Logos. This approach subordinated philosophy to Christian revelation while simultaneously creating a bridge for dialogue with educated pagans, legitimizing the critical appropriation of philosophical tools for theological construction and laying groundwork for a tradition of "faith seeking understanding."

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[11] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 22–25.
[12] The term *praeparatio evangelica* is most famously the title of a work by Eusebius of Caesarea, but the concept of philosophy as a preparation is evident in Justin and Clement. For *semina Verbi* (or *logos spermatikos*), see Justin Martyr, First Apology, chap. 46, and Second Apology, chaps. 8, 10, 13.
[13] Cf. Justin Martyr, First Apology, chap. 46.
[14] Clement of Alexandria, Stromateis, Book I, chap. 5 and chap. 7. See Stromata I.7 in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02101.htm.

The Patristic period reached a significant apex with towering figures such as St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD).[15] Augustine masterfully synthesized Christian doctrine with insights drawn from Platonic and, more specifically, Neoplatonic thought,[16] a philosophical framework that profoundly shaped his understanding of concepts like the incorporeal nature of God and the human soul, and the nature of evil as a privation of good.[17] This synthesis, however, was not a simple merging but a critical transformation of Neoplatonism in light of Christian revelation; Augustine adopted Neoplatonic concepts where they helped articulate Christian truths but critiqued and departed from Neoplatonism where it conflicted with core tenets such as creation *ex nihilo* and the incarnation.[18] His extensive explorations of the Trinity, the nature of divine grace, and the complexities of the human will, particularly in the context of the Pelagian controversy,[19] set the theological agenda for Western Christianity for over a millennium.[20] Augustine's teachings on grace and the will, while profoundly influential, also embedded certain tensions within Western theology—notably concerning divine sovereignty versus human responsibility—that would fuel debate and reinterpretation for centuries, especially during the Reformation.[21]

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[15] The Patristic period refers to the era of the Church Fathers, key Christian writers and theologians who lived roughly from the late 1st century to the mid-8th century AD. This period was crucial for the formation and articulation of Christian doctrine, as these Fathers engaged with philosophical thought, defended the faith against heresies and persecution, and laid the theological foundations for later developments in Christianity. Notable figures include St. Augustine, St. Justin Martyr, and Clement of Alexandria.

[16] Both Platonism and Neoplatonism are philosophical systems rooted in the teachings of Plato, but Neoplatonism represents a later development and reinterpretation of Platonic thought, developed by Plotinus and his successors, 3rd to 6th centuries AD, often integrating elements from other philosophical traditions and mystic experiences. In essence, Neoplatonism is a more systematized, mystical, and hierarchical expansion of Platonic metaphysics, positing an even more transcendent ultimate principle (The One) and outlining a clear path for the soul's return to its divine origin.

[17] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), section on Augustine, likely within pp. 25-50 based on Patristic period coverage. See also for Augustine's use of Platonism/Neoplatonism. Justo L. González, The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 239-253 (Part III, Chapters 21-22 on Augustine).

[18] Cf. Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 42-55 (on the philosophical milieu and Christian responses), 299-305 (Augustine's relation to Neoplatonism). quotes Eugene TeSelle: "what [Augustine] accepted from Platonism and what he rejected was always determined by the rule of faith."

[19] Pelagianism, a 5th-century heresy, denied the necessity of divine grace for salvation, asserting that humans have the inherent ability to choose good and avoid sin through their own free will and effort.

[20] Cf. McGrath, Historical Theology (2013), 39-43 (on the Pelagian controversy and Augustine's doctrine of grace). Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition, 305-331 (on Augustine's doctrines of sin, grace, Trinity).

[21] Augustine's profound exploration of grace and the will, while foundational for Western theology, inevitably introduced an enduring tension. This tension centered on the delicate balance between God's sovereign power and humanity's free will and moral responsibility. Augustine's theological framework emphasized the necessity of divine grace for salvation, asserting that human beings, due to the effects of original sin, are incapable of turning to God or performing genuinely good works without God's prevenient and assisting grace. This emphasis underscored God's ultimate authority and initiative in the process of salvation, highlighting that it is a divine gift rather than a human achievement. However, this focus on divine sovereignty raised questions about the extent of human freedom. If God's grace is the decisive factor in salvation, what role is left for human choice and

During the Middle Ages, the rise of universities as centers of learning fostered the development of Scholasticism, a theological method characterized by its systematic rigor and deep engagement with philosophical reasoning.[22] This represented a shift not just in content but in the very form and process of doing theology, aiming for comprehensive, rationally defensible systems of thought. St. Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109 AD) is often regarded as a key progenitor of this movement, famously encapsulating its spirit in the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum*—faith seeking understanding.[23] Anselm's pioneering use of reason to explore the content of Christian faith marked a significant development from earlier modes of theology. The zenith of Scholasticism, however, was achieved in the monumental work of St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274 AD). Aquinas undertook the colossal task of integrating the rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle—which had become available in the West largely through Arabic commentators—with Christian doctrine.[24] His *Summa Theologica* stands as a landmark of this synthesis, applying Aristotelian categories and logic to the whole of Christian belief.[14] This Aristotelian turn provided Christian theology with a new, comprehensive

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action? Critics argued that Augustine's position appeared to diminish human responsibility, potentially portraying humans as mere puppets of divine will. Augustine sought to maintain that humans possess free will, capable of making genuine choices, yet he simultaneously insisted that this will is wounded by sin and requires grace to be truly free and effective in choosing good. This intricate interplay between divine grace and human will remained a point of contention and debate throughout the centuries. During the medieval period, theologians grappled with Augustine's insights, attempting to reconcile divine sovereignty with human freedom. The Scholastics, particularly Thomas Aquinas, developed sophisticated theological systems that aimed to clarify and synthesize these concepts, emphasizing the compatibility of grace and free will within a broader metaphysical framework. However, the tension resurfaced with renewed intensity during the Reformation. Martin Luther, deeply influenced by Augustine's understanding of sin and grace, strongly affirmed the doctrine of predestination and the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. He argued for the bondage of the will, asserting that human beings, without grace, are enslaved to sin and incapable of choosing God. This position sparked heated debates with other reformers, notably Erasmus of Rotterdam, who defended the freedom of the will and the human capacity to cooperate with divine grace. John Calvin, another key figure in the Reformation, further developed the doctrine of predestination, emphasizing God's eternal decree and sovereign control over all things, including the salvation of individuals. Calvin's emphasis on divine sovereignty, while providing a robust theological framework, heightened the tension concerning human freedom and responsibility. The ensuing debates between Calvinists and Arminians, who advocated for a greater degree of human free will in the process of salvation, exemplify the ongoing legacy of Augustine's initial formulation. Throughout history, the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility has persisted, finding expression in various theological controversies and interpretations. Different theological traditions have emphasized one aspect or the other, seeking to maintain a coherent understanding of God's grace and human agency. Augustine's contribution lies not only in his profound insights into grace and the will but also in the enduring questions he raised, which continue to shape and challenge theological discourse. His legacy serves as a reminder of the complexity and mystery surrounding the relationship between God and humanity, and the ongoing need for careful reflection and nuanced articulation in theological inquiry.

[22] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 88-93 (introduction to Medieval theology).
[23] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 93-96 (on Anselm). Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition,* Vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 99-120 (Chapter on "Faith Seeking Understanding" focusing on Anselm).
[24] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 100-106 (on Aquinas). Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology*, 264-306 (extensive discussion of Aquinas).

philosophical framework, but it also marked a notable shift from the predominantly Platonic and Augustinian orientation of earlier Western thought, introducing new questions and, in time, prompting reactions.

The Reformation in the 16th century introduced another significant shift in the trajectory of Western Christian theology. Figures like Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564) championed the principle of *sola scriptura*—Scripture alone—as the ultimate authority for faith and practice.[25] This emphasis was not merely a call to read the Bible but a fundamental challenge to the prevailing ecclesiastical and theological authorities of the time, particularly the Papacy and the Scholastic tradition's reliance on Aristotelian philosophy.[26] Luther, for instance, in works like *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525), questioned the capacity of fallen human reason to arrive at true knowledge of God apart from divine revelation in Christ, expressing skepticism towards philosophical theology that he believed obscured the Gospel's message of grace. Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, while a highly systematic and rationally argued work, also grounded theological truth firmly in the authority of Scripture, understood through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.[27] While often portrayed as a wholesale rejection of philosophy, the Reformers' stance was more nuanced; their primary critique targeted philosophy's potential to dictate terms to theology or obscure the clear message of Scripture, rather than a complete dismissal of reason or learning. This period irrevocably fractured the religious landscape of Western Christianity, giving rise to distinct Protestant theological traditions—Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, Anabaptist, and others—each developing its own characteristic doctrinal emphases and ecclesiastical structures.[18] The principle of *sola scriptura*, while intended to provide a clear foundation, ironically contributed to this diversification, as differing interpretations of Scripture, without a single, universally accepted interpretive authority, led to a plurality of theological systems.

The modern era, commencing roughly with the Enlightenment in the 18th century, presented Christian theology with a new array of profound challenges. The rise of modern science, the philosophical turn to the subject initiated by thinkers like René Descartes and Immanuel Kant, the development of historical-critical methods for studying the Bible, the emergence of philosophical

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[25] For Luther and sola scriptura, see Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will* (1525), particularly sections discussing the clarity and authority of Scripture. See. For Calvin, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559 ed.), Book I, chaps. 6-9. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 124-127 (on Humanism and the sources of theology), 135-138 (Luther), 143-146 (Calvin).

[26] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 125-127 (critique of Scholasticism). Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. 4: Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 125-175 (on the "Crisis in the Authority of the Past").

[27] Calvin, *Institutes* I.7 ("The Testimony of the Spirit Necessary to Give Full Authority to Scripture..."). See , pp. 74-80

atheism, and the increasing privatization of faith all compelled theology to re-examine its foundations and methods.[28] Core doctrines that had long been assumed were now subjected to intense scrutiny, including the nature of revelation, the uniqueness of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. The Enlightenment's emphasis on autonomous reason and empirical science fundamentally shifted the epistemological ground upon which theology had traditionally stood, forcing it to reconcile, reject, or find new ways to articulate its claims in a world where its cognitive authority was no longer widely presupposed.

Thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) responded to this intellectual climate by attempting to ground religion not in metaphysical propositions or historical claims, but in human experience—specifically, in what he termed the "feeling of absolute dependence."[29] Schleiermacher argued that this immediate self-consciousness of being utterly dependent on a transcendent Other is the essence of piety, a pre-rational intuition accessible to all. This turn to "feeling" or "experience" was a pivotal move, seeking to secure a space for religion independent of both doctrinal propositionalism and scientific critique, though it also risked subjectivizing faith and detaching it from objective historical claims.

In the 20th century, figures such as Karl Barth (1886-1968) spearheaded a powerful reaction against such liberal theological tendencies. Barth and the movement known as "neo-orthodoxy" reasserted the centrality of God's sovereign self-revelation in Jesus Christ as the sole starting point and norm for Christian theology.[30] In his monumental Church Dogmatics, Barth emphasized the "infinite qualitative difference" between God and humanity, arguing that God can only be known through God's own gracious act of revelation in the Word—Jesus Christ—attested in Scripture and proclaimed by the Church. This was not a simple return to pre-critical scholasticism but a radical reaffirmation of God's sovereignty and the event-character of revelation, challenging the anthropocentric leanings of much modern thought.

Today, contemporary theology is characterized by an extraordinary diversity of voices and approaches. It encompasses movements such as liberation theology, which reads Scripture and tradition through the lens of the oppressed and advocates for social and political justice; feminist theology, which critiques

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[28] Cf. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (2013), 182-185 (introduction to the modern period). Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, Vol. 5: Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (since 1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1-36 (on "The Crisis of Orthodoxy").
[29] Cf. Schleiermacher, F., *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), Second Speech. See the translation by Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), e.g.,. 20-22, 45-50.
[30] Cf. Barth, K., *Church Dogmatics I/1: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, translated by G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), esp. §4 ("The Word of God in Its Threefold Form") and §5 ("The Nature of the Word of God"). See for a review citing page 119 for "Word become Flesh" and 137 for proclamation.

patriarchal structures in traditional theology and society and reclaims women's experiences as valid theological sources; and political theology, which explores the intersection of religious belief and political life. Alongside these contextual and critical theologies, there are also renewed and sophisticated engagements with Patristic and Thomistic thought, as theologians seek resources within the classical tradition to address contemporary challenges. The proliferation of such contextual theologies reflects a growing awareness that all theological reflection is, to some extent, situated, challenging older paradigms of theology as a purely objective, universal science and underscoring the importance of social location, experience, and praxis. Similarly, the *ressourcement* movements are not merely nostalgic but represent strategic retrievals of ancient wisdom to navigate issues inadequately addressed by Enlightenment or liberal theological frameworks.[31] Theology continues to grapple with the complex relationship between faith and reason in a world increasingly shaped by postmodern thought, globalization, and rapid technological advancement, making the foundational inquiries into its nature, sources, and methods all the more relevant.

The historical trajectory of Christian theology reveals a dynamic and adaptive intellectual tradition. Originating with the appropriation and transformation of the Greek philosophical term *theologia*, it evolved from a general discourse on the divine into a sophisticated discipline dedicated to the rational articulation, defense, and systematic exploration of Christian doctrine. This development was consistently shaped by its engagement with various intellectual currents—Judaic heritage, Greek philosophy (Platonism, Aristotelianism), the Enlightenment, and modern critical thought—as well as by the internal and external pressures faced by the Christian community. Key transitions, such as the Patristic synthesis of faith and reason, the systematic endeavors of Scholasticism, the Reformation's call for *sola scriptura*, and modern theology's grappling with new epistemological challenges, demonstrate both continuity in core commitments and significant shifts in methodology and emphasis.

The contemporary theological landscape, with its diverse contextual theologies and renewed interest in classical sources, continues this tradition of critical engagement and re-articulation of faith in an ever-changing world. The

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[31] The *ressourcement* movement, emerging in 20th-century Catholic theology, emphasizes a "return to the sources" (*ressourcement* meaning "return to the spring" or "to the source"). This involves a re-engagement with the foundational texts and traditions of Christianity, particularly the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers, to revitalize theological thought and address contemporary challenges. It seeks to draw fresh insights from these ancient wellsprings, rather than merely relying on later scholastic interpretations, to foster a deeper and more authentic understanding of the faith. For a extended presentation of the *Ressourcement* mouvement see Flynn, G, Murray, P.D., (ed.) *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

foundational inquiries into the nature of God, revelation, and human understanding, which marked the earliest stages of theological reflection, remain central to its ongoing task.

1.2. Defining Theology: The Interplay of Faith and Reason

In its traditional form, theology is frequently captured by St. Anselm of Canterbury's saying, *fides quaerens intellectum*, which translates to "faith seeking understanding," as was previously noted. This definition portrays theology as the endeavor of a believing mind to penetrate, articulate, and comprehend the truths received in faith. It is an active, reflective process that grapples with profound questions about God, humanity, creation, salvation, and ultimate meaning, drawing upon sacred texts, tradition, reason, and experience. As Anselm himself intended, it is the attempt "one who strives to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, and seeks to understand what he believes."[32] This journey from an established faith towards a deeper intellectual grasp underscores the dynamic nature of belief, where, as St. Augustine suggests, "intelligence is the fruit of faith. Do not therefore seek to understand in order to believe, but believe in order to understand."[33]

However, the journey between faith and reason is not solely unidirectional. The human intellect, in its own right, embarks on a quest that can lead it towards faith. This is captured by the complementary notion of *intellectus quaerens fidem*—understanding seeking faith. Pope Benedict XVI, in *Porta Fidei*, highlights this inherent human drive: "Human reason, in fact, bears within itself a demand for "what is perennially valid and lasting". This demand constitutes a permanent summons, indelibly written into the human heart, to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had he not already set out to meet us. To this encounter, faith invites us and it opens us in fullness."[34] This suggests that the sincere search for ultimate meaning and truth, driven by reason, can itself be an "authentic 'preamble to faith.'"[35] The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* famously uses the metaphor of faith and reason as "the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."[36] This imagery implies that both are necessary and are called to a harmonious collaboration.

Historically, thinkers have recognized this potential for reason to lead to the threshold of faith. Plato, through the character of Simmia in the *Phaedo*, mused

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[32] St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, Proemium.
https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/anselmproslogion.html.
[33] St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 29,6.
https://www.augustinus.it/latino/commento_vsg/omelia_029_testo.htm.
[34] Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 10.
[35] *Ib*.
[36] John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Introduction,1.

that if human reasoning proves insufficient in life's greatest questions, one might hope for a "divine revelation" as a "more solid ship" for the journey.[37] Church Fathers like St. Justin Martyr, with his theory of the *semina Verbi* (seeds of the Word), and Clement of Alexandria, who saw Greek philosophy as a *praeparatio evangelica*, also affirmed that reason, in its authentic pursuit of truth, could be open to the absolute and find its fulfillment in Revelation.[38] St. Thomas Aquinas articulated this relationship through the principle that "grace does not destroy nature but perfects it" (*gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*).[39] For Aquinas, "natural reason must serve faith (*subserviat fidei*)" and "the light of faith, which is infused in us by grace, does not destroy the light of natural reason placed in us by God."[40] The philosopher Maurice Blondel, in his work *L'Action*, phenomenologically explored how the human will, in its infinite striving, encounters its own limitations, leading to an awareness of the "supernatural" as something "absolutely impossible and absolutely necessary," a fulfillment that must come as a gift.[41]

Thus, theology engages with this rich interplay: faith seeking deeper understanding, and understanding, in its quest for ultimate truth, potentially finding its completion in faith. As Don Tommaso Demaria SDB notes, both philosophy and theology are "sciences of being," distinct from the "sciences of the phenomenon."[42] This shared focus on "being" underscores their inherent connection, regardless of the initial starting point of inquiry.

1.3. The Indispensable Role of Philosophy in Theology

Philosophy has historically played a crucial role in theological reflection, often described by the Latin phrase *philosophia ancilla theologiae*—philosophy as the handmaid of theology. This does not imply a subservience that diminishes philosophy, but rather highlights its supportive and instrumental function in clarifying, systematizing, and defending theological claims.

Don Tommaso Demaria elaborates on this relationship:

"The medieval theologians expressed this service with the phrase 'Philosophia ancilla theologiae' (philosophy is the handmaid of

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[37] Plato, *Phaedo*, 85d.

[38] Cf. Sabetta, A., "Intellectus quaerens fidem," in M. Cozzoli (ed.), Pensare Professare Vivere la fede. Nel solco dell'esor- tazione apostolica "Porta Fidei", LUP, Città del Vaticano 2012, p. 85, referencing Justin Martyr, I Apologia 46, 2-4, II Apologia 10, 1-8 and Clement of Alexandria, Stromata 1, 5, 28, 1-3.

[39] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, art. 8, ad 2.

[40] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, co 1.

[41] Cf. Sabetta, "Intellectus quaerens fidem," pp. 87-88, summarizing Blondel, *L'Action*.

[42] Demaria, T., *For a New Culture*, IV.1. English Translation of DEMARIA Tommaso, *Per una nuova cultura*, NPC Edizioni, Verona 1982.

theology). Modern philosophy found this 'service' displeasing, interpreting it as 'bondage' and rebelling against it. This was the failure of "true" philosophy, beginning with the negation of itself as "philosophy of being" and ending in a miserable atheist-materialist philosophy. And this is the great new "wisdom" that philosophy and modern culture want to offer poor humanity! How then can we be surprised about the predominance of atheist-materialist ideologies and about the disastrous situation of contemporary society, despite all scientific progress and technological conquests?"[43]

Demaria argues that this service, far from being demeaning, elevates philosophy, making it a "servant-master."[44] He outlines the service of philosophy to theology as primarily:

1. **Methodological:** "Philosophy does not add truths to the Faith... Philosophy is a 'method' for illuminating the revealed truths while respecting the inscrutability of the mystery. It is a service of reason to Faith."[45]
2. **Scientific:** "it assists theological research in the elaboration and systematization of theological science, which, without such a service from a competent philosophy, is reduced to the level of a literary exercise."[46]
3. **Instrumental:** "A many-sided service, but always clearly 'instrumental', precisely as a 'methodological-scientific-instrument' service that enables the transformation of theology into a proper 'theological science.'"[47]

Thus, a robust philosophical framework is not merely an optional adjunct to theology but a necessary instrument for its scientific rigor and intellectual depth.

1.4. The Great Divide: Idealism vs. Realism in Philosophy

A fundamental divergence in philosophical thought, with significant implications for theology, is the distinction between idealism and realism. Understanding this divide is crucial because it shapes how theologians approach sources of revelation, interpret doctrines, and conceptualize the very relationship between God, the world, and human knowledge.

- **Idealism**, in broad terms, posits that reality is fundamentally mental, mind-constituted, or mind-dependent. Its core tenet is that the object of knowledge is in some way inseparable from the knowing subject or consciousness.

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[43] *Ib*. IV.2.
[44] *Ib.*
[45] *Ib*. IV.3.
[46] *Ib*. IV.3.
[47] *Ib*. IV.3.

- **Realism**, conversely, asserts that reality, or at least some aspects of it, exists independently of our minds, thoughts, perceptions, or consciousness. It generally holds that the world has an objective structure that we can come to know.

1.4.1 Evolution of Idealism and Realism

The tension between these two broad approaches can be traced throughout the history of philosophy, though the terms themselves gained specific currency in later periods.

Idealism's Trajectory:

While Plato's theory of Forms is sometimes seen as a precursor, with its emphasis on a higher, intelligible realm as more real than the sensible world, modern idealism finds clearer expression starting with René Descartes (1596-1650). His famous *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) placed the thinking subject at the center of his philosophical starting point, raising questions about the certainty of the external world. George Berkeley (1685-1753) famously argued for immaterialism with his principle *esse est percipi* (to be is to be perceived), suggesting that things only exist insofar as they are perceived by a mind (either human or, ultimately, God's).

The most influential figure in modern idealism is Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). His "Copernican revolution" proposed that while an external world (the "noumenon" or thing-in-itself) might exist, we can only know it as it appears to us (the "phenomenon"), structured by the inherent categories of our understanding. As Demaria notes, "With Kant, philosophy is no longer the object of a revolution, but itself becomes a 'philosophical revolution'... Before him philosophy was centered on the 'object'; with him it begins centering on the 'subject.'"[48] Following Kant, German Idealism, with figures like G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), further developed these ideas, often positing Spirit (Geist) or Absolute Idea as the ultimate reality, unfolding itself through history and human consciousness.

Realism's Endurance:

Realism also has ancient roots, notably in the philosophy of Aristotle (384-322 BC), who, unlike Plato, grounded reality in concrete, individual substances in the sensible world, knowable through observation and reason. This Aristotelian realism was highly influential in medieval philosophy, particularly through St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), who synthesized it with Christian theology, affirming the mind's capacity to know objective reality.

In the modern era, despite the rise of idealism, various forms of realism

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[48] *Ib*. III.3.

persisted and re-emerged. These include naive realism (the common-sense view that we perceive the world directly as it is), critical realism (which acknowledges the role of the mind in knowledge but maintains an objective reality), and scientific realism (which holds that scientific theories aim to give a true account of an independent world). Don Tommaso Demaria positions himself firmly within the realist tradition, advocating for a "realist objective philosophical method" as essential, particularly for understanding "Historical Reality."[49]

1.4.2 The Current Philosophical Debate

The debate between idealism and realism, in its various forms, continues to be a central theme in contemporary philosophy, often intersecting with discussions in epistemology (theory of knowledge), metaphysics (theory of reality), philosophy of science, and philosophy of mind.

- **Challenges to Realism:** Realists face challenges in explaining how the mind can accurately access or represent an independent reality, especially given the insights from cognitive science about the constructive nature of perception and the influence of language and culture on thought. Skeptical arguments, questioning the certainty of our knowledge of the external world, remain a persistent hurdle.
- **Challenges to Idealism:** Idealism, particularly in its stronger forms, struggles to account for the apparent objectivity and intersubjectivity of the world, the success of science in predicting and manipulating physical phenomena, and the common-sense intuition that the world existed before conscious beings. Avoiding solipsism (the view that only one's own mind is sure to exist) is a constant challenge for some idealist positions.
- **Contemporary Nuances:** Many contemporary philosophers adopt positions that attempt to bridge the gap or offer alternatives, such as various forms of anti-realism (denying that certain types of statements have objective truth values, e.g., in ethics or aesthetics), pragmatism (focusing on the practical consequences of beliefs rather than their correspondence to an independent reality), and phenomenology (which seeks to describe structures of experience without necessarily making strong metaphysical claims about an independent reality). The debate also plays out in specific domains, for example, concerning the reality of universals, mathematical objects, or moral properties.

Don Tommaso Demaria's critique of post-Kantian philosophy highlights a key concern for realists: "Kantian criticism consists substantially in reducing the

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[49] *Ib*. I.2.

datum of experience to the 'phenomenon', which in turn is reduced to merely subjective knowledge... relegating 'being' (the 'noumenon') to the realm of the unknowable. The inevitable consequence: once the real, objective experience of being has been truncated, all that is left is the experience of the phenomenon. 'Metaphysical realism' has become simply impossible."[50] For Demaria, this has profound implications for our ability to grasp "real and objective being" and to act effectively in the world.

1.4.3 Consequences for Understanding the World and for Ethics

The adoption of an idealist or realist stance has profound consequences for how we understand the world and our place within it, as well as for ethical theory.

Understanding the World:

- **Idealism:** If reality is fundamentally mind-dependent, our understanding of the world becomes intrinsically linked to consciousness, interpretation, and conceptual frameworks. This can lead to an emphasis on the subjective experience of reality, the social construction of knowledge, or the limits of human understanding to grasp any reality "in itself." In its more extreme forms, it might foster skepticism about the external world or see scientific laws as useful constructs rather than descriptions of objective reality. The "world" becomes, in a sense, a human or mental world.

- **Realism:** A realist approach generally supports the view that there is an objective world with inherent structures and properties that exist independently of our knowing them. This allows for the possibility of objective truth—statements that correspond to this independent reality. Science, from a realist perspective, is often seen as a progressive discovery of these objective features. The world is "out there" to be investigated and understood. Demaria's insistence on a "realist objective ontologico-metaphysical knowledge" stems from the conviction that such knowledge is necessary "in order to act" meaningfully and effectively within this objective historical reality.

Ethics:

- **Idealism:** Ethical frameworks within an idealist paradigm can vary. Some idealists, like Kant, developed objective ethical systems based on universal reason (e.g., the categorical imperative). However, if moral values are seen as primarily constructions of individual or collective consciousness without an independent grounding, idealism can lean towards ethical subjectivism or relativism. The source and authority of moral norms become critical questions: are they discovered in an objective order, or are they created by minds?

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[50] *Ib*. I.3.

- **Realism:** Realism, particularly moral realism, often posits that moral values and principles are objective features of reality, grounded in human nature, natural law, the structure of being, or divine command (in theological realism). This provides a basis for universal ethical claims and the idea that some actions are intrinsically right or wrong, regardless of individual or cultural opinion. Ethical inquiry, from this perspective, involves discovering and applying these objective moral truths.

In summary, the choice between idealism and realism is not merely an abstract philosophical preference. It deeply influences our metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, which in turn shape our understanding of the cosmos, human knowledge, scientific inquiry, and the foundations of moral life. For theology, this divide impacts how one conceives of God's relationship to the world, the nature of revelation, and the possibility of human beings knowing divine truths.

1.5. The Ontology of St. Thomas Aquinas: A Realist Foundation

St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) stands as a monumental figure in the realist philosophical tradition. His metaphysics provides a sophisticated account of being, deeply influencing Catholic theology and Western philosophy.

Aquinas's ontology is centered on the concept of **being** (*esse*). For Aquinas, *esse* is the act of existing, the fundamental reality of anything that is. It is not merely a concept but the very actuality that makes a thing real. He distinguishes between **essence** (*essentia*)—what a thing is, its nature or definition—and **existence** (*esse*)—that a thing is. In created beings, essence and existence are distinct; a thing's nature does not inherently guarantee its existence. Only in God, who is Pure Actuality (Actus Purus), are essence and existence identical: God *is* His existence.

Key elements of Thomistic ontology include:

- **Act and Potency:** All created beings are composed of act (what a thing actually is) and potency (what a thing has the potential to become). Change is understood as the actualization of a potential.
- **Form and Matter (Hylomorphism):** Corporeal substances are composed of matter (the principle of potentiality and individuation) and form (the principle of actuality and specificity). The soul, for instance, is the substantial form of the human body.
- **Analogy of Being:** "Being" is not predicated univocally (in exactly the same sense) of God and creatures, nor equivocally (in completely different senses), but analogically. Creatures participate in being, which derives from God as its

ultimate source.

- **Act of Being:** (actus essendi) is the most fundamental perfection and actuality of all things. It is what makes a thing to be, rather than simply having being. *Actus essendi* is not merely a characteristic or property but the very act by which a substance exists; it is the ultimate perfection that actualizes all other perfections and determines a thing to be real. In God, *actus essendi* is identical with His essence, as He is the subsistent being itself. However, in created beings, existence is received and distinct from essence, making *actus essendi* the ultimate gift from God, the source of all being. It is through this act that a thing participates in existence and is brought from potentiality to actuality.

Demaria acknowledges Aquinas as a key proponent of the realist method: "The realist objective philosophical method is substantially the philosophical method of St Thomas."[51] However, he also characterizes Aquinas's metaphysics as a "static realist metaphysics,"[52] which, while foundational, requires development to address the "dynamic" nature of modern Historical Reality.

1.6. Don Tommaso Demaria: Towards a Realistic-Dynamic Metaphysics

Don Tommaso Demaria offers a profound analysis of the shift in Historical Reality and calls for a corresponding evolution in metaphysical thought. His work emphasizes the need to move from a "static" understanding of being to one that can adequately grasp the "dynamic" nature of our contemporary world.

1.6.1 The Ontological Passage from the Static to the Dynamic

Demaria's central thesis is that a fundamental **"ontologico-metaphysical"** shift has occurred in human history, a "passage from a 'static historical' (or better: static-sacral) reality to a 'dynamic secular' historical ontological reality."[53] This transformation, he argues, was primarily triggered by the **Industrial Revolution**:

"The Industrial Revolution effected an 'ontological' division of history... dividing it into two 'ontologically' different epochs: the one 'before' it, with a 'static-sacral' historical reality, and the one 'after' it, with a 'dynamic-secular' historical reality."[54]

Demaria identifies the shift from a static-sacral to a dynamic-secular

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[51] *Ib*. I.2.
[52] *Ib*. IV.5.
[53] *Ib*. I.1.
[54] *Ib*. I.6.

society as a fundamental revolution, triggered primarily by humanity's ability to harness and convert natural energy (starting with the steam engine) into historical force. This energy transduction, pioneered by industry, accelerated change far beyond economics, permeating all societal structures (social, cultural, technological). Ultimately, this ability to tap into nature's energy initiated a process of continuous evolution and dynamism within Historical Reality, constantly reshaping human history.[55]

He outlines the different essential characteristics of these two historical realities:

A) Static Historical Reality (Pre-Industrial):

- **"Staticity":** "ontologically it is (more exactly, was) a Historical Reality already complete, traditional, conservative, resistant to change, with a tendency to reorganization without problems of 'construction' and of 'future.'"[56]
- **"Ethicity":** "Because it was 'static'... the old Historical Reality with its corresponding society carried with it only an 'ethical exigence' to 'moralize' and 'govern'... by means of 'morality'... and of right."[57]
- **"Sacrality":** "The ethicity borrowed its efficacy from 'religion', as 'religious ethics'. There resulted a Historical Reality and a society 'founded and animated directly by religion': Historical Reality and society, therefore, of a 'sacral' nature."[58] In this epoch, "the 'ontology of static being' (= being whose real essence already is) was sufficient."[59]

B) Dynamic Historical Reality (Post-Industrial Revolution):

- **"Dynamism":** "The Industrial Revolution affected the very foundations of the old static-sacral society, forcing humanity to 'construct' a new society... A 'dynamic' Historical Reality and society is one that is not yet but is in the making, that 'constructs' itself actively, in space and time. 'Dynamism' is therefore to be understood not merely as change, but as active and passive 'constructivity.'"[60]
- **"Onticity":** "Dynamism as constructivity... finds itself in front of a Historical Reality and society that constitute themselves 'in their being'. 'Dynamism' combines therefore with 'onticity': it is by nature 'ontic' and not merely 'ethical'

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[55] Cf. Lufrani, R., "Recapitulating All Things in Christ: Divine Governance, AI, and the Church's Role in Cosmic Unity" in Schembri (ed.) *"Tu sei sacerdote in eterno". Festschrift per Paolo Garuti*, Venezia, Marcianum Press 2025, p. 198.
[56] Demaria, *For a New Culture,*. I.7. A.1.
[57] *Ib*. I.7. A.2.
[58] *Ib*. I.7. A.3.
[59] *Ib*. I.7. A.
[60] *Ib*. I.7. B.1.

or phenomenal. It is this 'ontic dynamicity' that postulates the 'ontological category' of 'dynamic being', as 'being' whose 'real essence' is not yet, but is in the process of making itself."[61]

- **"Secularity":** "This is the third essential characteristic... It consists in the 'rejection' of religion, and with it of religious morality as the 'foundation and soul' of society... What will this be? Here is the final observation, perhaps the most disconcerting of all: it will be 'ideology' as 'rationalized praxis'. Yes: it is the notorious ideology as rationalized praxis that has 'substituted religion as the foundation and soul' of the new dynamic secular society."[62]

This shift from a static-sacral to a dynamic-secular reality, where "ideology as rationalized praxis" becomes the new societal foundation, is, for Demaria, the crucial "datum of experience" that contemporary thought must grapple with.[63]

1.6.2 The Need for a New Metaphysics: Realistic-Dynamic Metaphysics

Given this profound ontological shift, Demaria argues that the traditional "static realist metaphysics," while foundational, is insufficient for understanding and navigating the new dynamic Historical Reality.

"Realist philosophy has remained fixed for centuries on the positions of Aristotle and St Thomas... What is needed is a philosophical revolution that is not 'antirealist' but 'realist', one that only a realist-dynamic metaphysics can bring about, that shifts the old realist metaphysical system from 'statics' to 'dynamics.'"[64]

He calls for the development of a **"realist-dynamic metaphysics"**. This is not an abandonment of realism but its necessary evolution. This new metaphysics would serve as a **"cultural matrix"** for the new dynamic-secular epoch, just as religion was the matrix for the static-sacral epoch.

"In this way the role of 'cultural matrix' has passed, at least in part, from religion to 'dynamic metaphysics'... The destiny of culture-civilization in the new dynamic-secular historical epoch thus remains linked to 'dynamic metaphysics' precisely as cultural matrix."[65]

Demaria sees this realist-dynamic metaphysics as a "philosophical revolution" in itself,[66] one that can provide the conceptual tools to understand

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[61] *Ib*. I.7. B.2.
[62] *Ib*. I.7. B.3.
[63] *Ib*. I.8.
[64] *Ib*. III.4.
[65] *Ib.* Prologue.
[66] *Ib*. III.1; III.4.

historical reality as "CUDB ('concrete universal dynamic being')" and interpret its "dyn-ont-organic" nature.[67] This new metaphysical approach aims to offer a "theo-spiritual" cultural outcome as an alternative to "immanentist"[68] and "atheist-materialist" dynamic metaphysics that have shaped ideologies like capitalism and Marxism.[69]

1.7. Conclusion: Setting the Stage for Contemporary Theology

This first chapter has sought to define theology and underscore its intrinsic relationship with philosophy. We have seen how the philosophical choice between idealism and realism shapes our approach to knowledge and being, with St. Thomas Aquinas providing a robust example of realist ontology. Crucially, Don Tommaso Demaria's work challenges us to recognize the profound ontological shift from a static-sacral to a dynamic-secular Historical Reality. His call for a "realist-dynamic metaphysics" is not merely an academic exercise but a vital response to the cultural and societal transformations of our time. Understanding this passage from the static to the dynamic, and the role of ideology in the new epoch, provides an essential framework for contemporary theological reflection. As we move forward, these foundational concepts will help us to engage more deeply with the challenges and opportunities facing faith in the 21st century.

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[67] *Ib*. III.4.
[68] "Immanentism" refers to philosophical or theological systems that assert God, the divine, or the absolute is entirely present within the natural world and accessible through human experience, rather than existing as a transcendent being separate from the universe. It often rejects the idea of a transcendent, supernatural realm, emphasizing the inherent divinity or self-sufficiency of the natural order.
[69] *Ib.* Prologue; II.10.

Chapter 2: The Quest for Happiness: Transhumanist Aspirations and Aristotelian Eudaimonia

Introduction: The Enduring Pursuit of Fulfillment

The human story is, in many ways, a story of relentless pursuit—a quest for something more, something better, something lasting. At the heart of this striving lies the desire for happiness, for a state of fulfillment that transcends the mundane and touches upon the eternal. In this chapter, we will explore this fundamental human aspiration by juxtaposing a contemporary, technologically-driven vision for human enhancement—Transhumanism—with a classical philosophical framework for human flourishing: Aristotle's theory of *eudaimonia*. By examining these contrasting yet sometimes overlapping perspectives, we aim to deepen our understanding of what it means to seek happiness and what constitutes a truly fulfilled human life, setting the stage for further theological reflection on the nature of beatitude.

2.1. Transhumanism:[70] The Quest for "Super" States Through Technology

Transhumanism is a modern intellectual and cultural movement that advocates for the use of science and technology to radically enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities, potentially overcoming fundamental human limitations such as aging, suffering, and cognitive constraints, and even death itself.[71] The movement is driven by a profound optimism about human potential and the power of innovation to reshape the human condition. The transhumanist agenda often crystallizes around three core aspirations: **super longevity**, **super intelligence**, and **super well-being**.[72]

2.1.1 Super Longevity: The Dream of Immortality

The pursuit of better health and an extended lifespan is a long-standing human endeavor, generally considered both legitimate and good.[73] Transhumanism takes this pursuit to its ultimate conclusion: the radical extension of life, potentially leading to effective immortality.[74] The argument often begins by blurring the line

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[70] Transhumanism will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 13.

[71] See Bostrom, N., "A History of Transhumanist Thought." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14 (2005) 1. Broadly, transhumanist literature outlines these goals.

[72] This is a general premise often acknowledged in discussions of medical ethics and human enhancement, e.g., in Juengst, E.T., Moseley, D., "Human Enhancement." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2019).

[73] Discussions on the ethics of aesthetic surgery often touch on the line between therapy and enhancement. See, for example, Delinsky, S.S., "Cosmetic Surgery: A Common and Accepted Form of Self-Improvement?" *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 35 (2005) 2012-2028.

[74] The view of aging as a disease to be "cured" is central to the work of biogerontologists like Aubrey

between healing and enhancing. Aesthetic surgery, for example, can be seen as an enhancement that contributes to psychological well-being, framed by some as a form of "healing." More significantly, if senescence (aging) is viewed as a degenerative illness—a perspective gaining traction among some thinkers and physicians—then efforts to combat it and continually improve lifespan appear as a natural continuation of medical progress.[75]

Some transhumanist thinkers argue that death itself is "unnatural" and a problem to be solved.[76] The popular futurist Jason Silva has expressed the sentiment that human self-awareness coupled with mortality is a kind of cosmic cruelty: "Godly yet creaturely is just impossibly cruel!"[77] Philosopher Nick Bostrom, a leading transhumanist voice, in his "Fable of the Dragon Tyrant," allegorizes death as a monstrous dragon that humanity has a moral imperative to defeat through technological means.[78] The underlying conviction for many transhumanists is that indefinite lifespans are achievable and desirable, and that human intelligence is capable of "fixing the 'bugs'" in our biology that lead to mortality.[79]

2.1.2 Super Intelligence: Towards Omniscience

The second pillar of the transhumanist vision is the attainment of super intelligence. This involves leveraging technology—such as artificial intelligence (AI), brain-computer interfaces, and cognitive enhancers—to vastly expand human cognitive capacities. The goal is to develop "a better performing intelligence, up to unknown levels, and state of mind inconceivable today, knowing and processing more and more information, and consequently developing an increasingly greater power."[80] Thinkers like Ray Kurzweil have popularized the idea of a "Singularity," a future point where technological growth, particularly in AI, becomes uncontrollable and irreversible, resulting in unforeseeable changes to human civilization, including

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de Grey. See de Grey, A.D.N.J., Rae, M. *Ending Aging: The Rejuvenation Breakthroughs That Could Reverse Human Aging in Our Lifetimes* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 2007).

[75] This is a common theme in transhumanist manifestos and writings. See, for example, the "Transhumanist Declaration," originally drafted by Max More online:
 https://www.humanityplus.org/the-transhumanist-declaration.

[76] The statement, "To be godly, yet creaturely, is just impossibly cruel," serves as the emotional and philosophical epicenter of the public-facing project of Jason Silva. This declaration is not a fleeting observation but the foundational problem that his entire body of work—a unique fusion of filmmaking, futurist speculation, and impassioned monologue—seeks to diagnose and ultimately resolve.

[77] Cf. Bostrom, N. "The Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant." *Journal of Medical Ethics,* 31 (2005) 273-277.

[78] This reflects a common sentiment in transhumanist literature regarding the malleability of human biology through technology. See Kurzweil, R., *The Singularity Is Near. When Humans Transcend Biology* (Viking: New York, 2005)

[79] This is a general characterization of the goal of superintelligence found in transhumanist thought. See Bostrom, N. (2014). Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies.

[80] This describes the general aim of achieving super well-being. See Pearce, D. The Hedonistic Imperative.

vastly augmented intelligence.[81] This quest is driven by the belief that greater cognitive ability will unlock solutions to complex global problems and enable new forms of understanding and creativity.

2.1.3 Super Well-being: The Pursuit of Bliss

The third "super" is the achievement of super well-being, a state of profound and enduring happiness or bliss. Transhumanists envision a future where suffering—physical, mental, and emotional—is largely eliminated. The aim is to "attain a state of life characterized by the absence of any suffering, never ending pleasure, satisfaction, and joy," potentially through "chemical, neuronal, etc." means.[82] David Pearce, a prominent transhumanist philosopher and co-founder of the World Transhumanist Association (now Humanity+), advocates for a "hedonistic imperative," arguing for the moral obligation to use technology to abolish all involuntary suffering and create states of "bliss that may be orders of magnitude richer than anything physiologically feasible today."[83] Importantly, for some proponents, this is often conceived not as a mere "uncontrolled and euphoric bliss-out, rather an intellectual bliss, a happiness driven by a deeper knowledge and a 'pro-social' attitude."[84]

In essence, the transhumanist agenda aims for a state that could be described as "an eternal, all-encompassing happiness/bliss." This ambition, while technologically modern, taps into an ancient human longing.

2.2. Aristotle's Eudaimonia: Flourishing Through Virtue and Reason

Long before the advent of advanced technology, the question of human happiness was a central concern of philosophy. The first major philosopher to systematically address happiness as the final end of human life was **Aristotle** (384-322 BC). In his seminal work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he presents a theory of *eudaimonia*, a Greek term often translated as "happiness" but more accurately conveying concepts like "flourishing," "living well," or "a life well-lived."[85]

2.2.1 The Ultimate Purpose of Human Existence

Aristotle begins his ethical inquiry by asking what the ultimate purpose

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[81] Pearce, D. (n.d.). The Hedonistic Imperative. Retrieved from hedonistic-imperative.com. The specific quote about "orders of magnitude richer" is a well-known part of his thesis.
[82] This nuanced view of transhumanist well-being, emphasizing intellectual and pro-social aspects, is articulated by some proponents, including Pearce in his broader arguments.
[83] This is a synthetic description of the combined aspirations of transhumanism.
[84] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I. Standard scholarly discussions affirms this translation and its nuances, e.g., Kraut, R., "Aristotle's Ethics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2018).
[85] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a30-34. (Using standard Bekker numbers for citation).

(*telos*) of human existence is, the end or goal for which all our activities are directed.[86] He observes that while people pursue various goods like pleasure, wealth, and honor, none of these can be the ultimate good in themselves. An ultimate end, he argues, must be self-sufficient and final, "that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a30-34).[87] Aristotle asserts that nearly everyone agrees that *eudaimonia* is this ultimate end. We desire other things because we believe they will make us happy, but happiness (*eudaimonia*) is sought for its own sake.[88]

Crucially, for Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is not a subjective state of mind or a fleeting pleasure. Instead, it "is a final end or goal that encompasses the totality of one's life... It is more like the ultimate value of your life as lived up to this moment, measuring how well you have lived up to your full potential as a human being."[89] Consequently, one cannot definitively say if a life has been happy until it is over. As he famously states, "for one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a18-20).[90] Children, for instance, cannot be truly happy because their potential for a flourishing human life, particularly the rational and virtuous aspects, has not yet been fully realized.

