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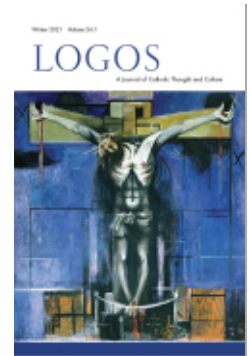
## Reciprocal Generativity: Reason, Intimacy, and Sexual Difference

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# Reciprocal Generativity

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## Reason, Intimacy, and Sexual Difference

### *Introduction*

THE FLESH WARS against the spirit (Gal 5:17). The human person finds himself in a strange place: seemingly weighed down by flesh that pulls him always to the center of the earth, even while that which is fire and breath within him is secretly drawn to the heavens. Plato did not hesitate to speak of the pain of this tension:

So long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be truth. In the first place, the body provides us with innumerable distractions in the pursuit of our necessary sustenance, and any diseases which attack us hinder our quest for reality. Besides, the body fills us with loves and desires and fears and all sorts of fancies and a great deal of nonsense, with the result that we literally never get an opportunity to think at all about anything.<sup>1</sup>

The soul, by its nature, seeks the truth, seeks to transcend. The body by its nature, with its beguiling desires, crippling vulnerability to

disease, and endless capitulation to distraction, ensnares that which would otherwise take flight, battling, as is its wont, against the spirit. And inexorably wrapped in this carnality is sexual difference: molding flesh in such a way that, in its union, yet more new and living flesh might be produced. It is, thus, easy to think of sexual difference as a kind of paradigmatic ambassador of the flesh and, as such, in this role, as somehow intrinsically opposed to reason: if reason plays the part of fire and air in man, impelling him toward the eternal, sexual difference, bound as it is to the earth, holds man captive amidst mud and briar. It is precisely against this position that I now wish to argue.

In that open field  
 If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,  
 On a summer midnight, you can hear the music  
 Of the weak pipe and the little drum  
 And see them dancing around the bonfire  
 The association of man and woman  
 In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie—  
 A dignified and commodious sacrament.  
 Two and two, necessarye coniunction,  
 Holding eche other by the hand or the arm  
 Whiche betokeneth concorde. Round and round the fire  
 Leaping through the flames or joined in circles,  
 Rustically solemn or in rustic laughter  
 Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,  
 Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth.<sup>2</sup>

St. Thomas Aquinas clearly exposes the problem with the notion that sexual difference essentially opposes reason: when asking why the power of generation is divided among two members of the species, Thomas notes that this division—and thus the sexual difference that envelops it—must be for the sake of reason, not opposed to it.<sup>3</sup> Hence a right understanding of sexual difference is one that sees the reality of sex as at the service of man's highest human powers and so at the service of the destiny bound up with those powers.

According to its original intention, it finds the commodious balance of necessary conjunction, which turns out to be a harmonious—not antagonistic—interplay of earth, air, fire, and water, of the material and the spiritual. It is this theme—the relation of sexual difference to reason and to human destiny that I will now explore. This means that we must ask ourselves questions of final causality. Why did nature and nature's God bring this mysterious reality of human maleness and femaleness into existence? We will focus on what St. Thomas Aquinas refers to as “the end of the thing generated,”<sup>4</sup> that is, not so much the form of what has been brought into being—“the end of generation”—as that for the sake of which the particular union of form and matter that is sexual difference has come to be. Nevertheless, we must begin with some consideration of form and then make our way to understanding why the form is as it is. Such considerations will lead us to the conclusion that sexual difference, though draped in earth, is charged with the fire of *logos*.

### *Form*

In order to explain why something is, we must know at least a little about what it is, about what defines it. So, I must begin with a brief focus on form and essence. What is it, then, that defines human maleness and femaleness? It seems undeniable that the distinction in sex centers upon the power of generation. More precisely, it centers upon a divided power of generation, and, more precisely still, an asymmetrically divided power of generation. The question of defining sexual difference is the question of capturing the nature of this asymmetry and discerning what is most essential in this asymmetry. To do that in any detail is outside of the scope of our current exploration, but let me offer the barest sketch of what defines sexual difference, and begin biologically:<sup>5</sup> the power of generation is divided into two distinct partial powers, such that one sex reproduces by means of producing ova and the other by means of spermatozoa. We see as well, however, that, beginning with this core, various organs

have to develop to support the production of these distinct gametes and their successful unification, since it is only the unification of both partial powers that permits the power of generation to be realized among human beings. Thus, human beings have distinct external genitalia that complement the distinct gametes they produce. But there are also distinctions in roles or typical behaviors that support successful generation. Taking the act of generation as a fixed point of reference, if we look “forward” from the still point of conception, we see gestation, birth, and care for and rearing of offspring. If we look “backwards” from conception, most proximately, we find sexual intercourse, marriage, courtship, and selection of a suitable mate. In all of these realms, we find sexual dimorphism of varying levels of importance or, we might say, “essentiality.” Hence, we arrive at the conclusion that maleness and femaleness are harmonies of various aspects of the human person that center on distinct ways of possessing the power of generation. At the very least, we must say that sexual difference centers upon the divided power of generation.

### *Why?*

With this brief sketch of what sexual difference is, we turn to the principal question of this work: why are maleness and femaleness the way they are? Can we peer into that-for-sake-of-which nature acts to bring about sexually differentiated human persons? To answer this question, the evolutionists can be of great help: Sexual difference centers upon a divided power of generation.<sup>6</sup> It’s worth taking a moment to note the uniqueness of this strategy of nature: think of all the powers that living things possess, all the capabilities that living things have, that nonliving things do not. All of these powers—except one—are held individually: In order to see, for example, one does not have to find some other who possesses the distinct and complementary partial power of sight; we all have our own power of sight, of thought, of growth, of digestion, and so on.<sup>7</sup> Generation is not this way. Nature has chosen to generate the human being such that no

one member of the species would possess the power of generation alone. So, our first question, is: why divide this power? Aquinas addresses the question in these very terms,<sup>8</sup> but, the evolutionists put a fine point on its poignance: if a genotype has survived in a given ecology to the point of being able to reproduce, then, clearly, that very genotype should reproduce itself exactly, for it is exactly the traits contained in that genotype that have proven adaptive.<sup>9</sup> So why would nature choose to move away from asexual reproduction, in which an exact genetic replica—a kind of clone—is produced, and shift to demanding the genetic contribution of some other? The evolutionists will offer answers to this question that center on the variation that is needed when organisms must confront dynamic environments. In particular, the genetic variation caused by sexual reproduction seems to provide enough variation in the defenses of the immune system so as to keep pathogens at bay.<sup>10</sup> While these solutions are of great interest and of great value, they are not my focus here, and so I cannot linger to explore them.

Supposing that we have established a need for genetic variation; in so doing, have we made a case for a shift from asexual reproduction to sexual reproduction? Put briefly, no. For, in establishing the need for reproduction with the genetic contribution of two members of a species, there is nothing *a priori* that demands that those two members of the species be different in any way other than providing genetic variation. There is no reason why this demands two distinct mating types. Any other other—with the exception of an identical twin—would provide genetic distinction. And again, nature's demand of distinct mating-types seems to defy evolutionary logic. If any member of a species could mate with any other member of the species, that would render finding a mate all the easier. But, by having two distinct mating types, and demanding that one member of the species finds precisely the other mating type in order to complete the power of generation, nature limits any individual's possible mates to half the species before the quest has even begun.<sup>11</sup> Why, then, would presumably wise nature choose to divide the power of

generation nonidentically, into two mating types, each of which requires the other for its completion? Again, though the evolutionary theories offered to respond to these questions are of great interest and value, we must forego any lengthy discussion here and settle for the most cursory of summaries: the evolutionary solution centers on the notion of disruptive selection in which extreme qualities are simultaneously selected. Thus, when the power of generation is divided, those pairs that most successfully reproduced were those in which one of the pair provided a richer cell and the other a simpler cell. Over time, both of these “extremes” were selected, culminating in the two mating types we now know: one that produces a rich gamete containing all the metabolic machinery needed for postconception flourishing (this we have named the female), and the other that produces a simple gamete containing more or less only the genetic contribution of the parent (this we have named the male).<sup>12</sup> It is further hypothesized that conflict between the mitochondrial DNA of the joined gametes might be at the origin of the disruptive selection that resulted in nature’s production of the two distinct mating types we call male and female.<sup>13</sup>

### *Two Questions, Two Paradigms*

So, now, finally, I have the two questions that will focus my work: Why divide the power of generation? And, why divide it asymmetrically? Is it sufficient to say that sexual difference is due to pathogens and intracellular conflict of mitochondrial DNA? I noted earlier that we are not going to explore the evolutionary response to these questions in depth. However, since we have permitted them to introduce our two teleological questions, perhaps some justification is needed as to why more space is not afforded to their responses. Further, I think that we shall see that, in exploring these questions, we will arrive at a first assertion of a fundamental point of this work: human sexual difference is for the sake of human reason, not somehow in opposition to it.