2.2.2 The Hierarchical View of Nature and the Function of Man

To explain human happiness, Aristotle draws upon his understanding of nature, which he views hierarchically, with different kinds of beings having distinct functions (*ergon*).

1. **Mineral (Non-living things):** Lifeless things like rocks and metals, which have basic tendencies, such as coming to rest or moving according to their nature, but lack life and soul.
2. **Vegetative (Plants):** Plants are alive and possess a nutritive soul, enabling them to seek nourishment and growth. Their "good" lies in fulfilling these basic life functions.
3. **Animal (Non-human animals):** Creatures possess a sensitive soul in addition to a nutritive one, allowing for perception, desire, and locomotion. They seek pleasure and reproduction, and their well-being can be assessed in terms of health and leading a life according to their nature.
4. **Human:** What distinguishes humans from other animals is **Reason** (*logos*).

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[86] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book* I, Ch. 2 (1094a18-22), Ch. 7 (1097a25-b21).
[87] This interpretation of eudaimonia as encompassing the totality of life and full potential is common in Aristotelian scholarship. See Hughes, G. J., *Aristotle on Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2001) Ch. 3.
[88] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a18-20.
[89] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Ch. 9 (1099b32-1100a4).
[90] Based on Aristotle's general physics and metaphysics, e.g., *Physics*, Book II; *Metaphysics*, Book XII.

Humans possess a rational soul. "Only humans are capable of acting according to principles [derived from reason], and in so doing so, they take responsibility for their choices."[91]

Aristotle argues that the good for any being lies in performing its unique function well. The unique function of a human being is "an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a7-8). Therefore, human happiness, or *eudaimonia*, must be closely linked to the excellent exercise of reason.

2.2.3 Happiness as an Activity of the Soul in Accordance with Virtue

Based on the human function, Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* as "an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (aretē), and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a16-18). Several key elements emerge from this definition:

- **Activity:** Happiness is not a passive state but involves active engagement in living a certain kind of life.
- **Soul:** It pertains to the rational part of the soul, our highest capacity.
- **Virtue (*aretē*):** Virtue means excellence. To achieve *eudaimonia*, one must live a life of excellent activity, particularly excellent rational activity. This involves cultivating both moral virtues (excellences of character, like courage and temperance) and intellectual virtues (excellences of thought, like wisdom and practical judgment). This is a "complete virtue."[92] Being virtuous is not passive; "one must act in accordance with virtue."[93]
- **A Whole Life:** *Eudaimonia* is achieved "through the course of a whole lifetime," encompassing the consistent practice of virtue and the attainment of necessary external goods (like health, friends, and moderate resources) that facilitate virtuous activity and contribute to the perfection of human nature and the enrichment of human life.[94] This often requires making difficult choices, prioritizing greater, long-term goods over immediate pleasures.[95]

2.2.4 The Role of Intellectual Contemplation

For Aristotle, the highest form of human activity, and thus the most complete form of happiness, is **intellectual contemplation** (*theōria*)—the activity of theoretical wisdom. Since our nature is to be rational, the ultimate perfection of our natures is rational reflection. This involves an intellectual curiosity and a natural

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[91] Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book II, Ch. 2-3.
[92] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Ch. 7 (1098a18-20).
[93] This is implied throughout Aristotle's discussion of moral virtue as a mean and the choices involved in virtuous action.
[94] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, Ch. 7.
[95] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books III-IV.

wonder to know. While practical virtues are essential for a flourishing life in society, contemplative activity—the pursuit and enjoyment of knowledge and wisdom for its own sake—is seen as the most self-sufficient, continuous, and divine-like activity a human can engage in. Aristotle states, "happiness extends just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not as a mere concomitant but in virtue of the contemplation; for this is in itself precious. Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation".[96]

In summary, Aristotelian **eudaimonia** is:

- The ultimate end and purpose of human existence.
- Not mere pleasure, nor simply possessing virtue, but the active exercise of virtue over a complete life.
- The perfection of human nature, depending fundamentally on the excellent exercise of reason.
- Reliant on acquiring a moral character, where virtues are cultivated as a mean between excess and deficiency.
- Culminating in intellectual contemplation as the highest and most complete realization of our rational capacities.

2.3. Transhumanism and Eudaimonia: A Comparative Glance

While separated by millennia and vastly different technological contexts, both Transhumanism and Aristotelian ethics grapple with the fundamental human desire for a better, more fulfilling existence.

Similarities:

- **The Centrality of Happiness/Well-being:** Both place a high value on achieving a state of profound well-being or happiness as a primary human goal.
- **The Role of Knowledge/Intellect:** The transhumanist pursuit of super intelligence and the notion of an "intellectual bliss" driven by deeper knowledge resonate with Aristotle's emphasis on reason and intellectual contemplation as crucial to, and indeed the pinnacle of, *eudaimonia*.[97]
- **Striving for Perfection/Full Potential:** Both frameworks involve a striving towards a kind of perfection or the full realization of human potential, albeit defined and pursued differently.

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[96] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X, Ch. 8.
[97] This is a reflective statement linking modern technological aspirations to ancient philosophical and theological concepts of ultimate happiness.

Differences:

- **Eternity and Finitude:** A major divergence lies in the concept of lifespan. Transhumanism actively seeks to overcome death and achieve "super longevity" or *ammortality*. Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, while encompassing a complete life, operates within the bounds of natural human finitude. His ethics is about flourishing *within* a mortal life. For Aristotle, while intellectual contemplation offers a taste of the divine and eternal, the human subject remains mortal.

- **Means to Achievement:** Transhumanism relies heavily on external technological interventions to modify and enhance human biology and capabilities. Aristotle's path to *eudaimonia* is primarily internal, focusing on the cultivation of virtue through habituation, character development, and the exercise of inherent rational capacities.

- **Nature of Happiness:** While both aim for a profound state of well-being, the transhumanist "super well-being" or "bliss," potentially achieved through neurochemical or genetic means, might differ significantly from Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, which is intrinsically linked to virtuous activity and the lived experience of a morally and intellectually excellent life, a product of one's own efforts and character.

- **The "Given" vs. the "Made":** Aristotle works with human nature as a given, seeking its perfection through its inherent capacities and function. Transhumanism often views current human nature as a starting point to be radically altered, redesigned, or transcended.

2.4. Conclusion: The Unchanging Desire for Beatitude

The transhumanist quest for the "three supers"—longevity, intelligence, and well-being—reflects an intense desire for a state of perfect and unending happiness, a modern technological echo of the ancient longing for beatitude. This desire for ultimate fulfillment is deeply inscribed in human nature. It is the final end of human life"[98] From a theological perspective, this innate human aspiration finds its ultimate answer not in self-generated technological transcendence, but in the divine invitation to share in God's own beatitude. St. Athanasius's famous dictum, "For He was made man that we might be made God",[99] points to a different kind of transformation, one grounded in grace and participation in the divine life.

By examining the aspirations of Transhumanism alongside the wisdom of Aristotle, we gain a richer appreciation for the complexity of human desire and the multifaceted nature of happiness. This prepares us to explore, in subsequent

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[98] Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1711.
[99] Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Incarnatione (On the Incarnation)*, 54:3. (Standard Patristic citation).

chapters, the theological understanding of beatitude, particularly as articulated by thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas, who built upon Aristotelian foundations to integrate them with Christian revelation.

Chapter 3: Happiness and Beatitude in St. Thomas Aquinas: The Divine End of Human Life

Introduction: The Thomistic Synthesis of Reason and Revelation

In the previous chapter, we explored the ancient philosophical quest for happiness through Aristotle's *eudaimonia* and contrasted it with modern transhumanist aspirations. We now turn to one of history's most influential thinkers, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who masterfully integrated Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology. Aquinas's profound analysis of human happiness distinguishes between an imperfect fulfillment achievable in this life (*felicitas*) and a perfect, ultimate happiness (*beatitudo*) found only in the vision of God. Examining Aquinas's doctrine, this chapter explores how he integrates classical traditions and directs the human longing for happiness toward its transcendent purpose. It concludes with a summary of psychological and neuroscientific perspectives on happiness.

3.1. St. Thomas Aquinas: Life, Context, and Legacy

St. Thomas Aquinas lived during a pivotal period in Western intellectual history. It was a time when the arrival of the Aristotelian corpus in Latin translation reopened the question of the relation between faith and reason.[100] Born in Roccasecca, Italy, Aquinas's intellectual journey took him from early studies at Montecassino to the University of Naples, where he encountered the newly established Dominican Order, which he later joined. He studied under Albertus Magnus, a renowned scholar of Aristotle, and subsequently became a regent master at the University of Paris.

In Paris, Aquinas countered both the Averroistic interpretations of Aristotle[101] and the Franciscan tendency to reject Greek philosophy. His work resulted in a new *modus vivendi* (way of living) between faith and philosophy which survived until the rise of the new physics. The Catholic Church has consistently recognized the central importance of Aquinas's theological and philosophical contributions. His detailed commentaries on Aristotle also represent a significant cultural and intellectual resource.[102]

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[100] Cf. "Saint Thomas Aquinas." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[101] Averroistic interpretations of Aristotle, particularly in the Latin West, referred to a philosophical approach, heavily influenced by the Muslim polymath Averroes, that emphasized a strict rationalism and asserted the unicity of the intellect (a single, separate intellect for all humanity). This interpretation challenged Christian theological doctrines, notably the personal immortality of the soul, by suggesting that only the active intellect, common to all, was immortal, not individual souls.
[102] Cf. *Ib.*

3.2. The Doctrine of Double Happiness: *Felicitas* and *Beatitudo*

Aquinas, in dialogue with thinkers like St. Augustine, taught that perfect happiness (*beatitudo*) is not fully attainable in this earthly life.[103] As in 1 Corinthians 13:12 is written: "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face," Aquinas stated that the inherent limitations and unsatisfied desires of the current human condition mean that the ultimate beatitude of man consists in the vision of God, which is not possible in this life. (*ST*, I-II, q. 5, art. 5).[104] The world, as a realm of created and finite goods, cannot provide the ultimate, infinite good that human nature inherently seeks.

However, Aquinas, critically engaging with and integrating philosophical truths he esteemed, particularly from Aristotle, maintained that a certain kind of "imperfect happiness" (*felicitas*) is achievable on earth. This imperfect happiness is proportionate to the actualization of our natural human faculties, particularly reason and virtue. Aquinas writes:

> "Man's ultimate happiness consists in the contemplation of truth, for this operation is specific to man and is shared with no other animals. So, too, this is ordered to nothing else as an end, for the contemplation of truth is sought for its own sake. Also, through this operation man is united by way of likeness with beings superior to him, since this alone of human operations is found also in God and in separate substances."[105]

This earthly contemplation of truth, especially philosophical wisdom concerning the highest causes, is an imperfect counterpart to the perfect vision of God in heaven. Thus, Aquinas distinguishes between:

- **Perfect Happiness (*beatitudo*):** This is the ultimate end of human beings, consisting in the direct vision of the Divine Essence in the afterlife. It is a supernatural gift that entirely satisfies all human desires, as it unites the intellect with the First Truth and the will with the Supreme Good.
- **Imperfect Happiness (*felicitas*):** This is attainable in this life and consists principally in the contemplation of truth accessible to reason, and secondarily in the practice of the moral virtues which dispose man to such contemplation and regulate his passions.

By making this distinction, Aquinas offers a view of human nature and earthly life that, while acknowledging its limitations, affirms its inherent goodness and capacity for a degree of fulfillment, without diminishing the ultimate

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[103] Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *ST*), I-II, q. 5, art. 3.
[104] 1 Corinthians 13:12 (NRSV).
[105] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (hereafter SCG), Book III, Chapter 37.

importance of the supernatural end. He affirmed that human nature, though wounded by sin, is not entirely corrupted and retains its natural goodness and inclination towards truth and virtue.[106]

Humans possess an innate impulse towards God as the universal good, alongside tendencies towards particular, worldly pleasures. The process of healing and growth can begin in this life through the exercise of the moral virtues (such as prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, which he analyzed with recourse to Aristotelian thought) and, crucially, the theological virtues revealed by God and infused by grace: faith, hope, and love (charity). These theological virtues specifically direct us towards our supernatural end of perfect beatitude.[107]

3.3. Happiness as Knowledge of God: The Ultimate Happiness

Aquinas is unequivocal that true, perfect happiness (*beatitudo*) can only be found in the knowledge and vision of God. No created good, no worldly pleasure, can ultimately satisfy the human heart's deepest longing for the universal good. He argues in the *Summa Theologiae*:

"It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's perfect happiness. For beatitude is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite altogether; else it would not be the last end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e., of man's appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone; because every creature has goodness by participation. Wherefore God alone can satisfy the will of man, according to the words of Psalm 102:5 (Vulgate): 'Who satisfieth thy desire with good things.' Therefore God alone constitutes man's happiness." (*ST*, I-II, q. 2, art. 8, co.).

This passage demonstrates Aquinas's characteristic method of blending rigorous philosophical reasoning (about the nature of the will and its object) with scriptural revelation, asserting that both pathways, properly understood, lead to the same truth.[108] Reason confirms the heart's innate desire for absolute perfection, an infinite good, which can only be found in God, the absolute Being and source of all goodness.[109]

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[106] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 85, art. 1; q. 109, art. 2, ad 1.
[107] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 62, art. 1-3.
[108] This is a widely recognized aspect of Aquinas's methodology. See Chenu, M.-D., *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (Regnery: Chicago, 1964) Ch. 5., VII.
[109] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 1, art. 7; q. 2, art. 8.

Consequently, Aquinas makes a sharp distinction between **enjoyment (or pleasure) derived from created goods** and **ultimate happiness (beatitude)**. Enjoyment pertains to particular, finite goods and physical pleasures, which are transient and ultimately incapable of satisfying the will's orientation to the universal good.[110] Even if all worldly desires for such particular goods were fulfilled, a person would remain unfulfilled because the desire for the infinite good would persist. The experience of those who possess abundant worldly goods yet remain deeply unhappy can be seen as an illustration of this truth. Aquinas would argue that when all finite enjoyments are pursued as if they were the ultimate end, the soul's deeper craving for the infinite good—God—remains unaddressed, leading to a profound sense of restlessness and dissatisfaction.[111]

3.4. Beatitude: Sharing in the Divine Life

For Aquinas, *beatitudo* is not merely an individual intellectual achievement but a participation in the very life and happiness of God. It involves the direct, intuitive vision of the Divine Essence, an experience that infinitely surpasses all earthly knowledge and joy. This beatific vision is a state of perfect fulfillment where the intellect apprehends the First Truth and the will rests in the Ultimate Good, finding complete satisfaction.[112]

Furthermore, this beatitude has a communal dimension. While the essential act of beatitude is the vision of God, which is personal, it is enjoyed in the "society of the blessed" (*societas beatorum*). Aquinas discusses the joy that comes from sharing this happiness with others, the saints and angels, in heaven.[113] This communal aspect underscores the Christian understanding of salvation as incorporation into a communion with God and with all those united to Him, where the joy of each is enhanced by the shared love and vision of God.

3.5. Thomistic Beatitude and the Transhumanist Quest

The transhumanist agenda, with its pursuit of super longevity, super intelligence, and super well-being, appears to echo the human desire for perfect happiness or beatitude.[114] Both transhumanism and Thomistic thought recognize a profound human desire for something beyond current limitations, a longing for a

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[110] *ST* I-II, q. 2, art. 1 (on riches); art. 2 (on honors); art. 3 (on fame/glory); art. 4 (on power); art. 5 (on bodily good); art. 6 (on pleasure).
[111] This is an application of Aquinas's core argument in *ST* I-II, q. 2, art. 8, that only the infinite good can satisfy the will.
[112] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 8; *SCG* III, cc. 51-63.
[113] Cf. *ST*, Supplement, q. 93, art. 1, ad 4
[114] This connection is an interpretive point, linking contemporary aspirations to the theological framework.

state of ultimate fulfillment and even a kind of "divinity" or perfection.[115]

However, the paths and the ultimate nature of this aspired-to "divinity" differ profoundly:

- **Means of Achievement:** Transhumanism proposes that this enhanced state can be achieved through human ingenuity and technological power, essentially a self-directed evolution.[116] In contrast, Christian theology, as articulated by Aquinas, teaches that ultimate beatitude is a supernatural gift from God, a sharing in His own life, which is received through divine grace and exceeds the natural capacities of human beings.[117]

- **Nature of Fulfillment:** The happiness sought by transhumanists, however radically enhanced, remains within the order of created, finite reality, potentially limited by the very technologies that enable it and still subject to the fundamental limitations of creaturehood. The beatitude described by Aquinas is participation in the uncreated, infinite goodness and life of God Himself.

- **The "Desire for Divinity":** The transhumanist quest highlights a deep-seated human aspiration for transcendence and perfection. Christian faith, particularly in the Thomistic understanding, affirms this innate desire for God (a natural desire to see God, which can only be fulfilled supernaturally), but posits that its true fulfillment lies not in self-deification through technology but in *theosis* or divinization by grace—becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) through union with Christ.[118]

Considering the transhumanist goal of super longevity or bodily immortality, Aquinas's framework would raise critical questions. While earthly life and health are goods, they are imperfect and ordered towards a higher, supernatural end. An indefinite earthly existence, even if technologically possible, would still fall short of *beatitudo*, as it would lack the direct vision of God which is the sole perfective end of the human intellect and will, and, finally, will resort in a kind of eschatological prison. Literary and cinematic explorations of indefinite lifespans often depict potential downsides such as ennui, social disruption, and a persistent sense of unfulfillment, resonating with Aquinas's argument that no finite good can ultimately satisfy the human desire for the infinite.[119]

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[115] This reflects a common human aspiration for a state of perfection or god-likeness, interpreted differently by transhumanism and theology.

[116] This is a general characterization of the transhumanist approach, emphasizing technological self-modification.

[117] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 5, art. 5, ad 1 (beatitude as exceeding created nature); q. 109 (on grace).

[118] *ST* I-II, q. 3, art. 8 (on the natural desire to see God). The concept of theosis or divinization is a patristic theme that Aquinas integrates into his understanding of grace and glory.

[119] This is a philosophical reflection on the implications of indefinite lifespan, consistent with Aquinas's view on the insufficiency of finite goods for ultimate happiness.

3.6. Contemporary Psychology, Neuroscience, and the Quest for Fulfillment

The ancient and medieval philosophical inquiries into happiness find echoes and new dimensions in contemporary psychology and neuroscience. While these scientific disciplines approach the subject with different methodologies, their findings offer intriguing points of comparison and contrast with Thomistic thought.

Psychological Perspectives on Happiness:

Modern psychology, particularly the field of positive psychology, has extensively studied happiness, often termed "subjective well-being" (SWB). SWB typically comprises three components: the presence of positive affect (emotions like joy, contentment), the absence of negative affect, and a sense of life satisfaction.[120] Leading theories include:

- **Hedonic Psychology:** Focuses on pleasure attainment and pain avoidance as central to happiness. This aligns with what Aquinas might term "enjoyment" derived from worldly goods, which he distinguished from ultimate beatitude.[121]

- **Eudaimonic Psychology:** Draws inspiration from Aristotle, emphasizing happiness as living a life of meaning, purpose, personal growth, and the realization of one's potential. This resonates more closely with Aquinas's *felicitas*, which involves virtuous activity and contemplation. Martin Seligman's PERMA model (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) is a prominent eudaimonic framework.[122]

- **Flow States:** Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow" describes a state of complete absorption in an activity, where one feels energized, focused, and enjoys the process itself.[123] This intense engagement can be seen as a component of earthly fulfillment and bears some resemblance to the deep satisfaction Aquinas attributes to contemplative activity, albeit on a natural level.

Neuroscience of Happiness and Ecstatic States:

Neuroscience investigates the brain mechanisms underlying pleasure, happiness, and altered states of consciousness, including those with mystical qualities:

- **Reward System:** The brain's reward system, involving neurotransmitters like

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[120] Cf. Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., Smith, H. L., "Subjective Well-Being: Three Decades of Progress." *Psychological Bulletin* 125 (1999) 276–302.

[121] See Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwarz, N. (ed.), *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (Russell Sage Foundation: 1999).

[122] Cf. Seligman, M. E. P., *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (Simon and Schuster: New York, 2011).

[123] Cf. Csikszentmihalyi, M. "Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience" *Journal of Leisure Research* 24 (1990) 93-94.

dopamine, is crucial for experiencing pleasure and motivation.[124] While this system is fundamental to survival and enjoyment, its overstimulation or dysregulation can lead to addiction, highlighting the potential pitfalls of a purely hedonic pursuit, a concern Aquinas might share regarding disordered attachment to created goods.

- **Neural Correlates of Well-being:** Research has identified brain regions and networks associated with sustained positive emotion, resilience, and life satisfaction. For instance, studies on long-term meditators have shown alterations in brain activity and structure, particularly in areas related to attention, emotional regulation, and self-awareness, suggesting that mental training can cultivate well-being.[125] This aligns with Aquinas's emphasis on the cultivation of virtue and the discipline of the mind for contemplation.

- **Mystical Experiences and the Brain:** Neuroscience has also explored the neural correlates of mystical or ecstatic experiences, often characterized by feelings of unity, transcendence, ineffability, and profound joy. Studies using neuroimaging on individuals during deep meditation, prayer, or under the influence of psychedelic substances (in controlled research settings) have pointed to changes in activity in areas like the parietal lobes (associated with self-orientation) and the default mode network (active during self-referential thought).[126] For example, Andrew Newberg's work on "neurotheology" attempts to map the brain activity during religious and spiritual practices.[127] While these studies describe the neural *correlates* of such experiences, they do not necessarily reduce them to mere brain states, nor do they confirm or deny their transcendent origin. From a Thomistic perspective, while God is the ultimate source of *beatitudo*, grace can certainly work through and perfect natural human capacities, including those of the brain, to facilitate experiences of divine connection. However, Aquinas would maintain that the perfect vision of God in *beatitudo* transcends any purely natural or neurologically inducible state.

Comparison with Thomistic Thought:
Contemporary scientific approaches offer valuable insights into the

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[124] Cf. Schultz, W., "Neuronal Reward and Decision Signals: From Theories to Data." *Physiological Reviews*, 95 (2015) 853–951.

[125] Cf. Lutz, A., Slagter, H. A., Dunne, J. D., Davidson, R. J., "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 12 (2008) 163–169.

[126] See, for example, research on the effects of psilocybin on mystical experience and well-being: Griffiths, R. R., et al. "Psilocybin produces substantial and sustained decreases in depression and anxiety in patients with life-threatening cancer: A randomized double-blind trial." *Journal of Psychopharmacology,* 30 (2016). 1181–1197. Changes in the default mode network are discussed in Carhart-Harris, R. L., et al., "Neural correlates of the psychedelic state as determined by fMRI studies with psilocybin." *PNAS*, 109 (2012) 2138-2143.

[127] Cf. Newberg, A. B., Waldman, M. R., *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (Ballantine Books: New York, 2009).

mechanisms and components of earthly happiness and profound subjective experiences. Psychology's emphasis on meaning, purpose, and engagement (eudaimonic well-being) aligns with Aquinas's notion of *felicitas* as involving virtuous and contemplative activity. Neuroscience provides a window into the brain processes underlying these states.

However, a key difference remains in the ultimate horizon. For Aquinas, both *felicitas* and even the most profound natural ecstatic experiences are imperfect and preparatory. True and perfect happiness, *beatitudo*, is supernatural, consisting in the direct intellectual vision of God, an end that transcends the capacities of unaided human nature and the empirical investigation of science. While psychology and neuroscience can describe the *phenomenology* and *physiology* of happiness and ecstatic states, Thomistic theology posits an *ontological* fulfillment in a transcendent God, which is the ultimate answer to the human heart's infinite longing.

3.7. The Hypnosphere and the Instrumentalization of Desire

The Thomistic understanding of an insatiable desire for the infinite finds a chilling modern relevance in what some thinkers have termed the "Hypnosphere," a technologically-mediated reality defined as "an environment that envelops every perception, where everything is infinitely reflected in a network of meanings that we cannot distinguish."[128] In this environment, the deep human restlessness that Aquinas identified as a yearning for God is systematically hijacked for political and economic ends. Contemporary "psychopolitics," as described by philosopher Byung-Chul Han, has shifted from overt coercion to a more subtle form of control that "exploits subjective freedom and inner desires" through seduction and self-exploitation.[129]

This new architecture of power operates through a "permanent suggestion," a distributed perceptual field sustained by the synergistic functioning of algorithms, social platforms, and digital interfaces These systems are not designed to satisfy our deepest longings but to harness them. They redirect the innate human quest for the infinite Good towards an endless cycle of finite,

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[128] Xun, J., *Ipnocrazia. Trump, Musk e la nuova architettura della realtà* (Edizioni Tlon: Pistoia, 2025), 45. The author of Ipnocrazia, "Jianwei Xun," was later revealed to be a fictional persona created by Italian philosopher Andrea Colamedici with the assistance of AI. The book itself is considered a "semiotic meta-experiment," as the revelation of its hybrid human-AI authorship serves as a performative demonstration of the very mechanisms of reality manipulation that the text critically analyzes. The ensuing public debate on the nature of authorship and digital manipulation solidified the relevance of "Hypnocracy" as a concept for understanding contemporary developments of the ontological status of reality.

[129] Cf. Han, B-C., *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power* (Verso: London, 2017), 2.

digitally-curated stimuli—likes, trends, and algorithmically personalized content—that provides fleeting pleasure but no lasting fulfillment.[130] This creates a state where the will, instead of being oriented towards a transcendent end, is captured in a feedback loop of manufactured desire. Freedom is paradoxically transformed into a form of coercion, an imperative to "realize oneself" that becomes an infinite obligation, leading to pathologies like burnout and depression.[131] In this system, our deepest yearning for beatitude is not fulfilled but is instrumentalized, becoming the very mechanism of our control within a political economy that thrives on our sustained dissatisfaction.

3.8. Conclusion: The True End of Human Beings

St. Thomas Aquinas provides a comprehensive vision of human happiness that acknowledges the value of earthly flourishing while firmly orienting the human person towards their ultimate supernatural end: the beatific vision of God. His key teachings emphasize:

- Perfect happiness (*beatitudo*) is possible only in the afterlife, consisting in the direct vision of God, which is the ultimate perfection of the intellect.
- Imperfect happiness (*felicitas*) can be attained in this life through the exercise of reason (contemplation of truth) and the practice of moral virtues, perfected and elevated by the theological virtues.
- God alone, as the universal and perfect good, can constitute true human happiness and fully satisfy the deepest desires of the human will.
- The innate human desire for ultimate fulfillment, which can be described as a desire for a "divine" state of being, finds its true and supernatural answer in sharing in God's own life through grace, culminating in the beatific vision.[132]

The doctrine of Beatitude provides the clearer interpretation to the quest of human fulfillment. It affirms the depth of human longing while directing it towards a transcendent horizon, where the quest for happiness finds its ultimate consummation in communion with the Divine. The modern "Hypnosphere" presents a dark parody of the quest for happiness; it hijacks the innate human longing for the infinite, not to fulfill it, but to instrumentalize it for economic and political gain. Where Aquinas posits a transcendent horizon where desire finds its rest in

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[130] A theological parallel can be argued between the mechanism of the TikTok algorithm and the Thomistic understanding of the Beatific Vision. In heaven, God impresses infused *species* upon each soul, granting a direct, unmediated vision of the Divine Essence that is uniquely tailored to the individual's capacity and earthly life (*ST*, I, q. 12, a. 6). The algorithm unconsciously mimics this formal structure by "impressing" a perfectly personalized stream of content based on user data. This creates a profane counterfeit of the soul's innate longing to be perfectly known and fulfilled, thus explaining its addictive power as a technological parody of our ultimate supernatural end—an isolating "beatific vision of the self" rather than a communion with the Divine.

[131] Cf. *Ib*,1.

[132] This summarizes Aquinas's doctrine on beatitude, drawing from *ST* I-II, qq. 1-5.

communion with the Divine, the psychopolitics of the digital age traps the will in a cycle of manufactured, finite desires, thriving on a restlessness it can never quell. Thus, Aquinas's thought becomes more relevant than ever, offering a critical framework to diagnose how our deepest yearning for beatitude can be distorted, and reminding us that its true consummation lies beyond any created or virtual reality.

Chapter 4: The Human Act: Agency, Morality, and Modern Perspectives

Introduction: Agency, Responsibility, and the Human Act

The question of human agency and moral responsibility is central to both theological and philosophical ethics. In an age increasingly marked by sophisticated artificial agents, the distinction between automated processes and genuinely human acts becomes ever more critical. This concern extends beyond overt examples like "intelligent weapons"—which are not considered moral agents because they cannot choose other than the predetermined responses... and therefore makes no decisions as to what is good—to the more subtle and pervasive influence of the digital "hypnosphere." Here, algorithmic systems threaten to compromise the integrity of human action not through overt control, but by systematically shaping our initial perceptions and desires. This chapter, therefore, presents the classical understanding of the human act (*actus humanus*), primarily through the lens of St. Thomas Aquinas, exploring its structure and morality. It then juxtaposes this framework with contemporary insights from psychology and neuroscience, culminating in a reflection on how modern algorithmic influence challenges our very ability to be the authentic authors of our actions.

4.1. Defining the Human Act (*Actus Humanus*)

In Thomistic thought, a crucial distinction is made between "acts of a man" (*actus hominis*) and "human acts" (*actus humanus*). Acts of a man are those actions performed by a human being but without deliberation or free choice, such as reflex actions, acts performed during sleep, or those done without sufficient knowledge or consent. In contrast, human acts are those that proceed from a deliberate will, involving both knowledge and freedom.[133]

These human acts are specifically those that are proper to humans as rational beings. They are voluntary acts that proceed from the will with prior knowledge of the end.[134] Because human acts are voluntary and ordered towards an end (*finis*), they are the proper subject of moral evaluation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*) - the official compendium of the Church's teachings - similarly states, "Freedom makes man a moral subject. When he acts deliberately, man is, so to speak, the *father of his acts*. Human acts, that is, acts that are freely chosen in consequence of a judgment of conscience, can be morally evaluated. They are either good or evil" (*CCC* 1749).

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[133] Cf. Aquinas, *ST* I-II, q. 1, art. 1. See also Pinckaers, S., *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (T&T Clark: New York, 1995) Ch. 12.
[134] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 6, preamble.

4.2. The Structure of a Human Act: The Interplay of Intellect and Will

St. Thomas Aquinas provides a detailed analysis of the internal structure of a human act, identifying a sequence of interconnected operations of the intellect and the will. These are not necessarily temporally distinct "small acts" but rather different aspects or "forms" of a single, complex movement towards an end.[135] This analysis often distinguishes twelve steps or "partial acts," grouped into the order of intention (concerning the end) and the order of execution (concerning the means).[136]

Order of Intention (Acts Concerning the End):

1. **Apprehension of the End (Intellect):** The intellect apprehends something as a good to be pursued. (*ST* I-II, q. 8, art. 1; q. 9, art. 1).
   - *Example: I see a Sacher-torte in a pastry shop; my intellect apprehends it as a desirable good, especially since I am hungry.*
2. **Volition/Wish for the End (Will):** The will has a simple, initial inclination or wish towards the apprehended good. (*ST* I-II, q. 8, art. 2).
   - *Example: I want to eat some of that cake!*
3. **Judgment Concerning the Possibility of the End (Intellect):** The intellect judges whether the end is attainable. (*ST* I-II, q. 13, art. 5, ad 1).
   - *Example: I can reach the cake.*
4. **Intention (Will):** The will effectively resolves to pursue the attainable end. This is more than a mere wish; it's a tending towards the end through some means. (*ST* I-II, q. 12, art. 1).
   - *Example: Okay, I'm definitely going to eat it! But how?*

Order of Execution (Acts Concerning the Means):

5. **Deliberation/Counsel (Intellect):** The intellect inquires into and considers various means to achieve the intended end. (*ST* I-II, q. 14, art. 1-6).
   - *Example: I can go inside and buy the slice with my money, or I could try to steal it.*
6. **Consent (Will):** The will approves of or accepts the means deliberated upon. If multiple means are suitable, the will consents to them. (*ST* I-II, q. 15, art. 1, 3).
   - *Example: It's okay... I can buy it or steal it! (Acknowledging both as potential means, though not yet morally evaluated here).*
7. **Practical Judgment/Decision (Intellect):** The intellect judges which of the

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[135] For a detailed philosophical analysis of the structure of human action in Aquinas, see Stump, E., *Aquinas* (Routledge: London, 2003), Ch. 9.
[136] The schema of twelve acts is a common way of summarizing Aquinas's detailed analysis in *ST* I-II, qq. 6-17.

available means is the best or most suitable in the given circumstances. (*ST* I-II, q. 14, art. 6; q. 13, art. 3 implies this judgment for choice).
- *Example: Stealing is not good, and I can afford to buy it. Buying it is the best means.*

8. **Choice/Election (Will):** The will selects a specific means from those judged suitable by the intellect. This is the core of free will (*liberum arbitrium*). (*ST* I-II, q. 13, art. 1, 6).
   - *Example: Okay, I choose to buy a slice!*

9. **Command/Imperium (Intellect):** The intellect directs the execution of the chosen means, ordering the relevant powers to act. (*ST* I-II, q. 17, art. 1).
   - *Example: (My intellect commands) I will pay with cash, since it is a small amount.*

10. **Use (Will):** The will applies the body's powers (and other faculties) to carry out the commanded action, employing the chosen means. (*ST* I-II, q. 16, art. 1).
    - *Example: (My will directs) Okay, let's pay cash!*

11. **Performance/Execution (External Act):** The external action is carried out by the commanded powers.
    - *Example: I enter the shop, order the slice, pay for it, sit down, and finally eat the slice!*

12. **Completion/Fruition/Enjoyment (Will & Intellect):** The will rests in the attainment of the end, experiencing satisfaction or enjoyment if the end is achieved. The intellect apprehends the achieved good. (*ST* I-II, q. 11, art. 1).
    - *Example: The intellect and will enjoy the taste of the Sacher-torte!*

It is crucial to understand that the acts of the intellect and the acts of the will are interior one to another and they constitute only one action, as its complementary principles.[137] They are not strictly sequential in a temporal sense but are interwoven aspects of a single, goal-directed human act.

4.3. The Morality of Human Acts: Sources of Morality

Human acts, being freely chosen, are subject to moral evaluation. According to Thomistic ethics, and as summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the morality of human acts depends on three "sources" or constitutive elements: the object chosen, the end in view (or intention), and the circumstances of the action (*CCC* 1750).

- **The Object Chosen (*Finis Operis*):** "The object chosen is a good toward which the will deliberately directs itself. It is the matter of a human act. The object chosen morally specifies the act of the will, insofar as reason

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[137] Aquinas emphasizes the intimate connection, e.g., *ST* I, q. 82, art. 4, ad 1 (will moves intellect per *modum agentis*; intellect moves will per *modum finis*).

recognizes and judges it to be or not to be in conformity with the true good" (*CCC* 1751). The object is the act itself considered in its essential moral species (e.g., giving alms, stealing, killing). For Aquinas, some acts are good or bad by their very nature, according to their conformity with right reason and the order of things.[138]

- **The End in View or Intention (*Finis Operantis*):** "In contrast to the object, the intention resides in the acting subject... The end is the first goal of the intention and indicates the purpose pursued in the action... Intention is not limited to directing individual actions, but can guide several actions toward one and the same purpose; it can orient one's whole life toward its ultimate end" (*CCC* 1752). The intention is the motive or reason why the agent performs the act. A good intention can never make an intrinsically evil act (an act with an evil object) good. As the *CCC* states, "The end does not justify the means" (*CCC* 1753). Conversely, "an added bad intention (such as vainglory) makes an act evil that, in and of itself, can be good (such as almsgiving)" (*CCC* 1753).[139]

- **The Circumstances of the Action:** "The circumstances, including the consequences, are secondary elements of a moral act. They contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts (for example, the amount of a theft). They can also diminish or increase the agent's responsibility (such as acting out of a fear of death). Circumstances of themselves cannot change the moral quality of acts themselves; they can make neither good nor right an action that is in itself evil" (*CCC* 1754). Circumstances include *who, what, where, when, why* (as a secondary motive), *how*, and *with what means*.[140]

For an act to be morally good, all three sources—object, intention, and circumstances—must be good, or at least not evil. "A morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances together" (*CCC* 1755). An evil in any one of these elements can vitiate the entire act. Furthermore, "There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may not do evil so that good may result from it" (*CCC* 1756).[141]

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[138] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 18, art. 2. See Pope, S. J. (ed.), *The Ethics of Aquinas* (Georgetown University Press: Washington D.C.: 2002) 65-70.
[139] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 18, art. 4; q. 19, art. 7.
[140] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 7 (on circumstances); q. 18, art. 3.
[141] ST I-II, q. 18, art. 4, ad 3 (on intrinsically evil acts). See also Aquinas, De Malo, q. 2, art. 4.

4.4. Human Acts in Psychology and Neuroscience: A Comparative View

The Thomistic understanding of the human act, with its emphasis on intellect, will, and freedom, provides a rich framework. Contemporary psychology and neuroscience offer complementary, and sometimes challenging, perspectives on human action, decision-making, and volition.

Psychological Perspectives on Human Action:

- **Decision-Making Theories:** Cognitive psychology has developed various models of decision-making. Dual-process theories, for example, distinguish between "System 1" thinking (fast, intuitive, emotional, often unconscious) and "System 2" thinking (slower, deliberate, logical, effortful).[142] This resonates to some extent with Aquinas's distinction between indeliberate acts (more akin to System 1) and deliberate human acts (requiring System 2-like processing, such as counsel and judgment).

- **Role of Emotions:** Modern psychology emphasizes the significant role of emotions in decision-making and behavior, sometimes preceding or overriding rational deliberation.[143] While Aquinas acknowledged the passions (emotions) and their influence on the will and intellect (*ST* I-II, qq. 22-48), his model prioritizes reason's capacity to govern them in a virtuous person. Also contemporary research suggests a complex interplay, where emotions can both aid and hinder rational choice.

- **Motivation and Volition:** Theories like Self-Determination Theory explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and the psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) that drive goal-directed behavior.[144] This focus on internal drives and the experience of autonomy aligns with the Thomistic emphasis on the will as the source of movement towards an apprehended good.

- **Cognitive Biases:** Research on cognitive biases (e.g., confirmation bias, availability heuristic) demonstrates systematic patterns of deviation from normatively rational judgment.[145] These findings challenge a purely rationalistic

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[142] Cf. Kahneman, D,. *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (Farra, Strauss and Giroux: New York, 2011).

[143] Cf. Damasio, A. R., *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (Punams: New York, 1994).

[144] Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a macro theory of human motivation and personality that concerns people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs. It posits that people are driven to grow and gain mastery, and that the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is essential for psychological growth, well-being, and intrinsic motivation. Cf. Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L. "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being." *American Psychologist* 55 (2000) 68–78.

[145] Cf. Tversky, A., Kahneman, D., "Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases." *Science* 185 (1974) 1124–1131.

view of human decision-making and suggest that the intellect's apprehension and judgment (steps 1, 3, 5, 7 in the Thomistic model) can be subtly distorted by non-rational factors.

Neuroscientific Perspectives on Human Action:

- **Neural Basis of Volition and Agency:** Neuroscience investigates the brain mechanisms underlying the sense of agency and voluntary action. Famously, Benjamin Libet's experiments suggested that unconscious brain activity (the "readiness potential") precedes the conscious awareness of the intention to act, raising questions about the nature of free will.[146] However, the interpretation of these findings is highly debated, with many arguing they do not negate free will as understood in more complex, deliberative contexts.[147]

- **Executive Functions:** Brain regions like the prefrontal cortex are crucial for executive functions, including planning, decision-making, working memory, and inhibiting inappropriate responses—processes that map onto Aquinas's intellectual acts of deliberation, judgment, and command.[148]

- **Neurobiology of Reward:** The brain's reward system (involving dopamine and other neurotransmitters) plays a key role in learning, motivation, and choice, particularly in pursuing pleasurable or beneficial outcomes. This provides a biological basis for the will's inclination towards apprehended goods, though it also highlights the potential for addiction when this system is dysregulated by certain stimuli.[149]

- **Unconscious Processes:** A significant body of research suggests that many of our actions and decisions are influenced by unconscious processes, habits, and environmental cues, rather than always resulting from explicit deliberation.[150] This challenges models that overemphasize conscious, rational control, though Aquinas himself acknowledged the role of habit (virtue or vice) in shaping action.

4.5. Algorithmic Influence and the Integrity of the Human Act

The digital environment, or "hypnosphere," introduces a novel and profound challenge to the integrity of the human act by systematically influencing its foundational stages. This is achieved through a "permanent suggestion" where algorithmic systems pre-emptively shape the intellect's *apprehension of the end*

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[146] See Mele, A. R., *Effective Intentions: The Power of Conscious Will* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009).
[147] Cf. Miller, E. K., Cohen, J. D., "An Integrative Theory of Prefrontal Cortex Function." *Annual Review of Neuroscience*, 24 (2001) 167–202.
[148] Cf. Schultz, W., "Neuronal Reward and Decision Signals: From Theories to Data." *Physiological Reviews*, 95 (2015) 853–951.
[149] Cf. *Ib*.
[150] Cf. Bargh, J. A., Chartrand, T. L., "The Unbearable Automaticity of Being." *American Psychologist* 54 (1999) 462–479.

and the will's initial *volition*. Theories of "perpetual inference" suggest that our perception is molded by expectations, or "priors," which in the digital realm are continuously sculpted by algorithmic feedback loops that reinforce cognitive biases.[151] Simultaneously, the model of "distributed attention" explains how platforms are designed to fragment our focus through infinite scrolling and notifications, thereby diminishing the capacity for critical reflection and heightening susceptibility to suggestion.[152] When large language models can generate "personalized persuasive messages" with unprecedented efficiency, they automate the process of targeting our psychological profiles to steer our desires.[153] This manipulation compromises the very root of a free act. If the "good" our intellect first apprehends and our will first desires is presented to us by a non-human intelligence optimizing for engagement or profit, the subsequent acts of deliberation and choice, however internally coherent, proceed from a tainted premise. Agency is thus subtly eroded, not through coercion, but through the imperceptible shaping of our most basic inclinations, suggesting that the modern individual may no longer be the sole "father of his acts."

Comparison with Thomistic View:

- **Points of Convergence:** Both Thomistic thought and modern sciences recognize that human action is typically goal-directed and involves cognitive appraisal (intellect) and motivational drive (will/emotions). The importance of learning, habit formation (virtues/vices in Aquinas; learned associations in psychology), and the pursuit of perceived goods are common themes.
- **Points of Divergence and Tension:**
  - **Free Will:** While Aquinas champions a robust notion of free will (*liberum arbitrium*) rooted in the will's rational appetite for the good, some interpretations of neuroscientific findings (like Libet's) and psychological determinism challenge this.[154] However, the Thomistic understanding of

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[151] Cf. Aggelopoulos, C., "Perpetual inference." *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews,* 55 (2015) 388.

[152] Cf. Baek, J., Chong, S. C., "Distributed attention model of perceptual averaging." *Attention, Perception, & Psychophysics* 82 (2020) 63-79.

[153] Cf. Matz, S.C., Teeny, J.D., Vaid, S.S. et al. (2024). "The potential of generative AI for personalized persuasion at scale." Scientific Reports, 14, 4692.