There is much intriguing and useful that can be profitably explored among the work of the evolutionists. In fact, we will continually refer to their insights throughout this work. However, there is a foundational distinction lying at the heart of how the evolutionist and the Aristotelian tradition approaches questions such as these; each has a fundamentally distinct explanatory paradigm. Steven Pinker's description of adaptation as understood within the Darwinian context is illustrative:

What is "adaptive" in everyday life is not necessarily an "adaptation" in the technical sense of being a trait that was favored by natural selection in a species' evolutionary history. Natural selection is the morally indifferent process in which the most effective replicators outreproduce the alternatives and come to prevail in a population. The selected genes will therefore be the "selfish" ones, in Richard Dawkins's metaphor—more accurately, the megalomaniacal ones, those that make the most copies of themselves. An adaptation is anything brought about by the genes that helps them fulfill this metaphorical obsession, whether or not it also fulfills human aspirations.<sup>14</sup>

Within this explanatory economy, the ultimate horizon, the linchpin of the system, is the "megalomaniacal" gene: the gene is the most fundamental unit able to project itself into the future. From its perspective, the means, the vehicle through which it makes that voyage into posterity, is irrelevant. What matters is that the gene replicates and continues to do so. There is nothing or no one acting for the sake of this replication nor for the sake of the whole organism, which is the means of replication. Rather, when it happens, it happens by mechanical necessity. The process of natural selection has led more and more complicated bearers of genes to survive, but we cannot be fooled into thinking that there was some hidden agent acting for the sake of the existence of these more complex entities—they were simply means to the more effective existence of certain genes. Neither should we think that there is anything acting for the sake of the

prolonged existence of the gene; rather, it is simply the case that genes by their nature replicate themselves and the traits they bear. Those that do so more effectively will come to prevail in a population. So, there is nothing acting for the sake of the whole organism, or for the sake of the species. Rather, the organism is for the sake of—insofar as we can use such language at all—the projection of the gene into the future. Put succinctly, rather than the part being for the sake of the whole (the gene for the sake of the whole organism of which it is a part), the whole is for the sake of the part. Bereft of any notion of substantial form, any principle of unity in the thing that renders it a unified whole—that renders it truly one thing—there is, not surprisingly, no way to conceive of parts as acting toward the end of the unified whole (what Aquinas refers to as the end of generation) and hence for the ends of that whole (what Aquinas refers to as the end of the thing generated).<sup>15</sup>

The general “directionality” of explanation is radically different as understood by Aristotle and Aquinas following him: the whole is not for the sake of the continued existence of the part, but rather the part is for the sake of the whole. Thus, the human being is not a vehicle for the sake of projecting genes into the future, but rather genes are for the sake of the human being. Thus, in the Aristotelian tradition, if we are to understand any part or aspect of a thing, it must be in terms of the whole of that thing.<sup>16</sup> Aquinas makes this general understanding of causal directionality clear when discussing the relation of the powers of the soul to each other: the higher powers are understood by Aquinas to stand toward the lower powers as both their agent and end.<sup>17</sup> This is a strong statement, for he includes the notion of agency along with finality. Thus, the powers of the soul flow from the essence of the soul according to an order: the most fundamental powers—growth, nutrition, and generation—are for the sake of the higher powers of sensation. And, in the human person, the powers of sensation are for the sake of the intellectual powers of reason and will, of knowing and loving. What’s more, in some way, the higher powers are agents of the existence of the lower

powers.<sup>18</sup> This latter point I will leave to a future work, but I wish to now turn our attention to the former: as the part is for the sake of the whole, so the lower is for the sake of the higher. It is this claim that will form the central point of the rest of my reflection. Thus, to refocus, we now return our attention to the question of sexual difference: for the evolutionist, sexual difference can only be explained insofar as random mutations and natural selection blindly produced sexual difference, for, in the ecologies in which it evolved, it allowed for more efficacious replication of genes. For Aquinas, the focus of explaining sexual difference is radically different: in order to grasp this part or aspect of human existence, it must be understood in terms of the whole of human existence. Ultimately, this means that it must be understood in terms of a cascade of ends that resolves in human beatitude: the wedding feast of the Lamb.

However, we may begin more modestly, by following Aquinas in his reflection on how the powers of the soul relate to each other: each lower power is for the sake of the higher. This means that all human powers are for the sake of the highest human power: the intellect, man's spiritual power—that through which the human person in his nature breaks the bonds of limited matter and is able to enter the realm of the infinite and eternal, the realm of communion. Every power in man is for the sake of his ultimate end. Every cell in our body exists for the sake of the whole person and so for the sake of that for the sake of which the person exists. Each part plays its role in bringing about the end of the whole. The power of generation—and the sexual difference that envelops it—is one such “part.” Thus, if we are to understand the “why” of sexual difference, we must see how sexual difference is in fact for the sake of the ultimate human end. We must therefore see how sexual difference serves the highest of human capacities. This means we must part company with those who would see sexual difference as somehow being an intrinsic enemy of reason, standing in essential opposition to the spirit. Rather, it is now for us to try to make the case that, far from being the “flesh” that is opposed to the “spirit,” sexual differentiation in the human person is

precisely for the sake of man's highest powers and thus the friend and helper of the human person in his journey to achieve his final end. Let us now see if we can make the case, then, that, far from being opposed to reason, sexual difference is precisely for the sake of reason and all the gifts that this spiritual power affords to man.