[154] Some examples of theories of psychological determinism include: Psychoanalytic theory (Freud): This theory suggests that unconscious drives and early childhood experiences determine adult personality and behavior. Behaviorism (Skinner, Watson): This perspective posits that all behavior is learned through conditioning (classical and operant) and is thus determined by environmental stimuli and consequences. Social learning theory (Bandura): While acknowledging cognitive factors, this theory still emphasizes that behavior is largely determined by observational learning and the environment. Biological determinism (e.g., genetic influences on personality): This view suggests that psychological traits and behaviors are determined by biological factors such as genes, brain structure, and neurochemistry. Cognitive determinism (e.g., cognitive schemas): While often associated with free will, some cognitive theories could lean towards determinism if they argue that our pre-existing cognitive structures and biases fundamentally determine how we perceive and react to the world.

freedom is not merely "uncaused choice" but the capacity to act for reasons towards a rationally apprehended good, which is a more nuanced concept than often addressed in these debates.[155]

- ○ **The Soul and Immaterial Intellect:** Aquinas's framework presupposes an immaterial soul with spiritual powers of intellect and will. Mainstream psychology and neuroscience operate within a materialist or physicalist framework, seeking explanations in terms of brain processes. This leads to different understandings of consciousness, reason, and volition.
- ○ **Ultimate End:** Aquinas's ethics is teleological,[156] with all human acts ultimately ordered (or disordered) with respect to the ultimate end of beatitude (union with God). Modern secular psychology and neuroscience generally do not operate with such a transcendent ultimate end, focusing instead on proximate goals, subjective well-being, or evolutionary adaptiveness.
- ○ **Emphasis on Rationality:** While Aquinas acknowledges passions, his model of the human act gives a certain primacy to the intellect's apprehension of the good and the will's rational pursuit of it. Some modern psychological theories give greater weight to non-rational, emotional, or unconscious determinants of behavior.

Contemporary findings can enrich the Thomistic model by providing a more detailed understanding of the psychological and neurological mechanisms involved in perception, emotion, deliberation, and execution. They can also highlight factors (biases, unconscious influences, neurological constraints) that can impede the full exercise of knowledge and freedom, which Aquinas himself considered in his discussions of impediments to voluntary action (*ST* I-II, q. 6, art. 8; q. 77). However, the fundamental Thomistic assertions about the human capacity for free, rational, and morally significant action towards a transcendent end remain a distinct and enduring philosophical position.

4.6. Conclusion: The Enduring Significance of the Human Act

The Thomistic analysis of the human act provides a sophisticated framework for understanding human agency, freedom, and moral responsibility. It underscores that truly human actions are those performed with knowledge and free consent, ordered towards an end perceived as good, with their moral quality determined by the object, intention, and circumstances.

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[155] For a nuanced discussion of free will in contemporary neuroscience and philosophy, see Haggard, P. "Human Volition: Towards a Neuroscience of Will." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 9 (2008) 934–946. For Thomistic free will, see *ST* I, q. 83.

[156] Teleological: Relating to or involving the doctrine that final causes, goals, and purposes exist and are inherent in nature, or to the study of such causes

While contemporary psychology and neuroscience offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of human behavior, the challenge posed by the digital age requires a renewed application of this classical wisdom. The "permanent suggestion" of the algorithmic hypnosphere, which works to pre-emptively shape our apprehension of the good and our initial desires, poses a fundamental threat to the root of free will. This subtle erosion of agency, accomplished by steering our most basic inclinations, makes the classical call to self-possession more urgent than ever.

The classical understanding of the human act, therefore, continues to hold profound significance not just as a historical model but as a critical tool. It calls us to a deeper awareness of our capacity—and the modern threats to that capacity—to be "the father of our acts." In an era of automated persuasion, the deliberate choice to act freely in pursuit of the true good becomes both more difficult and more necessary.

Chapter 5: The Passions of the Soul: Thomistic Insights and Modern Perspectives on Emotion

Introduction: Understanding Human Affectivity

In our exploration of human acts, we've seen that they are products of intellect and will. However, human experience is not purely rational; it is also deeply affective. The "passions of the soul," or what we commonly call emotions, play a significant role in shaping our perceptions, motivations, and actions. This chapter will explore the nature of the passions, primarily through the comprehensive analysis provided by St. Thomas Aquinas. We will examine his understanding of what passions are, their classification, their relationship with a reason-guided will, and their moral significance. This classical view of an ordered inner life will then be contrasted with modern scientific perspectives from psychology and neuroscience. Crucially, this entire framework will be brought to bear on our contemporary reality, examining how the modern techno-economic landscape —a "hypnocracy"— systematically targets and exploits the passions, not for the sake of virtue, but for profit and control, thus posing a radical challenge to the classical ideal of a well-ordered and free person.

5.1. Defining Appetite and Passion in Thomistic Thought

To understand Aquinas's view of the passions, we must first grasp his concept of *appetite* (*appetitus*). Appetite, in its broadest sense, is the inclination or tendency of a being towards something that is suitable for it, its connatural good, or away from what is unsuitable or evil. Aquinas distinguishes several kinds of appetite:

- **Natural Appetite (appetitus naturalis):** This is the inclination inherent in all things, even those without knowledge (like a stone falling to the earth), to their own perfection and end, according to the nature bestowed by the Creator. It is a tendency that follows the form of a thing as existing in nature.[157]
- **Sensitive Appetite (appetitus sensitivus):** This is an inclination following upon sense knowledge. It is a power of the soul that drives an animal being (including humans, insofar as they are animals) towards a good apprehended by the senses, or away from a sensible evil. This appetite is the seat of the passions.[158]
- **Rational Appetite or Will (appetitus rationalis seu voluntas):** This is an inclination following upon intellectual knowledge. It is a power of the soul that drives a rational being towards a good apprehended by the intellect, or away

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[157] Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 80, art. 1; *De Veritate*, q. 22, art. 1.
[158] Cf. *ST* I, q. 19, art. 1; q. 80, art. 1, ad 3.

from an intellectually apprehended evil. The will, for Aquinas, is distinct from the sensitive appetite and is not itself a passion, though it can be influenced by, and can command, the passions.[159]

Passion (passio), in Aquinas's specific psychological sense, refers to a movement of the sensitive appetite that is produced by the apprehension (through imagination or sense perception) of a sensible good or a sensible evil, and is accompanied by a notable bodily alteration (e.g., change in heart rate, temperature).[160] As Peter A. Kwasniewski summarizes, drawing on Aquinas, a passion is "a movement of the sensitive appetite, which follows the apprehension of the senses, and is accompanied by a bodily transmutation. The motion of the appetite is the formal element; and the bodily transmutation, the material element."[161] Passions are thus psychosomatic events, involving both soul (sensitive appetite) and body.

5.2. The Goodness and Morality of Passions

A common misconception, sometimes found historically within Christian thought, views passions as inherently negative or as impediments to virtue.[162] Anders Nygren, for example, contrasted Christian *agape* (selfless love) with *eros* (desirous love), often implying that genuine Christian love should be devoid of passion or self-referential desire.[163]

St. Thomas, however, presents a more nuanced and affirmative view. He argues that passions, in themselves, are neither morally good nor evil simply because they belong to the sensitive appetite, which humans share with other animals. Moral good or evil, properly speaking, pertains to human acts, which proceed from reason and will. However, passions become morally relevant in human beings precisely because the sensitive appetite can be, and in a well-ordered person is, governed by reason and commanded by the will.[164]

Aquinas makes several key points:

- **Passions in themselves are non-moral:** Considered merely as movements of the sensitive appetite (as in animals), they lack moral quality because "certain actions are called human or moral, inasmuch as they proceed from the reason." (*ST* I-II, q. 18, art. 5, co.).

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[159] Cf. *ST* I, q. 80, art. 2; I-II, q. 22, art. 2, ad 2.
[160] Cf. *ST* I, q. 82 (on the will); I-II, q. 8, art. 1.
[161] Cf. ST I-II, q. 22, art. 1 & 3.
[162] Cf. Kwasniewski, P. A., "Are Passions Good? St. Thomas Aquinas on the Passions." *The Aquinas Review* 6 (1999) 112, referencing *ST* I, q. 20, art. 1, ad 2. For Aquinas's direct text, see *ST* I-II, q. 22, art. 3.
[163] Kwasniewski "Are Passions Good?" 107-108, discusses this historical tendency.
[164] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 1.

- **Passions as subject to reason and will become moral:** "If the passions be considered as subject to the command of reason and will, then moral good and evil are in them... the passions, insofar as they are voluntary, may be called morally good or evil. And they are said to be voluntary, either from being commanded by the will, or from not being checked by the will." (*ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 1, co.).
- **Passions are intrinsic to human nature:** While reason and passion are distinct, "in reality there cannot be a total separation of human action from passion; their intrinsic connection stems from man's very nature." (*ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 1, co.).

Thus, for Aquinas, passions that are ordered by reason and contribute to a good chosen by the will are themselves good and can enhance the goodness of a human act. Conversely, disordered passions that sway reason and will towards evil contribute to the malice of an act.

5.3. The Relationship Between Reason, Will, and Passions

Aquinas describes the relationship between reason and the sensitive appetite (the seat of passions) not as one of "despotic supremacy" (like a master over a slave, where the slave has no will of its own), but as a "political and royal supremacy, whereby the free, who are not wholly subject to command, are governed." (*ST* I, q. 81, art. 3, ad 2; I-II, q. 17, art. 7). This means the sensitive appetite has its own movements but can listen to and obey reason.

He distinguishes between:

- **Antecedent Passion:** This is passion that arises before the judgment of reason and the choice of the will. If it is so strong that it "obscures the judgment of reason on which the goodness of the moral act depends, it diminishes the goodness of the act; for it is more praiseworthy to do a work of charity from the judgment of reason than from the mere passion of pity." It can also diminish the evil of a vicious act by lessening voluntariness (*ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 3, ad 1; q. 77, art. 6). (E.g., a poor hungry man stealing food out of overwhelming antecedent passion is less blameworthy than someone who steals coolly and deliberately).
- **Consequent Passion:** This is passion that follows the act of reason and will. It can arise in two ways:
  - **By way of redundance:** When the will is intensely moved towards a good by reason, this intensity can "overflow" into the sensitive appetite, producing a corresponding passion (e.g., intense love of God moving the will can result in feelings of joy). This kind of passion "is a sign of the

intensity of the will, and so indicates greater moral goodness." (*ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 3, ad 1).

- ○ **By way of choice:** When a person, by judgment of reason, deliberately chooses to arouse a certain passion to act more promptly and effectively with the cooperation of the sensitive appetite (e.g., a general arousing courage in himself and his soldiers before battle). "And thus a passion of the soul increases the goodness of an action." (*ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 3, ad 1).

Therefore, passions rightly ordered and commanded by reason are not only permissible but "are an indispensable component in the doing of morally good acts" (*ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 3, ad 1). They provide energy and intensity to virtuous actions.

5.4. Classification of the Passions

Aquinas provides a systematic classification of the passions based on the two fundamental powers of the sensitive appetite: the **concupiscible appetite** and the **irascible appetite**.[165]

- **The Concupiscible Appetite (appetitus concupiscibilis):** This appetite is concerned with a sensible good or evil simply apprehended as such — something pleasant to be sought or something unpleasant to be avoided. Its object is a good that is suitable or an evil that is contrary, without the aspect of difficulty.

  The principal concupiscible passions are:

  - ○ **Love (amor):** The fundamental passion; an initial complacency or attraction towards an apprehended good. (*ST* I-II, q. 26, art. 1-2).
  - ○ **Hatred (odium):** The contrary of love; a revulsion from an apprehended evil. (*ST* I-II, q. 29, art. 1-2).
  - ○ **Desire (desiderium or concupiscentia):** A movement towards a good that is loved but not yet possessed. (*ST* I-II, q. 30, art. 1-2).
  - ○ **Aversion (fuga or abominatio):** A movement away from an evil that is hated and not yet present but possible. (*ST* I-II, q. 30, art. 1, 3).
  - ○ **Joy or Delight (delectatio or gaudium):** Rest or satisfaction in a good that is possessed. (*ST* I-II, q. 31, art. 1).
  - ○ **Sadness or Sorrow (tristitia or dolor):** A depression of spirit caused by a present evil (which is the absence of a due good). (*ST* I-II, q. 35, art. 1).

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[165] Kwasniewski "Are the Passions Good?", 109, makes this point about indispensability. See *ST* I-II, q. 24, art. 3.

- **The Irascible Appetite (appetitus irascibilis):** This appetite is concerned with a sensible good or evil considered under the aspect of difficulty or arduousness in attaining the good or avoiding the evil. It arises to overcome obstacles. The principal irascible passions are:
  - **Hope (spes):** A movement towards a future good that is difficult but possible to attain. (*ST* I-II, q. 40, art. 1).
  - **Despair (desperatio):** A sinking of spirit when a difficult good is apprehended as impossible to attain. (*ST* I-II, q. 40, art. 4).
  - **Fear (timor):** A disturbance caused by an impending evil that is difficult to resist or overcome. (*ST* I-II, q. 41, art. 1-2).
  - **Courage or Daring (audacia):** A movement to attack or resist a threatening evil, arising from hope of overcoming it. (*ST* I-II, q. 45, art. 1).
  - **Anger (ira):** A desire for vengeance or retribution for a perceived injury or slight, accompanied by a hope of attaining it. It is a composite passion, involving both sorrow for the injury and desire for vindication. (*ST* I-II, q. 46, art. 1-3).

Aquinas sees love as the root of all concupiscible passions, and hope (regarding difficult good) and fear (regarding difficult evil) as foundational to the irascible passions.[166] The irascible passions are said to "fight on behalf of" the concupiscible, helping to achieve difficult goods and overcome threatening evils.

5.5. The Role of Pleasure (Delight)

Aquinas, following Aristotle, views pleasure (or delight, joy) positively when it is associated with good actions. Pleasure is the repose or resting of an appetitive power in a good obtained.[167]

- **Pleasure can perfect an operation:** It does so both from the perspective of the end (as pleasure is a good added to the good of the operation) and from the perspective of the agent ("inasmuch as the agent through taking pleasure in his action is more eagerly intent on it and carries it out with greater care," ST I-II, q. 33, art. 4, co.).
- **Moral quality of pleasure:** "In the moral order there is a good pleasure, whereby the higher or lower appetite rests in that which is in accord with reason, and an evil pleasure whereby the appetite rests in that which is discordant from reason and the law of God." (*ST* I-II, q. 34, art. 1, co.).
- **Pleasures that hinder reason:** Aquinas acknowledges that some intense pleasures, even if morally licit (like in conjugal intercourse), can temporarily

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[166] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 23, art. 1 & 4. See also Miner, R. C., *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2009),

[167] *ST* I-II, q. 25, art. 1-4 (on love as root); q. 40 (on hope and despair); q. 41 (on fear).

hinder the use of reason due to the accompanying bodily changes. This, however, is not necessarily morally evil, "as neither is sleep, whereby the reason is fettered, morally evil: for reason itself demands that the use of reason be interrupted at times." (*ST* I-II, q. 34, art. 1, ad 1). The key is whether the pleasure itself is sought in a way that is contrary to reason.

Ultimately, "since pleasure perfects operation as its end, an operation cannot be perfectly good unless there be also pleasure in good." (*ST* I-II, q. 34, art. 4, ad 3). The virtuous person experiences joy in doing good.

5.6. Passions/Emotions in Psychology and Neuroscience: A Comparative View

The Thomistic account of passions, with its detailed taxonomy and analysis of their interaction with reason and will, finds intriguing resonances and contrasts with modern scientific investigations of emotion.

- **Psychological Perspectives on Emotion:** Contemporary psychology has largely replaced the term "passions" with "emotions," studying their cognitive, physiological, behavioral, and social aspects.
  - **Basic Emotions Theory:** Some theories propose a set of universal, innate basic emotions (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise), each with distinct physiological and expressive signatures, somewhat akin to Aquinas's principal passions.[168]
  - **Dimensional Models:** Other models describe emotions along dimensions like valence (pleasant-unpleasant) and arousal (high-low activation), rather than as discrete categories.[169] Aquinas's distinction between concupiscible (related to simple good/evil) and irascible (related to difficult good/evil, implying arousal) passions has some parallel here.
  - **Cognitive Appraisal Theories:** These theories emphasize that emotions arise from an individual's interpretation or "appraisal" of a situation in relation to their goals and well-being.[170] This aligns closely with Aquinas's view that passions follow upon an apprehension (cognitive element) of a sensible good or evil.
  - **Emotion Regulation:** A significant area of research concerns how individuals manage and modulate their emotions. Strategies include reappraisal (changing how one thinks about a situation to alter its emotional impact) and suppression (inhibiting emotional expression).[171]

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[168] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 34, art. 4, ad 3.
[169] Cf. Ekman, P. , "An Argument for Basic Emotions." *Cognition & Emotion* 6 (1992) 169–200.
[170] Cf. Russell, J. A., "Core Affect and the Psychological Construction of Emotion." *Psychological Review* 110 (2003). 145–172.
[171] Cf. Lazarus, R. S., *Emotion and Adaptatio* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991).

This resonates with Aquinas's concept of reason governing the passions, either by checking antecedent passions or by enkindling consequent ones through rational judgment.

- **Neuroscientific Perspectives on Emotion:** Neuroscience explores the brain structures and processes underlying emotions.
  - **Limbic System and Amygdala:** Traditionally, structures like the amygdala (crucial for fear processing and emotional learning), hippocampus, and hypothalamus, often collectively referred to as the limbic system, have been central to understanding emotion.[172] The amygdala's rapid response to threats can be seen as analogous to the arousal of antecedent fear in Aquinas's model.
  - **Prefrontal Cortex (PFC):** The PFC, especially regions like the orbitofrontal cortex and ventromedial PFC, plays a critical role in emotion regulation, integrating emotional information with cognitive control, decision-making, and goal-directed behavior.[173] This aligns with Aquinas's view of reason's "political rule" over the sensitive appetite, guiding and modulating passions.
  - **Neurochemistry of Emotion:** Neurotransmitters (like serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine) and hormones (like cortisol, oxytocin) are deeply involved in emotional states and their regulation.[174] This provides a biological substrate for the "bodily transmutation" Aquinas considered integral to passions.
  - **Interoception and Embodiment:** Theories of embodied emotion emphasize the role of bodily states and their perception (interoception) in shaping emotional experience.[175] This strongly supports Aquinas's psychosomatic understanding of passions as involving both the soul's sensitive appetite and accompanying bodily changes.
- **Contemporary Distinction between Emotions and Feelings:**
  While the terms "emotion" and "feeling" are often used interchangeably in everyday language, many contemporary neuroscientists and psychologists make a conceptual distinction. Emotions are often described as complex, largely automated programs of action triggered by an external or internal stimulus. They involve physiological changes (heart rate, hormones), motor responses (facial expressions, posture), and alterations in cognitive processing. Emotions are, in this view, more public and observable through

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[172] Cf. Gross, J. J. (Ed.). (2014). Handbook of Emotion Regulation (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

[173] Cf. LeDoux, J. E., *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1996).

[174] See Ochsner, K. N., Gross, J. J., "The cognitive control of emotion." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 9 (2005) 242-249.

[175] Cf. Panksepp, J., *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998).

these manifestations. For example, fear can be described as a set of bodily and behavioral responses to a perceived threat.[176]

Feelings, on the other hand, are typically defined as the subjective, private, conscious experience of these emotional states. Feelings are the mental representations of the bodily changes and cognitive appraisals that constitute an emotion. So, one might have an emotional reaction of fear (physiological arousal, tendency to flee), and the feeling of fear is the conscious awareness of that state. As neuroscientist Antonio Damasio puts it, "feelings are mental experiences of body states."[177] This distinction allows for the possibility of unconscious emotional processing (where the body reacts but there is no conscious feeling) and highlights the role of conscious awareness in the full human experience of affect. Aquinas's concept of "passion" as involving both a movement of the sensitive appetite and a "bodily transmutation" seems to encompass what modern science would describe as an emotion, while the soul's awareness of this state would relate to the concept of feeling.

5.7. The Exploitation of Passions in the Digital Hypnocracy

The modern techno-economic landscape, or "Hypnocracy," reframes the passions not as integral components of a virtuous life to be ordered by reason, but as exploitable resources for profit and control. Tech giants, operating within a liberal-capitalistic framework, have constructed an "attention economy" that systematically hijacks the sensitive appetite through what has been termed "psychopolitics."[178] Platforms are engineered to trigger powerful antecedent passions—desire through endless novelty, fear of missing out, and anger through polarizing content that is algorithmically amplified to maximize emotional reaction[179]—in order to increase engagement. This constitutes a form of "emotional capitalism" where our passions, described as "limbic impulses," are commodified and our psychic energy is harvested for data and advertising revenue.[180] This entire model is predicated on an inversion of the classical view: instead of the will commanding the passions for a rational good, the passions are intentionally inflamed to bypass reason and direct the will towards consumption and compliance. The logic of this system, where corporate profit is the absolute, determines the methods of production and service delivery without regard for the

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[176] Cf. Damasio,. *Descartes' Error.*

[177] Cf. LeDoux, J. E., "Rethinking the Emotional Brain." *Neuro* 73 (2012) 653-676.

[178] Han's analysis of psychopolitics provides a framework for understanding the transition from external control to the internalized exploitation of freedom and emotion (cf. Han, Psychopolitics).

[179] Cf. Conti, M., et al., "Revealing The Secret Power: How Algorithms Can Influence Content Visibility on Social Media," where studies show algorithmic systems amplify emotionally charged content to increase engagement.

[180] Han analyzes this as a form of "emotional capitalism" wherein "limbic impulses and immediate reactions" are exploited to increase psychological dependence and engagement (p. 46).

common good or the profound consequences for the human psyche and the natural environment. The result is a populace conditioned for distraction and anxiety, facing psychic pathologies like burnout that arise from the endless obligation to perform within this system.[181]

5.8. Conclusion: The Integrated Human Person

St. Thomas Aquinas offers a holistic vision of the human person, in whom intellect, will, and passions are meant to operate in harmony. Passions are natural components of our being that acquire moral significance when governed by reason and will. This Thomistic understanding encourages not a suppression of passions, but their integration into a life oriented toward the true good. However, the contemporary reality of the "hypnocracy" presents a profound challenge to this integration. Its business model, predicated on the for-profit exploitation of our passions, threatens to create a permanent state of psychic disorder. Where the classical tradition sees the "political rule" of reason over the sensitive appetite as the basis for freedom, the digital attention economy establishes a new regime where antecedent passions are intentionally inflamed by algorithms to overthrow reason for the sake of engagement and control. Aquinas balanced and affirmative view of human affectivity, therefore, not only provides a robust foundation for understanding the moral life but also serves as a critical lens through which to diagnose and resist the dehumanizing tendencies of an age that seeks to turn our very passions against us.

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[181] Han connects this psychopolitical system, where the imperative to realize oneself becomes an infinite obligation, to pathologies such as burnout and depression (p. 1).

Chapter 6: Habits and Virtues: Shaping Human Action

Introduction: The Formation of Character and Action

Human actions, as we explored in previous chapters, are not merely isolated events. They often stem from deeper, more stable dispositions within the person. Alongside passions, which are transient movements of the sensitive appetite, **habits (habitus)** represent another crucial set of principles that shape human conduct. Habits, in the Thomistic sense, are stable qualities that incline a person to act in a certain way. When these habits dispose one to act well, in accordance with reason and towards the true good, they are called **virtues**. This chapter will examine the nature of habits and virtues according to St. Thomas Aquinas, exploring their acquisition, function, and classification. We will then contrast these classical insights with modern psychological and neuroscientific perspectives. Finally, the chapter will address a profound modern challenge: the systematic inversion of vice into virtue, analyzing how contemporary economic and technological systems actively cultivate habits ordered not toward the common good, but toward profit and control, thereby reshaping the very meaning of a "good" life.

6.1. The Nature of Habit (*Habitus*)

St. Thomas Aquinas defines habit (habitus) as "a quality difficult to change, by which an agent whose nature it is to be thus or otherwise disposed, is well or ill disposed, either in regard to himself or in regard to another." (*ST*, I-II, q. 49, art. 1, co.). It is a stable disposition that perfects or corrupts a power of the soul, inclining it to act readily and consistently in a particular manner.

Key characteristics of habit include:

- **Quality:** Habit is a type of quality, one of Aristotle's categories, which characterizes a substance in a relatively permanent way.[182]
- **Stability:** It is "not readily changed," distinguishing it from mere transient dispositions.[183]
- **Disposition to Well-being or Ill-being:** Habits dispose their possessor well or ill, either in their own being (entitative habits) or in their operations (operative habits).[184]

Aquinas distinguishes between:

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[182] Cf. Aristotle, *Categories*, Ch. 8 (8b26-27); Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, Lectio 10.
[183] Cf. ST I-II, q. 49, art. 1.
[184] Cf. ST I-II, q. 49, art. 2, ad 3.

- **Entitative Habits:** These are habits that dispose the subject well or ill in regard to its own being or nature. Health and beauty are examples, primarily residing in the body, though influenced by the soul.[185]
- **Operative Habits:** These are habits that dispose a power of the soul to act well or ill. Most virtues and vices fall into this category. These are the habits primarily relevant to moral theology, as they shape human actions.[186]

Operative habits are crucial because human beings have powers (like intellect and will) that are initially indeterminate with respect to many possible operations. A habit inclines these powers to act in specific ways, giving a certain ease, consistency, and even pleasure to the action.[187]

6.2. The Subject of Operative Habits

Habits reside in the powers of the soul. Aquinas argues that:

- **The Soul as Primary Subject:** The principal and primary subject of habits is the soul.[188] While the body can have certain dispositions (like health), even operative habits exercised through bodily members (like the skill of a musician) have their root in the soul's powers.[189]
- **Powers of the Soul, Not its Essence:** Habits are not in the essence of the soul itself, but in its various operative powers (intellect, will, sensitive appetites). This is because habits are ordered to action, and action proceeds from the powers of the soul.[190]
- **Intellect as Subject:** The intellect is the subject of intellectual habits such as understanding (intellectus of first principles), science (*scientia*), and wisdom (*sapientia*). These habits perfect the intellect in its operation of knowing truth.[191]
- **Will as Subject:** The will is the subject of moral habits, specifically the virtues (like justice) that perfect its choices in accordance with reason.[192] Indeed, Aquinas states that "habit is what one uses when one wills."[193]
- **Sensitive Appetites as Subject:** The sensitive appetites (concupiscible and irascible) can also be the subject of habits (moral virtues like temperance and fortitude) insofar as they are capable of being moved and ordered by reason and will. Animals, lacking reason, do not properly have habits in this moral

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[185] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 49, art. 4, ad 2 (on body as subject); q. 50, art. 1 (on health as an entitative habit or disposition).
[186] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 49, art. 3; q. 50, art. 2.
[187] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 5; q. 55, art. 1.
[188] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 1.
[189] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 3.
[190] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 2.
[191] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 4; q. 57.
[192] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 5; q. 56, art. 6.
[193] Aquinas quoting Augustine (Retract. i, 9), ST I-II, q. 50, art. 5, obj. 1.

sense, though they can acquire conditioned responses.[194]

6.3. The Cause of Operative Habits

Habits are primarily caused by repeated acts.

- **Repeated Acts:** Certain operative habits are formed in a man by repeated acts. In this way, for instance, a man develops a virtue or contracts a vice.[195] One act does not typically form a habit; rather, habits are regularly the product of repeated acts, not of one or two acts but of very many.[196] Through repetition, a power of the soul becomes more determined and disposed to act in a particular way.
- **Natural Dispositions:** Human nature itself, or an individual's temperament, can create a disposition towards certain habits, sometimes called "natural habits." However, these are more like predispositions that require acts to become fully formed habits.[197]
- **Infused Habits:** In addition to acquired habits, Aquinas discusses **infused habits**, which are directly produced in the soul by God without prior human acts. The theological virtues (faith, hope, charity) and the infused moral virtues are examples of such habits, given by grace to enable human beings to attain their supernatural end.[198] As Scripture says, "God filled him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding" (Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 15:5).

6.4. The Increase, Weakening, and Loss of Habits

- **Increase of Habits:** Habits increase when acts similar to those that caused them are performed with greater intensity or frequency. The increase is not merely an addition of acts, but a deeper rooting of the quality in the power, making the power more perfectly disposed to its act.[199] An act less intense than the habit itself may even diminish the habit.[200]
- **Weakening and Loss of Habits:**
  - **Directly Destroyed:** Some intellectual habits, like the understanding of first principles, cannot be directly destroyed as long as reason remains. However, habits like scientific knowledge can be lost through forgetting or being corrupted by error. Moral virtues can be destroyed by contrary sinful acts, which form a contrary habit (a vice).[201]
  - **Neglect:** Habits can also be weakened or lost through prolonged

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[194] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 50, art. 3.
[195] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 51, art. 2.
[196] Cf. ST I-II, q. 51, art. 3.
[197] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 51, art. 1.
[198] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 51, art. 4; q. 63, art. 1–3.
[199] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 52, art. 1 & 3.
[200] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 53, art. 3.
[201] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 53, art. 1-3.

cessation of their characteristic acts (disuse). For example, a musician may lose skill by neglecting practice.[202]

6.5. The Distinction of Habits

Habits are distinguished from one another based on:

- **Their Active Principles (Subject):** Habits are distinguished by the powers of the soul in which they reside (e.g., habits of the intellect vs. habits of the will or sensitive appetite).[203]
- **Their Nature and Formal Objects:** They are distinguished by their essential nature and, most importantly, by their formal objects or ends. For example, the habit of grammar has a different object than the habit of justice.[204] Thus, knowledge which aims at truth is distinguished from moral virtue which aims at moral goodness.[205]
- **Good vs. Bad Habits:** Habits are distinguished as good (virtues) or bad (vices) based on whether they dispose a power towards acts that are in conformity with reason and the agent's true good, or contrary to it.[206]

A habit is a single, simple quality, not a collection of other habits. While many habits can coexist in one subject, they remain distinct.[207]

6.6. Virtue: A Good Operative Habit

Virtue is a central concept in Thomistic ethics. Aquinas defines virtue as "a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us" (this last clause referring specifically to infused virtue, but the prior part is a general definition of virtue as a good habit).[208] More simply, "virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power." (ST I-II, q. 55, art. 1, co.). For human beings, virtue is "a habit that is a principle of good action." (ST I-II, q. 55, art. 3, co.).

Key aspects of virtue according to Aquinas:

- **Operative Habit:** Virtue is an operative habit; it has to do with doing, not being.[209] It perfects a power for its proper operation.
- **Good Habit:** Virtue makes its subject good, and makes the subject's work

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[202] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 54, art. 1 & 3.
[203] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 54, art. 2, based on the distinction of the soul's powers.
[204] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 54, art. 2.
[205] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 54, art. 2.
[206] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 54, art. 3.
[207] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 54, art. 4.
[208] This definition is similar to one often attributed to Augustine and used by Aquinas, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 55, art. 4, obj. 1. The phrase "which God works in us, without us" refers specifically to infused virtues.
[209] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 55, art. 2.

good.[210] It disposes one to act in accordance with right reason.

- **Excellence of Reason:** Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that moral virtues consist in a mean (*in medio stat virtus*) determined by reason, between extremes of excess and defect in passions and actions.[211] However, when we consider moral virtue in relation to reason, which is its measure and rule, then virtue does not consist in a mean, but rather in an extreme. A perfection is an extreme in the order of excellence.[212] The mean is not one of mediocrity but of perfection according to reason.
- **Interconnection of Moral Virtues:** Perfect moral virtues are interconnected, particularly through prudence, which is the intellectual virtue that guides moral action. One cannot have perfect fortitude without prudence, nor prudence without the moral virtues that rectify the appetites.[213]

Aquinas classifies virtues into:

- **Intellectual Virtues:** These perfect the intellect for the knowledge of truth. They include:
  - **Understanding (Intellectus):** The habit of grasping first principles (e.g., the principle of non-contradiction). (*ST* I-II, q. 57, art. 2).
  - **Science (Scientia):** The habit of drawing conclusions from principles in a particular field of knowledge. (*ST* I-II, q. 57, art. 2).
  - **Wisdom (Sapientia):** The habit of knowing the highest causes and ordering all things in their light; it considers the very highest cause, God. (*ST* I-II, q. 57, art. 2).
  - **Art (Ars):** Right reason concerning things to be made (*recta ratio factibilium*). (*ST* I-II, q. 57, art. 3).
  - **Prudence (Prudentia):** Right reason concerning things to be done (*recta ratio agibilium*). It is an intellectual virtue in its subject (the practical intellect) but moral in its matter, as it guides the moral virtues. (*ST* I-II, q. 57, art. 4-5).
- **Moral Virtues:** These perfect the appetitive powers (will and sensitive appetites) to act in accordance with reason. The four principal or **cardinal virtues** are:
  - **Prudence:** (As above, it directs the other moral virtues).
  - **Justice:** Perfects the will; the habit of rendering to each person their due. (*ST* II-II, q. 58, art. 1).
  - **Fortitude (Courage):** Perfects the irascible appetite to face dangers and endure hardships reasonably, especially in pursuit of a difficult good. (*ST*

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[210] Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* II, 6 (1106b36). Quoted by Aquinas, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 55, art. 3.
[211] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 55, art. 1; q. 64, art. 1.
[212] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 64, art. 1, ad 1.
[213] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 58, art. 4-5; q. 65, art. 1.

II-II, q. 123, art. 1-2).
- **Temperance:** Perfects the concupiscible appetite to moderate the desire for sensible pleasures according to reason. (*ST* II-II, q. 141, art. 1).
- **Theological Virtues:** These are infused by God and direct humans to their supernatural end, union with God. They are:
  - **Faith:** The habit by which the intellect assents to divine truths revealed by God, on the authority of God revealing. (*ST* II-II, q. 4, art. 1).
  - **Hope:** The habit by which the will confidently expects eternal life (beatitude) and the means to attain it from God. (*ST* II-II, q. 17, art. 1).
  - **Charity (Love):** The habit by which we love God for His own sake above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. It is the form of all other virtues, directing them to the ultimate end. (*ST* II-II, q. 23, art. 1, 8).

6.7. Habits and Virtues in Psychology and Neuroscience: A Comparative View

The Thomistic concepts of habit and virtue, as stable dispositions shaping thought and action, find significant parallels and points of exploration in contemporary psychology and neuroscience. Both passions (as discussed in Chapter 5) and habits are recognized as crucial principles of action in human beings, with habits representing more enduring and ingrained patterns.

- **Psychological Perspectives on Habits and Virtues:**
  - **Habit Formation and Automaticity:** Modern psychology extensively studies habit formation as a process of learning through repetition, where behaviors become increasingly automatic and cue-dependent, requiring less conscious deliberation.[214] This aligns with Aquinas's view of habits being formed by repeated acts and leading to promptness in action. The concept of "overlearning" a skill until it becomes "second nature" resonates with operative habits.
  - **Character Strengths and Virtues (Positive Psychology):** The field of positive psychology has revived interest in virtues and character strengths. Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification of 24 character strengths grouped under six core virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, transcendence) provides a contemporary empirical framework that echoes classical virtue ethics, including Thomistic categories.[215] These are understood to be as learnable traits that contribute to well-being and flourishing.

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[214] Cf. Wood, W., Rünger, D., "Psychology of Habit." *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (2016) 289–314.
[215] Cf. Peterson, C., Seligman, M. E. P., *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004).

- ○ **Self-Regulation and Willpower:** The capacity for self-regulation, resisting immediate temptations for long-term goals, is a key area of research. This can be understood as related to virtues like temperance and fortitude, and involves the executive functions of the brain. Concepts like "ego depletion" suggest that willpower is a limited resource, though this is debated.[216]
  - ○ **Implicit Processes and Habits:** Much research highlights the role of implicit or unconscious habits in guiding daily behavior, often outside of conscious awareness or deliberate choice.[217] This challenges an overly rationalistic view of action but can be reconciled with Aquinas if habits are understood as shaping the very way reason apprehends and the will inclines, even pre-deliberatively.
- ● **Neuroscientific Perspectives on Habits and Virtues:**
  - ○ **Neural Basis of Habit Learning:** Neuroscience has identified specific brain circuits involved in habit formation, particularly involving the basal ganglia (especially the dorsal striatum). As a behavior becomes habitual, control shifts from more goal-directed systems involving the prefrontal cortex to these more automatic striatal circuits.[218] This provides a neural substrate for the transition from deliberative action to habitual action described by Aquinas.
  - ○ **Neuroplasticity and Virtue:** The brain's capacity for neuroplasticity—its ability to change its structure and function in response to experience—underpins the formation of habits and, potentially, virtues. Repeated practice of virtuous actions could lead to lasting changes in neural pathways, making such actions easier and more natural, akin to Aquinas's notion of virtue as a stable disposition.[219]
  - ○ **Executive Functions and Prudence:** The prefrontal cortex, crucial for executive functions like planning, working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibition, is heavily implicated in what Aquinas would call prudence—the capacity for right reason about things to be done.[220] Damage to these areas often results in impaired judgment and decision-making.
  - ○ **Mirror Neurons and Empathy (related to virtues like Justice and Charity):** The discovery of mirror neurons, which fire both when an animal acts and when it observes the same action performed by another, has been linked to empathy, social understanding, and imitation learning, which

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[216] Cf. Baumeister, R. F., Vohs, K. D., Tice, D. M., "The Strength Model of Self-Control." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16 (2007), 351–355.

[217] Cf. Cushman, F., "Action, Outcome, and Value: A Dual-System Framework for Morality." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 17 (2014) 273-292.

[218] Cf. Graybiel, A. M., "Habits, Rituals, and the Evaluative Brain." *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 31 (2008) 359–387.

[219] See Doidge, N., The Brain That Changes Itself (Penguin Books: London, 2007).

[220] Cf. Fuster, J. M., *Cortex and Mind: Unifying Cognition* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003).

are relevant for the development of social virtues.[221]

6.8. The Inversion of Virtue: How Private Vices Became Public Virtues

A profound challenge to the classical understanding of virtue comes from the "invention of the economy" as an autonomous sphere of life with its own moral logic.[222] This modern turn, famously captured in Bernard Mandeville's maxim "private vices, public benefits," proposed a revolutionary idea: habits traditionally seen as vices, such as avarice (greed) and luxury (unrestrained consumption), could be harnessed as engines of public prosperity. In this framework, the relentless pursuit of self-interest is no longer a moral failing to be corrected by temperance and justice, but is recast as a civic virtue—the driving force of innovation, employment, and national wealth. This represents a fundamental philosophical shift where the *telos* of human action is no longer the perfection of the person in accordance with right reason, but the unlimited accumulation of capital and economic growth.

The neoliberal "psychopolitics" analyzed by thinkers like Byung-Chul Han extends this inversion to the level of personal habit.[223] The modern subject is encouraged to become an "entrepreneur of the self," internalizing the logic of the market as a primary moral duty.[224] Here, the vice of pride is transformed into the "virtue" of personal branding; the vice of restlessness becomes the "virtue" of perpetual optimization and productivity; and the vice of envy fuels the "virtue" of competitive consumption. Digital platforms within the "hypnocracy" are the new training grounds for these habits, creating feedback loops of desire and social comparison that cultivate vices under the guise of self-improvement. The outcome is the formation of stable, operative habits (vices) that dispose the person to act not for the common good or their own true flourishing, but for the good of a market system that profits from their psychic exhaustion and environmental degradation.

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[221] Cf. Rizzolatti, G., Sinigaglia, C. . *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008).
[222] This concept is central to the work of Serge Latouche, particularly in *L'invention de l'économie* (Albain Michel: Paris, 2005), which critiques the modern elevation of the economic sphere above all other forms of social life.
[223] Cf. Han. *Psychopolitics*.
[224] Han describes how the neoliberal subject becomes an "entrepreneur of its own self" (p. 2), internalizing the logics of productivity and optimization.

6.9. Conclusion: Shaping a Life of Excellence

Habits and virtues are fundamental to the human moral life, acting as stable principles that shape our character and guide our actions. St. Thomas Aquinas's comprehensive analysis reveals virtues as good habits that perfect our intellect and will, and the other powers of the soul, enabling us to live righteously and achieve our true end. This classical framework, however, is radically challenged by a modern economic ethos that strategically inverts this moral order. It has successfully reframed traditional vices like greed and endless desire as public virtues, the very engines of a prosperous society.

This inversion has now been weaponized by the digital "hypnocracy," which cultivates habits of self-exploitation and compulsive consumption under the guise of self-optimization and personal expression. The Thomistic understanding of virtue as a good operative habit ordered to the common good thus becomes more than a historical curiosity; it is an essential tool for critique. It allows us to diagnose how modern systems form habits in us that are ordered not toward our flourishing, but toward profit, and it calls us to the difficult work of cultivating true virtues in defiance of a culture that celebrates their opposite.

Chapter 7: The Cardinal Virtues: Hinges of the Moral Life

Introduction: The Foundation of Moral Excellence

In the previous chapter, we explored the nature of habits and virtues generally. Now, we turn our attention to a specific and foundational set of moral virtues known as the **cardinal virtues**. The term "cardinal" derives from the Latin word *cardo*, meaning "hinge," signifying that these four virtues—Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance—are the principal virtues upon which the door of the moral life swings.[225] St. Gregory the Great noted that "the whole structure of good works is built upon the four cardinal virtues."[226] This chapter will **investigate** each of these virtues in detail, drawing primarily from the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. We will examine their specific functions, the powers of the soul they perfect, their integral and potential parts, and crucially, how they are interconnected. Finally, we will consider how these classical virtues resonate with, and are illuminated by, contemporary perspectives from psychology and neuroscience.

7.1. Prudence (*Prudentia*): Right Reason in Action

Prudence is the intellectual virtue that perfects the practical intellect, enabling it to discern the true good in specific circumstances and to choose the right means of achieving that good.[227] It is "right reason applied to action" (*recta ratio agibilium*).[228] As the Book of Proverbs states, "the prudent man looks where he is going" (Proverbs 14:15), and St. Peter exhorts, "Keep sane and sober for your prayers" (1 Peter 4:7).

Aquinas, following Aristotle, calls prudence *auriga virtutum*—the charioteer of the virtues—because it guides the other moral virtues by setting their rule and measure.[229] It is not to be confused with timidity, fear, or cunning duplicity. Rather, it is the virtue that "immediately guides the judgment of conscience," enabling the prudent person to determine and direct their conduct according to that judgment, applying moral principles to particular cases without error and overcoming doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid (*CCC* 1806).

Shawn Floyd, discussing Aquinas's moral philosophy, notes that to act well, "we need to make good judgments about how we should behave. This is precisely

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[225] Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q. 61, art. 1. The "hinge" analogy is traditional.
[226] St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, II, 76.
[227] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 57, art. 4-5.
[228] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 5 (1140b 4-5, 20-21). Aquinas adopts this definition, *ST* II-II, q. 47, art. 2.
[229] ST II-II, q. 47, art. 6. The term auriga virtutum is classical.

the sort of habit associated with prudence."[230] Prudence requires a twofold knowledge: (1) knowledge of general moral principles and (2) knowledge of the particular, contingent circumstances in which action is required, for "actions are about singular matters."[231] Thus, prudence involves not merely applying universal rules, but, as Thomas Hibbs explains, "the appraisal of concrete, contingent circumstances" and the ability to "grasp what is pertinent and to assess what ought to be done in complex circumstances."[232]

Prudence does not establish the ultimate end of human action (which is the good, predetermined by human nature and ultimately God), nor does it desire that end (which is the role of the will and the moral virtues that rectify the appetites). Instead, prudence "illuminates for us the course of action deemed most appropriate for achieving our antecedently established telos."[233] Aquinas identifies three principal acts of prudence:

1. **Deliberation or Counsel (*consilium*):** Inquiring about the available and suitable means to the end. (*ST* II-II, q. 47, art. 8; q. 49, art. 5).
2. **Judgment (*iudicium*):** Determining the proper means for achieving the end based on the deliberation. (*ST* II-II, q. 47, art. 8; q. 51, art. 2).
3. **Command (*praeceptum* or *imperium*):** Applying that judgment, directing the execution of the chosen means. This is the principal act of prudence. (*ST* II-II, q. 47, art. 8).

Prudence also has several **integral parts**, which are like its components or necessary conditions:

- **Memory (*memoria*):** Accurate recall of past experiences, true to reality.
- **Understanding (*intelligentia*):** Grasp of first principles and the nature of the particular situation.
- **Docility (*docilitas*):** Open-mindedness to learn from others and accept wise counsel.
- **Shrewdness (*solertia*):** Quick-wittedness in discovering the right means, especially in unexpected situations.
- **Reason (*ratio*):** The ability to research, compare alternatives, and draw conclusions.
- **Foresight (*providentia*):** The capacity to anticipate future consequences and direct actions towards the goal.
- **Circumspection (*circumspectio*):** The ability to consider all relevant

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[230] Floyd, S. "Thomas Aquinas: Moral Philosophy." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[231] *ST* II-II, q. 47, art. 3.
[232] Hibbs, T. S., *Virtue's Splendor: Wisdom, Prudence, and the Human Good* (Fordham University Press: New York, 2001) 92.
[233] Floyd, "Thomas Aquinas: Moral Philosophy." IEP. Paraphrasing ST II-II, q. 47, art. 6.

circumstances.