### *Sexual Difference and the Intellect*

We have just seen a fundamental difference in the manners of explanation employed by the Aristotelian tradition and evolutionary thought. This does not mean, however, that there is not much to be gleaned from the research of the evolutionists. As such, I will turn to a brief consideration of evolutionary thought. Researcher David Puts offers a fascinating narrative of human development that links sexual difference with reason.<sup>19</sup> According to Puts, around 2.5 million years ago, our human ancestors began shifting from a more plant-based diet to a more meat-based diet, as evidenced by animal bones beginning to show signs of damage from stone weapons and tools. Then, around 2 million years ago, brain size in our ancestors began to increase. With this increase came the need for a longer time of development for offspring and hence a greater need for resources to support that development. It would be very difficult for the female alone to provide the security and resources needed for this prolonged development.<sup>20</sup> However, the relatively newly discovered capacity to provide large quantities of nutrient-rich food by means of hunting and eating animals gave the male the ability to meet the expanding development needs of his offspring. Hence, paternal investment in offspring, by providing high-quality food, increased the chance of survival for those offspring by allowing the brain to develop more slowly and, hence, more profoundly. Offspring with the benefit of paternal investment through provision of high-quality food were at a competitive advantage to those lacking such investment. Males, with the fruits of their hunting exploits, were able uniquely to meet the need of an expanding human brain. Thus, Puts draws our attention to

a telling phenomenon that is still operative in contemporary hunter/gatherer societies: during their years of producing offspring, males contribute significantly more calories to the society than they consume. Females, however, during their childbearing years, consume more calories than they contribute. The temporal and energetic costs of children hinder females in effective food procurement. Psychologist David Geary likewise notes that it was paternal investment that allowed a prolonged developmental period that in turn permitted more complex cognitive functioning.<sup>21</sup> Hence, we see an interesting implication arising from evolutionary theory regarding the evolution of paternal investment and the evolution of the human brain: it is sexual difference and the distinct and complementary roles that such difference affords that provide the conditions under which the human brain is able to evolve. Thus, sexual difference, in the way outlined above, is for the sake of human reason insofar as the complementarity it implies permits the evolution of a brain that becomes the fitting helpmate to human reason.<sup>22</sup> Hence, we begin to be able to draw a fascinating conclusion from the work of the evolutionists—it is an observation that, as we shall soon see, Aristotle drew thousands of years earlier: sexual dimorphism leads to a kind of symbiotic division of labor, which collaboration permits the developmental conditions that make the exercise of human reason possible. Hence, we have a linkage that we shall now continue to explore: sexual difference, human community—tribe or city—and human reason are all bound with one another. Let us see if we can further draw out these relationships. To do so, I now turn our attention to Aristotle to see what he can offer regarding the “why” of sexual difference. Why does a human being not reproduce by simply growing a bud that develops into the same uniform kind of human?

### *Sexual Difference and the Polis*

While Aristotle does not put the question in these terms, we can glean how perhaps he would respond to the question of why there is sexual

difference. In a famous and powerful line from his *Politics*, Aristotle makes the radical observation: "In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue."<sup>23</sup> There must be the union of male and female. Without such union, there is not the fullness of humanity, for any isolated individual is lacking an essential power of all living things: the power of generation. So, we can say that the power of generation is divided precisely so that it can be reunited. The necessity of reunification that results from division of the power of generation strikes a decisive blow to humanity's solipsistic tendencies. As such, the necessary reunification of the divided power of generation is the origin of human community, culminating in the *polis*, in the natural order, and the Church in the supernatural. "It is not good for the man to be alone."<sup>24</sup> We are not, as some social contract theorists claim, in our natural state when we are alone. We are rather, by nature, communal. Sexual difference inexorably orders us toward communion while standing as a bulwark against the tendency toward solipsism and narcissism. Human communion and community are built upon the foundation of the marriage bed. It is for this reason that the marriage bed of Odysseus and Penelope is carved from living olive wood; the palace of Odysseus is built precisely around it.<sup>25</sup> The seat of his kingdom rests upon this bed, along with the fidelity of Penelope, as a fixed point in a swirling and chaotic world. Like Aristotle, Homer saw that sexual difference is the foundation of the city.