- **Caution (cautio):** Taking care to avoid obstacles and evils that might impede the good action.

These are detailed in *ST* II-II, q. 48, art. 1 (implicit); q. 49, arts. 1-8. Failure in these can lead to imprudent acts due to precipitation, thoughtlessness, or inconstancy.[234]

7.2. Temperance (*Temperantia*): Moderation of Desires

Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods, especially those associated with the sense of touch, namely the pleasures of food, drink, and sex.[235] It perfects the **concupiscible appetite**, restraining it according to the order of reason.[236]

Aquinas emphasizes that temperance does not eradicate or demonize bodily pleasure. Physical pleasure, resulting from natural operations, is not intrinsically evil.[237] Rather, the purpose of temperance is to refine the way we enjoy bodily pleasures, creating a proper sense of moderation with respect to what is pleasurable. When passions are not excessive, a person can more easily subordinate themselves to reason. "Sensible and bodily goods... are not in opposition to reason, but are subject to it as instruments which reason employs in order to attain its proper end" (*ST* II-II, q. 141, art. 3, ad 2).

As a cardinal virtue, temperance has several **potential parts** or subsidiary virtues that share its mode of restraint concerning various insatiable human passions:

- **Abstinence:** Moderation in food. (*ST* II-II, q. 146).
- **Sobriety:** Moderation in drink. (*ST* II-II, q. 149).
- **Chastity:** Moderation of sexual desire according to right reason. (*ST* II-II, q. 151).
- **Humility:** Restrains the immoderate desire for one's own excellence, keeping it within right bounds. (*ST* II-II, q. 161, art. 1-2). Aquinas argues this is part of temperance because "whatever virtues restrain or suppress, and the actions which moderate the impetuosity of the passions, are considered parts of temperance" (*ST* II-II, q. 143, art. 1, regarding modesty as a general part of temperance, under which humility can be classed).
- **Meekness (or Mildness):** Moderates anger. (*ST* II-II, q. 157).

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[234] These "integral parts" are detailed in *ST* II-II, q. 49 (for prudence) and q. 48 (for its quasi-integral part, *euboulia* or good counsel).
[235] Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 141, art. 1.
[236] Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 60, art. 2 & 5.
[237] Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 141, art. 4.

- **Clemency:** Moderates the desire to punish. (*ST* II-II, q. 157, art. 1, ad 3, relates it to meekness).
- **Studiousness:** Moderates the desire for knowledge, curbing vain curiosity and directing the pursuit of knowledge to its proper end. (*ST* II-II, q. 166-167).

7.3. Fortitude (*Fortitudo*): Courage in the Face of Difficulty

Fortitude, or courage, is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good (*ST* II-II, q. 123, a. 1). It perfects the **irascible appetite**, enabling one to overcome or endure dangers and hardships, especially the fear of death in defense of the good, according to the order of reason (*ST*, II-II, q. 123, a 4 & 6).

Fortitude moderates the passion of fear, preventing it from overwhelming reason when one ought to endure difficulties, and it also curbs recklessness or unreasonable daring (*ST* II-II, q. 123, a. 3). Fear itself is not intrinsically evil; "there are some things that we should fear, like an untimely death [in certain contexts] or a bad reputation" (*ST* II-II, q. 125, a. 3). Fortitude intervenes when fear would prevent us from doing what reason dictates as good.

The principal act of fortitude is twofold: to attack (audacia - daring) when appropriate, and more primarily, to endure (patientia - endurance) hardships and dangers well (*ST* II-II, q. 123, art. 6). Those with fortitude exhibit several related virtues or **potential parts**:

- **Magnanimity (Greatness of Soul):** Striving for great and honorable deeds worthy of great honor. (*ST* II-II, q. 129).
- **Magnificence:** The disposition to undertake great and costly works for the common good or the honor of God. (*ST* II-II, q. 134).
- **Patience:** Enduring present evils without being broken by sorrow. (*ST* II-II, q. 136).
- **Perseverance:** Persisting in a difficult good over a long period, despite weariness or discouragement. (*ST* II-II, q. 137).
- **Confidence:** A "strength of hope" arising from a firm conviction that one can overcome difficulties, often with divine assistance. (*ST* II-II, q. 129, art. 6, ad 2, links to magnanimity).

7.4. Justice (*Iustitia*): Rendering What is Due

Justice is the moral virtue that perfects the **will**, consisting in the constant and firm will to give their due (*ius*) to God and neighbor.[238] Unlike the other cardinal virtues that primarily concern the agent's own passions and actions in relation to

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[238] Cf. ST II-II, q. 58, art. 1.

themselves, justice is intrinsically ordered to others (*ad alterum*). (*ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 1 & 2).

Aquinas, following Aristotle and Roman Law traditions, discusses several kinds of justice:

- **Legal or General Justice:** This directs the acts of all virtues to the common good of the community. It concerns our obligations to the community as a whole, ensuring that individual actions contribute to societal welfare. (*ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 5). While other virtues like prudence, temperance, and courage perfect the individual, when these virtues are "informed" by legal justice, they also contribute to the common good. (*ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 6).
- **Particular Justice:** This governs our interactions with individual persons, directing us to the good of individual neighbors and colleagues. It ensures fairness in exchanges and distributions. (*ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 7). Particular justice has two species:
  - **Commutative Justice:** Regulates exchanges between individuals ("mutual dealings"). It seeks an arithmetic equality, ensuring that what is exchanged is of equal value (e.g., in buying and selling, paying back debts). "One person should pay back to the other just so much as he has become richer out of that which belonged to the other." (*ST* II-II, q. 61, art. 2, co.).
  - **Distributive Justice:** Regulates the distribution of common goods, honors, and burdens by a community or its authority to its members according to a "due proportion" based on merit, dignity, or need. It seeks a geometric equality. (*ST* II-II, q. 5618, a. 1 & 2). For example, "it would be unjust if laborers are paid equal wages for doing an unequal amount of work." (*ST* II-II, q. 61, a. 2).

Justice has many **potential parts** or allied virtues that share its characteristic of being ordered to another, though they may not perfectly fulfill the definition of justice (which involves a strict debt):

- **Religion:** Renders to God the worship and honor due to Him as the first principle of all things. (*ST* II-II, q. 81).
- **Piety:** Renders due honor and service to parents and one's country. (*ST* II-II, q. 101).
- **Observance:** Shows honor and deference to those in positions of dignity. (*ST* II-II, q. 102).
- **Truthfulness (Veracity):** Showing oneself to others as one truly is, in word and deed. (*ST* II-II, q. 109).
- **Gratitude:** Acknowledging and repaying benefits received. (*ST* II-II, q. 106).
- **Affability (Friendliness):** Behaving agreeably with others in social intercourse.

(*ST* II-II, q. 114).

- **Liberality:** Right use of riches, especially in giving to others. (*ST* II-II, q. 117).
- **(Vindication/Just Punishment):** While Aquinas discusses vengeance in the context of responding to injury, it must be ordered by justice and charity, aimed at correcting the offender or restoring order, not fueled by hatred. (*ST* II-II, q. 108).

7.5. The Connection of the Virtues

Aquinas, again following Aristotle, argues for the **connection of the moral virtues**, especially when they are perfect.[239] This means that one cannot possess one moral virtue in its perfect state without possessing the others. The primary reason for this connection is **prudence**.

- There is no moral virtue without prudence, because moral virtues are elective habits, meaning they involve making good choices about the means to an end. Good choice requires right deliberation and judgment, which are acts of prudence.[240]
- Conversely, there is no prudence without moral virtues, because prudence requires that the agent be rightly disposed towards the true ends of human life. The moral virtues rectify the appetites (will and sensitive appetites), inclining them towards these good ends. If the appetites are disordered by vice, they will present false goods to the intellect, thereby corrupting the judgment of prudence.[241]

This creates a "virtuous circle": moral virtues set the right end (intentionally), and prudence determines the right means (electively). In the order of intention towards the end, moral virtue precedes prudence. In the order of choosing the means, moral virtue follows prudence, which determines the mean. However, because the right intention towards the end is itself a product of well-formed moral virtue, prudence ultimately has a foundational primacy as the determinant principle of a virtue as such—it shapes the very form of all moral virtues by directing them with right reason.

7.6. Contemporary Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on the Cardinal Virtues

The Thomistic understanding of the cardinal virtues, while ancient, finds intriguing parallels and areas of investigation within contemporary psychology and neuroscience.

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[239] Cf. ST I-II, q. 65, art. 1.
[240] Cf. *Ib*.
[241] Cf. ST I-II, q. 58, art. 4-5.

Prudence (Practical Wisdom):

- **Psychology:** Prudence aligns with concepts of practical wisdom, sound judgment, and effective decision-making. Research in cognitive psychology on **executive functions** (planning, working memory, cognitive flexibility, inhibition) details the cognitive processes essential for prudent action.[242] Theories of wisdom emphasize reflective insight, understanding of context, and the ability to balance multiple perspectives in making life choices.[243] The "integral parts" of prudence like memory, foresight, and docility are all active areas of psychological research.
- **Neuroscience:** The **prefrontal cortex (PFC)** is heavily implicated in executive functions and thus in the neural basis of prudence. Damage to the PFC can lead to impulsive behavior, poor planning, and an inability to weigh future consequences, all deficits in prudence.[244] Neuroimaging studies of complex decision-making and moral reasoning often highlight PFC activation.

Justice (Fairness, Prosocial Behavior):

- **Psychology:** Moral psychology investigates the development of justice reasoning (e.g., Kohlberg's stages).[245] Social psychology examines concepts like fairness, equity, altruism, and cooperation. Research on **empathy** and **perspective-taking** explores psychological mechanisms that can motivate just and prosocial behavior.[246] The sense of fairness appears early in development and is a powerful motivator in social interactions.
- **Neuroscience:** Neuroeconomic studies using tasks like the Ultimatum Game have explored brain responses to fairness and unfairness, implicating regions like the **anterior insula** (in response to unfair offers) and the **dorsolateral prefrontal cortex** (in overriding self-interest for fairness).[247] The neural correlates of empathy involve networks including the anterior cingulate cortex and insula, suggesting a biological basis for our capacity to respond to the needs and states of others.[248]

Fortitude (Courage, Resilience):

- **Psychology:** Courage is studied in positive psychology as a character strength enabling individuals to overcome fear and adversity to achieve goals.

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[242] See Fuster, J. M. (2003). Cortex and Mind: Unifying Cognition.
[243] Cf. Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (1990). Wisdom: Its Nature, Origins, and Development.
[244] Cf. Damasio, A. R. (1994). Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain.
[245] Cf. Kohlberg, L. (1981). Essays on Moral Development, Vol. I: The Philosophy of Moral Development.
[246] Cf. Eisenberg, N., & Mussen, P. H. (1989). The Roots of Prosocial Behavior in Children.
[247] Cf. Sanfey, A. G., et al. (2003). "The Neural Basis of Economic Decision-Making in the Ultimatum Game." Science, 300(5626), 1755–1758.
[248] Cf. Decety, J., & Jackson, P. L. (2004). "The Functional Architecture of Human Empathy." Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews, 3(2), 71-100.

Concepts like **resilience** (the ability to bounce back from hardship), **grit** (perseverance and passion for long-term goals), and **psychological hardiness** are modern psychological constructs that map onto aspects of fortitude.[249] Research also examines fear conditioning and extinction, relevant to how fortitude manages fear.

- **Neuroscience:** The **amygdala** is central to fear processing. Fortitude involves the PFC's ability to regulate amygdala activity, allowing for reasoned action despite fear.[250] Studies on stress and coping mechanisms investigate how the brain responds to and manages threatening situations, with neurotransmitter systems like the HPA axis playing a key role.

Temperance (Self-Control, Moderation):

- **Psychology:** Temperance relates to the extensively studied concept of **self-control** or **self-regulation**—the ability to override or alter one's inner responses and to interrupt undesired behavioral tendencies.[251] Research on delayed gratification (e.g., the "marshmallow test") highlights the importance of self-control for long-term success.[252] Addiction research investigates the breakdown of self-control in the face of powerful desires.
- **Neuroscience:** Self-control involves a complex interplay between the PFC (providing top-down control) and subcortical regions associated with reward and desire (e.g., ventral striatum, limbic system).[253] Neuroimaging studies have shown that engaging in self-control tasks activates PFC regions, and deficits in these regions are often linked to impulsivity and addiction.

While scientific approaches describe mechanisms and correlates, Thomistic virtue ethics provides a normative and teleological framework, understanding these capacities as perfectible habits ordered towards human flourishing and, ultimately, beatitude. The modern studies can, however, illuminate the material conditions and psychological processes through which these virtues are expressed and developed.

7.7. Conclusion: Living a Virtuous Life

The four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—serve as the essential pillars for a morally good and flourishing human life. Prudence guides our actions with right reason, justice ensures fairness

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[249] Cf. Duckworth, A. L., et al. (2007). "Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-Term Goals." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92(6), 1087–1101.

[250] Cf. LeDoux, J. E. (2015). Anxious: Using the Brain to Understand and Treat Fear and Anxiety.

[251] Cf. Baumeister, R. F., & Tierney, J. (2011). Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength.

[252] Cf. Mischel, W., Shoda, Y., & Rodriguez, M. L. (1989). "Delay of Gratification in Children." Science, 244(4907), 933–938.

[253] Cf. Heatherton, T. F., & Wagner, D. D. (2011). "Cognitive Neuroscience of Self-Regulation Failure." Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 15(3), 132–139.

in our dealings with others and God, fortitude strengthens us against difficulties, and temperance moderates our desires for pleasure. Their interconnectedness, particularly through the guiding role of prudence, highlights the holistic nature of the virtuous life.

While ancient in their formulation, these virtues find resonance in contemporary psychological and neuroscientific explorations of wisdom, fairness, resilience, and self-control. By understanding both the classical articulation of these excellences and modern scientific insights into their underlying mechanisms, we can gain a richer appreciation for the enduring human quest to live rightly and achieve our full potential.

Chapter 8: The Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity

Introduction: Virtues Ordered to a Supernatural End

In our previous discussions, we explored human virtues as acquired habits that perfect our natural capacities for good action. However, Christian theology posits that human beings are called to an end that transcends their natural capabilities—a supernatural end consisting in the beatific vision of God. To attain this end, natural virtues are insufficient. Therefore, St. Thomas Aquinas discusses **infused virtues**, which are "directly produced by God in the operative faculties of a man,"[254] not through human effort but by divine grace, to elevate human activity to a divine level.[255]

Among these, the **theological virtues** are paramount because their object is God Himself, our ultimate supernatural end.[256] They are **Faith**, **Hope**, and **Charity**, providing the light for the mind and then rectitude for the will to orient the person toward a supernatural happiness.[257] This chapter will examine each of these theological virtues according to Aquinas and compare them with related psychological concepts. Finally, it will analyze how the ends and acts of these virtues are systematically intercepted and redirected by a new class of techno-ideological "legislators" who seek to replace our supernatural destiny with an immanent, technologically-mediated one.

8.1. Faith (*Fides*): Assent to Divine Truth

Faith is the first of the theological virtues. It is a supernatural virtue infused by God, by which the intellect, moved by the will, which is itself moved by God's grace, assents to divine truths on the authority of God who reveals them.[258]

- **Subject and Object:** Faith resides primarily in the **intellect**, as its act is to assent to truth. However, the **will** plays a crucial role because the truths of faith (e.g., the Trinity, the Incarnation) are not self-evident to reason; thus, the will commands the intellect's assent.[259] The formal object of faith is the **First Truth (Prima Veritas)**, which is God Himself. Its material object consists of all those truths God has revealed, which are beyond the grasp of unaided human reason.[260]

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[254] ST, I-II, q. 62, art. 1; q. 63, art. 3.
[255] Cf. ST I-II, q. 63, art. 2.
[256] Cf. Augustine, De Praedestinatione Sanctorum, V, 10.
[257] Cf. ST I-II, q. 62, art. 1.
[258] Cf. ST II-II, q. 1, art. 1; q. 4, art. 1.
[259] Cf. ST II-II, q. 2, art. 1 & 3; q. 6, art. 1.
[260] Cf. ST II-II, q. 1, art. 1; q. 1, art. 4.

- **Certainty and Obscurity:** The assent of faith is more certain than any natural knowledge because it rests on the infallible authority of God. However, from the perspective of the human knower, the objects of faith remain obscure, as they are not seen directly by the intellect in this life (*ST* II-II, q. 4, art. 8). Faith is thus "the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).
- **A Gift and a Human Act:** Faith is a divine gift, yet believing is also a genuinely human act, in which the intellect and will cooperate with God's grace.

8.2. Hope (*Spes*): Trust in Divine Assistance for Eternal Life

Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit (*CCC* §1813).

- **Subject and Object:** Hope resides in the **will** (the rational appetite), as it is a movement of desire towards a future good.[261] Its primary object is **eternal life** or beatitude—the perfect union with God. Its secondary object is the **divine assistance** (God's grace and omnipotence) necessary to attain this supernatural good, which is arduous and exceeds human capacity.[262]
- **Relationship with Faith and Charity:** Hope presupposes faith, for one cannot hope for union with God unless one believes in God and His promises. It is also intrinsically linked to charity; while hope desires God as our good, charity loves God for His own sake.
- **Certainty and Merit:** Our confidence in hope rests not on our own accomplishments, but on the omnipotence and mercy of God. This hope actively encourages us to perform good works which, through grace, become meritorious. For Aquinas, a meritorious act is one that, while performed by our free will, is ultimately a fruit of God's grace, to which God in His goodness has chosen to attach the promise of a reward (*ST* I-II, q. 114, a. 1, 3). In this way, hope moves us to cooperate with grace, performing the very works that lead to the fulfillment of God's promise (*ST* II-II, q. 17, a. 1-2).

8.3. Charity (*Caritas*): Friendship with God and Love of Neighbor

Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for His own sake, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God.[263] It is the "queen of all virtues" and the "form" of all other virtues, meaning it directs their acts to the

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[261] Cf. ST II-II, q. 17, art. 1.
[262] Cf. ST II-II, q. 17, art. 2 & 6.
[263] Cf. ST II-II, q. 23, art. 1. This is the foundational definition of charity.

ultimate supernatural end.[264]

- **Nature as Friendship:** Aquinas describes charity as a kind of **friendship (amicitia)** between human beings and God.[265] This friendship is based on God communicating His own beatitude (His divine life) to us through grace, making us partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).[266]
- **Love of Neighbor:** The love of neighbor is an integral part of charity. We love our neighbors because they too are loved by God and are capable of sharing in God's beatitude. Thus, we love our neighbor "for God's sake."[267]
- **Effects of Charity:** The internal effects of charity are joy, peace, and mercy. The external effects are beneficence, almsgiving, and fraternal correction. (ST II-II, qq. 28-33).
- **Charity as the Form of the Virtues:** Charity is the "form" of all virtues because it orders them to the ultimate supernatural end. Without charity, other virtues lack their ultimate perfection and orientation towards our final end in God.[268]

8.4. Contemporary Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on Faith, Hope, and Love

While the theological virtues are supernatural, contemporary science investigates natural human capacities that bear some analogy to them.

- **Faith (Belief, Trust, Meaning-Making):** Psychology studies **belief formation**, **trust**, and the human search for **meaning**. Neuroscience investigates the neural correlates of **belief and certainty**, suggesting the involvement of networks associated with emotion and cognitive control.[269]
- **Hope (Optimism, Goal-Directedness, Resilience):** Psychology studies hope as a cognitive-motivational state involving goal-setting and agency.[270] Neuroscience links the anticipation of positive outcomes to the brain's **reward system** and motivational circuits involving dopamine.[271]
- **Charity (Love, Altruism, Empathy, Compassion):** Psychology studies

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[264] ST II-II, q. 23, art. 8.
[265] Cf. ST II-II, q. 23, art. 1.
[266] Cf. ST II-II, q. 23, art. 1.
[267] Cf. ST II-II, q. 25, art. 1; q. 26, art. 4.
[268] Cf. ST II-II, q. 23, art. 8, co. & ad 2.
[269] Cf. Harris, S., Sheth, S. A., & Cohen, M. S. (2008). "Functional Neuroimaging of Belief, Disbelief, and Uncertainty." Annals of Neurology, 63(2), 141–147.
[270] Cf. Snyder, C. R. (2002). "Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind." Psychological Inquiry, 13(4), 249–275.
[271] Cf. Knutson, B., & Greer, S. M. (2008). "Anticipatory affect: neural correlates and consequences for choice." Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 363(1511), 3771-3786.

attachment, **altruism**, **empathy**, and **compassion.**[272] Neuroscience has identified neural systems associated with these prosocial behaviors, involving the anterior cingulate cortex, insula, mirror neurons, and the neuropeptide **oxytocin.**[273]

These scientific studies illuminate the natural "raw material" that divine grace elevates and perfects through the theological virtues.

8.5. The Technological Interception of the Theological Virtues

The theological virtues face a unique and systematic challenge from the ideological project of tech elites, who function as the "new legislators of Silicon Valley."[274] This project, powered by AI and vast capital, does not merely distract from God but actively proposes a counterfeit spiritual end, intercepting the acts and objects of faith, hope, and charity.

- **Faith** in the First Truth is replaced by faith in technologically-mediated reality. Tech visionaries, wielding "oracular authority,"[275] demand an assent of the intellect not to divine revelation, but to their own ideological narratives—be it libertarianism, accelerationism, or transhumanism—disseminated through the "philosophical meme-grenades"[276] of their platforms. The object of belief shifts from God's infallible authority to the algorithm's curated truth, creating information bubbles that function as digital magisteria.
- **Hope** for eternal beatitude is supplanted by the promise of an immanent, technologically-achieved utopia. Instead of relying on divine assistance for salvation, humanity is told to place its trust in venture capital and engineered solutions for radical life extension, virtual existence, or escape from a supposedly doomed planet. Hope's supernatural horizon is collapsed into a worldly project of optimization and control.
- **Charity**, as friendship with God and neighbor, is perverted into quantified engagement. The neighbor ceases to be someone loved for God's sake and becomes a data point, a consumer, a follower, or an ideological opponent. The "common good" of shared beatitude is replaced by the network effect, and the mutual benevolence of *amicitia* is supplanted by the fleeting solidarity of digital tribes, all while serving the ultimate end of market expansion and shareholder value.

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[272] Cf. Reis, H. T., & Aron, A. (2008). "Love: What is it, why does it matter, and how does it operate?" Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3(1), 80-86.

[273] Cf. Zak, P. J., Stanton, A. A., & Ahmadi, S. (2007). "Oxytocin Increases Generosity in Humans." PLoS ONE, 2(11), e1128.

[274] Cf. Morozov, E. (2024, April 25). "Silicon Valley's New Legislators." The Ideas Letter. This article describes how tech elites use their financial and ideological power to reshape societal structures.

[275] *Ib.*

[276] *Ib.*

This techno-ideological project thus represents a direct spiritual competitor, systematically redirecting the human person's natural desire for truth, goodness, and permanence away from God and toward a digitally constructed immanence.

8.6. Conclusion: Living by God's Own Life

The theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity are the foundational principles of the Christian life, orienting the human person directly towards God as their ultimate end and source of perfect happiness. They are supernatural gifts that elevate and perfect human nature, enabling us to believe in God's revealed truths, trust in His promises of eternal life, and love Him and our neighbor for His sake.

This entire supernatural framework, however, is now confronted by a powerful secular eschatology promoted by the "new legislators" of the technological world. Their project offers a counterfeit faith in data, a counterfeit hope in computation, and a counterfeit charity of networked connectivity. By redirecting our ultimate concerns toward an immanent, solvable, and profitable horizon, they attempt to render the theological virtues obsolete. Understanding faith, hope, and charity is therefore no longer just an internal matter for theology; it is an essential tool for cultural and spiritual critique, allowing us to unmask the profound spiritual stakes of our age and to reaffirm that our destiny lies not in a machine, but in God.

Chapter 9: Vices and Sin: Turning from the Good

Introduction: The Nature of Moral Evil

Having explored the virtues that perfect human nature and orient it towards its ultimate end, we now turn to their opposites: vices and sin. If virtue is a good habit disposing one to act in accordance with reason and towards the true good, **vice** is a bad habit that inclines one to evil, away from reason and the true good. **Sin**, in turn, is a particular act—a thought, word, deed, or omission—contrary to the eternal law of God.[277] This chapter will **investigate** the Thomistic understanding of vices and sin, their sources, classifications, and consequences, and will conclude by considering contemporary psychological and neuroscientific perspectives on moral failings and harmful behaviors.

9.1. Vices: Disordered Habits

Vices, for St. Thomas Aquinas, are habits that corrupt the powers of the soul, turning the human person away from God, their ultimate end, and inclining them towards evil actions.[278] They are contrary to virtue not just by negation (absence of virtue) but by a positive disposition to act badly.

- **Sources of Vice:** Aquinas identifies several sources from which vices can arise:
  - **Ignorance:** Particularly voluntary or vincible ignorance, where one could and should know better. (*ST* I-II, q. 76).
  - **Unruled Passions:** When the sensitive appetites (passions) are not governed by reason and will, they can lead to disordered actions which, if repeated, form vices. (*ST* I-II, q. 77).
  - **Malice (Pure Malice):** Choosing evil knowingly and deliberately, not merely from passion or ignorance. This is considered more grave. (*ST* I-II, q. 78).
  - **The Demon**: While not a direct cause of sin in the sense of compelling the will, demonic influence can act on the imagination and senses to suggest evil and tempt. (ST I, q. 114). God can never be the cause of sin or moral disorder, though He permits it as a consequence of created freedom and may withdraw grace as a just consequence of sin, which can lead to further hardening.[279]
- **Capital Sins (or Deadly Sins):** Stemming from disordered self-love (*amor sui*)—what St. John called "concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the

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[277] See Augustine, Contra Faustum Manichaeum, XXII, 27; Aquinas, ST, I-II, q. 71, art. 6.
[278] Cf. ST I-II, q. 71, art. 1.
[279] Cf. ST I-II, q. 75, art. 4 (God as indirect cause of material element of sin, not its formal element of aversion from God).

eyes, and pride of life" (1 John 2:16)—are certain principal vices from which many others arise. St. Gregory the Great enumerated them, and Aquinas analyzes them as: **Vainglory (often linked with Pride), Envy, Wrath, Avarice (Greed), Sloth (Acedia), Gluttony, and Lust.**[280] They are called "capital" because they are heads or sources of other sins. From these, other capital sins arise, often more grave, hatred of God, for example, and despair, because man does not all at once reach complete perversity.

9.2. Sin: An Act Against Eternal Law

St. Augustine famously defined sin as "a deed, a word, or a desire in opposition to the eternal law."[281] Aquinas adopts and analyzes this definition, understanding sin not only in its causes (vices, temptations) but also as a specific type of human act.

- **Nature of Sin:** Sin is fundamentally a human act that is morally evil. It is a voluntary turning away from the good as determined by right reason and divine law, and consequently, a turning away from God, the ultimate end. Sins are distinguished specifically by their objects (the good they deviate from or the evil they embrace), rather than primarily by their opposition to virtues or precepts, though these are related.[282]
- **Mortal vs. Venial Sin:** Aquinas makes a crucial distinction between mortal and venial sin. He clarifies that "sin" is not a univocal term applied equally to both, but is found analogically in them.[283]
  - **Mortal Sin:** This is a grave offense against God that destroys charity (the supernatural life of the soul) and turns the person away from their ultimate end (God). It is "simply against the law" and, in itself, without God's grace and repentance, is irreparable by the sinner alone. It consists in choosing a created good in such a way that it entails a rejection of God as the ultimate end. Mortal sin deprives the soul of sanctifying grace, wounds human nature, and merits eternal punishment (separation from God) because, if unrepented, it represents a permanent turning away from God.[284] The gravity of mortal sins varies; sins directly against God (like apostasy, despair, hatred of God) are the worst.[285]
  - **Venial Sin:** This is a less serious offense that does not destroy charity or turn one completely away from the ultimate end, but involves a disorder in the pursuit of created goods or a failure to observe the due measure in

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[280] See ST I-II, q. 84, art. 4; St. Gregory the Great, Moralia in Job, XXXI, 45.
[281] See Augustine, Contra Faustum Manichaeum, XXII, 27. Cited by Aquinas, ST I-II, q. 71, art. 6.
[282] Cf. ST I-II, q. 72, art. 1
[283] Cf. ST I-II, q. 72, art. 5.
[284] Cf. ST I-II, q. 72, art. 5; q. 87, art. 3-4; q. 88, art. 1.
[285] Cf. ST I-II, q. 73, art. 2.

things ordained to the end. It is rather beside the law than against it, in the sense that it does not destroy the fundamental orientation to God but hinders progress towards Him. It is reparable and does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace, though it weakens charity, tarnishes that brightness given to the soul by acts of virtue, can lead imperceptibly to mortal sin if neglected, and merits temporal punishment (purification).[286]

- **Imperfection vs. Sin:** A feeble act of virtue, or an act that is good but lacks some desirable perfection or promptitude, is not itself a venial sin. It is a lack of greater good, not a choice of evil or a disorder in relation to the end.[287]

9.3. Original Sin

Original sin is specifically distinct from actual sin (mortal or venial acts we commit).

- **Nature:** It is the "sin of nature," a state of privation transmitted with human nature from the first parents. It is "voluntary in its cause," meaning it results from the voluntary sin of Adam, the head of the human race.[288]
- **Formal and Material Aspects:** Formally, original sin consists in the **privation of original justice and holiness**—the state of harmony with God, within the self, and with creation, in which humanity was first constituted. This privation means the will is no longer perfectly subject to God, and the lower appetites are no longer perfectly subject to reason.[289] Materially, this disorder manifests as **concupiscence**, an inclination to sensible pleasures and a disordered self-love that makes it difficult to attain virtue and avoid sin.[290]
- **Subject:** Original sin, as the privation of sanctifying grace, resides fundamentally in the **essence of the soul**, from which its disorder affects the soul's powers (intellect and will) and the sensitive appetites.[291]

9.4. Contemporary Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on Vices and Sin (Moral Failings)

While "sin" is a theological concept denoting an offense against God, and "vice" a moral-philosophical term for bad habits, contemporary psychology and neuroscience study behaviors and dispositions that overlap with these concepts, often under terms like moral failings, antisocial behavior, addiction, impulsivity, and character deficits.

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[286] Cf. ST I-II, q. 72, art. 5; q. 88, art. 2; q. 89, art. 1-2.
[287] Cf. ST I-II, q. 89, art. 3.
[288] Cf. ST I-II, q. 81, art. 1; q. 82, art. 1.
[289] Cf. ST I-II, q. 82, art. 3.
[290] Cf. *Ib.*
[291] Cf. ST I-II, q. 83, art. 1.

Vices (Bad Habits, Disordered Behaviors):

- **Psychology:**
  - **Bad Habits and Addiction:** Psychology extensively researches the formation of bad habits and the mechanisms of **addiction** (e.g., to substances, gambling, internet use). These are often characterized by compulsive behavior, loss of control, and continuation despite negative consequences, mirroring the way vices can enslave the will.[292] Learning theory explains how maladaptive behaviors can be reinforced.
  - **Impulsivity and Self-Control Failure:** Conditions like ADHD or generally low self-control are associated with difficulties in resisting immediate temptations for long-term goods, akin to failures in temperance or prudence.[293]
  - **Personality Disorders:** Certain personality disorders, such as **antisocial personality disorder** (often associated with lack of empathy, deceitfulness, and disregard for others' rights) or **narcissistic personality disorder** (grandiosity, lack of empathy, need for admiration), describe ingrained patterns of thought and behavior that have strong parallels with vices like injustice, pride, or severe forms of disordered self-love.[294]

- **Neuroscience:**
  - **Neurobiology of Addiction:** Research highlights dysregulation in the brain's **reward system** (especially dopamine pathways in the ventral striatum and prefrontal cortex) in addiction, leading to a disconnect between the "wanting" and "liking" of a substance or behavior.[295]
  - **Impulsivity and Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) Dysfunction:** Deficits in PFC function, the brain area crucial for executive control and inhibition, are often implicated in impulsive behaviors and difficulties with self-regulation, providing a neural correlate for failures in virtues like temperance or fortitude against temptation.[296]
  - **Empathy Deficits:** Conditions associated with a lack of empathy (e.g., psychopathy) show distinct neural patterns, often involving reduced activity in brain regions associated with emotional processing and

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[292] Cf. Koob, G. F., & Volkow, N. D. (2016). "Neurobiology of Addiction: A Neurocircuitry Analysis." The Lancet Psychiatry, 3(8), 760–773.

[293] Cf. Moffitt, T. E. (1993). "Adolescence-Limited and Life-Course-Persistent Antisocial Behavior." Psychological Review, 100(4), 674–701.

[294] Cf. American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.).

[295] Cf. Volkow, N. D., Wang, G. J., Fowler, J. S., & Tomasi, D. (2012). "Addiction circuitry in the human brain." Annual Review of Pharmacology and Toxicology, 52, 321-336.

[296] Cf. Bechara, A. (2005). "Decision making, impulse control and loss of willpower to resist drugs: a neurocognitive perspective." Nature Neuroscience, 8(11), 1458-1463.

understanding others' mental states (e.g., amygdala, ventromedial PFC).[297] This relates to failures in justice and charity.

Sin (Moral Transgressions, Harmful Acts):

- **Psychology:**
    - **Moral Disengagement:** Albert Bandura's theory of moral disengagement describes psychosocial maneuvers by which individuals can transgress their own moral standards without self-condemnation (e.g., moral justification, euphemistic labeling, minimizing consequences).[298] This sheds light on how people can commit acts Aquinas would deem sinful while rationalizing their behavior.
    - **Cognitive Dissonance:** Individuals experience discomfort when their actions contradict their beliefs, often leading them to change their beliefs or rationalize their actions to reduce this dissonance, which can perpetuate morally problematic behavior.[299]
    - **Development of Moral Reasoning & Behavior:** Theories like Kohlberg's stages of moral development describe how individuals' reasoning about right and wrong evolves, though moral reasoning doesn't always translate to moral behavior.[300] Factors like situational pressures, obedience to authority (Milgram experiments), and group conformity (Asch experiments) demonstrate how easily individuals can commit acts they might otherwise consider wrong.
    - **Guilt and Shame:** Psychology studies the adaptive and maladaptive roles of moral emotions like guilt (focused on specific behavior, often leading to reparative action) and shame (focused on the self, often leading to withdrawal or defensiveness) in response to transgressions.[301]
- **Neuroscience:**
    - **Neural Correlates of Moral Judgment:** Neuroimaging studies investigating moral dilemmas (e.g., trolley problems) reveal the involvement of brain networks associated with both emotional processing (e.g., amygdala, ventromedial PFC) and cognitive control/deliberation (e.g., dorsolateral PFC).[302] This suggests an interplay of "gut feelings" and

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[297] Cf. Blair, R. J. R. (2007). "The Amygdala and Ventromedial Prefrontal Cortex in Morality and Psychopathy." Trends in Cognitive Sciences, 11(9), 387–392.
[298] Cf. Bandura, A. (1999). "Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities." Personality and Social Psychology Review, 3(3), 193–209.
[299] Cf. Festinger, L. (1957). A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.
[300] Cf. Kohlberg, L. (1981). Essays on Moral Development, Vol. I: The Philosophy of Moral Development. For critiques of the reasoning-behavior link, see Haidt, J. (2001). "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail."
[301] Cf. Tangney, J. P., Stuewig, J., & Mashek, D. J. (2007). "Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior." Annual Review of Psychology, 58, 345–372.
[302] Cf. Greene, J. D., Sommerville, R. B., Nystrom, L. E., Darley, J. M., & Cohen, J. D. (2001). "An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment." Science, 293(5537), 2105–2108.

reason in moral evaluation.
  ○ **Antisocial Behavior:** Neurobiological factors, including genetic predispositions and brain abnormalities (e.g., reduced PFC volume or activity, amygdala dysfunction), have been associated with persistent antisocial behavior and psychopathy.[303]

Original Sin/Concupiscence (Innate Human Tendencies):

While "original sin" is a theological doctrine, some psychological and evolutionary perspectives discuss innate human tendencies that can lead to conflict and selfishness, alongside prosocial tendencies.

- **Evolutionary Psychology:** Suggests that some traits like self-interest, in-group bias, and aggression may have had adaptive value in ancestral environments, even if they contribute to morally problematic behavior in modern contexts.[304]

- **Developmental Psychology:** Observes the emergence of both selfish and altruistic behaviors in early childhood, suggesting a complex interplay of innate predispositions and social learning in the development of moral character.[305]

  These naturalistic explanations of human fallibility or "disordered inclinations" (concupiscence in Thomistic terms) do not equate to the theological doctrine of original sin as a privation of grace and inherited state, but they do point to inherent challenges in consistently acting well, which theology addresses with concepts of grace and redemption.

Comparison with Thomistic View:

Contemporary sciences offer valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying maladaptive habits, harmful behaviors, and the psychological processes involved in moral decision-making and its failures. They can identify risk factors, cognitive distortions, and neural correlates associated with what theology might term vice and sin.
However, key differences remain:

- **Concept of Sin as Offense Against God:** Psychology and neuroscience describe harmful or dysfunctional behaviors in naturalistic terms (e.g., maladaptation, social harm, mental disorder). The theological concept of sin adds a crucial dimension: it is an offense against God and His eternal law, a disruption of the relationship with the ultimate Good.

- **Moral Responsibility and Free Will:** While psychology explores factors influencing choice, and neuroscience examines its neural basis, the Thomistic emphasis on free will as the root of moral culpability for sin is a philosophical

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[303] Cf. Raine, A. (2013). The Anatomy of Violence: The Biological Roots of Crime.
[304] Cf. Buss, D. M. (2019). Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind (6th ed.). Routledge.
[305] Cf. Warneken, F., & Tomasello, M. (2009). "The Roots of Human Altruism." British Journal of Psychology, 100(3), 455-471.

and theological assertion that goes beyond empirical description of causality.

- **Grace and Redemption:** Theology posits that the ultimate remedy for sin and the acquisition of supernatural virtue (and healing from original sin's effects) requires divine grace and redemption, concepts outside the scope of empirical science.

Scientific findings can help understand the *how* of vicious habits and harmful actions, identify predispositions, and inform interventions. Thomistic theology provides a framework for understanding the *why* in terms of ultimate ends, the *what* in terms of moral species and gravity, and the *what for* in terms of salvation and union with God.

9.5. Conclusion: The Reality of Moral Evil and the Path to Goodness

The concepts of vice and sin address the stark reality of moral evil in human experience. Vices, as ingrained bad habits, lead individuals away from their true good and ultimate end, while sin represents concrete acts of thought, word, deed, or omission that violate the divine and natural law. St. Thomas Aquinas's analysis provides a structured understanding of these realities, from the capital sins that fuel further wrongdoing to the crucial distinction between mortal and venial sin, and the inherited state of original sin.

While contemporary psychology and neuroscience offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of harmful behaviors, addictions, and moral failings, the theological understanding of sin as an offense against God and a deviation from our ultimate end remains distinct and paramount for a complete Christian anthropology. Recognizing the nature of vice and sin is not merely an academic exercise but a crucial step in understanding the human condition, the need for grace and redemption, and the ongoing call to cultivate virtue and pursue the good with the help of divine assistance.

Chapter 10: The Divine Order: Law in St. Thomas Aquinas

Introduction: God's Plan and Human Guidance

Human existence, marked by the pursuit of beatitude yet wounded by sin, requires guidance and support. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "Called to beatitude but wounded by sin, man stands in need of salvation from God. Divine help comes to him in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him" (CCC §1949). This chapter will explore St. Thomas Aquinas's profound and comprehensive understanding of law as a key element in God's plan for creation and human salvation. We will examine his definition of law and investigate the distinct yet interrelated kinds of law: Eternal, Natural, Human, and Divine. Finally, this classical framework will be used to analyze a potent, emerging challenge: the rise of a new form of "law" born from technology, where ordinances of code, rather than ordinances of reason, seek to govern human life and redefine our common good.

10.1. The General Scheme of Law According to Aquinas

For St. Thomas Aquinas, law is not merely a set of arbitrary rules but an "ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated." (Summa Theologiae, I-II, q. 90, art. 4, co.). This definition encapsulates the essential elements of law:

- **An Ordinance of Reason (ordinatio rationis):** Law is not a product of mere will, but of practical reason directing actions towards an end. It provides a "rule and measure of acts whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting." (ST I-II, q. 90, art. 1, co.).
- **For the Common Good (ad bonum commune):** The primary purpose of law is to promote the common good of the community it governs, not the private interest of individuals or the legislator. The ultimate common good to which all law is ordered is happiness, and ultimately, God Himself (ST I-II, q. 90, art. 2.).
- **Made by Him Who Has Care of the Community (ab eo qui curam communitatis habet):** Legitimate law-making authority rests with the one (or ones) responsible for the well-being of the whole community (ST I-II, q. 90, art. 3.).
- **Promulgated (promulgata):** For a law to be binding, it must be made known to those who are subject to it (ST I-II, q. 90, art. 4.).

Aquinas sees law as originating in God's providential governance of the universe. J. Budziszewski notes that, in Aquinas's view, "law is no less than the

pattern for God's governance of everything he has made."[306] This governance begins with the Eternal Law in the mind of God. Human beings, as rational creatures, participate in this divine governance in a unique way, primarily through Natural Law, which is a reflection of the Eternal Law in the created intellect (ST I-II, q. 93, art. 1, co.).

10.2. The Kinds of Law

Aquinas distinguishes four main kinds of law, which are hierarchically ordered and interconnected:

10.2.1 Eternal Law (*Lex Aeterna*)

Eternal Law is the very plan of Divine Wisdom by which God governs the entire universe, directing all creatures to their proper end. It is the "type of Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements." (ST I-II, q. 93, art. 1, co.).

- **Source and Nature:** The Eternal Law exists in the mind of God, the ultimate lawgiver and governor of all creation. It is eternal because God's understanding and plan are eternal. All other forms of law derive their legitimacy and force from the Eternal Law (ST I-II, q. 93, art. 4-6.).
- **Scope:** It extends to all created things, rational and irrational. Irrational creatures (like animals and plants) are subject to it by being moved by divine providence according to their natures. Rational creatures (humans and angels) participate in it in a higher way, by knowing it (at least in its principles) and freely conforming their actions to it (*ST* I-II, q. 91, art. 2.).
- **Promulgation:** The Eternal Law is promulgated "both by God's Word and by the work of creation; for both the Word and the work are from eternity." (ST I-II, q. 91, art. 1, ad 2). More specifically for rational creatures, it is imprinted on their minds through the Natural Law.

10.2.2 Natural Law (*Lex Naturalis*)

Natural Law is nothing other than the rational creature's participation in the Eternal Law (*ST* I-II, q. 91, art. 2, co.). It is the "light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil." (*ST* I-II, q. 91, art. 2, co.). This "imprint of the Divine light in us" allows humans to understand and order themselves and others towards the good proper to their nature (*ST* I-II, q. 94, art. 2.).

- **First Precept:** The most fundamental precept of the Natural Law is "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided." All other precepts of the Natural Law are based upon this (*ST* I-II, q. 94, art. 4-5.).
- **Primary Precepts:** These flow from the first precept and correspond to the

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[306] Budziszewski, J. (2014). Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Law.

natural inclinations of human nature:
- The inclination to self-preservation (shared with all substances).
- The inclination to procreation and the education of offspring (shared with other animals).
- The inclination to know the truth about God and to live in society (proper to rational nature). (ST I-II, q. 94, art. 2).

- **Secondary Precepts:** These are more specific conclusions drawn from the primary precepts through the exercise of reason. While the primary precepts are universal and immutable, the application of secondary precepts can vary according to circumstances, though their core rationale remains tied to the primary precepts (ST I-II, q. 94, art. 4 & 6.).
- **Knowability and Immutability:** According to Aquinas, the most general principles of Natural Law are absolutely immutable and self-evident to all. They are self-evident because they are the primary starting points of all moral action, grasped immediately by reason—chiefly, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided." They are immutable because they are founded upon the essential inclinations of human nature, which do not change, and thus reflect the unchanging Eternal Law of God. While these foundational principles remain constant, Aquinas notes that more remote conclusions drawn from them can be obscured or misapplied due to the influence of blinding passions, evil habits, or corrupt customs in certain individuals or cultures (*ST* I-II, q. 94, a. 4 & 6).
- **Promulgation:** Natural Law is promulgated by the very fact that "God has instilled it into human minds so as to be known by them naturally." (ST I-II, q. 90, art. 4, ad 1).