It is worth noting two things at this point: while we have made a connection between sex and the city, we have yet to connect sexual difference with the power of reason. And, perhaps more importantly for us immediately, while separating the power of generation precisely so that it might be reunited demands two parents, it does not demand that these parents be different in any way other than number: a symmetrically divided power of generation would likewise demand its reunification and hence ground the necessity of human community. As such, we have not provided an argument for the existence of two distinct mating-types. So why, then, is the power of

generation divided nonidentically into the two mating-types we call male and female?<sup>26</sup>

A rich text from Aristotle's *Ethics* is worth quoting at length; it echoes in a general way many of the points just made regarding male and female contributions to child development:

Between man and wife friendship seems to exist by nature; for man is naturally inclined to form couples—even more than to form cities, inasmuch as the household is earlier and more necessary than the city, and reproduction is more common to man than with the animals. With the other animals the union extends only to this point, but human beings live together not only for the sake of reproduction but also for the various purposes of life; for from the start the functions are divided, and those of man and woman are different; so they help each other by throwing their peculiar gifts into the common stock. It is for these reasons that both utility and pleasure seem to be found in this kind of friendship. But this friendship may be based also on virtue, if the parties are good; for each has its own virtue and they will delight in the fact. And children seem to be a bond of union (which is the reason why childless people part more easily); for children are a good common to both and what is common holds them together.<sup>27</sup>

Again, there is the claim that the union of man and woman is the origin of the city. But here he notes several other aspects of this union: first, it is not temporary. The union of man and woman extends beyond simply the act of unifying the power of generation: more than just playing their role in the act of generation, each contributes unique goods to the “various purposes of life.” Male and female, precisely in their asymmetry, work together to forge a common good. The division of the power of generation into two necessitates their reunification. The difference of these two establishes a harmony in ordering to the common good of the community. As we saw from the evolutionists, sexual dimorphism establishes an order in which

each member of the primordial human community may contribute unique gifts to the common good of that community and thereby secure its flowering and flourishing.

But it is not only a mere and mechanical division of labor that Aristotle brings to our attention, for the differences serve more than a practical purpose.<sup>28</sup> Such utility might serve the lower forms of friendship: a friendship of utility or pleasure in which one finds a certain level of delight in the other due to her usefulness or the pleasure that he brings. But if, as Aristotle observes, the spouses are good, are virtuous, the source of delight that each takes in the other need not be only the utility of the other, or the pleasure received from that other, but rather delight in the unique virtue of the other. The unique otherness of the other is the source of a unique goodness and thus a captivating goodness. Such goodness can thus be the source of a true friendship that further cements the bond that founds the *polis*.

It is worth taking a moment to reflect upon what the evolutionists have offered regarding the complementary roles of male and female that allowed for the evolution of the human brain. Clearly, Puts is speaking of a division of labor in which each throws his or her particular gifts into the common stock for the sake of the common good: the male provisioning of high-quality food through hunting adds to the already immense contribution of the female in allowing the slow and deep development of human offspring. Aristotle, however, introduces an element that I did not mention in the work of the evolutionists: friendship. For Aristotle, it is friendship—and, ideally, the friendship of virtue—that stands at the heart of the formation of human community. This element is not wholly missing from the evolutionary account and merits brief mention here.

Puts notes the necessity of male provisioning; without it, offspring simply cannot develop as well as they can with it.<sup>29</sup> He also notes that the necessary provisioning became possible with the innovation of hunting with stone tools and the subsequent capacity to provide large quantities of high-quality food. However, the presence of male provisioning for his offspring is not found among other primates.

Paternal involvement beyond insemination was a practice that had to develop. Obviously, we cannot here even briefly sketch the evolution of human paternal investment; however, a few points as they relate to friendship and human sexuality are worth noting: when ovulation is easily observed, dominant males may control the fertility of females precisely when they are fertile, and so most effectively project their genes into the future. Humans, however, developed concealed ovulation; though there are subtle clues, for the most part, a woman's periods of fertility are not evident. Hence, human copulation takes place throughout the fertility cycle, rendering it more difficult for a dominant male to control female fertility. As the energy and time demands of offspring increase, demanding greater and greater investment from the male, sex-specific needs likewise develop: in addition to high genetic quality from a male, a female also needs a male who will aid in providing for her offspring. She needs a male who will not run away after impregnating her. Hence, she will begin to demand that a male commit to provisioning for offspring before having access to her fertility. The male, however, also has a unique need before he will invest in his partner's offspring; he is most concerned about being duped into provisioning for the offspring who are not his own. If he is to risk life and limb hunting, he must have assurance that the child for whom he is providing is indeed his own. Hence a committed pair-bond forms. It is easy to see how trust and true friendship are highly relevant to the formation of this bond. It is the bond that founds society. It is solidified in true friendship and the generation of children, and evolutionists have shown how it is related to reason. But now let us return to Aristotle on this point.

### *Sexual Difference and Logos*

As just noted, Aristotle has helped us in beginning to see a connection between the meaning of sexual difference and human community, for sexual difference is integral both to the formation of human community and to its sustained flourishing. We now, however, must

begin to construct the bridge that links human sexual difference and the power of reason; the evolutionists have already helped us here, but we must see how philosophy can provide greater richness to the picture they paint. In fact, we shall see that, not surprisingly, all three are linked: human sexual difference, reason, and communion. We will allow Aristotle and Aquinas to introduce the topic, but then shall follow the thought of contemporary French philosopher Fabrice Hadjadj in exploring the link between sex and reason.

Only a little further on in the text in which Aristotle notes that the union of woman and man constitutes the basis of the city, he draws our attention to a difference between human societies and those of other communal animals:

Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust.<sup>30</sup>

Sexual difference orders the human person to a common life, but that common life is unlike that of any other animal, for the human person possesses the gift of reasoned speech, of *logos*. And, as Aristotle notes, this gift is not given to the human person in vain. Human speech is to be used. And if that speech is not to be in vain, then human persons must share a life in common. That common life will not be like that of other animals, whose highest measure is pleasure or pain. Human community can express the reason it bears; human community must then be founded on justice, not mere pleasure and pain, which the grunts and groans of the beasts can vocalize. We thus begin to see an interesting symbiosis forming: the communion that

human sexual union engenders is infused with *logos*, with reason—as we have already seen, ideally, the foundation of the polis is the friendship of virtue. The city offers the place in which reason can flourish. Thus, only reason can give birth to the city, for the city is ruled by justice and reason, not mere pleasure or pain. But, in another way, the city gives birth to reason—for without the polis, man is forced to live as a wild beast.

Here again, we find the symbiotic nexus of sexual difference, human reason, and human community uncovered by the evolutionists coming to the fore: the unique gifts of male and female being thrown into the common stock allows for the very development of human reason. That human reason, in turn, permits the development of the unique human community in which that reason is alone able to flourish and grow: the *polis* serves *logos*, and *logos* serves the *polis*. Each needs the other. And each, in its own way, like the bed of Odysseus, is rooted in sexual difference.

We have begun to make our case. Why is there sexual difference? The power of generation is divided, precisely so that it can be reunited. The reunification of this divided power is at once the completion of humanity—those things must be joined which cannot exist without each other—and the foundation of human community. Why the asymmetry of the division? At the very least, the asymmetrical division of the power generation provides a multiplicity of gifts that each contribute uniquely to human community. Further, we see that the distinction of gift, perhaps, provides the very shared work that allows for the development of human reason. Hence, we have likewise begun to see the relationship between human sexual difference and reason: human community is infused with *logos*. It thus gives rise to the friendship of virtue, transcending dynamics based upon mere pleasure and pain and arising to the realm of justice and love. Sexual difference somehow stands at the root of this community while being a paradigmatic expression of this community, which is a community of rational beings: a communion of persons. But there is yet more to say about the relationship of sexual difference to reason.

*Human Sexual Difference and the Intellect*

Up to this point, we have seen how human sexual difference is for the sake of reason insofar as it facilitates the conditions under which reason is able to flourish and how it possibly contributed to the development of the organs that make reason possible: sexual difference is foundational in the formation of the civil union that allows human reason to prosper. And it seems that paternal investment and the division of labor and provisioning that such investment afforded was instrumental in meeting the conditions that allowed the human brain to develop as it has. So, we can see that sexual difference is for the sake of reason insofar as it proves pivotal in providing the conditions in which reason can flourish.

But sexual difference proves itself to be ordered to man's highest powers and thus the highest ends that these powers make possible not only by providing reason—and the contemplation and intimacy it affords—the conditions that lead to its development and flourishing as a faculty, but also by providing reason with unique and critically revealing objects toward which to direct its incisive power. These unique objects spur its growth in radical ways. It is to the truths to which sexual difference turns the mind's eye that we now turn our attention.

So far in this work, I have—perhaps justifiably—been assuming the answer to a question: Aristotle says that man and woman must be united so that the human race can continue. He clearly assumes that this continuation is a good evidently to be sought. But can we make such a presumption? Sexuality is essentially bound to the power of generation. But in humans, this power is wielded in a manner different than in any other reproducing beings: Hadjadj observes that, as persons, man and woman are free.<sup>31</sup> Aquinas notes, in defending his definition of the person, that persons are not only hypostases, but they are hypostases rendered even more individual than just any hypostasis by the fact that they have dominion over their acts.<sup>32</sup> Thus, unlike any other material living being, the human person must

decide whether or not to reproduce. Hadjadj poignantly captures that which hangs in the balance of the choice the human person must make: “What good is it to keep filling-up cemeteries? What good is it to have children, if it is only to delay the triumph of the dust?”<sup>33</sup> If we perceive what lies under the surface of the choice we confront in deciding whether or not to be part of bringing new human life into the world, we find ourselves staring into the eyes of one of the most fundamental questions we meet: to use a phrase Gabriel Marcel borrows from the Bard, is life a tale told by an idiot, or not?<sup>34</sup>