10.2.3 Human Law (*Lex Humana*)

Human Law refers to the particular statutes and ordinances devised by human reason for the good of civil society (ST I-II, q. 95, art. 2.). These are derived from the Natural Law in two ways:

- **By way of conclusion (per modum conclusionis):** Some human laws are derived from Natural Law like conclusions from premises (e.g., the Natural Law precept "one should not harm others" leads to the human law "murder is prohibited") (ST I-II, q. 95, art. 2.).
- **By way of determination (per modum determinationis):** Some human laws specify or determine general principles of Natural Law that can be fulfilled in various ways (e.g., Natural Law requires that wrongdoing be punished, but human law determines the specific type and measure of punishment for a particular crime) (ST I-II, q. 95, art. 1.).
- **Necessity and Purpose:** Human law is necessary to apply the general

principles of Natural Law to concrete situations, to compel people to virtue through discipline (especially those not easily led by persuasion), and to ensure peace and order in society (ST I-II, q. 96, art. 4.).

- **Binding Force:** Just human laws are binding in conscience because they derive their authority from the Eternal Law, as mediated through the Natural Law. An unjust law, one that contradicts Natural or Divine Law, is "no law at all" but rather a "perversion of law" and does not bind in conscience, unless to obey it would avoid greater scandal or disorder (ST I-II, q. 96, art. 4).
- **Promulgation:** Human laws must be promulgated by public authority to be effective.

10.2.4 Divine Law (*Lex Divina*)

Divine Law is law revealed directly by God, necessary for human beings to attain their supernatural end (eternal beatitude) and to guide human life with greater certainty (ST I-II, q. 91, art. 5; qq. 98-105.). Aquinas gives several reasons for the necessity of Divine Law:

- It directs human beings to their supernatural end (the vision of God), which exceeds their natural capacities.
- It provides certainty regarding what is to be done and avoided, as human judgment can be uncertain in contingent matters.
- It governs interior acts (thoughts, desires), which human law cannot adequately regulate.
- It ensures that all sins are prohibited and punished, as human law cannot forbid or punish all evils. (ST I-II, q. 91, art. 4).

Divine Law is divided into:

- **The Old Law (Mosaic Law):** Given by God to the Jewish people through Moses. It contained moral, ceremonial, and judicial precepts. Its primary end was to prepare for Christ and to order people to an earthly, sensible good as a figure of the heavenly good. It operated primarily through fear of punishment (ST I-II, q. 91, art. 5; qq. 106-108.).
- **The New Law (Law of the Gospel or Law of Christ):** Revealed by Jesus Christ. It is principally the grace of the Holy Spirit given to believers, an interior law written on the heart. Its external elements are the teachings of Christ and the Apostles (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount, sacraments). Its primary end is the intelligible and heavenly good of eternal life, and it operates primarily through love (ST I-II, q. 91, art. 6.). The New Law fulfills, perfects, and surpasses the Old Law.

Aquinas also mentions the **Law of the Fomes (lex fomitis)** or the "law of sin" (cf. Romans 7:23), which is not a law in the proper sense but rather an

inclination of sensuality (concupiscence) that is a consequence of original sin. It is called a "law" metaphorically because it acts as a punishment for sin and inclines to sin, thus having the character of a penalty derived from divine justice.[307]

10.3. Contemporary Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on Law and Rule-Following

The Thomistic understanding of law, particularly Natural Law (as intrinsic to human reason) and Human Law (as rational ordinances for social order), intersects with contemporary scientific investigations into how humans understand, internalize, and respond to rules, norms, and legal systems.

- **Psychology of Moral Development:** Theories like those of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg describe stages of moral development in which individuals move from externally imposed rules (based on punishment/reward) to an internalized understanding of justice, rights, and universal ethical principles.[308] This resonates with Aquinas's idea that Natural Law principles are grasped by reason and that just Human Law should aim to cultivate virtue.
- **Research on social learning theory** (e.g., Bandura) emphasizes how individuals learn and internalize norms and rules through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within their social environment.[309] This highlights the importance of the community and upbringing in shaping moral understanding, a factor Aquinas would acknowledge in the formation of virtues and vices.
- **Neuroscience of Moral Judgment:** Neuroimaging studies investigating moral dilemmas and judgments about fairness or rule violations often implicate brain regions involved in both emotional processing (e.g., ventromedial prefrontal cortex, amygdala, insula) and cognitive control/deliberation (e.g., dorsolateral prefrontal cortex).[310] This suggests that our response to laws and moral norms involves an interplay of intuitive/emotional reactions and reasoned analysis, which is broadly compatible with Aquinas's view of reason guiding passions.
- **The prefrontal cortex (PFC)** is crucial for understanding and adhering to social rules, inhibiting impulsive behavior contrary to norms, and considering the future consequences of actions.[311] Damage to the PFC can lead to

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[307] Cf. Piaget, J. (1932/1965). The Moral Judgment of the Child; Kohlberg, L. (1981). Essays on Moral Development.
[308] Cf. Bandura, A. (1977). Social Learning Theory.
[309] Cf. Greene, J. D. (2013). Moral Tribes.
[310] Cf. Fuster, J. M. (2003). Cortex and Mind: Unifying Cognition.
[311] Cf. Decety, J., & Jackson, P. L. (2004). "The Functional Architecture of Human Empathy." Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews, 3(2), 71-100.

difficulties in social conduct and rule-abiding behavior, underscoring the neural basis for the "ordinance of reason" that Aquinas describes as essential to law.

- **Research on empathy and theory of mind** (the ability to understand others' mental states) points to neural systems (e.g., mirror neuron system, temporoparietal junction) that enable us to appreciate the impact of our actions on others, which is fundamental for understanding the need for laws aimed at the common good and justice.[312]

- **Psychology of Obedience and Authority:** Classic experiments by Stanley Milgram demonstrated the powerful influence of authority figures on individuals' willingness to obey commands, even when those commands conflict with personal conscience.[313] This highlights the complexities of obedience to human law and the potential for unjust laws or authorities to elicit compliance, a concern Aquinas addressed by stating that unjust laws do not bind in conscience.

- **Social psychology** also examines conformity and the influence of group norms, showing how individuals often align their behavior with perceived social expectations, which can either support or undermine adherence to formal laws.[314]

- **Cognitive Biases and Legal Reasoning:** Research in cognitive psychology has identified numerous cognitive biases (e.g., confirmation bias, hindsight bias) that can affect how individuals interpret evidence, make judgments about culpability, and apply legal rules.[315] This suggests that the "dictate of practical reason" in applying or formulating human law can be subject to systematic errors, highlighting the need for careful deliberation and procedural safeguards, aligning with Aquinas's emphasis on the role of prudence in law-making.

While science can illuminate the mechanisms of rule-following, the Thomistic framework grounds the purpose and legitimacy of law in a metaphysical and ethical vision of human nature and its ultimate good.

10.4. The Law of Code: Algorithmic Governance vs. the Divine Order

The classical understanding of law is now challenged by an emerging, parasitic legal order: the law of code. This new system, engineered by the "new

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[312] Cf. Milgram, S. (1974). Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View.
[313] Cf. Cialdini, R. B., & Trost, M. R. (1998). "Social Influence: Social Norms, Conformity, and Compliance."
[314] Cf. Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow.
[315] *Ib.*

legislators of Silicon Valley,"[316] inverts each of Aquinas's four essential elements of law. It is not an ordinance of *reason* but an ordinance of *code and capital*, optimized not for the common good but for private *profit and ideological control*. Its authority derives not from a "care of the community" but from plutocratic power, and its commands are not *promulgated* openly but operate invisibly through the "permanent suggestion" of the hypnosphere, shaping behavior without conscious assent.[317]

This techno-legal system wages a quiet war on the Thomistic hierarchy of law. It supplants the **Eternal Law** by proposing a universe without a divine governor, one to be re-engineered by human intelligence. It directly attacks the **Natural Law**, not only by undermining the rational faculty's ability to discern the good through constant manipulation but also by promoting a transhumanist ideology that seeks to redefine human nature itself. It systematically bypasses democratic **Human Law**, replacing public deliberation with the unaccountable, frictionless governance of platforms. Finally, it offers a counterfeit **Divine Law**, promising a technological path to salvation—immortality through data, virtual heavens, and engineered utopias—that directly competes with the supernatural end of beatitude. What results is a "perversion of law" far more subtle than a simple unjust statute; it is a new legal architecture designed to colonize human consciousness and redirect it toward a purely immanent horizon.

10.5. Conclusion: The Ordered Path to Flourishing

St. Thomas Aquinas's treatise on law presents a grand, hierarchical vision in which all true law participates in the wisdom and providence of God. From the Eternal Law governing all creation, to the Natural Law imprinted on human reason, to the specific applications in Human Law, and culminating in the Divine Law guiding us to our supernatural destiny, law is understood as a rational direction towards virtue and ultimate fulfillment.

Far from being a mere historical artifact, this framework, which grounds law in reason and the common good, remains an essential tool for contemporary critique. It allows us to unmask the emerging "law of code" as a counterfeit order, one that replaces reason with algorithms, the common good with profit, legitimate authority with plutocratic power, and open promulgation with opaque manipulation. By contrasting the divine order with the algorithmic one, Aquinas's wisdom illuminates the profound moral and spiritual stakes of our time, reminding

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[316] Cf. Morozov, E. (2024, April 25). "Silicon Valley's New Legislators." The Ideas Letter.
[317] This concept of a manipulative environment is detailed in works like Xun's (2025) Ipnocrazia and Han's (2017) Psychopolitics, which describe the mechanisms of the "hypnosphere" and the exploitation of freedom.

us that true law frees and guides us toward our ultimate end, while its counterfeit merely manages and controls us for the ends of another.

Chapter 11: Divine Grace: God's Gift for Human Flourishing and Salvation

Introduction: The Indispensable Aid of Grace

In the preceding chapters, we have explored the human person's nature, capacities, and journey towards their ultimate end. We have seen that human beings are called to beatitude, yet, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, "wounded by sin, man stands in need of salvation from God. Divine help comes to him in Christ through the law that guides him and the grace that sustains him" (*CCC* §1949). Law points the way, but human nature, weakened by sin, is incapable of attaining its supernatural end by its own efforts. This chapter will examine the nature and necessity of **divine grace** according to St. Thomas Aquinas, understanding it as God's gratuitous gift enabling humanity to be healed, elevated, and ultimately united with Him. This classical understanding of grace as a divine gift will then be contrasted with a powerful modern counterfeit: the promise of a technological "grace" offered by a new class of techno-ideologues who seek to redefine salvation itself.

11.1. The Nature of Grace: A Supernatural Gift Perfecting the Soul

For St. Thomas Aquinas, grace (*gratia*) is fundamentally a supernatural gift from God, freely bestowed upon rational creatures, elevating them beyond their natural capacities to participate in the divine life and attain eternal beatitude (*ST*, I-II, q. 109, art. 1). Aquinas clarifies that "the New Law is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Spirit, which is given to those who believe in Christ." (*ST*, I-II, q. 106, art. 1, co.).

- **A Quality Perfecting the Soul's Essence:** Grace is not merely God's favor or benevolent regard from afar, nor is it a substance. It is a real, created quality, an **entitative habit** (a habit of being), that inheres in and directly perfects the very **essence of the soul**, making it pleasing to God (*gratum faciens*) (*ST* I-II, q. 110, art. 2). Just as natural powers like intellect and will have virtues that perfect their operations, the soul's essence is perfected by habitual (or sanctifying) grace, which makes it capable of a higher, supernatural mode of being and acting (*ST* I-II, q. 110, art. 2, ad 1.). The light of grace, which is a participation in the divine nature, is distinct from the infused virtues which derive from it (*ST* I-II, q. 110, art. 2.).
- **Participation in the Divine Nature:** Sanctifying grace is a "participation in the Divine Nature" (cf. 2 Peter 1:4) (*ST* I-II, q. 110, art. 3.). This participation is not pantheistic (making us part of God's substance) but analogical. It bestows

a created likeness to God's own nature, a "second nature" or a new, supernatural principle of life and operation within the soul (ST I-II, q. 110, art. 2.). This new generation or creation allows the soul to be elevated to perform acts ordered to the vision of God.

- **Distinction from Virtues:** While grace resides in the soul's essence, the infused virtues (theological and moral) reside in the powers of the soul (intellect and will) as operative habits that flow from and are ordered by grace, enabling specific supernatural acts (ST I-II, q. 110, art. 4.).

11.2. The Necessity of Grace

Aquinas argues extensively for the necessity of grace for human beings to achieve their ultimate supernatural end and even to perform truly good and meritorious actions consistently within the natural order.

- **For Healing from Sin:** After original sin, human nature is wounded; reason is darkened, the will weakened, and the appetites disordered. Grace is necessary to heal these wounds and to remit sin (*ST* I-II, q. 109, art. 2 & 7).
- **For Knowing Supernatural Truth:** While human reason can know some truths about God, it cannot, without grace and revelation, attain to the supernatural truths necessary for salvation (e.g., the Trinity, the Incarnation), which are the objects of faith (*ST* I-II, q. 109, art. 1 & 5).
- **For Doing Good and Avoiding All Sin:** To perform any supernaturally good and meritorious act ordered to eternal life, grace is absolutely necessary. Furthermore, to avoid all sin and to fulfill the whole law consistently, fallen human beings require the healing and strengthening aid of grace (*ST* I-II, q. 109, arts. 2, 4, 8).
- **For Disposing to Justification:** The initial movement towards justification (the remission of sins and infusion of sanctifying grace) itself requires prevenient grace from God to turn the heart towards Him (ST I-II, q. 109, art. 6; q. 112, art. 2).
- **For Persevering in Good:** To persevere in grace and in the good until the end of life is a special gift of God, also requiring the continuous assistance of grace (ST I-II, q. 109, art. 10).

Grace is thus indispensable for entering into, progressing in, and consummating the supernatural life.

11.3. Kinds of Grace

Aquinas makes several important distinctions regarding grace:

- **Uncreated Grace vs. Created Grace:**
  - **Uncreated Grace (Gratia Increata):** This is God Himself, particularly the

Holy Spirit, dwelling in the soul and communicating His love and life.[318]

  ○ **Created Grace (Gratia Creata):** This is the effect of Uncreated Grace in the soul—the created supernatural gift or quality that makes the soul pleasing to God and capable of supernatural acts. This is what is usually meant by habitual/sanctifying grace and actual grace.[319]

- **Habitual Grace (Sanctifying Grace - Gratia Gratum Faciens) vs. Actual Grace:**
  ○ **Habitual Grace (Sanctifying Grace):** This is a permanent, supernatural quality inhering in the essence of the soul. It makes the person holy, a child of God, and an heir to eternal life. It is the principle of supernatural life and the foundation for the infused virtues (ST I-II, q. 110, art. 2-3).
  ○ **Actual Grace (Gratia Actualis):** This is a transient divine help or motion from God, moving the soul to perform some particular good act or to avoid some evil. It enlightens the intellect and strengthens the will for specific actions ordered to salvation (ST I-II, q. 110, art. 2; q. 111, art. 2).

- **Operative Grace vs. Cooperative Grace (distinctions within Actual Grace):**
  ○ **Operative Grace (Gratia Operans):** This is actual grace by which God is the sole mover of the soul to a good act, particularly in the initial conversion (ST I-II, q. 111, art. 2).
  ○ **Cooperative Grace (Gratia Cooperans):** This is actual grace by which God assists the will, which is already in motion, to perform a good act (ST I-II, q. 111, art. 2).

- **Efficacious Grace vs. Sufficient Grace:**
  ○ **Efficacious Grace:** This is grace that infallibly achieves its effect because God wills it to be so, always respecting human freedom.[320]
  ○ **Sufficient Grace:** This is grace that gives a person the genuine capacity to perform a good act, but which may not always produce its effect due to human resistance.[321]

- **Charismatic Graces (Gratiae Gratis Datae):** These are special gifts (e.g., prophecy, gift of tongues) given not primarily for the sanctification of the recipient, but for the benefit of others and the building up of the Church.[322]

11.4. Justification and Merit

Grace is intimately linked to the concepts of justification and merit.

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[318] This distinction is fundamental. See ST I-II, q. 110, art. 1.
[319] Cf. *Ib.*
[320] Cf. ST I, q. 23, art. 6. The distinction itself is more developed in later Thomistic schools but has roots in Aquinas.
[321] This reflects Aquinas's principle that God does not command the impossible when His grace is available. See ST I-II, q. 109, art. 4, ad 2.
[322] ST I-II, q. 111, art. 1 & 4. These are referred to as *gratiae gratis datae*.

- **Justification:** This is the transition from the state of sin to the state of righteousness (grace). It involves the remission of sins and the infusion of sanctifying grace, by which a person is interiorly renewed. Justification is principally the work of God's mercy, freely given for Christ's sake, but it requires the free cooperation of the adult human person through faith and repentance (*ST* I-II, q. 113, art. 1-8).
- **Merit:** Through grace, human beings, by their free acts, can merit rewards from God, principally the increase of grace and eternal life itself. This merit is not based on human works in isolation, but on works performed under the influence of God's grace. Thus, all merit is ultimately a gift of God, who crowns His own gifts (*ST* I-II, q. 114, art. 1-10).

11.5. Contemporary Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on Experiences Analogous to Grace

While supernatural grace is a theological concept referring to a direct, unmerited divine gift, contemporary psychology and neuroscience study various human experiences and capacities that, on a natural level, bear some analogy to the effects or dispositions associated with grace, such as transformation, healing, enhanced moral capacity, and profound well-being.

- **Psychology:**
  - **Transformative Experiences and Post-Traumatic Growth:** Psychology investigates **transformative experiences** (e.g., profound insights, peak experiences, spiritual awakenings) that can lead to lasting changes in worldview, values, and behavior.[323] Similarly, the concept of **post-traumatic growth** describes how individuals can experience positive psychological change as a result of struggling with highly challenging life circumstances, sometimes reporting a deepened sense of meaning or spirituality.[324] These transformations, while explainable through psychological mechanisms, might be seen by a theologian as moments where natural human resilience and meaning-making are particularly open to or potentiated by what they would understand as grace.
  - **Gratitude, Forgiveness, and Altruism:** Positive psychology has extensively studied the benefits of **gratitude** (recognizing and appreciating unearned benefits) and **forgiveness** (releasing resentment towards an offender). Both are linked to increased well-being and

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[323] Cf. Maslow, A. H. (1964). Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences; James, W. (1902). The Varieties of Religious Experience.
[324] Cf. Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (2004). "Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence." Psychological Inquiry, 15(1), 1–18.

prosocial behavior.[325] The capacity for **altruism** and **compassion**—acting for the benefit of others, sometimes at a cost to oneself—is also a major area of research.[326] While these are natural human capacities, their consistent and selfless exercise, especially when directed towards enemies or involving significant sacrifice (as encouraged by charity), is something theology would see as perfected by grace.

- ○ **Resilience and Coping:** The study of **resilience**—the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity—and effective **coping mechanisms** (including meaning-focused coping and spiritual coping) highlights human capacities to endure and overcome difficulties.[327] From a theological perspective, the strength and perseverance beyond natural expectation often attributed to grace could find expression through these psychological processes.

- ○ **Mindfulness and Self-Transcendence:** Practices like **mindfulness meditation**, which cultivate present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, have been shown to reduce stress and enhance well-being. Some psychological theories also explore **self-transcendence**, experiences where the sense of self diminishes and one feels connected to something larger than oneself.[328] Such experiences, often sought in spiritual practices, can have profound psychological effects that theology might interpret as natural dispositions open to the effects of grace.

- **Neuroscience:**
  - ○ **Neuroplasticity and Transformation:** The brain's capacity for **neuroplasticity**—its ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life—provides a biological basis for how experiences, including potentially those interpreted as effects of grace (like conversion or sustained virtuous practice), can lead to lasting changes in thought patterns, emotional responses, and behavior.[329]

  - ○ **Neural Correlates of Spiritual Practices:** Neuroimaging studies on practices like meditation and prayer have identified changes in brain activity and connectivity, often involving increased activity in prefrontal regions (associated with attention and self-regulation) and decreased activity in areas like the parietal lobe (associated with self-other distinction and spatial orientation), which may correlate with subjective reports of

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[325] Cf. Emmons, R. A. (2007). THANKS! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier; Worthington Jr, E. L. (2006). Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Theory and Application.
[326] Cf. Batson, C. D. (2011). Altruism in Humans; Keltner, D. (2009). Born to Be Good.
[327] Cf. Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). "Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress." American Psychologist, 44(3), 513-524.
[328] Cf. Kabat-Zinn, J. (2013). Full Catastrophe Living (Revised ed.); Yaden, D. B., et al. (2017). "The varieties of self-transcendent experience."
[329] Cf. Doidge, N. (2007). The Brain That Changes Itself.

peace, focus, and self-transcendence.[330]

- ○ **Neurobiology of Empathy and Compassion:** Research on brain networks involved in empathy (e.g., anterior insula, anterior cingulate cortex) and compassion (often involving prefrontal regulation of empathic distress and motivation to help) provides insights into the biological underpinnings of prosocial behaviors which are central to the effects of charity.[331]

- **Comparison and Caveats**:

    It is crucial to maintain a distinction: psychology and neuroscience study natural phenomena, human capacities, and the observable effects of experiences. Supernatural grace, as understood by Aquinas, is a divine initiative and a supernatural quality that transcends empirical measurement. Science can describe the psychological or neural correlates of experiences that a believer might attribute to grace (e.g., the feeling of peace after prayer, the strength to forgive), but it cannot directly investigate grace itself as a theological reality. The value of this comparison lies in seeing how divine grace might work through and perfect natural human capacities. For instance, grace might enhance a person's natural resilience, deepen their capacity for empathy, or provide the motivation and strength to live according to altruistic ideals that psychological models describe. Scientific findings can thus offer a richer understanding of the "human material" that grace elevates and transforms, without reducing grace to these natural processes.

11.6. The Counterfeit of Grace: Technological Salvation vs. Divine Gift

The Thomistic understanding of grace as a divine gift is directly challenged by the ideology of the "hypnocracy," which offers a counterfeit grace that is not given but engineered. This new soteriology,[332] promoted by the tech elites of Silicon Valley, seeks to replace every function of divine grace with a technological substitute.[333]

- **Healing from Sin vs. Correcting Imperfection:** Where sanctifying grace heals the wounds of sin, technology promises to "heal" the supposed imperfections of the human condition itself—aging, suffering, cognitive limits,

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[330] Cf. Newberg, A. B., & Waldman, M. R. (2009). How God Changes Your Brain; Lutz, A., et al. (2008). "Attention regulation and monitoring in meditation."

[331] Cf. Singer, T., & Klimecki, O. M. (2014). "Empathy and compassion." Current Biology, 24(18), R875-R878.

[332] Soteriology is the study of salvation, encompassing its nature, means, and effects. It is a central theological concept in many religions, particularly Christianity, where it explores topics such as atonement, redemption, grace, and justification.

[333] Cf. Morozov, E. (2024, April 25). "Silicon Valley's New Legislators." This article outlines the ambition of tech elites to act as ideological shapers of society, offering technological solutions to human problems.

and even death. The *telos* is not restoration to a right relationship with God, but the overcoming of biological finitude through transhumanist enhancement.

- **Elevation of Nature vs. Obsolescence of Nature:** Sanctifying grace *elevates* nature to participate in the divine life. The new technological "grace" seeks to *replace* nature with a posthuman successor, viewing the un-enhanced human as obsolete. This is not a participation in God's nature but an attempted escape from the given nature.
- **Actual Grace vs. Algorithmic Nudges:** Where actual grace is a divine assistance moving the soul toward a supernatural good, the digital environment provides a constant stream of "actual grace" in the form of algorithmic nudges, personalized recommendations, and gamified incentives. This assistance, however, moves the soul not toward virtue or salvation, but toward predictable consumer behavior and ideological conformity that serves the system's true end: profit and control.[334]
- **Merit vs. Optimization:** In the divine economy, one "merits" an increase of grace through free cooperation with God's gift. In the technological economy, one earns standing not through moral goodness but through optimization—by becoming a more efficient, productive, and data-rich node in the network. The human person is no longer a cooperator with God but a resource to be managed.

This techno-gnostic project represents the ultimate inversion of grace: it is a "gift" we must build and buy to save ourselves from a nature deemed unworthy, a salvation offered not freely by God, but sold to us by the new priests of the digital age.

11.7. Conclusion

Divine grace, in the Thomistic vision, is God's gratuitous and loving self-communication to humanity, an indispensable aid for healing the wounds of sin, elevating human nature, and enabling the attainment of our supernatural end. Through sanctifying grace, the soul is made a participant in the divine nature, and through actual grace, the intellect and will are strengthened to perform supernaturally good acts. This classical understanding, however, is now confronted by a potent secular challenger: a technological "grace" that promises salvation through engineering. This counterfeit offers to "heal" our finitude, "elevate" us beyond our humanity, and "assist" us with algorithmic nudges toward a purely immanent horizon. By contrasting the gratuitous gift of divine grace with the purchasable upgrades of the techno-ideologues, we see clearly that the modern

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[334] Cf. Han, B-C. (2017). Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power. Han's work details how neoliberalism co-opts freedom and desire for its own ends, a process now automated by the digital "hypnocracy."

struggle is not merely over ethics, but over the very nature of salvation and the source of our ultimate hope.

General Conclusion of Part I: A Thomistic Vision of the Human Person

This first part of our textbook has sought to lay a foundation by exploring key elements of theological anthropology through the lens of St. Thomas Aquinas. We began by defining theology, moving through the fundamental quest for happiness, and analyzing the structure of the human act, the passions, and the virtues that shape our moral character. We considered sin as a deviation from the good, and law as the guide pointing us toward our end. Finally, we have seen how grace is the intrinsic, supernatural principle healing, elevating, and enabling us to achieve that ultimate end of union with God. In essence, the Thomistic vision presents the human person as a creature of immense dignity, created, fallen, redeemed, and called to glory—a robust framework for theological inquiry.

Introduction to Part II: Engaging Contemporary Challenges with Divine Revelation

In the preceding section, we laid the groundwork for understanding theological anthropology, providing a lens through which we can interpret and engage with the world around us. Now, armed with this foundational knowledge, the subsequent part of this educational endeavor will pivot to applying these principles, as illuminated by the guiding light of Divine Revelation, to a series of pressing, multifaceted contemporary challenges that define our era.

These are not abstract philosophical quandaries but tangible issues shaping our present and future. They include the exponential development of Artificial Intelligence, a phenomenon poised to reshape our lives in ways we are only beginning to grasp, raising questions about the very nature of intelligence, consciousness, and human distinctiveness. We will also approach the aspirations of Transhumanism, a movement that envisions fundamentally altering the human condition through technology, pushing us to reconsider what it means to be human and the ethical boundaries of such endeavors.

Furthermore, we will scrutinize the future of work in what some foresee as an emerging "economic singularity," a point of profound disruption where technological advancements could radically transform labor markets and societal structures. The rise of psycho-politics and neuro-politics, fields that seek to understand and influence human behavior through psychological and neurological insights, will also come under our examination. These phenomena raise significant concerns about individual autonomy and the potential for manipulation. Lastly, we will analyze the drift toward technocratic governance, a form of rule where decision-making is entrusted to technical experts, potentially sidelining broader democratic processes and considerations.

Our fundamental aim throughout this exploration is to demonstrate how the timeless wisdom of the Christian theological tradition, rooted in centuries of reflection and spiritual insight, can offer invaluable light, guidance, and hope. In the face of the intricate complexities that characterize the 21st century and the uncharted territories that lie beyond, this tradition provides a robust framework for ontological discernment, moral clarity, and a hopeful vision for humanity's future. It is a resource that can help us navigate these challenges with wisdom, integrity, and a deep sense of purpose.

Chapter 12: The Exponential Ascent of Artificial Intelligence: Promises, Perils, and the Human Future

Introduction: The Algorithmic Age and Its Human Questions

The 21st century is increasingly defined by the rapid and accelerating progress of Artificial Intelligence (AI). What began as a theoretical pursuit in computer science has burgeoned into a transformative force, reshaping industries, economies, and the very fabric of daily life. AI's exponential development presents a landscape of immense opportunities alongside profound ethical dilemmas and existential questions. As we examine this technological frontier, we are compelled to consider not only the technical capabilities of AI but also its implications for human nature, consciousness, labor, identity, and societal governance. The potential for AI to surpass human capabilities, often termed the "Singularity," looms as a particularly significant, if debated, horizon. Issues of algorithmic bias, the control and governance of powerful AI systems, and the imperative for responsible development in alignment with human dignity and the common good are paramount. From a theological perspective, the rise of AI challenges us to reflect anew on concepts of human creativity as *imago Dei* (image of God), our stewardship of creation, the unique status and value of the human person, and the very meaning of intelligence and purpose in a universe where non-biological intelligence may play an increasingly prominent role. This chapter will explore these multifaceted dimensions of AI's ascent.

12.1. A Brief History of Artificial Intelligence

The intellectual roots of AI can be traced back to antiquity, with myths and philosophical speculations about artificial beings and mechanical thought. However, the formal field of AI research emerged in the mid-20th century, spurred by foundational work in logic, computation, and cybernetics.

- **Early Foundations (Pre-1950s):** Philosophers like Ramon Llull (13th century) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (17th century) envisioned logical calculi and reasoning machines. George Boole's development of Boolean algebra in the 19th century provided a mathematical basis for logical operations.[335] The early 20th century saw Alan Turing's seminal work on computation and the concept of the "Turing machine," a theoretical model of a general-purpose computer, and his famous "Turing Test" to assess machine intelligence.[336] Norbert

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[335] Cf. Boole, G. (1854). An Investigation of the Laws of Thought.
[336] Cf. Turing, A. M. (1936). "On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidungsproblem." Proceedings of the London Mathematical Society, s2-42(1), 230-265; Turing, A. M. (1950). "Computing Machinery and Intelligence." Mind, 59(236), 433-460.

Wiener's work on cybernetics also laid important groundwork concerning feedback and control systems in both animals and machines.[337]

- **The Dartmouth Workshop and the Birth of AI (1956):** The term "Artificial Intelligence" was coined by John McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Nathaniel Rochester, and Claude Shannon for a 1956 workshop at Dartmouth College. This event is widely considered the birth of AI as a distinct field of research, bringing together key figures who laid the groundwork for subsequent developments.[338] Early AI research focused on areas like problem-solving (e.g., Newell and Simon's Logic Theorist and General Problem Solver), game playing (e.g., checkers and chess programs), and symbolic reasoning.

- **"AI Winters" and Resurgences (1970s-2000s):** The initial optimism was followed by periods of reduced funding and progress, known as "AI winters," often due to the computational limitations of the time, the difficulty of tasks like common-sense reasoning, and overly ambitious predictions.[339] However, breakthroughs continued, including the development of expert systems in the 1980s, which captured human expertise in specific domains. The 1990s and 2000s saw a resurgence driven by increased computing power, larger datasets, and new algorithmic approaches, particularly in machine learning and statistical methods.

- **The Deep Learning Revolution (2010s-Present):** The most recent surge in AI has been fueled by advances in **deep learning**, a subfield of machine learning using artificial neural networks with many layers ("deep" architectures). Combined with massive datasets ("big data") and powerful hardware (especially Graphics Processing Units - GPUs), deep learning has achieved remarkable success in areas like image recognition, natural language processing, speech recognition, and game playing (e.g., DeepMind's AlphaGo and subsequent systems).[340]

12.2. Understanding AI: Types and Capabilities

Artificial Intelligence is a broad field encompassing various approaches and levels of capability. It's often categorized by its capacity relative to human intelligence:

- **Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) or Weak AI:** This is the type of AI we encounter most frequently today. ANI is designed and trained for a specific task or a limited range of tasks. Examples include virtual assistants (Siri, Alexa),

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[337] Cf. Wiener, N. (1948). Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine.
[338] Cf. McCarthy, J., Minsky, M. L., Rochester, N., & Shannon, C. E. (1955). "A Proposal for the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence." AI Magazine, 27(4), 12.
[339] See Lighthill, J. (1973). "Artificial Intelligence: A General Survey." (The Lighthill Report); Russell, S. J., & Norvig, P. (2020). Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach (4th ed.), pp. 19-23.
[340] Cf. Goodfellow, I., Bengio, Y., & Courville, A. (2016). Deep Learning. MIT Press.

image recognition software, recommendation algorithms (Netflix, Amazon), self-driving car components, and AI in medical diagnosis or financial trading.[341] While highly effective in their specific domains, ANI systems lack general cognitive abilities and consciousness.

- **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) or Strong AI:** AGI refers to a hypothetical form of AI that possesses the ability to understand, learn, and apply intelligence across a wide range of tasks at a level comparable to a human being. It would exhibit cognitive abilities such as reasoning, problem-solving, abstract thinking, common sense, and potentially self-awareness and consciousness. Achieving AGI is a major long-term goal for many AI researchers, but it remains largely theoretical, and its feasibility and timeline are subjects of intense debate.[342]

- **Artificial Superintelligence (ASI):** ASI is a hypothetical form of AI that would surpass human intelligence across virtually all cognitive domains. Philosopher Nick Bostrom defines superintelligence as "any intellect that greatly exceeds the cognitive performance of humans in virtually all domains of interest."[343] The emergence of ASI is a key component of "Singularity" scenarios and raises profound questions about control and existential risk.

The underlying technologies driving current AI progress include:

- **Machine Learning (ML):** Algorithms that allow computer systems to learn from data and improve their performance on a task without being explicitly programmed for each specific instance.
- **Deep Learning (DL):** A subset of ML using multi-layered artificial neural networks to learn hierarchical representations of data, particularly effective for complex pattern recognition.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** Enables computers to understand, interpret, generate, and interact using human language.
- **Computer Vision:** Enables computers to "see" and interpret visual information from images and videos.

12.3. The Exponential Development of AI: Current Frontiers and Near-Term Expectations

AI development is widely perceived to be on an exponential trajectory, with capabilities advancing at an accelerating pace, leading to rapid transformations across sectors.

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[341] Cf. Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2019). "Siri, Siri, in my hand: Who's the fairest in the land? On the interpretations, illustrations, and implications of artificial intelligence." Business Horizons, 62(1), 15-25.
[342] Cf. Russell & Norvig (2020), pp. 27-28, 1020-1043.
[343] Bostrom, N. (2014). Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies, p. 22. Oxford University Press.

- **Current Frontiers:**
  - **Generative AI:** Systems like GPT-4 (and its successors from various labs), DALL-E 3, Midjourney, and Sora can generate highly coherent and contextually relevant text, realistic images, audio, video, and even computer code, transforming creative industries, content generation, software development, and human-computer interaction.[344]
  - **Large Language Models (LLMs) and Foundation Models:** The foundation of many generative AI systems, LLMs are trained on vast textual and multimodal datasets. They exhibit remarkable abilities in understanding context, answering questions, summarizing information, translating languages, and engaging in complex dialogue. The trend is towards even larger and more general "foundation models" applicable to a wide array of tasks.[345]
  - **AI in Scientific Discovery:** AI is accelerating research in fields like drug discovery (e.g., AlphaFold for protein structure prediction), materials science, climate modeling, and fundamental physics by analyzing complex datasets, identifying patterns, generating hypotheses, and even designing experiments.[346]
  - **Robotics and Embodied AI:** Advances in AI are leading to more capable, adaptable, and autonomous robots for manufacturing, logistics, healthcare (e.g., surgical assistance, patient care), agriculture, and exploration, increasingly capable of interacting with complex physical environments.
- **Near-Term Expectations (Next 5-10 years):**
  - **Increased Integration and Ubiquity:** AI will become more deeply embedded and often invisible in everyday tools, consumer products, business processes, services, and critical infrastructure.
  - **Hyper-Personalization:** AI will drive highly personalized experiences in education (adaptive learning platforms), healthcare (precision medicine, tailored treatment plans), entertainment, and commerce.
  - **Enhanced Automation and Productivity:** Further automation of routine cognitive and physical tasks across various sectors, potentially leading to significant productivity gains but also labor market shifts.
  - **Improved Human-AI Collaboration:** AI systems will increasingly function as sophisticated cognitive partners, assistants, and collaborators for human professionals, augmenting human capabilities rather than merely

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[344] E.g., OpenAI's GPT series, Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude. For image generation, DALL-E, Midjourney, Stable Diffusion. For video, OpenAI's Sora.

[345] Cf. Bommasani, R., Hudson, D. A., Adeli, E., Altman, R., Arora, S., von Arx, S., ... & Liang, P. (2021). "On the opportunities and risks of foundation models." arXiv preprint arXiv:2108.07258.

[346] See, for example, Jumper, J., et al. (2021). "Highly accurate protein structure prediction with AlphaFold." Nature, 596(7873), 583-589.

replacing them in many domains.

- ○ **More Powerful and Multimodal Foundation Models:** Continued development of larger, more general-purpose AI models capable of processing and generating information across multiple modalities (text, image, audio, video, etc.) with greater understanding and coherence.

However, this rapid development also intensifies challenges, including the need for robust ethical frameworks, addressing inherent biases in AI systems, ensuring data privacy and security, and managing societal and economic disruptions.

12.4. The Singularity Hypothesis: AI Surpassing Human Capabilities

The concept of a **"technological singularity"** (often just "the Singularity") refers to a hypothetical future point where technological growth, particularly in AI, becomes uncontrollable and irreversible, resulting in unforeseeable and potentially abrupt changes to human civilization.[347] The term was popularized by science fiction author Vernor Vinge and extensively explored by futurist Ray Kurzweil.

- **Core Idea:** The hypothesis posits that if an AI system reaches a certain level of general intelligence (AGI), it could begin to recursively improve itself (an "intelligence explosion" or "recursive self-improvement" fueled by its own design capabilities), leading rapidly to the emergence of Artificial Superintelligence (ASI) that far exceeds human cognitive abilities in all relevant aspects.[348]

- **Proponents and Timelines:** Kurzweil, for example, has famously predicted the Singularity to occur around 2045, based on extrapolating exponential trends in computing power ("Law of Accelerating Returns") and other technologies.[349] Other researchers and thinkers, like Ben Goertzel, also actively work towards AGI with such an outcome in mind. However, many AI researchers remain skeptical about the likelihood and timeline of such an event, emphasizing the immense complexity of general intelligence and the current limitations of AI approaches.[350]

- **Potential Implications:** The implications of a Singularity event are profound and largely speculative, ranging from utopian visions to dystopian fears:
  - ○ **Unprecedented Progress:** ASI could potentially solve many of humanity's

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[347] Cf. Vinge, V. (1993). "The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era."

[348] Cf. Chalmers, D. J. (2010). "The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis." Journal of Consciousness Studies, 17(9-10), 7-65.

[349] Cf. Kurzweil, R. (2005). The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology. Viking.

[350] Cf. Tegmark, M. (2017). Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of Artificial Intelligence, Ch. 5 & 8. Knopf.

most intractable problems, such as disease, poverty, resource scarcity, and environmental degradation, leading to an era of unimaginable abundance and progress.

○ **Existential Risk:** A misaligned or uncontrollable ASI could pose an existential threat to humanity if its goals are not perfectly and robustly aligned with human values and survival. The "control problem" or "alignment problem"—how to ensure that highly intelligent systems act in ways beneficial to humans—is a central concern for researchers like Nick Bostrom and Stuart Russell.[351]

○ **Transformation of Human Existence:** The nature of work, society, consciousness, and human identity itself could be fundamentally altered. Concepts such as mind uploading, digital immortality, radical life extension, and the merging of human and machine intelligence (as explored in transhumanist thought) become central to these discussions.

The Singularity remains a highly debated and speculative topic, with significant disagreement among AI researchers, philosophers, and futurists regarding its likelihood, timeline, characteristics, and potential consequences.

12.5. Global Actors in AI Development

The development and deployment of AI have become a critical arena for international competition and strategic positioning, with significant geopolitical implications.

● **The West (Primarily the United States):**
  ○ **Private Sector Dominance:** US tech giants such as Google (including DeepMind), Meta, OpenAI (a major partner of Microsoft), Amazon, Apple, and NVIDIA are at the forefront of AI research and development. They invest billions, attract top global talent, and focus heavily on developing foundational models, cloud AI services, and diverse commercial applications.[352]
  ○ **Government Initiatives and Funding:** The US government has recognized AI's strategic importance, increasing funding for AI research through agencies like Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). National AI initiatives, such as the National AI Initiative Act of 2020, aim to bolster US leadership, foster public-private

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[351] Cf. Bostrom (2014); Russell, S. J. (2019). Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control. Viking.

[352] Cf. Lee, K.-F. (2018). AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

partnerships, and address ethical, social, and security considerations.[353]

- ○ **Academic and Research Institutions:** Universities like Stanford, MIT, Carnegie Mellon, UC Berkeley, and others remain vital hubs for fundamental AI research, talent development, and critical analysis of AI's impact.

- **China's Ascent:**
  - ○ **National Strategy and Ambition:** China has unequivocally made AI development a top-tier national strategic priority, viewing it as essential for economic modernization, enhanced national security, and achieving global technological leadership. In 2017, the State Council issued the "Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan," a comprehensive roadmap with ambitious goals. This plan explicitly stated the aim for China to "occupy the commanding heights of artificial intelligence technology" and become the "world's primary AI innovation center by 2030."[354] The plan sets phased objectives, including making significant breakthroughs in AI theory and becoming a leader in specific AI application fields by 2025, with the aim of AI core industry scale exceeding 400 billion RMB and related industry scale over 5 trillion RMB by that year.[355]

  - ○ **Government Investment and Support:** The Chinese central and local governments have committed substantial financial resources and policy support to AI research and development, the creation of AI industrial parks, talent cultivation programs, and the development of AI-related infrastructure.

  - ○ **Tech Giants and Data Advantage:** Chinese tech behemoths such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent (collectively known as BAT), and Huawei are major global players in AI. They benefit from a massive domestic market, which generates vast quantities of data crucial for training AI models, and a regulatory environment that, in certain aspects, facilitates more centralized data collection and utilization for AI development compared to Western counterparts.[356]

  - ○ **Focus Areas:** China's AI efforts are broad, with significant advancements and applications in areas like facial recognition and surveillance technologies, autonomous vehicles, smart cities, e-commerce, financial technology (fintech), healthcare, and military modernization.

- **Geopolitical Competition and Europe's Position:**

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[353] Cf. National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act of 2020. See also National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (NSCAI). (2021). Final Report.

[354] Cf. China State Council. (2017, July 20). Notice of the State Council Issuing the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan (Guo Fa [2017] No. 35). (Translation by Center for Security and Emerging Technology, Georgetown University).

[355] Cf. *Ib.*, Section II, Strategic Objectives.

[356] Cf. Lee (2018).

- **US-China AI Rivalry:** The dynamic between the US and China is often characterized as an intense "AI race" for technological supremacy, economic advantage, influence over global standards and norms, and strategic military capabilities.[357] This rivalry has implications for global supply chains (e.g., semiconductors), data governance policies, talent migration, and international security, with concerns raised about an AI-fueled arms race.
- **Europe's "Human-Centric" Approach:** The European Union (EU) is striving to forge a distinct path, often described as a "third way" in AI development and governance. This approach emphasizes "trustworthy AI" that is lawful, ethical, and robust, with a strong focus on protecting fundamental rights, democratic values, and ensuring human oversight.[358] The EU's landmark **AI Act**, proposed in 2021, is a comprehensive attempt to regulate AI systems based on their potential risk levels, aiming to foster innovation while mitigating potential harms. It categorizes AI applications into unacceptable risk (banned), high-risk (subject to strict requirements), limited risk (transparency obligations), and minimal risk (largely unregulated).[359] While Europe possesses strong academic research capabilities and several AI hubs, it faces challenges in translating these into globally dominant AI companies on the scale of those in the US and China. Initiatives like Horizon Europe and national strategies in countries like Germany and France aim to bolster European AI R&D, innovation, and deployment. The overarching challenge for Europe is to cultivate a competitive AI ecosystem while upholding its strong ethical and regulatory framework in a rapidly evolving and highly competitive global AI landscape.

12.6. The Dual-Edged Sword: Opportunities and Perils of AI Development

The exponential development of AI is a quintessential dual-edged sword, offering unprecedented opportunities alongside significant risks and ethical dilemmas.