We do well now to turn our attention to Marcel. He proposes that all of philosophy hangs upon a fundamental choice between hope and despair. With a poignancy to equal that of Hadjadj, he writes: “The deathly aspect of this world may, from a given standpoint, be regarded as a ceaseless incitement to denial and suicide. It could even be said in this sense that the fact that suicide is always possible is the essential starting point for any genuine metaphysical thought.”<sup>35</sup> We are forced to take a stand on the fundamental nature of being: Were the ancients right in their insight into the transcendentals? Is all that is likewise good, true, one, and beautiful? Or have we somehow been fooled, meaninglessly thrown into an absurd existence to play our roles in a tale told by an idiot? Marcel observes the “ceaseless incitement to denial and suicide” plays its role in forcing us to take a stand on the side of either hope or despair. So is Hadjadj’s point about sexual difference and possibility of generating new life that envelops it perhaps superfluous in reference to demanding from us an election of hope or despair?

The question of preserving one’s own being is weighted with all the moment that Marcel finds in it. The free choice of whether or not to give life to another, however, demands more of us than simply choosing not to snuff out our own life. The questions, though, certainly are fundamentally related. We can preserve ourselves simply for ourselves. But the decision to bring about new life necessarily brings us out of ourselves. It necessarily brings us to the position that being is good enough to share with another.<sup>36</sup> Existence

is good enough to share with another for whom we very well may be called upon to sacrifice all, for this other begins his or her life completely helpless, completely dependent upon us. Without the continual outflow of the richness of our own being, this other will certainly perish. To judge that being is good enough to preserve my own participation in it is one thing; to judge that it is good enough to be willing to lay down my own life so that another may participate in it is another.

Yet, we are still confronted with the question: Why keep filling cemeteries? The reality of having to confront the possibility of ending one's life demands of the human person a stance of hope or despair; either we concur with Macbeth or protest from the depth of our being against his indictment of existence, taking arms against the claim that life is a tale told by an idiot. But if life does not signify nothing, what does it signify? Is the choice for hope simply the optimism that more pleasant days are nigh? But then, do not the pleasant days pass one by one until, finally, the cemetery receives yet one more resident? If this were the hope that beats back the advances of despair and suicide and fuels the choice to bring new life into the world, then it is a "hope" that only delays the triumph of the dust. It is not the hope to which Marcel points, nor is it the hope that Hadjadj observes as implied in the decision to give new life. Aquinas can help us in seeing this point.

When considering the incorruptibility of the soul, Aquinas points to a sign of the soul's resistance to nonbeing. He had already argued for the soul's subsistence by showing that it has an act that is wholly independent of matter.<sup>37</sup> He then makes his formal arguments for why a subsistent form could not corrupt. Beyond that, however, he offers what he refers to as a sign that what he just formally argued for is true: the human intellect is able to know existence absolutely, in a manner that is bound to neither time, space, nor any individual instance of what is known.<sup>38</sup> The senses, however, are bound to the individual instance alone, and thus bound to the here and now. Desire follows upon knowledge. Because man knows in an absolute

manner—in a manner that transcends the here and now that the senses give—he desires the absolute. In brief, the human person desires the infinite and the eternal, for his mind allows him to escape space and time; and his desire follows him there. “Whence everything having an intellect desires to be always.”<sup>39</sup> If this desire were in vain, man would be absurd. And so many think him to be: they would offer that, though the human person desires the eternal, ultimately the dust pulls him back from his foolish attempts to escape. The dust reclaims him. By contrast, the conscious choice to bring about new life in the face of the dust is a statement of hope not only in the possibility of a pleasant life, but in the possibility of eternity. It is a hope that the infinite desire that Aquinas identifies is not absurd. It is thus that Hadjadj observes that marriage is more surrounded by religious rites than it is by rats that might feed upon the carcasses of the dead.<sup>40</sup> The decision to reunite the divided power of generation is not just a vague affirmation of the goodness of being; it implies its eternity. Human generation is thus inexorably bound up with some of the most fundamental questions that the human person confronts: Is his existence meaningless or not? Does it end in the nothingness of atoms and the void, or is there something that answers to the infinite desires that flow from the human spirit?