12.6.1 Immense Opportunities (Pros):

- **Healthcare:** AI can revolutionize medical diagnosis (e.g., analyzing medical images with enhanced accuracy), accelerate drug discovery and development,

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[357] Cf. Allison, G. (2017). Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap? Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. (Context for US-China relations extended to tech).

[358] Cf. European Commission. (2019). Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI. High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence.

[359] Cf. European Commission. (2021, April 21). Proposal for a Regulation... (Artificial Intelligence Act). COM(2021) 206 final.

enable personalized medicine tailored to individual genetic profiles, and improve surgical precision through robotic assistance, leading to better health outcomes and more efficient healthcare systems.[360]

- **Economic Growth and Productivity:** AI-driven automation can significantly enhance productivity across diverse industries, create entirely new products, services, and markets, optimize complex supply chains, and potentially fuel substantial economic growth and innovation.[361]

- **Solving Complex Global Challenges:** AI can be a powerful tool for addressing pressing global issues such as climate change (e.g., by optimizing energy grids, modeling climate impacts, developing new sustainable technologies), alleviating poverty (e.g., by improving resource allocation, enhancing agricultural yields), ensuring food security, and managing natural disasters.

- **Enhanced Quality of Life and Accessibility:** AI can improve daily life through more intuitive intelligent assistants, personalized and adaptive educational tools, assistive technologies for people with disabilities, smarter and safer transportation systems, and more immersive and engaging entertainment experiences.

- **Scientific Advancement:** AI can accelerate the pace of scientific discovery by processing and analyzing vast and complex datasets beyond human capacity, identifying novel patterns and correlations, formulating new hypotheses, and even designing and running experiments in fields ranging from astrophysics and materials science to genomics and neuroscience.[362]

12.6.2 Significant Ethical Dilemmas and Risks (Cons):

- **Job Displacement and Economic Inequality:** Widespread automation driven by AI could lead to significant job displacement, particularly for tasks involving routine cognitive and physical labor. This could exacerbate economic inequality and social disruption if the benefits of AI-driven productivity are not widely shared and if adequate measures for workforce transition and social support are not implemented.[363]

- **Bias and Discrimination:** AI systems learn from the data they are trained on. If this data reflects existing societal biases related to race, gender, age, or other characteristics, the AI can inadvertently learn, perpetuate, and even amplify these biases in critical applications such as hiring, loan approvals, criminal justice (e.g., predictive policing, recidivism risk assessment), and

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[360] Cf. Topol, E. J. (2019). Deep Medicine: How Artificial Intelligence Can Make Healthcare Human Again. Basic Books.
[361] Cf. Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2014). The Second Machine Age.
[362] Cf. Agrawal, A., Gans, J., & Goldfarb, A. (2018). Prediction Machines: The Simple Economics of Artificial Intelligence. Harvard Business Review Press.
[363] Cf. Ford, M. (2015). Rise of the Robots: Technology and the Threat of a Jobless Future.

healthcare, leading to unfair and discriminatory outcomes.[364]

- **Privacy and Surveillance:** AI-powered surveillance technologies, including advanced facial recognition, emotion recognition, and behavioral analysis systems, raise profound concerns about individual privacy, freedom of expression, and the potential for misuse by state actors for mass surveillance or by corporations for intrusive marketing and data exploitation.[365]

- **Autonomous Weapons (Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems - LAWS):** The development of AI-powered autonomous weapons that can independently select and engage targets without meaningful human control poses severe ethical and legal challenges. These include questions of accountability for unlawful actions, compliance with international humanitarian law (distinction, proportionality, precaution), the risk of algorithmic errors leading to unintended escalation, and the lowering of the threshold for armed conflict.[366]

- **Control and Safety of Advanced AI (Existential Risk):** As AI systems become more powerful and autonomous, ensuring that their goals remain robustly aligned with human values and intentions (the "alignment problem") becomes increasingly critical and difficult. The potential for AGI or ASI to develop goals that diverge from human well-being, or to pursue well-intentioned goals in harmful ways, poses a significant, if debated, long-term existential risk to humanity.[367]

- **Manipulation and Misinformation:** AI can be used to create highly realistic "deepfakes" (synthetic media, which appears to represent a real person), generate persuasive and targeted misinformation campaigns at an unprecedented scale, and automate social engineering attacks, thereby undermining trust in information, manipulating public opinion, and potentially destabilizing democratic processes and social cohesion.

- **Concentration of Power:** The immense computational resources, vast datasets, and specialized talent required for cutting-edge AI development are currently concentrated in a few large technology corporations and a small number of nations. This raises concerns about the monopolization of this transformative technology, the stifling of competition, and the undue influence these entities might wield over society and the global economy.

12.7. AI and the Human Person: Theological Reflections and Magisterial Guidance

The exponential development of AI prompts profound theological reflection

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[364] Cf. Noble, S. U. (2018). Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism; O'Neil, C. (2016). Weapons of Math Destruction.
[365] Cf. Zuboff, S. (2019). The Age of Surveillance Capitalism.
[366] Cf. Arkin, R. C. (2009). Governing Lethal Behavior in Autonomous Robots.
[367] Cf. Bostrom (2014); Russell (2019).

on the nature of the human person, our place in creation, and our relationship with God. The Catholic Church, through various Magisterial documents and initiatives, has begun to engage with these emerging questions, offering ethical guidance rooted in its rich anthropological and social teachings.

- **Creativity and *Imago Dei*:** Humans are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), a status that endows them with reason, creativity, and free will (Genesis 1:26-27; CCC §355-357). The human endeavor to create AI can be understood as a participation in God's own creative power, a manifestation of the *imago Dei*. However, this raises questions about the nature of AI's "intelligence" and "creativity." While AI can exhibit remarkable problem-solving and generative capabilities, theological anthropology emphasizes that human intelligence is integrated with consciousness, self-awareness, spiritual longing, and the capacity for love and relationship, dimensions not currently attributable to AI. Pope Francis, in his 2024 World Day of Peace Message, acknowledged that "Artificial intelligence is now one of the most important and rapidly developing fields of human knowledge and ingenuity," yet cautioned that "the very meaning of the term 'artificial intelligence', is already in itself potentially misleading," as machines possess "at most, a prodigious capacity to correlate enormous quantities of data," which is distinct from human understanding and consciousness.[368]

- **Stewardship and Responsibility:** The human mandate to "have dominion" (Genesis 1:28) is understood in Christian tradition as responsible stewardship, not arbitrary exploitation. The development of powerful AI technologies falls under this call to cultivate and care for creation, including the digital realm. This implies a profound ethical responsibility to ensure AI is developed and deployed for the authentic good of all humanity and creation, with particular attention to the vulnerable. The Pontifical Academy for Life, in the "Rome Call for AI Ethics" (2020), co-signed with major tech leaders, emphasized principles such as transparency, inclusion, responsibility, impartiality, reliability, and security and privacy, advocating for an "algorethics" that ensures AI serves "the good of every human being."[369]

- **Human Dignity and Purpose:** If AI systems can perform many tasks previously considered uniquely human, it prompts reflection on the ultimate source of human dignity and purpose. Christian theology asserts that human dignity is inherent and inalienable, rooted in being created in God's image and likeness, and called to an eternal destiny, not merely in functional capabilities or economic productivity (*CCC* §1700). Pope Francis has frequently stressed

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[368] Cf. Pope Francis. (2023, December 8). Message for the 2024 World Day of Peace: Artificial Intelligence and Peace, nos. 2, 3.
[369] Cf. Pontifical Academy for Life. (2020, February 28). Rome Call for AI Ethics.

that technology must serve the human person and not the other way around. The challenge is "to ensure that artificial intelligence remains at the service of the human being, and not vice versa."[370] The meaning of work, the value of human relationships, and the pursuit of integral human development must be safeguarded in an AI-suffused world.

- **The Nature of Intelligence, Consciousness, and the Soul:** AI research compels a deeper philosophical and theological examination of what constitutes intelligence, consciousness, self-awareness, and understanding. While AI may simulate or exhibit intelligent behavior, theological anthropology distinguishes this from the human soul, understood as the spiritual principle of life, with its capacities for self-transcendence, abstract thought, moral deliberation, love, and a direct relationship with God. The unique spiritual nature of the human person is not reducible to algorithmic processes.[371]

- **Ethical Governance and the Common Good:** The Magisterium has consistently called for ethical reflection and governance of new technologies to ensure they promote the common good and integral human development. Pope Francis, in his address to the participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (2020), warned against a "technocratic paradigm" and urged that AI development be guided by "an ethical vision, capable of creating an alliance between scientific knowledge and human values."[372] This involves addressing issues of bias, ensuring inclusivity, preventing harm, and fostering international cooperation for the responsible governance of AI. He further reiterated in his 2024 Peace Message that "the global scale of artificial intelligence makes it clear that, alongside the responsibility of sovereign states to regulate its use internally, international organizations have a vital role to play in brokering multilateral agreements and coordinating their application and enforcement."[373]

- **Suffering, Limitation, and the Human Condition:** Some AI aspirations, particularly those connected with transhumanism (which we will explore in the next chapter), aim to overcome fundamental human limitations, including suffering, disease, and mortality. Christian theology, while affirming the goodness of alleviating suffering and promoting health, offers a distinct perspective on human finitude and the meaning of suffering. It acknowledges these as part of the current human condition, often linked to sin and our

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[370] Pope Francis. (2019, September 27). Address to Participants in the Meeting "The Common Good in the Digital Age".

[371] See John Paul II, Pope. (1998). Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio, esp. nos. 81-85 on wisdom and the limits of instrumental reason.

[372] Cf. Pope Francis. (2020, February 28). Address to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life. See also Pope Francis. (2015). Encyclical Letter Laudato Si', nos. 102-136 on the technocratic paradigm.

[373] Cf. Pope Francis. (2023, December 8). Message for the 2024 World Day of Peace, no. 8.

creaturely status, but finds redemptive potential within them through the Paschal Mystery of Christ. The ultimate hope is not for a technologically achieved immortality within this world, but for resurrection and eternal life in communion with God. The pursuit of AI should not lead to a "Promethean presumption of self-sufficiency" or a denial of human vulnerability which opens us to God and to each other.[374]

The ongoing dialogue between faith, reason, and technological innovation is crucial. The Church seeks to contribute to this dialogue by offering its anthropological and ethical wisdom, advocating for an AI that truly serves the flourishing of every human person and the whole human family.

12.8. Conclusion: AI - Harbinger of New Human Frontiers and an Introduction to Transhumanism

Artificial Intelligence stands as one of the most transformative technologies in human history, promising to reshape our world in ways we are only beginning to comprehend. Its exponential development offers solutions to age-old problems and pathways to unprecedented progress. Yet, it also brings forth complex ethical dilemmas, societal disruptions, and even potential existential risks that demand careful navigation and wise governance. The journey with AI is not merely a technological one; it is a deeply human one, forcing us to confront fundamental questions about our nature, our values, and our future.

The capacity of AI to augment, and potentially even redefine, human capabilities serves as a crucial bridge to the next major challenge we will explore: **Transhumanism**. If AI represents the creation of non-biological intelligence and powerful tools for altering our environment and ourselves, transhumanism takes the ambition further, advocating for the direct technological modification and enhancement of the human organism itself. The questions raised by AI—about intelligence, consciousness, control, and the meaning of being human—become even more acute when the technology is aimed squarely at re-engineering humanity.

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[374] Cf. *Ib*., no. 3, referencing the "Promethean presumption of self-sufficiency."

Chapter 13: Transhumanism: The Technological Quest to Remake Humanity

Introduction: Beyond AI – The Redesign of the Human

The previous chapter explored the exponential development of Artificial Intelligence, a technology poised to augment and potentially redefine human capabilities and societal structures. This ascent of AI serves as a critical precursor and often an enabling technology for an even more ambitious and radical intellectual and cultural movement: **Transhumanism**. If AI focuses on creating non-biological intelligence and tools to alter our environment, transhumanism directs the power of technology inward, advocating for the fundamental redesign and enhancement of the human organism itself. This chapter will examine the multifaceted phenomenon of transhumanism, tracing its historical and philosophical roots, outlining the core tenets and goals of the modern movement, considering its aspirational promises, and confronting the profound ethical dilemmas and existential risks it entails. We will also consider contemporary psychological and neuroscientific perspectives on the drive for such radical self-modification and examine Magisterial documents of the Catholic Church that address themes relevant to transhumanism, before concluding with a theological reflection on the movement's underlying desires.

13.1. Defining Transhumanism: A Movement for Human Transcendence

Transhumanism is broadly defined as a philosophical and scientific movement that advocates for the use of emerging technologies to enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities, and to overcome fundamental human limitations such as disease, aging, suffering, and even involuntary death.[375] The ultimate aim for many transhumanists is to guide humanity towards a "posthuman" condition—a state of being so radically different from current humanity, due to technological augmentation, as to no longer be "human" in the traditional sense.[376]

Key concepts central to transhumanism include:

- **Human Enhancement:** Going beyond therapy or restoration of normal function (which aims to bring individuals to a species-typical norm) to improve

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[375] Cf. Bostrom, N. (2005). "A History of Transhumanist Thought." Journal of Evolution and Technology, 14(1), 1-25; See also the definition provided by Humanity+ (formerly World Transhumanist Association).

[376] Cf. Hayles, N. K. (1999). How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics. University of Chicago Press. This concept is central to transhumanist discourse.

human traits and abilities above that norm. This can involve biological, genetic, or technological interventions.[377]

- **Technological Self-Direction of Evolution:** The idea that humanity can and should take control of its own evolutionary trajectory using science and technology, rather than leaving it to the slower processes of natural selection or chance. This implies a deliberate redesign of the human species.[378]

- **Posthumanity:** A hypothetical future state where descendants of humans, or humans themselves, have been so radically altered by technology (e.g., through genetic engineering, cybernetic augmentation, or mind uploading) that they possess capabilities far exceeding those of present humans, potentially lacking what are now considered defining human characteristics like mortality or a fixed biological form.[379]

13.2. Historical and Intellectual Roots of Transhumanism

While a formal movement of the late 20th and 21st centuries, the aspirations underpinning transhumanism have deep historical and philosophical roots.

- **Ancient Longings:** The desire to transcend human limits is an ancient theme. Myths of immortality (e.g., the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* recounting the hero's search for an herb of eternal life), quests for a Fountain of Youth, and alchemical pursuits of the elixir of life reflect a long-standing human grappling with finitude and a desire for enhanced being.[380] Greek myths like those of Prometheus (who stole fire/technology from the gods) and Daedalus (the master craftsman and inventor) celebrate human ingenuity in overcoming natural limitations, albeit often with tragic consequences, highlighting an early tension between human ambition and perceived natural or divine order.

- **Renaissance Humanism:** The Renaissance saw a renewed focus on human potential and dignity. Thinkers like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), famously depicted God addressing Adam: "We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of yourself, you may fashion yourself in whatever shape you shall prefer."[381] This vision of human self-shaping and an undefined nature that can aspire to "higher forms, which are divine," is seen by some as an early precursor to transhumanist ideals.[382] Plotinus, centuries earlier, in his *Enneads*, had similarly

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[377] Cf. Juengst, E. T., & Moseley, D. (2019). "Human Enhancement." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
[378] Cf. Bostrom, N. (2005). "Transhumanist Values." Ethical Issues for the 21st Century.
[379] Cf. Fukuyama, F. (2002). Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution.
[380] Cf. See, e.g., Kramer, S. N. (1963). The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character, for the Epic of Gilgamesh.
[381] Cf. Pico della Mirandola, G. (1486). Oration on the Dignity of Man. (Standard translations).
[382] This connection is often made in histories of humanism and transhumanism, see, e.g., Bostrom

urged a self-sculpting of one's own inner "statue" towards beauty and perfection, stating: "Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful..."[383]

- **The Enlightenment and the Idea of Perfectibility:** The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment placed immense faith in reason, science, and progress to improve the human condition. Francis Bacon, in his *Novum Organum* (1620), advocated for an empirical scientific method aimed at "the effecting of all things possible" by mastering nature for human benefit, envisioning a future where human life could be prolonged and suffering alleviated through scientific knowledge.[384] Enlightenment thinkers championed human perfectibility through education, societal reform, and scientific advancement. Figures like the Marquis de Condorcet, in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), envisioned a future where medicine would dramatically extend human lifespan, perhaps indefinitely: "Might not a period then arrive when death would be nothing more than the effect either of extraordinary accidents, or of the increasingly slower decay of the vital forces...?"[385] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, while also warning of its dangers (seeing perfectibility as a potential cause of human misfortune and tyranny over nature if it alienates humanity from its natural state), explored the concept of human "perfectibility" (*perfectibilité*) as a distinctive human faculty for almost unlimited self-improvement, a movement, once begun, that knows no bounds.[386] This era saw the human being increasingly as a subject capable of self-creation, no longer wholly defined by a fixed nature or divine decree, contributing to what some have termed a "divorce between the world of values and the world of facts."[387]

- **19th Century Influences:** Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection (1859) profoundly impacted the understanding of human origins and mutability, suggesting that species are not fixed but subject to change over vast timescales.[388] While Darwinism itself does not imply directed evolution by humans, it provided a conceptual backdrop for later ideas of self-guided human transformation. The 19th-century ideology of "progress," which Auguste Comte in his *Course in Positive Philosophy* characterized as a

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(2005), "A History of Transhumanist Thought."
[383] Plotinus, Enneads, I.6.9.
[384] Cf. Bacon, F. (1620). Novum Organum, Aphorism II, 2.
[385] Cf. Condorcet, Marquis de. (1795). Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind, Tenth Epoch.
[386] Cf. Rousseau, J.-J. (1755). Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men, Part I.
[387] This "divorce" is a concept often discussed in relation to modernity, e.g., by Leo Strauss or Alasdair MacIntyre in different contexts.
[388] Cf. Darwin, C. (1859). On the Origin of Species.

fundamental law of social dynamics tending towards improvement, also fueled these aspirations.[389] Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, with its concepts of the "will to power" and the "Übermensch" (Overman/Superman), advocated for a radical self-overcoming, revaluation of values, and the creation of a higher type of human being beyond traditional morality, ideas which some transhumanists have found resonant.[390]

13.3. The Emergence and Development of the Modern Transhumanist Movement

The formal transhumanist movement began to coalesce in the latter half of the 20th century, significantly influenced by developments in cybernetics, computer science, space exploration, and biotechnology.

- **Key Figures and Terms:** Biologist Julian Huxley is credited with first using the term "transhumanism" in a modern sense in his 1957 essay of the same name, where he wrote: "the human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature."[391] In the 1960s, futurist Fereidoun M. Esfandiary (who later changed his name to FM-2030) began describing "transhumans" as transitional beings adopting new technologies, lifestyles, and worldviews en route to a posthuman future. He argued that because our ancestors "could do nothing about death... they invented life after death," implying technology might offer a more direct path to overcoming mortality.[392]

- **Foundational Thinkers and Organizations:** In the late 1980s and early 1990s, philosopher Max More, along with Tom Morrow, founded the Extropy Institute, promoting "Extropianism," a specific libertarian transhumanist philosophy emphasizing principles like perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, and spontaneous order.[393] More defined transhumanism as a "class of philosophies of life that seek the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life beyond its current human form and limitations by means of science and technology, guided by

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[389] Cf. Comte, A. (1830-1842). Course in Positive Philosophy.
[390] Cf. Nietzsche, F. (1883-1885). Thus Spoke Zarathustra. See discussions in, e.g., Sorgner, S. L. (2009). "Nietzsche, the Overhuman, and Transhumanism." Journal of Evolution and Technology, 20(1), 29-42.
[391] Cf. Huxley, J. (1957). "Transhumanism." In J. Huxley, New Bottles for New Wine (pp. 13-17). Chatto & Windus.
[392] Cf. Esfandiary, F. M. (FM-2030). (1989). Are You a Transhuman? The quote about ancestors inventing life after death is famously attributed to FM-2030.
[393] Cf. More, M. (1990). "Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy." Extropy, 6.

life-promoting principles and values."[394] The 1990s also saw the rise of discussions around "NBIC convergence"—the synergistic interplay of Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information technology, and Cognitive science—as a key enabler of radical human enhancement, notably in a US National Science Foundation report.[395] In 1998, philosophers Nick Bostrom and David Pearce founded the World Transhumanist Association (WTA), which aimed to provide a broader, more inclusive platform for transhumanist thought and advocacy.[396]

- **Core Tenets and Goals:** The WTA (which became Humanity+ in 2008, with figures like Natasha Vita-More playing leading roles) formally defined transhumanism in its "Transhumanist Declaration", which has since been updated over time. Core tenets include affirming the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities. Its mission also included studying the implications, promises, and potential dangers of such technologies, including the "ethical issues raised by the elaboration and development of use of such techniques."[397]

- **Current Landscape:** Today, transhumanism is a diverse, multi-faceted global movement, encompassing various philosophical perspectives from libertarian to social democratic approaches regarding access and regulation of enhancement technologies. It has a significant presence in academic philosophy, futurist circles, and the tech industry, particularly in areas like Silicon Valley. While historically strongest in North America and parts of Europe (with organizations like Transhumanist UK and various European transhumanist parties or associations), transhumanist ideas and organizations are also gaining traction in Asia (e.g., China, South Korea) and other parts of the world, reflecting the global reach of NBIC industries and the universal appeal of overcoming human limitations.[398]

13.4. Philosophical and Theological Currents Resonating with Transhumanism

While transhumanism is largely a secular and materialist philosophy, some of its themes—such as evolution towards greater complexity and consciousness, and

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[394] Cf. More, M. (2013). "The Philosophy of Transhumanism." In M. More & N. Vita-More (Eds.), The Transhumanist Reader (pp. 3-17). Wiley-Blackwell. This is a refined definition.

[395] Cf. Roco, M. C., & Bainbridge, W. S. (Eds.). (2003). Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance.

[396] Cf. Bostrom, N. (2005). "A History of Transhumanist Thought."

[397] Cf.This summarizes the mission and goals often stated by Humanity+ and related manifestos, such as earlier versions of the Transhumanist Declaration.

[398] Cf. Ranisch, R., & Sorgner, S. L. (Eds.). (2014). Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction.

an ultimate point of convergence or transformation—have found echoes or points of contact (often controversially) with certain interpretations of theological and philosophical figures.

Most notably, the evolutionary theology of Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) is sometimes cited in discussions related to transhumanist thought, though it's crucial to distinguish his fundamentally Christocentric vision from secular transhumanism.[399] Teilhard envisioned cosmic evolution as a directional process of "complexification-consciousness," leading towards increasing spiritualization and unification, culminating in an "Omega Point"—a supreme point of unity and convergence, which he identified with the cosmic Christ, the personal center of the universe.[400] He spoke of the "noosphere" as an emerging global "thinking layer" or collective consciousness facilitated by human interaction, culture, and technology—"a closely interdependent network...over the whole earth"—an idea some have seen as anticipating the internet and global interconnectedness.[401] Teilhard also used terms like "trans-human" and "ultra-human" to describe future evolutionary stages of humanity. Julian Huxley, who wrote the introduction to the English translation of Teilhard's *The Phenomenon of Man*, was deeply impacted by Teilhard and himself used "transhumanism" to describe humanity transcending itself through realizing new possibilities.[402] While some transhumanists have drawn inspiration from Teilhard's expansive vision of evolution and future transformation, his framework is deeply rooted in Christian theology, emphasizing divine immanence and transcendence, the role of love (charity) as the energy of evolution, and the ultimate fulfillment of creation in Christ. This differs significantly from the often materialist, individualistic, and self-directed evolutionary goals of mainstream transhumanism. The Catholic Church's engagement with Teilhard's thought has been complex, with early cautions followed by more appreciative references from recent Popes, including Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, who acknowledge aspects of his contribution while situating it within Christian doctrine.[403]

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[399] See discussions in Mercer, C., & Trothen, T. J. (Eds.). (2014). Religion and Transhumanism.
[400] Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, P. (1955/1959). The Phenomenon of Man.
[401] Cf. *Ib.*
[402] Cf. Huxley, J. (1959). Introduction to P. Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man.
[403] See, e.g., Benedict XVI's references in Spirit of the Liturgy or addresses; Francis, Pope. (2015). Encyclical Letter Laudato Si', no. 83.

13.5. The Allures and Aspirations of Transhumanism (The "Pros")

Transhumanism's appeal lies in its promise to overcome deeply ingrained human limitations and to unlock new potentials for human experience and flourishing.

- **Overcoming Suffering and Disease:** A primary and widely shared goal is the elimination of involuntary suffering, whether from physical disease, mental illness, or the debilitating effects of aging. This includes the pursuit of radical life extension or "healthy indefinite lifespans," viewing aging as a treatable, if complex, condition rather than an inevitable fate.[404]
- **Enhanced Capabilities:** Transhumanists envision significant enhancements to human capacities:
    - **Cognitive Enhancement:** Augmenting intelligence, memory, creativity, concentration, and learning speed through neuro-pharmacology ("smart drugs"), genetic engineering, brain-computer interfaces (BCIs), or even AI augmentation.[405]
    - **Physical Enhancement:** Improving strength, speed, endurance, sensory acuity (e.g., seeing new parts of the electromagnetic spectrum), and resilience beyond current human norms.
    - **Emotional Enhancement (Mood Brightening):** Greater control over emotions, the ability to experience heightened states of well-being, joy, love, artistic appreciation, and "superhappiness," potentially eliminating negative emotions not deemed useful or conducive to flourishing.[406]
- **The Quest for "Super" States:** As discussed in relation to AI and happiness (Chapter 2), transhumanism often aims for states of being characterized by super-longevity (or even digital immortality via mind uploading), super-intelligence, and super-wellbeing, fundamentally altering the human condition.
- **Expansion of Freedom and Choice:** For many transhumanists, the pursuit of enhancement is an expression of individual autonomy and morphological freedom—the right to self-modification and to choose one's own physical and mental form, expanding the range of human choices and experiences beyond biological constraints.[407]

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[404] Cf. Kurzweil, R. (2005). The Singularity Is Near; De Grey, A. D. N. J., & Rae, M. (2007). Ending Aging.
[405] Cf. Bostrom, N., & Savulescu, J. (Eds.). (2009). Human Enhancement.
[406] Cf. Pearce, D. (n.d.). The Hedonistic Imperative. (hedonistic-imperative.com).
[407] Hughes, J. J. (2004). Citizen Cyborg.

13.6. Ethical Dilemmas and Existential Risks of Transhumanism (The "Cons")

Despite its optimistic vision, transhumanism raises profound ethical concerns and potential risks, as extensively debated by bioethicists, philosophers, social critics, and theologians.[408]

- **Safety and Health Risks:** Radical biological or genetic modifications, especially germline alterations,[409] carry unknown and potentially severe health risks, not only for the individual but for future generations. As ethicist Maxwell J. Mehlman pointed out regarding early transgenic engineering, unintended consequences can arise when complex biological systems are altered, citing the example of the "Beltsville pigs" which suffered numerous health problems despite achieving some desired traits like reduced fat.[410]

- **Social Justice and Equality (The "Enhanced Divide"):** A major concern is the potential for enhancement technologies to exacerbate existing social inequalities, leading to a genetic or technological divide between the "enhanced" and the "unenhanced." Molecular biologist Lee M. Silver, in *Remaking Eden*, envisioned scenarios of "GenRich" and "GenPoor" populations becoming effectively distinct species, with the enhanced possessing vastly superior capabilities and opportunities.[411] Equitable access to enhancement technologies is a critical and largely unresolved issue.

- **Identity and Human Nature:** What does it mean to be human if core aspects of our biological nature—such as finitude, vulnerability, interdependency, and natural cognitive and physical limits—are radically altered or eliminated? The U.S. President's Council on Bioethics, in its report *Beyond Therapy*, raised concerns that "In our enhancement efforts, we risk making our bodies and minds little more than tools, turning into 'someone else,' flattening our souls, and ignoring the pursuit of true happiness" that comes from engaging with life's natural goods and challenges.[412] The very notion of a shared human nature and identity could be fractured.

- **Existential Threats:** Philosopher Nick Bostrom has warned that poorly conceived or misapplied advanced technologies, including those pursued by

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[408] See Kass, L. R. (2002). Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity; Sandel, M. J. (2007). The Case Against Perfection.

[409] Germline alterations are inheritable genetic changes in reproductive cells (sperm or egg) that are passed to offspring, affecting every cell. Unlike non-inheritable somatic alterations, they can involve single gene mutations or larger chromosomal changes, predisposing individuals to genetic diseases.

[410] Cf. Mehlman, M. J. (2012). Transhumanist Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares, p. 2. The Beltsville pig example is widely cited in bioethics literature discussing unintended consequences of genetic engineering.

[411] Cf. Silver, L. M. (1997). Remaking Eden, pp. 4-7, 236-238.

[412] Cf. President's Council on Bioethics (USA). (2003). Beyond Therapy, p. 287. Lebacqz's summary reflects themes from this report.

transhumanists (e.g., advanced nanotechnology, radical genetic engineering, or uncontrolled superintelligence resulting from cognitive enhancement), could lead to catastrophic outcomes, even human extinction or the permanent loss of humanity's potential.[413]

- **Discrimination and Social Disruption:** The emergence of "enhanced" individuals could lead to new forms of discrimination in employment, social interactions, and political rights. The social fabric could be strained by vast differences in capabilities and lifespans. Feminist critics like Mariann Springer-Kremser (as noted in the provided PDF structure) have also raised concerns that transhumanist technologies might further entrench existing gender inequalities or create new vulnerabilities for women by medicalizing and instrumentalizing their bodies.[414]

- **Economic Disruption:** If enhancements create significantly different levels of productivity and capability, this could profoundly disrupt labor markets and economic structures, potentially benefiting a small, enhanced elite and further marginalizing those without access to such technologies. Economist Tyler Cowen's work on the future of labor in an age of intelligent machines hints at such challenges, which could be amplified by biological enhancement.[415]

- **Societal Understanding and Governance:** The complexity of enhancement technologies poses a challenge for public understanding and democratic deliberation. Ensuring that decisions about the future of human nature are made responsibly and inclusively, rather than by a technological or economic elite, is crucial. Mehlman noted the difficulty for non-scientists to adequately assess the claims and risks involved.[416]

13.7. Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on Transhumanist Aspirations

The drive towards transhumanist goals can be examined through contemporary psychological and neuroscientific lenses, which offer insights into the motivations behind such aspirations and the current technological feasibility of certain enhancements.

- **Psychological Drivers:**
  - **Existential Anxiety and Fear of Death (Terror Management Theory):** A fundamental driver is arguably the deeply human fear of death and the

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[413] Cf. Bostrom, N. (2002). "Existential Risks."
[414] These concerns are voiced in feminist bioethics; precise citation for Springer-Kremser would require locating her specific work. General themes are found in authors like Donna Haraway or Rosi Braidotti.
[415] Cf. Cowen, T. (2013). Average Is Over.
[416] This point regarding public understanding is a general concern in the ethics of technology, echoed by many authors including Mehlman in various contexts.

desire for self-preservation and symbolic immortality. Transhumanism's pursuit of radical life extension or immortality directly addresses this existential anxiety, which Terror Management Theory posits as a core human motivator.[417]

- ○ **Quest for Control, Mastery, and Self-Efficacy:** The ambition to overcome biological limitations and direct human evolution reflects a powerful desire for control over nature, life, and personal destiny, which can be seen as an extension of the human drive for mastery and self-efficacy.[418]
- ○ **Perfectionism and Narcissism vs. Self-Actualization:** Psychological critiques might explore whether the intense focus on self-enhancement and the pursuit of "super" states could reflect maladaptive perfectionism or narcissistic tendencies (a grandiose sense of self, need for admiration, lack of empathy).[419] Conversely, proponents might frame it as a radical interpretation of self-actualization (striving to realize one's fullest potential, albeit technologically mediated), pushing the boundaries of Maslow's hierarchy.[420]
- ○ **Meaning and Transcendence in a Secular Age:** For some, transhumanism may offer a secular, technological path to a form of transcendence and a search for meaning in a post-religious or disenchanted world, replacing traditional religious narratives of salvation and ultimate concern with technological ones.[421]
- ○ **Cognitive Biases:** Optimism bias (underestimating risks of new technologies), the Dunning-Kruger effect (overestimating one's understanding of recently discovered complexity), and pro-innovation bias (overemphasizing benefits while downplaying drawbacks) might influence the uncritical adoption of certain transhumanist goals.[422]
- ● **Neuroscientific Perspectives on Enhancement:**
  - ○ **Cognitive Enhancers (Nootropics):** While "smart drugs" exist and are used (e.g., stimulants like methylphenidate, modafinil, and substances like piracetam), their efficacy for significant, sustained, and safe cognitive enhancement in healthy individuals is often modest, highly debated, and they carry potential side effects and risks of misuse. The neuroscientific path to "superintelligence" through pharmacology is currently far from the

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[417] Cf. Yalom, I. D. (1980). Existential Psychotherapy. (Discusses death anxiety as a core human concern, informed by Terror Management Theory by Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon).
[418] Cf. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control.
[419] Cf. Kernberg, O. F. (1975). Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism. For a critical psychological view of some enhancement drives.
[420] Cf. Maslow, A. H. (1968). Toward a Psychology of Being.
[421] Cf. Noble, D. F. (1997). The Religion of Technology: The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention.
[422] Cf. Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow (discusses various biases).

radical leaps envisioned by some transhumanists.[423]

- ○ **Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs):** BCIs are advancing rapidly, with impressive applications in restoring sensory or motor function (e.g., cochlear implants, advanced neuroprosthetics for paralysis) and emerging attempts at more direct neural communication for therapeutic purposes.[424] However, high-bandwidth, seamless, and safe integration for radical cognitive enhancement (e.g., direct knowledge transfer, significant intelligence augmentation) or "mind uploading" remains a formidable scientific and technical challenge, involving profound complexities of neural coding, brain plasticity, information processing in the brain, and the nature of personal identity and consciousness that are far from resolved.[425]

- ○ **Neurofeedback and Brain Stimulation:** Techniques like neurofeedback, transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), and transcranial direct current stimulation (tDCS) are being explored for modulating brain activity and potentially enhancing cognitive functions (like memory or attention) or treating neurological/psychiatric conditions. While promising for specific applications and demonstrating some short-term effects, their capacity for radical, stable, and widespread enhancement is limited by current understanding of precise brain function, individual variability, and ethical considerations regarding safety and non-medical use.[426]

- ○ **Limits of Current Neuroscience for Radical Goals:** Current neuroscience, while rapidly advancing, is still far from providing the means to achieve the more extreme transhumanist goals like indefinite lifespans through complete brain preservation and revival, digital immortality via faithful mind uploading (which itself rests on contestable philosophical assumptions about identity), or the creation of ASI through direct neural augmentation that significantly and safely surpasses species-typical intelligence. The emergent complexity of the brain, the hard problem of consciousness, and the philosophical underpinnings of personal identity present immense hurdles that are often underestimated in popular transhumanist discourse.[427] The psychological and ethical impacts of even seemingly minor but widespread enhancements (e.g., on self-perception, social dynamics, and concepts of normality) would also be profound and

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[423] Cf. Turner, D. C., & Sahakian, B. J. (2006). "Neuroethics of cognitive enhancement." BioSocieties, 1(1), 113-123.

[424] Cf. Nicolelis, M. A. L. (2011). Beyond Boundaries. See also recent developments from companies like Neuralink.

[425] Cf. Glannon, W. (2007). Bioethics and the Brain. For philosophical critiques of mind uploading, see discussions of personal identity by philosophers like Derek Parfit or contemporary neurophilosophers.

[426] See reviews like Horvath, J. C., Forte, J. D., & Carter, O. (2015). "Quantitative Review of Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation in Motor Learning." PLoS ONE, 10(2), e0116836; and broader discussions in neuroethics.

[427] Cf. Rose, S. (2005). The Future of the Brain: The Promise and Perils of Tomorrow's Neuroscience.

require careful, ongoing consideration.

13.8. Magisterial Documents and the Transhumanist Challenge

The Catholic Church's Magisterium has not issued a single comprehensive document solely dedicated to transhumanism, but numerous teachings address underlying principles and specific technologies relevant to the movement's aspirations.

- **Human Dignity:** The Church consistently affirms the inherent and inalienable dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*), from conception to natural death (CCC §1700). This dignity is not dependent on physical or mental abilities, youth, or perfection. Documents like *Donum Vitae* (Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, 1987) and *Dignitas Personae* (Instruction on Certain Bioethical Questions, 2008) articulate this foundational principle in the context of biomedical interventions. *Dignitas Personae* states, "The human body is not an object that man can dispose of at will, but it is an integral part of the human person, called to participate in eternal glory. One cannot arbitrarily decide the meaning and value of the body."[428] This challenges any view that treats the body merely as a machine to be radically re-engineered or discarded.

- **Therapy vs. Enhancement:** The Church generally distinguishes between therapeutic interventions aimed at restoring health and normal functioning, which are typically viewed positively as part of humanity's stewardship over life, and non-therapeutic enhancements aimed at altering or "improving" human nature beyond its species-typical capacities, which raise significant ethical concerns.[429] *Dignitas Personae* warns against a "eugenic mentality" that could lead to the stigmatization and marginalization of those with disabilities or perceived imperfections.[430]

- **The Meaning of Creation and Human Finitude:** Christian anthropology understands human beings as creatures, not creators of themselves *ex nihilo*. Finitude, vulnerability, and mortality are part of the human condition in a fallen world, though ultimately destined for transformation through Christ's resurrection. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, critiques the "technocratic paradigm" which promotes an "undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm" and "the myth of unlimited material progress," often forgetting that "reality is more important than the idea."[431] He warns against a human "self-centredness" that "would embrace a Promethean vision of mastery over

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[428] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (2008). Instruction Dignitas Personae: On Certain Bioethical Questions, no. 21. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
[429] See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (1987). Instruction Donum Vitae, I, 3.
[430] Cf. Instruction Dignitas Personae, no. 22.
[431] Cf. Francis, Pope. (2015). Encyclical Letter Laudato Si', nos. 106, 110.

the world."[432] The desire to overcome all limits through technology can reflect a "misguided notion of our own power."[433]

- **Integral Human Development:** The Church advocates for an "integral human development" that encompasses all dimensions of the person—physical, intellectual, social, spiritual, and moral—and is oriented towards the common good.[434] Enhancement that focuses solely on particular capacities at the expense of others, or that undermines human relationships or our relationship with God, would be stigmatized as contrary to human dignity.

- **Gift vs. Making:** Many theological critiques of radical enhancement emphasize the importance of understanding life and human capacities as gifts to be received and cultivated, rather than as mere raw material for human making and remaking at will. Michael Sandel, though not a Magisterial source, captures a sentiment resonant with this in *The Case Against Perfection*, arguing that the drive to master our nature can diminish our appreciation for the "giftedness of life."[435] Pope Benedict XVI often spoke about the dangers of a "technical mentality" that sees everything as subject to human making and control, forgetting the "grammar of creation."[436]

13.9. Transhumanism as a Contemporary Manifestation of an Ancient Temptation

Transhumanism, in its various expressions, is not merely a future prospect awaiting promotion; its underlying ethos and many of its enabling technologies are already shaping our world. From performance-enhancing drugs in sports and academia to advanced prosthetics, cosmetic surgery on an unprecedented scale, genetic screening, and early forms of brain-computer interfaces, humanity is already actively engaged in modifying and "enhancing" itself. The transhumanist movement formalizes and accelerates this trajectory, driven by an explicit philosophical commitment to transcend biological limitations.

At its core, the transhumanist project can be interpreted as an attempt to fulfill the profound human desire for transcendence, for "more life, more knowledge, more being"—aspirations that resonate deeply with the human spirit's innate orientation towards the infinite and the perfect. Christian theology identifies this as the **natural desire for God**, an inbuilt longing for ultimate truth, goodness,

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[432] *Ib*. no. 116.
[433] *Ib*. no. 117.
[434] Cf. See, e.g., Paul VI, Pope. (1967). Encyclical Letter Populorum Progressio; Benedict XVI, Pope. (2009). Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate.
[435] Cf. Sandel, M. J. (2007). The Case Against Perfection.
[436] See, e.g., Benedict XVI. (2010, September 17). Address to Representatives of British Society, including the Diplomatic Corps, Politicians, Academics and Business Leaders, Westminster Hall.

beauty, and unending life, which finds its true object in God Himself.[437]

However, transhumanism often seeks to achieve these "god-like" attributes—immortality, omniscience, omnipotence (over nature and self), and perpetual bliss—through human ingenuity and technological power *alone*, effectively "being like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5) on humanity's own terms, without reference to, or even in explicit rejection of, a transcendent Creator. In this sense, it can be understood to be a modern, technologically sophisticated manifestation of the original temptation: to achieve divinity by one's own efforts, to be the sole arbiter of one's nature and destiny, to grasp at being God *without God*.

All sin, from the original sin onwards, can be understood as having this root: an attempt by the creature to usurp the place of the Creator, to seek ultimate fulfillment in created goods or in the self-aggrandizement of the ego, rather than in loving communion with God. While the desire for more life, more knowledge, and greater well-being is in itself good and reflects our creation in the *imago Dei*, when this desire becomes detached from its true end (God) and seeks a self-made, immanent "salvation" through technology, it risks profound disorder and ultimately, deeper forms of alienation and frustration. Christian faith proposes that **beatitude**—the perfect happiness found in the vision and love of God—is the only possible, and divinely offered, fulfillment of this profound human desire for the infinite. This beatitude is not a self-achieved posthuman state but a gift of grace that perfects and elevates human nature, uniting it with its ultimate source and end.

13.10. Conclusion: The Posthuman Horizon and Theological Questions Revisited

Transhumanism, with its bold ambition to transcend human biological limitations through technology, presents one of the most profound and potentially disruptive challenges to traditional understandings of human nature, purpose, and destiny. It moves beyond the creation of external intelligent tools (as with AI) to propose the direct and radical refashioning of humanity itself. This quest for a "posthuman" future, driven by a potent mix of scientific optimism, ancient longings, and contemporary technological capabilities, compels a deep ethical and theological engagement.

The allure of overcoming suffering, disease, aging, and even death is

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[437] Cf. Aquinas, ST, I-II, q. 2, art. 8 (on God as ultimate beatitude); I, q. 12, art. 1 (on the natural desire to see God).

undeniably powerful. Yet, the pursuit of such radical enhancements is fraught with complex ethical dilemmas concerning safety, justice, identity, and the very meaning of human flourishing. The Magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church consistently call for a response grounded in the inherent dignity of the human person, the understanding of life as a gift, and the pursuit of integral human development ordered to the common good and our ultimate supernatural end. The underlying desire for "god-likeness" that animates much of the transhumanist project, while reflecting a distorted echo of our deepest spiritual yearning, finds its true and authentic fulfillment not in technological self-apotheosis, but in the grace of divine adoption and the promise of eternal beatitude. The next chapters will examine these theological dimensions more closely, considering how Christian faith responds to the promise and peril of the transhumanist vision and other contemporary challenges.

Chapter 14: The Economic Singularity: AI, Labor, and the Future of Society

Introduction: Navigating the Precipice of Economic Transformation

The preceding chapters have explored the exponential rise of Artificial Intelligence and the ambitions of Transhumanism. Flowing directly from these technological trajectories is the prospect of a profound, perhaps unprecedented, disruption to our economic systems and the very nature of human labor: the Economic Singularity. This chapter will examine this concept, distinguishing it from the more commonly discussed technological singularity, and analyze its potential implications for employment, societal structure, and human meaning. We will consider historical precedents of technological unemployment, the unique challenges posed by advanced AI, and various scenarios for the future. Furthermore, this chapter will incorporate contemporary psychological and neuroscientific perspectives on the potential human impact of such a shift and reflect on the Catholic Church's Magisterial teachings concerning the dignity of work and the principles that should guide us in building a just and humane future.

14.1. Defining the Singularities: Technological and Economic

The term "singularity" is borrowed from mathematics and physics, where it signifies a point at which variables become infinite or ordinary rules break down, such as the center of a black hole.[438] In discussions of future technology, two main types of singularities are posited:

- **The Technological Singularity:** This, as discussed in Chapter 12, most commonly refers to the hypothetical moment when Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) emerges, capable of recursive self-improvement, leading to an "intelligence explosion" and the creation of Artificial Superintelligence (ASI) far surpassing human intellect. The consequences of such an event are considered radically unpredictable and transformative for humanity.[439]

- **The Economic Singularity:** This concept, while related to advancements in AI, focuses specifically on the economic consequences. Calum Chace defines it as "the point at which a relevant part of the population of the world will be unemployed, replaced by more performing and cheap Artificial Intelligence and robots."[440] It signifies a fundamental breakdown of the traditional

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[438] Cf. Chace, C. (2016). The Economic Singularity: Artificial Intelligence and the Death of Capitalism, Kindle Locations 172-176.
[439] Cf. Kurzweil, R. (2005). The Singularity Is Near; Bostrom, N. (2014). Superintelligence.
[440] Chace (2016), conceptual definition.

labor-for-income model due to widespread technological automation of both physical and cognitive tasks, leading to a situation where a large portion of the human workforce may become permanently unemployable.

While the technological singularity concerns the advent of ASI, the economic singularity could potentially occur even with advanced Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) or less-than-superintelligent AGI, if these systems become capable enough to automate a vast range of human jobs more efficiently and cost-effectively.

14.2. Automation and the Workforce: Historical Precedents and Present Concerns

The fear of machines replacing human labor is not new. Resistance to labor-saving technology dates back centuries:

- In the 15th century, Dutch textile workers reportedly attacked looms by throwing wooden shoes (*sabots*) into them, possibly giving rise to the term "sabotage."[441]
- In the late 16th century, Queen Elizabeth I of England famously refused a patent to William Lee for a mechanical knitting machine, concerned it would deprive her subjects of employment and lead to social unrest.[442]
- The Luddite movement in early 19th-century England saw textile workers destroying machinery they believed threatened their livelihoods during the Industrial Revolution.[443]

Historically, while mechanization and automation have displaced workers in specific sectors (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing), overall employment levels in developed economies have generally risen. New technologies created new industries and new types of jobs, and increased productivity led to greater wealth, which in turn fueled demand for new goods and services.[444] This historical pattern leads many economists to argue that current fears about AI-driven unemployment are overstated, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the "Luddite fallacy."[445]

However, the current wave of AI-driven automation presents potentially distinct challenges. The **Information Revolution** made information and knowledge increasingly critical factors of production, leading to the rise of the service sector

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[441] Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 231-235. Historical accounts of early labor disputes often mention such actions.
[442] Cf. *Ib*. This anecdote is widely cited in discussions of technological unemployment.
[443] Cf. See, e.g., Sale, K. (1995). Rebels Against the Future: The Luddites and Their War on the Industrial Revolution.
[444] Cf. Autor, D. H. (2015). "Why Are There Still So Many Jobs? The History and Future of Workplace Automation." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 29(3), 3–30.
[445] Cf. *Ib.*

as the dominant economic force in many developed countries.[446] Alvin Toffler argued that a post-industrial society arrives when most workers are engaged in "brain work" rather than manual labor.[447] The crucial question now is: **Is it different this time?** As machines increasingly acquire cognitive skills previously unique to humans, will they begin to automate jobs in the service and knowledge sectors at a scale that outpaces our ability to create new, uniquely human roles?[448]

14.3. The Shifting Landscape of Labor: Jobs, Tasks, and the "Human Touch"

The impact of AI on employment is complex. It's more accurate to say that AI automates *tasks* rather than entire *jobs*. Many jobs consist of a bundle of tasks, some of which are more susceptible to automation than others.[449] This can lead to:

- **Job Transformation:** Humans may work alongside AI in "centaur" models, where AI handles routine, data-intensive, or analytical tasks, freeing humans to focus on aspects requiring complex interpersonal skills, creativity, critical judgment, or ethical decision-making.[450] The idea, as Kevin Kelly puts it, is that "machines are for answers; humans are for questions."[451]

- **Task Fragmentation and the Gig Economy:** Jobs may be increasingly "sliced and diced" into discrete tasks, allocated via digital platforms (e.g., Uber, TaskRabbit). While offering flexibility, this can also lead to precarious work, reduced benefits, and algorithmic management.[452]

- **The Limits of "Human Touch":** Some argue that jobs requiring distinctly human social skills, empathy, and care (e.g., nursing, therapy, teaching) will remain resistant to automation. David Deming's research indicates faster growth in jobs requiring high social skills.[453] However, AI is making inroads even here. For example, "robot therapists" like "Ellie," developed with DARPA funding, have shown that some individuals, particularly those hesitant to open up to human therapists (like soldiers with PTSD), may respond positively, even more openly, to virtual therapists that are perceived as non-judgmental and can analyze subtle non-verbal cues more effectively than humans in some

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[446] Cf. Mokyr, J. (2002). The Gifts of Athena. This shift is well-documented in economic history.
[447] Cf. Toffler, A. (1980). The Third Wave. Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 272-277, references Toffler.
[448] Cf. Brynjolfsson, E., & McAfee, A. (2014). The Second Machine Age; Ford, M. (2015). Rise of the Robots.
[449] Cf. Arntz, M., Gregory, T., & Zierahn, U. (2016). "The Risk of Automation for Jobs in OECD Countries."
[450] Cf. This "centaur" concept is discussed by various futurists and economists, e.g., Kasparov, G. (2017). Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begins.
[451] Cf. Kelly, K. (2016). The Inevitable. This quote is a common theme in his work.
[452] Cf. Standing, G. (2011). The Precariat.
[453] Cf. Deming, D. J. (2017). "The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market."

instances.[454] The assumption that humans always prefer human interaction is being challenged.

- **Artisanal Value and Status:** Others suggest that products and services "made by hand" or delivered by humans will retain a premium value due to perceived quality, uniqueness, loyalty, or status.[455] However, such markets are likely to remain niche and insufficient to absorb widespread job displacement.

- **Creativity and Art:** While human creativity has long been considered a bastion against automation, generative AI systems like DALL-E 2 and music composition AIs demonstrate that machines can produce novel and aesthetically interesting outputs. The distinction between machine "creativity" (often sophisticated pattern recognition and recombination) and genuine human artistic expression (rooted in intention, experience, and consciousness) is a subject of ongoing debate.[456]

Even if new jobs are created, as Sebastian Thrun optimistically suggests has always happened with new technologies,[457] the concern is whether they will be created fast enough, in sufficient numbers, and be accessible to the skills of the displaced workforce, especially as AI's capabilities continue to improve exponentially.

14.4. Challenges of the Economic Singularity

Should widespread technological unemployment occur, societies would face profound challenges, as outlined by commentators like Calum Chace:[458]

1. **Economic Contraction:** If a large segment of the population loses earned income, aggregate demand could plummet. Even if AI and robots continue to produce goods and services efficiently (maintaining supply), a lack of purchasing power would lead to falling prices and, potentially, a deflationary spiral, grinding the economy to a halt. The classic anecdote of Walter Reuther and the Ford executive ("how will the robots buy cars?") illustrates this fundamental problem.[459]

2. **Distribution of Wealth and Resources:** With labor's share of income diminishing, the wealth generated by AI and automation could become increasingly concentrated in the hands of capital owners and AI developers.

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[454] Cf. Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 2388-2393, describes "Ellie." Research on virtual therapists and AI in mental health is ongoing.
[455] This is a general argument made by some defenders against mass technological unemployment, noted in Chace (2016).
[456] See, e.g., Boden, M. A. (2004). The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms.
[457] Thrun's optimism is noted in Chace (2016).
[458] This outlines Chace's (2016) framework of five major challenges, Kindle Locations following approx. 3000.
[459] This anecdote and its economic implication are discussed in Chace (2016).

This would exacerbate inequality. The question of how to distribute the immense wealth potentially created by AI becomes paramount. **Universal Basic Income (UBI)**—an unconditional income granted to all citizens—is one widely discussed proposal to address this, advocated by organizations like the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN) and figures like Martin Ford.[460] UBI aims to provide a safety net and maintain consumer demand. However, its funding, implementation, and potential social effects are complex and debated.

3. **Meaning and Purpose:** Work is not just a source of income; for many, it provides identity, social connection, structure, and a sense of purpose and contribution. Widespread, permanent unemployment could lead to a crisis of meaning, potentially increasing depression, anomie, and social alienation.[461] While some point to historical aristocracies or current retirees as examples of non-working populations who can find fulfillment, these analogies may not fully apply to a mass society without the option of work, especially if leisure is not coupled with resources and opportunities for meaningful engagement.[462]

4. **Allocation of Scarce Goods:** Even in a society of material abundance potentially generated by AI, some goods will remain inherently scarce (e.g., desirable locations, unique experiences, positions of status). In a society with largely equalized incomes via UBI but unequal pre-existing asset distribution, how would these scarce goods be allocated? Virtual reality (VR) has been suggested by some (like Oculus founder Palmer Luckey) as a way to provide access to simulated desirable experiences for all, with John Carmack arguing that "if people are having a virtually happy life, they are having a happy life. Period."[463] This raises questions about the nature of genuine experience and fulfillment.

5. **Social Cohesion and Potential Fracture:** If access to advanced technologies (including human enhancement, as discussed in Chapter 13) is unequal, society could fracture into distinct groups, perhaps the "enhanced" and the "unenhanced," or the AI-owning elite and a dependent populace. This could lead to resentment, instability, and the erosion of social solidarity. The "gods and the useless" scenario, where a technologically advanced elite lives in isolated, protected communities, represents an extreme dystopian outcome.[464]

14.5. Future Scenarios: Navigating Uncertainty

Given these challenges, various future scenarios are envisioned:

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[460] Van Parijs, P., & Vanderborght, Y. (2017). Basic Income; Ford (2015) also advocates for UBI. BIEN's definition is standard.

[461] Cf. Jahoda, M. (1982). Employment and Unemployment: A Social-Psychological Analysis. (Classic work on psychological functions of employment).

[462] Cf. Chace (2016) discusses aristocrats and retirees in this context.

[463] Luckey and Carmack quotes are from Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 3343-3344.

[464] Cf. Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 3408-3418, describing the "gods and the useless" scenario.

- **No Fundamental Change / Muddling Through:** Some argue that, as in the past, new jobs will emerge, and society will adapt without a radical break from current economic structures, though with ongoing adjustments and social safety nets. John Markoff, for instance, has expressed skepticism about the imminence of radical technological disruption, pointing to a perceived slowdown in basic science innovation.[465]

- **Racing with (and against) the Machines:** Humans may increasingly collaborate with AI ("centaurs"), leveraging unique human skills alongside AI's capabilities. However, the domain of "uniquely human" skills may continually shrink. While some, like Jonathan Grudin, believe "there is no shortage of things that need to be done," the question remains whether these will be *paid* jobs for a majority.[466]

- **Capitalism + UBI:** A market economy might persist, but with a strong UBI and other social support systems funded by the productivity gains of AI (e.g., through taxes on AI/robots or capital). This aims to preserve consumer demand and provide basic security, but challenges of meaning and allocation would remain.[467]

- **Fracture:** As described above, society could split into highly unequal segments based on access to technology, resources, and enhancements, leading to instability.

- **Collapse:** If the transition is poorly managed, widespread unemployment, economic contraction, and social unrest could lead to a collapse of existing social and economic orders.

- **Protopia (Incremental Progress):** Kevin Kelly advocates for a "protopian" future—not a perfect utopia (which he deems sterile and improbable), nor a dystopia, but a state of incremental progress where new technologies create almost as many problems as they solve, but crucially, they offer new choices and a slight net positive improvement over time.[468] This view emphasizes ongoing adaptation and problem-solving.

14.6. Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on an Economic Singularity

The prospect of an economic singularity, particularly widespread technological unemployment and the potential implementation of UBI, has significant implications for human psychology and brain function.

- **Psychological Well-being, Identity, and Purpose:**

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[465] Cf. Markoff, J. (2015). Machines of Loving Grace. Chace (2016) notes Markoff's skepticism.
[466] Cf. Grudin's view is cited in Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 3541-3542.
[467] Cf. Ford (2015) and Chace (2016) discuss this scenario.
[468] Cf. Kelly (2016), as discussed by Chace (2016), Kindle Locations 3618-3619.

- ○ **Work and Identity:** For many, work is a central component of **identity, self-esteem, and social status.**[469] The loss of work can lead to feelings of uselessness, diminished self-worth, and social isolation. Adapting to a "post-work" society would require a significant cultural shift in how value and identity are constructed.
- ○ **Mental Health:** Unemployment is strongly linked to increased risks of **depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues.**[470] While UBI could alleviate financial stress, it might not fully address the psychological needs met by work (e.g., structure, social connection, sense of contribution). Research on UBI pilots is beginning to explore these mental health impacts, with some studies suggesting improvements in well-being when financial precarity is reduced.[471]
- ○ **Motivation and Meaning:** A central question is how humans would find **motivation and meaning** if traditional work is no longer a primary life activity. Theories of intrinsic motivation (e.g., Self-Determination Theory, focusing on autonomy, competence, and relatedness) suggest that individuals can be motivated by activities pursued for their own sake (hobbies, learning, community engagement, creative pursuits), which could flourish in a society with greater leisure time.[472] However, cultivating such intrinsic motivation on a mass scale might require new educational and social structures.
- ○ **Stress and Adaptation:** The transition itself would likely be a period of significant **stress and societal adaptation**. The psychological capacity for resilience and coping with large-scale change would be crucial.
- **Neuroscientific Perspectives:**
  - ○ **The Brain's Reward System:** The brain's reward system, driven by dopamine, is activated not just by primary rewards (like food) but also by achieving goals, learning new skills, and social recognition—many of which are often tied to work.[473] A "post-work" society would need to provide alternative avenues for engaging this system to maintain motivation and prevent anhedonia.
  - ○ **Cognitive Engagement and Brain Health:** Meaningful cognitive engagement is important for brain health throughout life, potentially

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[469] Cf. Blustein, D. L. (2013). The Psychology of Working: A New Perspective for Career Development, Counseling, and Public Policy. Routledge.

[470] Cf. Paul, K. I., & Moser, K. (2009). "Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses." Journal of Vocational Behavior, 74(3), 264-282.

[471] See reviews of UBI pilot studies, e.g., an overview by the Stanford Basic Income Lab or policy briefs from OECD/World Bank.

[472] Cf. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). "Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being." American Psychologist, 55(1), 68–78.

[473] Cf. Berridge, K. C., & Kringelbach, M. L. (2015). "Pleasure systems in the brain." Neuron, 86(3), 646-664.

staving off cognitive decline.[474] If work is a major source of such engagement, its absence would necessitate finding other stimulating activities (e.g., lifelong learning, complex hobbies, problem-solving in community projects).

- ○ **Stress and the Brain:** Chronic economic insecurity and unemployment are associated with elevated stress hormones and negative impacts on brain structure and function, particularly in areas related to memory and emotional regulation (e.g., hippocampus, prefrontal cortex).[475] UBI could potentially mitigate these neurobiological effects of financial stress.
- ○ **Social Connection and the Brain:** Work provides a key avenue for social interaction. Social isolation is detrimental to brain health and overall well-being. A society with less work-based interaction would need to foster other forms of community and social connection to support brain health, potentially leveraging new technologies or revitalizing local community structures.[476]

Understanding these psychological and neurobiological dimensions is crucial for anticipating the human impact of an economic singularity and for designing societal structures (including but not limited to UBI) that support genuine human flourishing in such a future.

14.7. Human Work, Divine Providence, and the Civilization of Love: Magisterial Reflections

The prospect of an economic singularity profoundly challenges traditional understandings of human work and its role in society. The Catholic Church's social doctrine offers enduring principles to guide reflection on these issues.

- **The Dignity of Human Work:** The Church has consistently taught the profound dignity of human work. Pope St. John Paul II, in *Laborem Exercens*, emphasized that work is "a good thing for man…because through work man not only transforms nature…but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'."[477] Work is seen as a participation in God's creative activity, a means of self-realization, providing for one's family, contributing to the common good, and even sanctification.
- **Work Beyond Mere Economic Output:** Magisterial teaching critiques

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[474] Cf. Stern, Y. (2012). "Cognitive reserve in ageing and Alzheimer's disease." The Lancet Neurology, 11(11), 1006-1012.

[475] Cf. McEwen, B. S. (2017). "Neurobiological and Systemic Effects of Chronic Stress." Chronic Stress (Thousand Oaks), 1.

[476] Cf. Cacioppo, J. T., & Patrick, W. (2008). Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection. W. W. Norton & Company.

[477] Cf. John Paul II. (1981). Encyclical Letter Laborem Exercens, no. 9.

reducing work solely to its economic or productive dimension. *Gaudium et Spes* states that human activity "proceeds from man; it is also ordered to him. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well."[478] This integral view highlights the personal and social value of work beyond mere income generation. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* reiterates that "Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfilment."[479]

- **Providential Distribution of Talents and Interdependence:** Christian anthropology recognizes that God endows each person with unique talents and gifts (cf. Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11). This diversity is not accidental but providential, intended to foster interdependence and mutual service within the human family. As *Gaudium et Spes* notes, "God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity." (GS §32). The distribution of diverse talents and even weaknesses creates opportunities for solidarity and the building up of the community, where each person's contribution is valued.

- **The Common Good and the Universal Destination of Goods:** The Church's social doctrine insists that economic systems must serve the **common good** and uphold the **universal destination of goods**—the principle that the earth's resources are intended for the benefit of all humanity.[480] If technological advancements lead to immense wealth creation but widespread unemployment, these principles demand innovative solutions to ensure that the fruits of such progress are shared justly and that everyone can live in dignity, even if traditional employment models change.

- **Building a Civilization of Love and Peace:** Ultimately, economic and social structures should contribute to building a "civilization of love," a concept frequently invoked by Pope St. Paul VI and Pope St. John Paul II.[481] This involves fostering solidarity, promoting justice, ensuring participation, and respecting the dignity of every person. In a future potentially marked by an economic singularity, this would mean creating a society where individuals, even without traditional jobs, can find meaning, contribute their talents (in diverse, perhaps non-market ways), and experience themselves as valued members of the community. The challenge will be to re-imagine "contribution" and "participation" in ways that uphold human dignity and foster social cohesion, preventing the alienation and marginalization that can arise from unemployment and economic exclusion. This requires not only economic

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[478] Cf. Second Vatican Council. (1965). Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, no. 35.
[479] Cf. Francis, Pope. (2015). Encyclical Letter Laudato Si', no. 128.
[480] Cf. Gaudium et Spes, no. 69; Benedict XVI. (2009). Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate, no. 7.
[481] Cf. Paul VI. (1975). Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, no. 31 (referencing the "civilization of love"). John Paul II developed this theme extensively.

adjustments like UBI but also a profound cultural and spiritual renewal focused on integral human development and service to others.

14.8. Conclusion: The Future of Work and the Work of Being Human

The prospect of an economic singularity, driven by the exponential advance of AI and automation, presents humanity with one of its most significant and complex challenges. It forces us to re-examine the nature of work, its role in our lives and societies, and the very foundations of our economic systems. While the precise timeline and extent of technological unemployment remain debated, the potential for profound disruption necessitates careful consideration and proactive planning.

The challenges of economic contraction, wealth distribution, finding meaning beyond traditional employment, allocating scarce resources, and maintaining social cohesion are immense. Various scenarios, from societal collapse to a "protopian" future of managed progress, are conceivable. Psychological and neuroscientific perspectives highlight the deep connections between work, identity, well-being, and brain health, underscoring the need for solutions that address not only economic needs but also the profound human need for purpose, engagement, and social connection.

From a theological standpoint, the Catholic Church's social doctrine offers timeless principles: the inherent dignity of the human person and of work itself, the universal destination of goods, the importance of the common good, solidarity, and subsidiarity. These principles call for an economic order that serves the human person, ensuring that the benefits of technological progress are shared widely and that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute their God-given talents and live in dignity. As we stand before the possibility of a radically different economic future, the task is to envision and build a society where technology serves integral human development and helps to construct a true "civilization of love and peace," even if the nature of "work" as we know it undergoes a fundamental transformation. The ultimate "work" may increasingly become the work of being fully human in relationship with God and others.

Chapter 15: Psycho-Neuro-Politics and Technocratic Governance

15.1 Introduction: The New Architectures of Power

The first part of this book established a theological anthropology centered on the human person's journey toward their ultimate end, and it identified a series of modern challenges that seek to subvert this journey. We have seen how the "hypnocracy" aims to corrupt the **human act** by manipulating our apprehension of the good (Ch. 4), how it weaponizes the **passions** to bypass reason (Ch. 5), how it systematically inverts **vices into virtues** to serve a market logic (Ch. 6), and how it proposes a counterfeit **law** (Ch. 10) and **grace** (Ch. 11) to replace the Divine order with a technological one. This chapter will now delve into the practical dynamism by which this agenda is advanced, exploring the concrete tools of **psycho-politics** and **neuro-politics**, and the overarching governance model that they enable: **technocracy**.

Here, we will examine how advancements in psychology and neuroscience, augmented by big data and AI, are applied to influence thought, emotion, and behavior on a societal scale. We will then analyze how this drive toward cognitive and affective engineering converges with a technocratic mode of governance, where decision-making is increasingly ceded to technical experts and algorithmic systems. This fusion of psychological manipulation and expert rule represents the operational frontier of the ideological challenges previously discussed. Confronting this requires a robust theological anthropology, centered on the dignity and freedom of the human person, to serve as an ethical compass in navigating these new forms of power.

15.2 Defining the Landscape: Psycho-politics and Neuro-politics

While often intertwined, it is useful to delineate psycho-politics and neuro-politics to understand their distinct yet synergistic mechanisms.

Psycho-politics operates primarily by harnessing psychological knowledge, amplified by big data, to influence behavior. Philosopher Byung-Chul Han describes a contemporary form of psychopolitics where power is exerted not through overt repression but through subtle seduction and the illusion of freedom, leading to a state of voluntary self-exploitation and optimization.[482] Key techniques

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[482] Han, Byung-Chul. Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power. Translated by Erik Butler. London: Verso, 2017.

include:

- **Microtargeting:** Political campaigns and other actors use data analytics to create detailed psychological profiles of individuals, tailoring messages to exploit their specific vulnerabilities, fears, hopes, and biases. The Cambridge Analytica scandal serves as a stark example.[483]

- **Nudge-craft and Behavioral Economics:** Insights from behavioral psychology are used to "nudge" populations towards certain behaviors or choices, often bypassing rational deliberation.[484]

- **Affective Computing and Sentiment Analysis:** Technologies are developed to detect and respond to human emotions, allowing for the real-time shaping of messages or environments to achieve desired emotional states and, consequently, political responses.

Neuro-politics involves the more direct engagement with neural processes. This field is rapidly evolving and encompasses a spectrum of applications:

- **Neuromarketing in Politics:** Techniques such as fMRI and EEG are employed to measure physiological and neural responses to political messages, aiming to identify subconscious preferences and emotional reactions.[485]

- **Brain-Based Profiling and Prediction:** Research explores the possibility of identifying neural markers associated with political ideologies or susceptibility to persuasion.[486]

- **Neuro-stimulation and Modification:** Technologies like TMS or tDCS can temporarily alter brain activity, raising questions about their potential non-therapeutic uses in political or security contexts.[487]

- **Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) and Neuro-surveillance:** BCIs offer great promise but also present a significant ethical frontier, particularly if deployed for state surveillance or control.[488]

The convergence of these fields means that political actors may increasingly seek to influence not just expressed opinions, but the underlying psychological and neural processes that give rise to them.

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[483] Cf. Cadwalladr, Carole, and Emma Graham-Harrison. "Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach." The Guardian, March 17, 2018. https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/cambridge-analytica-facebook-influence-us-election.

[484] Cf. Thaler, Richard H., and Cass R. Sunstein. Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

[485] Cf. Westen, Drew. The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation. New York: PublicAffairs, 2007.

[486] Cf. Cranmer, S. M., et al. (2022). Functional connectivity signatures of political ideology. PNAS Nexus, 1(3), pgac066.

[487] Cf. Hamilton, Roy, Rajiv R. Ratan, and Jonathan H. Williams. "Neuromodulation of the 'Moral Brain'." Neuron 65, no. 6 (2010): 755-757.

[488] Cf. Yuste, Rafael, et al. "Four ethical priorities for neurotechnologies and AI." Nature 551, no. 7679 (2017): 159-163.

15.3 The Allure and Mechanisms of Technocratic Influence

The gravitation towards psycho-political and neuro-political techniques stems from their perceived efficacy. In an era of information saturation, methods that promise a more direct route to influence are particularly appealing. This trend is a core feature of **technocratic governance**, a system where decision-making is predominantly steered by experts and driven by technical criteria, prioritizing efficiency and quantifiable results.

The mechanisms of this influence often exploit known **cognitive biases**. For instance, confirmation bias is amplified by personalized news feeds, creating echo chambers. The availability heuristic can be manipulated through the strategic repetition of emotionally charged information. Neuro-political techniques aim for a deeper level, seeking to bypass rational thought to tap into primal emotional responses, as "the political brain is an emotional brain."[489]

This reliance on technical management is propelled by the "datafication" of society. Algorithms, processing vast amounts of data, become formidable instruments in influencing policy and allocating resources. Efficiency, defined in measurable terms, becomes the cardinal virtue. This is evident in economic policy shaped by complex models, public health responses driven by statistical forecasts, and "smart city" projects that optimize urban life through pervasive surveillance. The specialized language of technocracy further erects a barrier to public participation, reinforcing the idea that governance is best left to experts.[490]

15.4 Ethical Frontiers and Alarms: The Person vs. The System

The deployment of these strategies brings profound ethical challenges, threatening fundamental aspects of human personhood.

- **Autonomy, Privacy, and Freedom of Thought:** Many techniques operate below the threshold of conscious awareness, undermining the ideal of the autonomous citizen. Neuro-technologies challenge the "last frontier" of mental privacy, leading to calls for a legally recognized "cognitive liberty."[491] The prospect of one's unexpressed thoughts or emotions being decoded for political ends is a radical intrusion.
- **Sophisticated Social Control and Discrimination:** Profiling individuals based on psychological or neural characteristics creates the potential for new forms

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[489] Westen, Drew. The Political Brain, op. cit.
[490] Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 460.
[491] Cf. Farahany, Nita A. The Battle for Your Brain: Defending the Right to Think Freely in the Age of Neurotechnology. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2023.

of discrimination. On a societal scale, these technologies could be employed to enforce conformity and suppress dissent, creating a "neuro-dystopia" where inner lives are managed and controlled.

- **Authenticity and Selfhood:** If our choices are increasingly the product of external manipulation, the capacity for genuine self-governance and the development of an authentic moral character are eroded.
- **Diminution of Democratic Sovereignty:** When critical policy determinations are cast as technical necessities with a singular "correct" resolution, the citizenry's role is curtailed to passive acquiescence. This can cultivate a sentiment of disempowerment, what Jürgen Habermas cautioned against as the "scientization of politics," where technical rationality supplants communicative rationality.[492]
- **Marginalization of Knowledge:** Technocratic procedures may inadvertently marginalize non-quantifiable forms of knowledge and experience, such as indigenous wisdom, ethical considerations, and the lived realities of ordinary individuals, leading to policies that are technically proficient but socially inequitable.[493]

15.5 The Common Good Beyond Efficiency

A core critique of technocratic governance is its tendency to equate the common good with narrowly defined efficiency. A theological perspective insists that the true common good must serve the **integral human development** of every person, a concept far more holistic than what technocracy in isolation can provide. The Second Vatican Council defined the common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily."[494] This fulfillment is integral, encompassing the "spiritual and moral welfare" of persons.[495]

A technocratic paradigm can compromise fundamental ethical tenets:

- **Justice** may be jeopardized if efficiency targets result in the neglect of the vulnerable.
- **Solidarity**, the "firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good,"[496] can be diminished if societal issues are viewed merely as technical defects.

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[492] Cf. Habermas, Jürgen. Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics. Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
[493] Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes. 1965, no. 75.
[494] Cf. *Ib.* no. 26.
[495] Cf. *Ib.*
[496] Cf. Pope John Paul II. Encyclical Letter Sollicitudo Rei Socialis. 1987, no. 38.

- **Subsidiarity**, which protects the functions of lower-order communities,[497] can be compromised by centralized, expert-led solutions.

Pope Francis warns that the "technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life," accepting every advance "with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings."[498]

15.6 Theological Anthropology: A Necessary Compass

In navigating this ethically perilous terrain, a robust theological anthropology offers an indispensable moral compass.

- **Inherent Human Dignity (Imago Dei):** Christian anthropology affirms that every person is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and possesses an inherent dignity. The person is an end in themselves, never to be treated merely as an instrument. Psycho-political and technocratic techniques fundamentally challenge this dignity by reducing the individual to a set of predictable responses or a data point.[499]
- **Freedom of Will and Conscience:** Theology emphasizes the human capacity for free will and the sanctity of conscience. Technologies that aim to bypass rational deliberation or manipulate subconscious desires threaten this God-given freedom.[500]
- **The Sanctity of the Interior Life:** The inner life of thought, reflection, prayer, and emotion is a space of profound personal encounter. Attempts to surveil, decode, or manipulate this interiority would be a profound violation.
- **The Common Good, Holistically Understood:** The true common good must serve the integral development of every person, including their spiritual and moral well-being. Technologies that achieve order at the expense of freedom, dignity, or truth ultimately undermine the common good.[501]

A theological anthropology, therefore, calls for a profound skepticism towards technologies that aim to instrumentalize the human psyche or brain for political control.

15.7 Navigating the Future: Towards Ethical Governance and Safeguards

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving

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[497] Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 186.
[498] Cf. Pope Francis. Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'. 2015, no. 109
[499] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997, no. 362.
[500] Cf. *Ib.* no. 1731.
[501] Cf. GS no. 26.

ethical reflection, legal innovation, and technological design that prioritizes human values.

- **Developing Robust Ethical Frameworks and "Neurorights":** There is an urgent need for clear ethical guidelines and potential legal codification of "neurorights"—such as the right to mental privacy, personal identity, and free will.[502]
- **Promoting Transparency and Accountability:** When these technologies are used in ways that impact the public, there must be transparency and accountability. "Black box" algorithms, where the internal workings are not easily understood or transparent, must be auditable.
- **Fostering Public Literacy and Engagement:** An informed citizenry is better equipped to recognize and resist manipulative techniques.
- **Strengthening Data Protection and Privacy Laws:** Existing data protection regimes need to be updated to specifically address the sensitivities of psychological and neural data.
- **Cultivating Critical Thinking and Media Literacy:** In an environment ripe for manipulation, the capacity for critical thinking, discernment, and resistance to emotional contagion becomes a vital civic virtue.

15.8 Conclusion: Protecting the Inner Citadel

The accelerating capacity to understand, analyze, and influence the human mind presents a profound ethical crossroads. Psycho-politics, neuro-politics, and the technocratic governance they serve offer tantalizing prospects of control, but they risk eroding the very foundations of human freedom, dignity, and self-determination. The allure of shaping thoughts and behaviors on a societal scale must be met with a resolute defense of the inner citadel of the human person. The warnings from ethicists and scholars cannot be ignored. These responses cannot be solely technological or legal; they must be deeply rooted in a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be human. This theological anthropology, with its unwavering affirmation of the *imago Dei*, the sanctity of conscience, and the gift of free will, provides an essential ethical anchor. It challenges us to ensure that progress in understanding the brain does not lead to the diminishment of the person. As we navigate this new frontier, the guiding question must always be how these powerful tools can serve, rather than subvert, the flourishing of every human person in their full, God-given dignity.

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[502] Cf. Yuste, Rafael, et al. "Four ethical priorities for neurotechnologies and AI," op. cit. See also: Ienca, Marcello. "On Neurorights." Frontiers in Human Neuroscience 15 (2021): 701258.

Chapter 16: Divine Governance, Artificial Intelligence, and Cosmic Unity

16.1 Introduction: Humanity's Role in the Divine Plan

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment in history, immersed in a world whose very fabric is woven by powerful, competing visions for humanity's future. These dominant secular ideologies, driving progress at an unprecedented rate, often pull us toward a fragmented existence, where the profound dignity of the human person is obscured and our horizons are confined to the material world. The staggering advancement of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence, acts as a powerful amplifier for the ideas that create it. Left unguided by a higher purpose, it risks accelerating us toward a future, such as transhumanism, that offers a hollow echo of the transcendence for which we are made, ultimately steering us away from our authentic end. In the face of these profound challenges, human reason alone falls short. To truly understand the dynamic forces that shape our world and to navigate them with wisdom, we require a more penetrating light—the light of divine revelation. It is only through the lens of faith that we can perceive God's providential plan for the cosmos and comprehend the eternal law that underpins all of reality. Revelation unveils the truth that history is not a chaotic accident but a purposefully guided story into which God invites us to play a principal role. He bestows upon us the sublime dignity of participating in the very governance of His universe.[503] By aligning our freedom with His eternal law, we are elevated from mere inhabitants of the world to active collaborators with God, shaping the course of history from within.

This high calling transforms our relationship with all human endeavors, especially our creation and use of technology. When we grasp our role as participants in divine governance, tools like Artificial Intelligence are no longer seen as ends in themselves—for power, profit, or a technologically-induced paradise—but as powerful instruments to be wielded in service of a genuine human flourishing that is open to an eternal destiny. In the sections that follow, we will explore precisely why and how our conscious participation in the governance of the universe, guided by the light of Christ, becomes the foundational act of building a true and lasting civilization of love and peace.

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[503] Cf. Riccardo Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ: Divine Governance, AI, and the Church's Role in Cosmic Unity," in «Tu sei sacerdote in eterno» Festschrift per Paolo Garuti, ed. Justin Schembri OP (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2025), p. 181. Lufrani quotes G. Biffi and S.-T. Bonino on this point.

16.2 The Recapitulation of All Things in Christ

A foundational concept for understanding the divine plan is the "recapitulation of all things in Christ," drawn from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1:10). The Greek text speaks of God's plan for the fullness of time, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ (anakephalaiōsasthai ta panta en tō Christō) – "to bring together all things in Christ."[504]

The key verb, **ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι (anakephalaiōsasthai)**, suggests more than a simple summary. While used in Greco-Roman rhetoric to mean the summing up of arguments, and in the Protoevangelium of James to mean "to repeat," its Pauline usage in Ephesians is understood to derive from the noun κεφαλαιόν (kephalaion – main point or summary) rather than κεφαλή (kephalē – head). In this context, its meaning conveys "the reality of recapitulation, of summarizing and bringing to completion."[505] This recapitulation is a divine action of cosmic scope, a dynamic and ongoing process aimed at reunifying and perfecting what was fragmented, giving it a sense of wholeness and ultimate unity in Christ. Christ's redemptive action is thus portrayed as a creative and unifying act, directing all created reality towards its eschatological fulfillment.[506]

16.3 Creation, Christ, and the Church: An Ecclesio-Christocentric Perspective

The divine plan of recapitulation can be illuminated through **Ecclesio-Christocentrism**, a theological framework that places Christ at the absolute center of God's eternal design. This perspective, often employing an "anagogical method" (seeking higher, spiritual meanings), understands the divine plan, or οἰκονομία (oikonomia – governing plan) and πρόθεσις (prothesis – purpose) of the Father, as the ontological foundation for all existence.[507]

This plan is Christocentric: Christ is the beginning, fullness, and recapitulation of all things. He is "the first of the predestined," the "source of all created existence," and is configured as the exemplary cause, final cause, and "objective (indeed ontological) principle of the entire extra-divine reality."[508] The dynamic of redemption is realized in and through the Church. The "Christ" at the center of this divine plan is the "**Christus totus**" – the total Christ, which includes the crucified and risen Lord and, inseparably, all created and renewed things within Him. Since this "total Christ" is the Church (cf. 1 Cor 12:12), the Church, with Christ

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[504] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 182.
[505] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 184, referencing E. Best and T. Van Aerde.
[506] Cf. *Ib.*
[507] Cf. *Ib.*, p. 185.
[508] Cf. *Ib.*

and in Christ, stands at the "center" of the entire creation.[509] This leads to the understanding of the Church as the "luogo metafisico in cui il mondo ha coscienza di essere diafania di Dio. E dunque essa è la salvezza e integrità di tutto" (the metaphysical place where the world is conscious of being a transparency of God. And therefore it is the salvation and integrity of everything).[510]

16.4 From Second-Degree Being to Dynamic Superorganism

To articulate how this recapitulation unfolds within history, a philosophical approach known as **realistic-dynamic metaphysics** offers valuable tools. A central concept within this framework is that of the "second-degree being."[511]

16.4.1 The Ontological Status of Collective Beings: Introducing Second-Degree Beings

Traditional Aristotelian-Thomistic categories may not fully capture the specific ontological status of collective realities such as the Church. While St. Thomas Aquinas discussed the Church as a "Body" – an "ordered multitude" – and considered entities like armies and cities as having organic unity, a distinct ontological category for such collective entities was further developed by Don Tommaso Demaria through the concept of **"second-degree beings"** or "historical beings."[512]

These are described as non-substantial real beings that, unlike "first-degree beings" (individual entities *in natura rerum* – in the nature of things, which are direct divine creations), primarily originate from human action (with the Mystical Body being an extraordinary case also involving divine action). Second-degree beings emerge from the integration and transcendence of first-degree beings, realizing a new form of existence. A key distinction lies in their inherent dynamism: their essences are in continuous becoming (*ens cuius essentia fit* – a being whose essence *becomes*), as opposed to the static, unchanging essences of first-degree beings (*ens cuius essentia est* – a being whose essence *is*).[513] A family, for example, is more than the sum of its individual members; it is a complex social reality with evolving dynamics and its own operational principle. This concept can also be applied to larger entities such as businesses, cities, or states.[514]

Support for the ontological reality of collective entities can also be found in

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[509] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 186, referencing G. Barzaghi.
[510] Cf. *Ib.*
[511] Cf. *Ib.*
[512] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 187-188, referencing Y. Congar and F. Amerini on Thomistic thought and Demaria for the concept of second-degree being.
[513] Appendix 1 offers a more detailed look at the core ontological concepts of Dynamic Realism.
[514] Cf. *Ib.*, p. 190.

biblical angelology, where angels are sometimes understood as representing communities as collective singular entities, such as the "angels of nations" in Daniel 10.[515]

Demaria's innovation allows for a realist metaphysical study of **Historical Reality** itself, not merely as a sequence of events, but as possessing a distinct ontological character.[516]

16.4.2 Historical Reality as a Dynamic Superorganism (DS)

Historical Reality is conceived as the concrete, dynamic totality of human becoming over time. Within realistic-dynamic metaphysics, it is characterized as a **Concrete Universal Dynamic Being (CUDB)**.[517] This CUDB is further conceptualized as a **Dynamic Superorganism (DS)** – a complex, unified reality animated by its own vital principle. This framework can apply to biological organisms as well as to second-degree beings such as the Mystical Body of Christ and enterprises.[518]

It is important to distinguish the singular, all-encompassing Dynamic Superorganism of Historical Reality from the many particular **phenomenic dynamic organisms** (such as institutions, communities, and enterprises). These individual organisms constitute the "matter" which, through their interactions, make up the unified Historical Reality DS.[519] The **Mystical Body of Christ** is presented as the primary analogue for a Dynamic Superorganism, composed of both celestial and historical elements.[520]

16.4.3 The Industrial Revolution and the Ontological Leap: From Static-Sacral to Dynamic-Secular

A pivotal event in transforming the nature of Historical Reality was the **Industrial Revolution**. This was not merely an economic or technological shift but is argued to be an **ontological transformation**. The key catalyst was humanity's new capacity to **transduce natural energy** (e.g., converting the energy in coal into motive power via the steam engine) into historical force, a force capable of constructing and shaping reality. This process "dynamized" Historical Reality, transitioning society from a relatively **static-sacral** order to a **dynamic-secular** one.[521]

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[515] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 189, referencing W. Wink and M. Campatelli.
[516] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 191.
[517] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 192, referencing T. Demaria.
[518] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 192-193, referencing T. Demaria.
[519] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 196.
[520] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 197.
[521] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 197-198, referencing T. Demaria.

This ontological shift was preceded by what is termed the **"humanistic interlude"** in Europe (encompassing Humanism, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution). During this period, the Christian sacral society, founded on a religious Absolute, encountered growing resistance from secular forces aiming to establish societal foundations on reason rather than religious authority.[522] This process fundamentally altered society's **cultural matrix**, namely the fundamental source that generates and animates a society's entire culture, including its knowledge, values, and civilization. In the prior static-sacral order, religion was the primary element shaping tradition, values, and knowledge. The Industrial Revolution, building upon the humanistic interlude, completed a profound reversal, establishing **culture-knowledge** as the dominant force in shaping values and civilization, often relegating religion to a secondary or excluded role.[523]

16.4.4 The Vital Principle of Dynamic Historical Reality: Ideopraxis

In this new dynamic-secular society, the primary vital principle or "soul" of Historical Reality is identified as **ideopraxis**. This concept describes **"ideology rationalized into praxis"** – it is not merely abstract ideology, but ideology manifested and embodied in concrete actions that construct and shape the new dynamic society.[524]

Ideopraxis consists of:

- **Matter**: The concrete elements it comprises and acts upon, such as the economy, politics, culture, social relations, sciences, social structures, and the human person.
- **Form**: This is provided by the **ideological Absolute**, which can be primary (the ultimate Divine or, in secular ideologies, Anti-divine foundation understood in an ideological, rather than purely religious, sense) or derivative (how the primary Absolute is specified and applied in particular domains).[525]

The primary Absolute infuses a unified direction and meaning, functioning as the "spiritual" principle of ideopraxis. Derivative absolutes mediate between this "soul" and the "body" of praxis, translating core values into operational criteria that shape the Dynamic Superorganism of Historical Reality.[526]

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[522] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 199, referencing T. Demaria.
[523] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 199-200.
[524] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 200, referencing T. Demaria.
[525] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 200, referencing T. Demaria for the definition of ideological Absolute.
[526] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 201.

16.5 The Mystical Body and Historical Reality: A Hylomorphic Dynamic

The Mystical Body of Christ is understood as the most complex Dynamic Superorganism, animated by God Himself as its vital principle, endowing it with a divine life-action.[527] Its relationship with Historical Reality involves two key functions:

1. **Salvific Function**: The traditional role of mediating Christ's redemptive action through grace and the sacraments. This constitutes God's direct action in humanity.

2. **Ontic Function**: Following the dynamization of Historical Reality by the Industrial Revolution, the Mystical Body also assumes an "ontic" role. It acts as an internal metaphysical structuring principle, shaping Historical Reality in accordance with eternal law and the divine incarnation. This function operates through metaphysical form within Historical Reality via ideopraxic dynamism and requires human agency.[528]

These salvific and ontic functions are complementary, creating a reciprocal dynamic: grace facilitates the human capacity to implement Christic form in the profane world, and as the world becomes more conformed to Christ, it becomes more open to receiving salvific grace.[529]

This relationship can be described as a **hylomorphic dynamic** (from Greek *hyle*=matter, *morphe*=form):

- The **Formal DS**: This is the Church as the Mystical Body, exercising formal causality by transmitting the Christic form.
- The **Material DS**: This encompasses temporal institutions (like the State), which constitute the "proximate matter" that receives form from the Formal DS.
- The **Total DS**: This is concrete Historical Reality, emerging from the dynamic synthesis of the Formal DS and Material DS. It represents the progressive incarnation of the dominion of the Christ-Form. The Mystical Body metaphysically mobilizes to influence the Material DS towards realizing this total Christic DS.[530]

The ultimate goal of this process is the progressive "Christification" of Historical Reality, which involves active human participation.

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[527] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 201, referencing T. Demaria.
[528] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 202, referencing Biffi and Barzaghi.
[529] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 203.
[530] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 204, referencing T. Demaria.

16.5.1 Dynamic Transcendentals as Operative Principles

For the Mystical Body (Formal DS) to effectively shape Historical Reality through a Christic ideopraxis, this ideopraxis must operate both at an essential level (as dynamic form) and at an existential level. Existentially, it translates into five **dynamic transcendentals**. These are essential qualities of the Concrete Universal Dynamic Being (Historical Reality) that emanate from its metaphysical ontological-dynamic Absolute, paralleling classical transcendentals (e.g., being, one, true, good) but specific to dynamic, historical being. They possess characteristics of universality, necessity, absoluteness, supremacy, and irreducibility.[531]

The primary dynamic transcendental (DT) is **religiosity**, which corresponds to the "religious form"—the tension towards the Absolute—that is the metaphysical "cause" of the CUDB.[532] Religiosity is a synthetic DT, encompassing four other analytical DTs: **morality, educativity, sociality, and missionarity**.[533] These DTs are not the form itself but "formalities" or qualities deriving from the form. They always carry content, which can be good (aligned with the Christic form) or bad (termed pseudo-DTs). All concrete human action inherently carries the valences, the combinations of these five DTs.[534] Through them, the Formal DS (Mystical Body) acts as a formal cause to structure material dynamic organisms and praxis, guiding them towards the full actualization of Christ's dominion.[535]

16.6 Dominant Ideopraxes and the Need for Christic Ideopraxis

Contemporary Historical Reality is largely shaped not by a Christic ideopraxis, but by dominant **liberal-capitalist and communist ideopraxes**. These are critiqued as deriving from atheist-materialist Absolutes that reject divine primacy in favor of an immanentist humanism.[536]

- Liberal-capitalist ideopraxis is said to absolutize individual freedom as a mere absence of constraints, leading to social fragmentation and isolated individualism.
- Communist ideopraxis is said to absolutize the State and the collective, negating individual value and leading to totalitarianism.
- Both exploit the dynamic activist transcendentals while detaching them from their divine origin, leading the total DS into an existential crisis under a guise of

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[531] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 205, referencing T. Demaria.
[532] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 205.
[533] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 206.
[534] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 206, referencing S. Tropea.
[535] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 206-207.
[536] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 207, referencing T. Demaria.

false liberation, ultimately demeaning human dignity.[537]

The proposed alternative is the development of a **Christic ideopraxis**, rooted in the divine form embodied in the Mystical Body. This would order temporal realities towards their ultimate end in Christ, enabling humanity to cooperate in divine governance and build an authentic Civilization of Love and Peace.[538] There are indications that even secular organisms are gradually acquiring Christic characteristics, manifesting the Risen Christ's continuous action. Examples include the transformation of marriage towards love-based unions and the evolution of corporate forms towards more organic and socially conscious models.[539] A conscious adoption of Christic ideopraxis could accelerate and properly orient these developments.

16.7 Building the Civilization of Love and Peace

The development of a Christic ideopraxis is directed towards building the **"Civilization of Love and Peace,"** a concept articulated by Pope St. Paul VI. He linked this vision to Pentecost and a "new sociology, one penetrated by the values of the spirit," oriented towards human dignity and unity.[540] Civilization, in this sense, is "that complex of moral, civil, economic conditions, which allow human life a better possibility of existence, a reasonable fullness, a happy eternal destiny."[541]

Within a hylomorphic framework, this civilization has:

- A **body**: comprising the economy, technology, social structures, politics, and culture.
- A **soul**: its vital principle, which is **ideopraxis**.[542]

While current ideopraxes are often atheistic-materialist, the Civilization of Love and Peace necessitates a **theo-spiritualist ideopraxis** grounded in **God-Love** as its primary Absolute. This Love is Christian charity, expressed personally and as social or political charity, which must be the "constant and highest norm of action" in every sector of human life, extending to the international order.[543] Christic ideopraxis thus emerges as the proper form and operative principle of this civilization, actualized through the hylomorphic dynamism between the Mystical Body (Formal DS) and Historical Reality (Material DS), and

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[537] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 207-208.
[538] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 208.
[539] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 208-209, referencing C. Steiner on marriage and S. Aquino on corporate evolution.
[540] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 210, quoting Paolo VI.
[541] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 210, quoting Paolo VI.
[542] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 210, referencing T. Demaria.
[543] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 210-211, referencing T. Demaria and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

propagated through the dynamic transcendentals.[544]

Participation in building this civilization constitutes humanity's participation in divine universal governance.[545] However, this requires more than mere ethical inspiration; it demands a specifically Christ-centered ideopraxis that allows the Formal DS (Mystical Body) to shape Historical Reality in a Christ-centered sense, mobilizing all temporal realities towards their ultimate end in Christ.[546]

16.8 The Role of Artificial Intelligence in the Civilization of Love and Peace

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a crucial and increasingly central role. While a satisfactory realist ontological definition of AI is still developing, its impact is evident: AI mimics and often surpasses human cognitive faculties, enables unprecedented knowledge of the world, transforms temporal and spatial dimensions, and, through predictive capabilities, creates a "proleptic milieu" - a setting or environment that embodies or anticipates a future state or condition - that shapes human traits and habits.[547]

In a profound and increasingly undeniable manner, AI stands as a transformative force, exponentially amplifying humanity's innate capacity to both comprehend and actively construct Historical Reality. This goes beyond mere data processing; AI fundamentally reshapes our understanding of the past and influences the narratives we build for the future.

Furthermore, AI is not a neutral tool. It inherently embodies and reproduces the very ideopraxis—the intertwined theoretical concepts and practical actions—of those who develop it. This dynamic accelerates progress toward the goals, whether explicitly conscious or implicitly embedded, of that guiding ideopraxis. The algorithms and architectures reflect the values, biases, and objectives of their creators, making AI a powerful vehicle for the propagation of specific worldviews.

At its operational core, AI functions through what can be termed "thematizing praxis." This involves the statistical observation and identification of patterns within human behavior and interaction. Once these patterns are identified, AI systems are designed to reinforce them, often by optimizing for desired outcomes or predicting future actions based on past trends. This process, while seemingly objective, is intrinsically and fundamentally bound to its governing ideological Absolute. Whether this absolute is economic efficiency, social control, or a specific political agenda, AI becomes a powerful instrument for shaping reality

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[544] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 212.
[545] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 212, referencing M. Mantovani and M. Toso.
[546] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 212-213, referencing T. Demaria.
[547] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 214, referencing C. Accoto.

in accordance with its foundational principles. The data it processes, the patterns it discerns, and the actions it recommends are all filtered through this ideological lens, ultimately influencing the trajectory of historical development.[548]

As we have seen in chapter 13, a major concern is that dominant atheist-materialist ideopraxes are driving humanity towards **transhumanism** through AI-accelerated ideopraxic dynamics. Transhumanism—the movement to enhance human physical and cognitive capacities beyond current biological limits using technology to create a "post-human" species—is interpreted here as an attempted technological satisfaction of the innate human desire for transcendence, a surrogate for true eschatological salvation through divine participation.[549]

While the ideopraxic dynamic shaping Historical Reality seems an inescapable element, the crucial choice of which ideopraxis to embody remains a human responsibility.[550] This dynamic itself can be seen as part of eternal law, instituted by God to enable active human participation in the governance of the Universe, with the ultimate purpose of imparting Christ-like form to the material Dynamic Superorganism.

Thus, AI emerges as a potentially potent tool for realizing the Civilization of Love and Peace. This, however, requires concentrated intellectual, theological, philosophical, and ethical efforts to comprehend and direct its development according to divine design. Failing this orientation, AI risks autonomously constructing the antithesis—a civilization of hatred and war. Yet, love, as foundational to the universe's essence, is seen as an inescapable force naturally directing humanity toward the Civilization of Love.[551]

16.9 Ideopraxic Implementation of the Civilization of Love and Peace

Building the Civilization of Love and Peace through the ideopraxic formation of the material Dynamic Superorganism requires orienting all elements, especially AI, toward this goal. This involves:

1. Establishing a clear definition of the Civilization of Love and Peace.
2. Identifying existing contributory elements in current actions (e.g., human rights advancements, sustainable development efforts, peace movements).

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[548] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 215, referencing S. Tropea.
[549] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 215, referencing J. Huberman on transhumanism.
[550] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 216.
[551] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 217.

3. Systematically coordinating these efforts by developing and implementing the civilization's specific ideopraxis.[552]

While the foundational philosophical-theological system for interpreting Historical Reality's dynamism has been laid out, the development of a specific Christic ideology and its practical rationalization into concrete praxis remains a contemporary challenge. Ideology here is understood not as mere theory applied to action, but as "thematized praxis"—a conscious adherence to an observable historical process that calls for responsible action.[553] This constructive effort should begin within the productive practices of industrial enterprises, recognized as highly effective agents in shaping Historical Reality, and extend to all other second-degree beings, from families to states.

16.10 Conclusion: Humanity's Response to the Divine Invitation

The understanding of humanity's role in the divine plan of recapitulation is grounded in God's self-communication through Christ and Sacred Scripture. Anagogical theology and realist-dynamic metaphysics provide the frameworks for comprehending the ideopraxic dynamism that pervades Historical Reality, revealing history as a Providence-guided process demanding active human cooperation.[554]

Persisting with atheistic-materialist ideopraxes as the dynamic forms of Historical Reality presents a significant peril, as these deny humanity's transcendent foundation and can lead to catastrophic outcomes. This danger underscores the necessity of developing the **Civilization of Love and Peace** project to counter nihilistic tendencies and promote authentic integral human development. Achieving this requires elaborating a corresponding **Christic ideopraxis** that translates the Social Doctrine of the Church into concrete action within Historical Reality. Businesses are identified as potentially primary agents in this endeavor. This approach integrates theological understanding with practical implementation, offering a path to address contemporary challenges through principled and conscious action in service of the divine plan.[555]

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[552] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 217-218.
[553] Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 218, quoting S. Tropea.
[554] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," p. 219.
[555] Cf. Lufrani, "Recapitulating All Things in Christ," pp. 219-220.

Chapter 17: Conclusion: Building the Civilization of Love in the Light of Revelation

We have journeyed through the great questions of human existence, from our innate desire for happiness to the complex structure of our moral lives, the virtues that perfect us, and the grace that saves us. We have also confronted the towering challenges of our time—Artificial Intelligence, transhumanism, and new forms of governance that threaten to reduce the human person to a mere instrument. We arrive now at a final, conclusive thesis: it is only with the light of Divine Revelation, interpreted through a theology founded on realist metaphysics, that we can truly understand the world, our purpose within it, and the path to a future of authentic peace and flourishing. Human reason, left to its own devices, ultimately proves insufficient to grasp the full meaning of history and our role in it. Secular ideologies, born of this limited vision, offer only fragmented and often dehumanizing solutions. They see history as a struggle for power or a march of material progress, but they miss its deepest truth: history is a love story, a divine drama of salvation into which God invites us to be protagonists.

Revelation illuminates this drama. It unveils a God who is not a distant watchmaker but a loving Father with a providential plan—an *oikonomia*—for all of creation. This plan, the Eternal Law, is not a blueprint for a deterministic universe but an invitation to free and rational creatures to participate in their own fulfillment and in the governance of the cosmos. Our ultimate end is not a self-made paradise on earth but a supernatural one: eternal beatitude, the loving communion with the Triune God. This is the truth that gives ultimate meaning to every human life and every historical moment.

To understand *how* we participate in this divine governance in our specific historical epoch—an age defined by unprecedented dynamism—we require the tools of a realist-dynamic metaphysics, as developed by thinkers like Don Tommaso Demaria from the foundational realism of St.Thomas Aquinas. This framework allows us to see "Historical Reality" not as a chaotic series of events, but as a unified, intelligible reality—a "dynamic superorganism." The vital principle, the very "soul" of this historical organism, is what we have called *ideopraxis*: ideology rationalized and made concrete in action. Today, our world is animated by powerful atheist-materialist ideopraxes that, in their denial of our transcendent origin and destiny, inevitably lead to the instrumentalization of the person and the degradation of creation.

The Christian response is not to retreat from the world but to engage it with a more powerful, more truthful, and more beautiful alternative: a **Christic**

ideopraxis. This is the Social Doctrine of the Church made active, a way of thinking and acting in every sphere of life—economics, politics, science, art—that is animated by the love and logic of the Gospel. By consciously adopting this Christic ideopraxis, we align our freedom with the Eternal Law. This alignment *is* our participation in divine governance. We become, in a real sense, co-workers with God, shaping Historical Reality from within and guiding it toward its fulfillment in the "recapitulation of all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10).

From this understanding, a **Civilization of Love and Peace** emerges not as a utopian fantasy but as the **"natural" issue** of a history animated by Christic ideopraxis. When human society is structured according to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, the common good, and the inviolable dignity of the human person, the result is a social order that reflects the love of the Trinity. It is a civilization where justice and mercy meet, where every person is valued, and where peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the tranquility of a rightly ordered community. It is in this context that we can finally situate the astonishing new technologies of our time. Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, and other innovations are not inherently good or evil; they are powerful amplifiers of the ideopraxis that creates and wields them. If driven by the logic of profit and power, they will accelerate our path toward a transhumanist dystopia, creating a world of greater inequality, control, and spiritual emptiness. However, if these technologies are harnessed by a **Christic ideopraxis**, they become providential tools of immense potential for building the Civilization of Love. AI can help us solve complex problems of poverty, disease, and environmental degradation, and unlock new scientific understandings that reveal the beauty and intricacy of God's creation. Global communication technologies can be used to foster a genuine solidarity and a shared sense of responsibility for our common home. With these new instruments, animated by the eternal wisdom of the Faith, the construction of a civilization that is more just, more loving, and more peaceful can be achieved with a rapidity previously unimaginable.

Our task, therefore, is clear. It is to embrace our sublime calling as participants in God's governance. It is to study, develop, and implement a robust Christic ideopraxis for our time. It is to see our work, our relationships, and our use of technology through the lens of this high purpose. The future is not a predetermined script, nor is it a void to be filled by our own hubris. It is an open invitation from God to collaborate with Him, through the power of His grace and the light of His truth, in the magnificent work of building a world that reflects His glory—a true and lasting Civilization of Love and Peace.

Appendix 1: Key Concepts in Tommaso Demaria's Dynamic Realism

1. First-Degree Beings (Ente di Primo Grado): The Static Foundation

In this philosophical framework, reality is the interaction of three ontological spheres: the divine sphere (God himself), the Creation and the Historical Reality build by human beings starting from what they find in the Creation and in interaction with God. The sphere of Creation is composed of "first-degree beings". These are the foundational entities of the natural world (*in natura rerum*), originating directly from divine or natural creation. Their essential characteristic is that their essence is static and complete from the first moment of their existence. Demaria defines them with the Latin phrase *ens cuius essentia est*— **a being whose essence is**.[556] This means that a being like a tree, an animal, or a human in their fundamental nature does not become something else; its essence is fixed. This category includes all individual beings that exist independently of human construction, from the simplest elements to the human person considered in their bare, God-given nature.

2. Second-Degree Beings (Ente di Secondo Grado): The Dynamic Construction

Contrasted with the static nature of first-degree beings are "second-degree beings". These are complex realities that emerge primarily from human action, constructed by integrating and organizing first-degree beings into a new, transcendent entity. The defining feature of a second-degree being is its dynamic essence. It is an *ens cuius essentia fit*— a being whose essence becomes or is made.[557] Its very nature is in a state of continuous development, shaped by collective action and historical context.

There are two primary types of second-degree beings:

Infra-human beings: These are typically artifacts (*ens artificiosum*) like a house or a tool. While they are constructed by humans, their dynamism is limited to their creation phase, and their "form" is considered lifeless[3]. They are constituted from non-human materials.

Non-biological organisms: These are living social organisms whose constituent parts are human persons. They possess a "living form" and an ongoing,

[556] Cf. Denaria, T., *Realismo dinamico I - Ontologica realistico-dinamica* (Costruire: Verona, 1975) 126.
[557] Cf. *Ib.* 133.

evolving essence.[558] It is this higher category that includes entities like institutions, societies, and, ultimately, the Mystical Body of Christ.

3. The Unique Nature of the Human Person: First, Second, and Supernaturalized Being

The human person holds a unique ontological position, existing simultaneously across three dimensions.

As a First-Degree Being: In their fundamental nature, defined by scholastic philosophy as *rationalis naturae individua substantia* ("an individual substance of a rational nature"), the person is a static, first-degree being.[559]

As a Second-Degree Being: In concrete reality, it is not this abstract nature that exists, but the "historicized person."[560] This is the person as they live, act, and exist within history, becoming a dynamic, second-degree being who is both a product of and a contributor to Historical Reality.

As a Supernaturalized Being: The ultimate end of the person's dynamic existence is to be existentially supernaturalized through grace. This elevates the person beyond the natural and historical orders. Demaria proposes an enhanced definition to capture this totality: a person is a *rationalis naturae existentialiter supernaturalizatae individua substantia*—that is, an individual substance of a rational nature, existentially supernaturalized.[561]

4. The Organism: Biological and Non-Biological

In Demaria's philosophy, an "organism" is defined metaphysically, allowing it to be applied to both biological and non-biological realities. The general definition is that an organism is "a complex reality, animated by its own vital principle, and therefore capable of living and acting on its own account."[562] This concept is then applied to two distinct types of organisms:

- **The Biological or "Static Organism" (*organismo statico*):** This is the conventional biological entity, such as a plant or animal. It is a "static organism" because its fundamental essence is fixed and complete from the start (*essentia est*), even as it undergoes phenomenal growth. It is composed of cells and tissues and is animated by a substantial form or "soul" (*anima*).
- **The Non-Biological or "Dynamic Organism" (*organismo dinamico*):** This refers to complex human historical realities like institutions, societies, or

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[558] Cf. Denaria, T., *Realismo dinamico III - La realtà storica come superorganismo dinamico* (Costruire: Verona, 1975) 227.
[559] Cf. Demaria, *Realismo dinamico I*, 47.
[560] Cf. *Ib*. 46.
[561] Cf. Demaria, *Realismo dinamico III*, 190-191.
[562] Cf. *Ib*. 33.

political states. To emphasize their true ontological value, they are also called **"dynontorganisms."** Their "vital principle" is a unifying form, such as a shared ideology or mission, and their constituent parts are human persons who function as its "person-cells." A dynamic organism is an *ente dinamico* because its essence *becomes* (*essentia fit*); it is not static but is continuously constructed and reconstructed in history through the collective "life-action" (*praxis*) of its members.[563]

5. Ideopraxis and the "Humanist Interlude": The Soul of Dynamic Historical Reality

The Industrial Revolution marked an "ontological passage" from a "static-sacral" historical reality to a new "dynamic-secular" one.[564] This new reality, unlike its predecessor, is defined by its nature as being in a state of continuous construction. In the old epoch, the "foundation and soul" of society was religion.[565] However, the new dynamic society, in its assertion of secularity and the "autonomy of terrestrial realities," rejects religion as its direct animating principle.[566] This transition was not immediate but was prepared by a long historical process Demaria calls the "humanist interlude." This period, stretching from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment, culturally replaced the divine Absolute with the "pseudo-Absolute of the human being understood as an autonomous and sovereign individual."[567] It was a para-ideological phase that dismantled the old sacral order before the new dynamic one was fully constructed.

When the Industrial Revolution finally gave birth to a truly dynamic reality that required constant construction, this humanist framework proved insufficient. The new society demanded a more powerful, constructive soul, which was found in **ideopraxis**. This concept describes "ideology as rationalized praxis"—it is not an abstract doctrine but a concrete, world-building force.[568] It is the fusion of two elements:

Praxis: The collective, active, and constructive "life-action" of the new dynamic society.[569] Left on its own, praxis would be mere "crude energy," but it possesses an "internal objective rationality" that can be theorized.[570]

Ideology: This is the "ontologico-dynamic soul" of praxis.[571] It is the metaphysical theorization that defines the internal rationality of praxis, transforming it from raw

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[563] Cf. *Ib*. 43.
[564] Cf. Demaria, *For a new Culture*, I.6.
[565] Cf. *Ib*. VI.5.
[566] Cf. *Ib*. IV.6.
[567] Cf. *Ib*. VI.4.
[568] Cf. *Ib*. I.7.
[569] Cf. *Ib*. V.2.
[570] Cf. *Ib*. II.4-5.
[571] Cf. *Ib*. V.5.

energy into a mobilized, constructive force aimed at building a specific type of society.

Therefore, ideopraxis becomes the new soul of historical reality because it is the only principle capable of providing the continuous, rationalized, and secular animation required to build and direct the new dynamic-secular world. The ideologies of capitalism and Marxism are presented as the first historical examples of such rationalized and theorized praxis dominating the modern epoch.[572]

6. The Providential Dynamization of Historical Reality

The ontological shift triggered by the Industrial Revolution can be seen as providentially significant. The core of this revolution was the "substitution of the human energy potential with the unlimited and anonymous energy potential of the forces of the physical world."[573] This new energy gave rise to new "super-agents," such as the industrial company (azienda industriale), which replaced the individual artisan (homo faber) and created a new kind of society defined by "dynamism" and "onticity."[574] This new "dynamic matter" of society was essential for Christianity to fully realize its own inherent nature.

Christianity, at its core, is described as an essentially dynamic reality. This is because its essence is the Mystical Body of Christ, an entity that "constitutes itself" (si costituisce) or "self-constructs" (si autocostruisce) continuously in history.[575] For centuries, however, this intrinsically dynamic Christian "form" was constrained because it had to incarnate itself in a "static-sacral" historical "matter."[576] A dynamic form cannot be properly received by a static matter; its dynamism is inevitably blocked or institutionalized into a static structure. The Industrial Revolution, by creating for the first time a profane, dynamic-secular society, providentially generated the "dynamic matter" that the Christian "dynamic form" required to potentially shape the world in a new and more profound way.

This created the modern historical challenge: to animate this new dynamic reality with the true Christian form rather than with the false, "atheist-materialist" forms that came to dominate it.[577]

7. The Dynamic Transcendentals (DT): Giving Form to Praxis

The Dynamic Transcendentals (trascendentali dinamici, or DT) are the essential properties of the superorganism (the EDUC or DS) through which its "form"—the Absolute or ideological principle—becomes operative. They are the

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[572] Cf. *Ib*. II.9.
[573] Cf. *Ib*. III.2.
[574] Cf. *Ib*. I.8-9.
[575] Cf. *Ib*. III.3.
[576] Cf. Demaria, *Realismo dinamico III*, 97.
[577] Cf. Demaria, *For a new Culture*, III.5.

mechanism that gives the ideopraxic form to historical reality by mobilizing and directing praxis.[578] The five transcendentals are: Religiosity (religiosità), Educativity (educatività), Morality (moralità), Sociality (socialità), and Missionariety (missionarietà).[579] Religiosity is the "synthetic DT," representing the direct link to the Absolute, while the other four are "analytic DTs" that articulate its function across all domains of human life.[580] These are considered the only true dynamic transcendentals because they are the sole properties that are universal, necessary, absolute, and directly linked to the form of the superorganism. Other powerful social forces, such as economics or politics, are considered part of the matter to be shaped, not the form itself. They can only appear to be transcendentals when a false Absolute is put in place, creating "pseudo-DTs."[581] The function of the DTs is to ensure the "dominion of the form" over all historical reality. They are the levers that translate the abstract principle of an ideology into concrete, world-building action by shaping the fundamental pillars of human existence—how people are educated, their moral framework, their social organization, and their drive to expand their vision of the world.

8. The Person-Cell and Transpersonality within the Superorganism

When human persons are integrated into a higher-level "human" second-degree being—such as an institution, a State, or the Church—this entity functions as a living non-biological organism, or **Superorganism** (*superorganismo dinamico*). Within this new reality, the historicized person takes on a new ontological role: they become a **"person-cell"** (*persona-cellula*).[582] This transformation is characterized by the essential property of **transpersonality** (*transpersonalità*).[583] Because the superorganism is not itself a "person" (it is not a first-degree substance), its reality transcends the individuals who compose it. This process of becoming a person-cell is not a dehumanizing loss of self, but a **"super-personalization"** (*super-personalizzazione*).[584] The person, by becoming part of a greater whole, transcends their individual limitations and achieves a new, higher, and richer mode of being. This happens without negating their fundamental autonomy as a first-degree being, creating a synthesis between their individual nature and their cellular function within the larger organism.

Let's consider a university as a prime example of a non-biological organism.

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[578] Cf. Denaria, T., *Realismo dinamico II - La metafisica della realtà storica* (Costruire: Verona, 1975) 117.
[579] Cf. *Ib*. 126.
[580] Cf. Demaria, *Realismo dinamico III*, 199,
[581] Cf. Demaria, *Realismo dinamico I*, 185.
[582] Cf. *Ib*. 199.
[583] Cf. Demaria, *Realismo dinamico I*, 185.
[584] Cf. *Ib*. 196.

Its fundamental, first-degree constituent beings are not merely abstract concepts, but tangible entities that work in concert to define its existence and function. These include its individual students, faculty members, and administrators. Beyond these human elements, the university's "body" also encompasses its physical infrastructures—lecture halls, laboratories, libraries—and its relations with the outer world, including funding bodies and alumni networks. Within this complex organism, the individuals transcend their individual identities to become "person-cells" of the university.

The university, far from being merely a collection of individuals, embodies a profound transpersonal reality. It possesses a distinct mission, a culture, a legal identity, and a historical trajectory far greater than the aggregate of the lives of its members. In essence, it operates as a singular, cohesive entity, a "super-agent" with its own discernible will and impact on the world. This super-agent is characterized by an inherent dynamism, its very essence being in a constant state of becoming (*ens cuius essentia fit*). Its academic focus, values, and reputation undergo continuous transformation, organically shaped by the collective *praxis* – the vibrant, ongoing life-action – of the entire organism.

Appendix 2: The Bible, the Book of the Community

Introduction: A Book That Breathes with the Church

We often think of reading as a solitary activity. We pick up a book, find a quiet corner, and enter its world alone. While this is true for many books, it is not the case for the Bible. The Bible is not a single book dropped from heaven into the hands of an individual; it is a library, assembled over centuries, born from the life of a community of faith. Its very nature, from the stories it tells to the way it was formed, demands that it be read, interpreted, and lived *within* that community. This appendix will explore how the Bible came to be, demonstrating that it is, and has always been, the book of the Church.

Part I: A Divine Word in Human Language - The Nature of Inspiration

Before listing the books of the Bible, we must first understand *how* they are the Word of God. The Catholic faith does not hold that the Bible was dictated word-for-word by God. The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, teaches that "in composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted" (DV 11).

This is a mystery analogous to the Incarnation itself: just as Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God who fully assumed our human nature (cf. John 1:14), the Scriptures are the Word of God fully expressed in the limitations, styles, and contexts of human language. God chose to communicate with us in a radically relational way. He did not bypass our humanity but embraced it. The human authors were true authors, using their own skills and cultural perspectives to craft the texts. The various layers and even the tensions we find within the biblical text are not flaws; they are the fingerprints of this divine-human collaboration. They are the register of a real relationship between God and His people, developing over time.

There is a profound dignity in this. God honors human freedom and history by choosing to speak from within it. The Bible is not a static, otherworldly oracle; it is the living testimony of God's patient, unfolding self-revelation to humanity. The changes and developments in the text are not signs of corruption but evidence of a living faith community wrestling with God's message for their own time. This process makes the Bible eternally relevant, as it shows God meeting humanity where it is.

Part II: The Catholic Bible - A Library of Inspired Books

The word "Bible" comes from the Greek *tà biblía*, which means "the books." This is a fitting name, as the Catholic Bible is a collection of 73 distinct books. The composition of this library spanned over a millennium and multiple continents, from the Near East to the Mediterranean world. The Old Testament books were redacted in places like Jerusalem and Babylon, especially during and after the Babylonian Exile (6th century BC), while the New Testament books were written throughout the Roman Empire—in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome—during the latter half of the first century AD.

The Old Testament (46 Books)

Written primarily in Hebrew and Aramaic, these books are traditionally classified into four sections:

1. **The Pentateuch (or Torah):** *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*
2. **The Historical Books:** *Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 & 2 Maccabees*
3. **The Wisdom Books:** *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)*
4. **The Prophetic Books:** *Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*

The New Testament (27 Books)

Written in Greek in the decades following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1. **The Gospels:** *Matthew, Mark, Luke, John*
2. **The Acts of the Apostles**
3. **The Epistles:**
   - **Pauline Epistles:** *Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*
   - **The Letter to the Hebrews**
   - **Catholic (or General) Epistles:** *James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude*
4. **The Book of Revelation (or Apocalypse)**

Part III: The Formation of the Canon - A Communal Discernment

How did these 73 books, and not others, come to be included in the Bible? The process of forming the "canon" was a long, organic process guided by the Holy Spirit within the community of the Church. It was not the decision of a single person, but a gradual consensus that grew over centuries.

The early Church used several key criteria to discern which books were truly inspired by God:

1. **Apostolic Origin:** Was the book written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle?
2. **Universal Acceptance (Catholicity):** Was the book accepted and used by a wide number of Christian communities?
3. **Liturgical Use:** Was the book regularly read and proclaimed in the central act of Christian worship, the Mass?
4. **Consistent Message:** Did the book's teaching cohere with the core message of the faith handed down from the apostles?

This process took time. Regional Church councils, such as those at **Hippo (393 AD)** and **Carthage (397 and 419 AD)**, affirmed the list of 73 books that the Catholic Church holds today. This decision was a formal recognition of the lived practice and belief of the churches. Many other religious books were written, but the community, in a process of spiritual discernment, did not recognize them as possessing the unique, inspired character of the canonical texts.

Part IV: The Old Testament, the LXX, and the Qumran Discoveries

A key difference between Catholic and Protestant Bibles is the presence of seven "deuterocanonical" books. During the Reformation, these were excluded based on the argument that they were not in the Hebrew Bible and were not originally written in Hebrew. This argument is challenged by history:

1. **The Septuagint (LXX):** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures used by the New Testament authors, which *did* include the deuterocanonical books. This shows the first Christian communities used a broader canon.
2. **The Discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran:** In 1947, scrolls from the time of Jesus were discovered. These included Hebrew originals of some deuterocanonical books (like Sirach and Tobit). This critically undermines the argument for their exclusion, proving they were part of the rich tapestry of Jewish sacred writings in the time of Jesus, which the early Church drew

upon.

Conclusion: Reading, Interpreting, and Living the Bible as a Community

The story of how the Bible was written, compiled, and preserved is the story of a community. The Bible did not create the Church; the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, discerned and formed the Bible. This fundamental truth shapes how Catholics approach Scripture today. The task of interpretation is both a scholarly and a spiritual work, undertaken within the heart of the Church.

Modern **exegetical studies**, grounded in scientific research from archaeology, linguistics, and history, are a gift. The Church encourages this work, as affirmed in papal encyclicals from Pope Leo XIII's *Providentissimus Deus* to Pope Pius XII's *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. These studies help us better understand the human context in which God's Word was written. The work of contemporary Catholic scholars like Raymond E. Brown and Joseph Fitzmyer, who utilized these methods, has greatly enriched the Church's understanding of Scripture.

However, science alone is not enough. This has been the constant teaching of the Church, from the earliest centuries. The Church Fathers developed rich traditions of interpretation. **Origen of Alexandria**, for example, explored the spiritual senses of Scripture, while **St. Augustine of Hippo**, in his work *On Christian Doctrine*, laid out principles for a faith-filled reading. **St. Thomas Aquinas** later systematized this, teaching that all other senses of Scripture (allegorical, moral, anagogical) are based on the literal sense—what the human author intended to convey.

Crucially, **St. Jerome**, who translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate, insisted on the importance of returning to the original languages. Yet even with perfect linguistic knowledge, we can never perfectly reconstruct every ancient nuance. This very limitation shows why interpretation requires more than academia; it requires the guidance of the **Holy Spirit within the community**.

Therefore, Catholic interpretation is guided by several principles, articulated in *Dei Verbum* and the Pontifical Biblical Commission's document *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*:

1. **Read in the living Tradition:** The Bible is read with the saints and scholars of every generation.
2. **Heed the Analogy of Faith:** The interpretation of any single passage of Scripture must be in harmony with the entirety of the Church's teaching. A reading of the Bible cannot contradict the dogmas of the faith, because both

Scripture and dogma flow from the same divine source.

3. **Submit to the Church's Judgment:** The Magisterium (the Pope and bishops) has the ultimate authority to make a definitive judgment on the interpretation of Scripture, serving as the servant of the Word of God by protecting it from error.

Finally, to ensure a common text for worship and study, the **episcopal conferences** approve official translations for their regions. This act makes a translation not just a scholarly work, but the official Scripture of that local Church, ready to be proclaimed in the liturgy. To read the Bible as a Catholic, then, is to recognize that this library of books is a family inheritance, a love letter from God not to an individual, but to His people, the Church.

Appendix 3: The Catholic Magisterium

I. Introduction

This appendix serves to elaborate on the nature, historical development, and authoritative structure of the Catholic Church's Magisterium. Understanding the Magisterium is crucial for comprehending the Church's teaching authority and the manner in which divine revelation is preserved, interpreted, and transmitted to the faithful.

II. What is the Magisterium?

The term "Magisterium" (from the Latin *magister*, meaning 'teacher') refers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. It is entrusted primarily to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him, as successors to Peter and the Apostles respectively. The Magisterium's role is to authentically interpret the Word of God, whether written (Sacred Scripture) or handed on (Sacred Tradition), and to safeguard the deposit of faith. This authority is not above the Word of God but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit.[585]

III. History of the Magisterium: From the Bible to Tradition

The concept of a definitive teaching authority within God's people has roots in the Old Testament, where prophets and priests held specific roles in interpreting God's law. However, the Magisterium, as understood in Catholicism, originates with Jesus Christ's commissioning of the Apostles.

A. The Apostolic Foundation

Jesus Christ conferred a unique teaching authority upon His Apostles. He commanded them: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20). He also promised them the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). This divine mandate established an authoritative teaching office within the nascent Church. Peter, in particular, was given a special role of strengthening his brethren (Luke 22:32) and being the "rock" upon which the Church would be built (Matthew 16:18-19).[586]

B. The Early Church and the Development of Tradition

After Pentecost, the Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, began to preach the Gospel. Their teaching, both oral and written, formed the core of what would become Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture. The early Christian communities looked to the Apostles and their appointed successors (bishops, presbyters) for guidance on

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[585] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), no. 10. Available at: www.vatican.va.
[586] See Avery Cardinal Dulles, Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2007), 15-28.

matters of faith and morals. Councils, such as the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), demonstrated the collective exercise of this authority in resolving doctrinal disputes.[587] The writings of the Church Fathers (e.g., Irenaeus, Tertullian, Augustine) attest to the importance of apostolic succession and the living Tradition as benchmarks against heresy.

C. Medieval Period: Consolidation and Papal Primacy

Throughout the medieval period, the teaching authority of the bishops, particularly the Bishop of Rome (the Pope), became more clearly defined and consolidated. Ecumenical Councils, convened to address major theological challenges, played a pivotal role in articulating doctrine (e.g., Nicaea I, Chalcedon). The development of canon law and scholastic theology further systematized the Church's teachings. The primacy of the Roman Pontiff, while acknowledged from early times, gained increasing prominence as a universal teaching and governing authority.[588]

D. The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent served as a monumental moment for the Magisterium. It definitively clarified many doctrines challenged by the Reformers, particularly regarding justification, sacraments, and the canon of Scripture. Trent underscored the authority of both Scripture and Tradition as sources of revelation and reaffirmed the hierarchical structure of the Church with its teaching office.

E. First Vatican Council (1869-1870)

The First Vatican Council, through its dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, solemnly defined the dogma of papal infallibility. This teaching states that the Pope, when he speaks *ex cathedra* (from the chair of Peter) on matters of faith or morals, with the intention of defining a doctrine for the universal Church, is preserved from error by divine assistance.[589] This council significantly clarified and heightened the understanding of papal authority within the Magisterium.

F. Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

The Second Vatican Council, particularly in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, provided a profound and comprehensive treatment of the Magisterium. It reaffirmed papal infallibility but also emphasized the collegiality of bishops, stating that the college of bishops, together with its head (the Pope), also exercises supreme and full authority over the universal Church.[590] *Lumen Gentium* clarified that the Pope exercises his authority both personally and collegially, and that

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[587] Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), The Nature and Mission of Theology (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 45-56.

[588] Klaus Schatz, Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 67-101

[589] First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution Pastor Aeternus (18 July 1870), Chapter 4. Available at: www.vatican.va.

[590] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium (21 November 1964), no. 25. Available at: www.vatican.va.

bishops teach in union with the Pope as authentic teachers of the faith. The Council underscored that the Magisterium's authority is a service to the Word of God, not superior to it.

IV. Degrees of Authority of Magisterial Documents

Not all statements emanating from the Magisterium carry the same degree of authority or require the same level of assent from the faithful. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's (CDF) *Donum Veritatis* (On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian) provide clear distinctions.[591]

A. Infallible Teachings (Requiring the Assent of Faith - *Assensus Fidei*)

These are truths revealed by God or intimately connected to them, proposed definitively and infallibly by the Church for belief. To reject them is to commit heresy.
1. **Solemn Definitions by the Roman Pontiff (*Ex Cathedra*)**: When the Pope, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, proclaims a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the universal Church. Examples include the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption of Mary (1950).
2. **Solemn Definitions by an Ecumenical Council**: When the bishops, gathered in an ecumenical council with the Pope, define a doctrine as divinely revealed. Examples include the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas defined by the early councils (e.g., Nicaea I, Chalcedon).
3. **Universal Ordinary Magisterium**: When the bishops throughout the world, in communion with the Pope, teach a particular doctrine as definitively true, even if not formally defined. This applies when they are in agreement that a specific teaching is to be held definitively, such as the sinfulness of direct abortion or the reservation of priestly ordination to men alone.[592]

B. Definitive (but Non-Infallible) Teachings (Requiring Firm and Definitive Assent - *Firmiter Tenenda*)

These are teachings on matters connected by historical or logical necessity with revealed truth. While not formally revealed themselves, they are necessary for the deposit of faith to be preserved and faithfully expounded. They are proposed definitively, even if not infallibly defined.
- **Examples**: The canonization of saints (which definitively declares a person to be in heaven), the invalidity of Anglican orders, or the illicitness of euthanasia.
- **Obligation**: These teachings require firm and definitive assent. To reject them, while not heresy, is gravely contrary to Catholic doctrine.

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[591] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Donum Veritatis (Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian) (24 May 1990), nos. 23-31. Available at: www.vatican.va; See also Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 88-90, 891-892. Available at: www.vatican.va.

[592] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Responsio ad dubium concerning the doctrine on the ordination of women (28 October 1995), and Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (22 May 1994).

C. Authoritative (Non-Infallible) Teachings (Requiring Religious Submission of Intellect and Will - *Obsequium Religiosum Intellectus et Voluntatis*)

These are teachings proposed by the Pope or the College of Bishops in the exercise of their authentic ordinary Magisterium, but not with the intention of proclaiming them definitively.

- **Nature**: These teachings aim to promote a deeper understanding of revealed truth, explain aspects of Christian morality, or apply doctrine to current situations.
- **Examples**: Encyclicals (e.g., *Humanae Vitae* on contraception, *Laudato Si'* on ecology), Apostolic Exhortations, Pastoral Letters of bishops, or instructions from dicasteries of the Roman Curia.
- **Obligation**: The faithful are bound to give religious submission of intellect and will to these teachings. This means a sincere effort to understand and accept the teaching, and a presumption of its truth. While not requiring the *assent of faith*, it does imply a duty to adhere to it unless, in rare and specific circumstances, there are grave theological reasons for questioning it, which must be done humbly and always with a desire to remain in communion with the Church.[593]

D. Prudential Judgments and Disciplinary Directives (Requiring Obedience and Respect)

These refer to specific applications of doctrine to practical situations, disciplinary norms, or administrative decisions.

- **Nature**: These are often time-bound and context-dependent. They are not direct doctrinal statements but aim to guide the faithful in Christian living or to regulate Church life.
- **Examples**: Specific liturgical regulations, particular moral applications in complex situations, or administrative guidelines.
- **Obligation**: These call for obedience and respect. While they can change, and sometimes a change may even be prudentially desirable, the faithful are generally obliged to follow them.

V. Authors and Types of Magisterial Documents

Magisterial documents originate from various levels of the Church's teaching authority, primarily the Roman Pontiff and the College of Bishops, often through the Roman Curia.

A. Current Authors of Magisterial Documents

1. **The Roman Pontiff (the Pope)**: As the successor of St. Peter and head of the College of Bishops, the Pope is the supreme visible source of Magisterial teaching. His direct teachings are found in various forms, as listed below.
2. **The College of Bishops**: In communion with the Pope, the bishops exercise the Magisterium collectively. This occurs most prominently in Ecumenical

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[593] Donum Veritatis, no. 28.

Councils. It also happens through the Universal Ordinary Magisterium when bishops throughout the world concur on a teaching.

3. **Dicasteries of the Roman Curia**: These permanent departments of the Holy See assist the Pope in exercising his supreme pastoral office. Documents issued by Dicasteries (e.g., the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, etc.) do so by mandate of the Pope and share in his authority to varying degrees, depending on the nature of the document and the explicit approval given by the Pontiff.[594]

B. Kinds of Magisterial Documents

The following are common types of documents issued by the Magisterium, generally listed in descending order of their authoritative weight, though the specific content and explicit intent of the author always determine the precise level of assent required.

1. **Apostolic Constitutions (*Constitutio Apostolica*)**: The most solemn form of papal document, used for matters of great importance, such as dogmatic definitions (e.g., *Munificentissimus Deus* defining the Assumption), establishing new dioceses, or promulgating new codes of canon law.

2. **Encyclicals (*Litterae Encyclicae*)**: Letters addressed by the Pope to the bishops of the world, and often to all the faithful or even to all people of good will, on significant doctrinal, moral, or social issues. They are a primary vehicle for the Pope's ordinary Magisterium (e.g., *Laudato Si'*, *Fratelli Tutti*).

3. **Apostolic Letters (*Litterae Apostolicae*)**: A broad category of papal documents used for various purposes, including addressing specific groups, declaring particular laws, or marking significant events. They can vary greatly in their weight and scope.

4. **Apostolic Exhortations (*Adhortatio Apostolica*)**: Papal reflections on a particular topic addressed to the clergy and faithful, often following a Synod of Bishops. They encourage particular virtues or missions and are pastoral in nature, not typically defining new doctrine (e.g., *Amoris Laetitia*).

5. **Motu Proprios (*Litterae Motu Proprio Datae*)**: Documents issued by the Pope "on his own initiative" concerning legislative or administrative matters, often to modify existing law or establish new norms within the Church (e.g., *Traditionis Custodes*).

6. **Decrees (*Decretum*)**: Documents that promulgate a new law, interpret existing law, or make a decision on a particular matter. Decrees can originate from Ecumenical Councils, the Pope, or Dicasteries.

7. **Declarations (*Declaratio*)**: Statements that clarify existing doctrine, respond to particular questions, or express the Church's position on contemporary issues.

8. **Instructions (*Instructio*)**: Directives from a Dicastery of the Roman Curia to bishops or others, providing guidelines for the implementation of laws or the application of doctrine.

9. **Homilies, Addresses, Messages**: Less formal communications, often given orally, that nonetheless convey authentic teaching and guidance. The level of authority depends on the context and the explicit intent of the speaker.

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[594] [10] For a detailed understanding of the Roman Curia and its functions, see Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution Praedicate Evangelium (19 March 2022). Available at: www.vatican.va.

C. Accessing Magisterial Documents

The official website of the Holy See, where most major magisterial documents are published and archived, is:
- **Vatican.va**: www.vatican.va

This website serves as the primary digital repository for papal documents, documents from Ecumenical Councils, and those issued by the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia.

VI. Key Reference Compilations

Two important resources for studying the Magisterium are the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* and Denzinger.

A. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS)

The *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Latin for "Acts of the Apostolic See"), often cited as AAS, is the official gazette of the Holy See.[11] It was established by Pope Pius X on September 29, 1908, and began publication in January 1909.
- **Purpose**: The AAS serves as the official means of promulgating laws and official documents of the Holy See. Unless otherwise specified, laws contained within the AAS come into force three months after their date of publication.
- **Content**: It contains all the principal decrees, encyclical letters, apostolic constitutions, decisions of Roman congregations, and notices of ecclesiastical appointments, among other official acts of the Pope and the Roman Curia. It is published periodically, typically about twelve times a year. Its publication ensures the authenticity and official nature of the documents it contains.

B. Denzinger (*Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*)

Commonly referred to simply as "Denzinger," this comprehensive handbook is a collection of essential texts of Catholic doctrine, covering creeds, definitions, and declarations concerning faith and morals from the earliest times of the Church to the present day.[12] The full Latin title translates to "Handbook of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals."
- **Origin**: The original compilation was by Heinrich Joseph Dominicus Denzinger (1819–1883), a German theologian, who first published his *Enchiridion* in 1854. It has been continually updated and expanded by subsequent editors.
- **Purpose**: Denzinger provides a chronological compendium of doctrinal statements from various authoritative sources, including Ecumenical Councils, papal pronouncements, and other significant ecclesiastical documents. It serves as an invaluable reference tool for theologians, canonists, and anyone studying Catholic dogma, offering easy access to the precise wording of key Church teachings. Citations in theological works and even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* frequently refer to entries in Denzinger (often abbreviated as "DS," referring to the Denzinger-Schönmetzer edition).

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