The depth to which the human desire for generation—for fatherhood and motherhood—leads the human intellect is likewise underscored by Aquinas’s understanding of the most fundamental orderings of the human person to God through the human participation in the eternal law that is the natural law. Commenting on the divisions of the natural law, Lawrence Dewan writes:

We see that the inclination common to all substances is a natural love for itself as an individual, and even more for its species, and still more again for the author of being, God Himself. In this respect, one should notice that in ST.I-II.94.2, the third inclination does not speak of love of God, but of knowledge concerning God. . . . Love of God, on the other

hand, is presented everywhere in Thomas's writings as present in every substance as such, and indeed such that every being loves God naturally more than it loves itself. It is this domain of what might be called "transcendental inclination" that is being referred to in the first place in ST.I-II.94.2.<sup>41</sup>

Love of self, which stands as the bulwark against the self-destruction noted by Marcel, and the faith in the goodness of who and what we are as human beings manifest in the desire for generation, all point to the love of God that the human being shares, in a way, with all other things that exist. All things are moved to the praise of God by the most fundamental orderings of the eternal law. The human desire for generativity is a subcurrent in the unyielding flow of all being back to its maker. Hence, the question "why keep filling cemeteries?" points the human person to his most fundamental longings. It points him to his ultimate destiny in the love of God.

### *Reciprocal Generativity*

Yet, up to this point, we have been speaking of reproduction generally: the power of generation demands from man a stance on the goodness of being, a stance for hope or despair. Even if generation were to be asexual, as long as it were a free act, it would demand of the person a judgment on the goodness (or lack thereof) of existence. So, what is it that human generation in particular demands of the mind?

Our inclination to generativity lies at the most fundamental levels of the natural law. It is an expression of the very same movement by which all things are ordered to God, by which they love God, as directed by the eternal law. That which moves us not only to preserve our own being but also to bring about new beings is the same fundamental inclination that moves the cosmos. But, in the case of human generativity, there is a curious variation on a theme: in order to answer the call of all things to love God, in order to affirm the goodness

of being by the decision to bring new life into the world—even in the face of the apparent triumph of the dust—in order to participate in the love song of creation for God, the individual human person must unite himself with another individual human person. No one can be generative alone. Hence, in order to love God in this way—by sharing the gift of substantial being with another—the human person must unite himself with another, and precisely another who is not like him, another whose generative power makes sense only in terms of his and so has no meaning on its own. Hence, if we are to give our being to another—the child—we must first give our being to another—the spouse. Flowing from the deepest layers of natural law is a transcendental inclination for generativity; but, in human beings, this transcendental inclination implies an imperative for intimacy. It is this imperative that we must now explore, for it is in this imperative that we will find the meaning of human sexual difference. In this context, I could reframe the principal question of our work as follows: Why is it that, in order to be generative in this fundamental order of nature, we must unite ourselves with an other who is other than us in a precise way, that is, with the otherness of sexual difference?

### *The One and the Many*

The classic question of the one and the many, resplendent in the work of Plotinus, centers upon how the many may be derived from the one. This question is indeed relevant to our work, but, in the order of knowing, we shall have to approach a related question that arises from the opposite pole: When the many become one, what becomes of their “manyness”? The imperative of intimacy of which we just spoke demands that the many become one, that what has been divided be reunited. For the human person, this can be terrifying, for perhaps we sense that union with another could lead to our destruction. Hence, we must explore what could be called the paradoxical fruitfulness of union. In order to achieve this exploration, Hadjadj

points us to the work of Emmanuel Levinas,<sup>42</sup> who draws our attention to the great perils and the great glory of human intimacy.

Levinas astutely observes that there are three possible paths forward in attempting to follow the transcendental inclination toward generativity: the paths of fusion, dominance, or what I will call intimacy.<sup>43</sup> We must briefly consider each of these in turn: fusion is the Parmenidean paradigm in which two beings united are ultimately reduced to one. The individual identity of one is lost in the other. Either one is wholly subsumed into the other, as a drop into the sea, or, perhaps, both lose their individual identity into some one, new thing, as hydrogen and oxygen cede their identities to the new being of water. In the case of fusion, the union of two into one is devastating for at least one of those being united; union is the death of identity, the death of alterity. The one cannot abide the many and so consumes it.

The case of dominance, while perhaps less radical, is comparatively destructive. In this case, one party is servilely subject to the power of the other. Their otherness becomes merely a tool of the power of the dominant. Though each, on some level, maintains his identity—unlike the drop in the sea—the identity of the oppressed is caged and bent to purposes that contradict its own dignity. Though seemingly unscathed in the union, the identity of the oppressor is in fact also corrupted by its abuse of power. Though seeming to augment itself in the vassalage of another, it rather diminishes itself by inviting injustice into its soul. In this dynamic, alterity is not utterly destroyed; it is rather in one case diminished by domination and, in the other, corrupted by abuse.

For the third way, what I am referring to as the way of intimacy, we refer to a famous text from Levinas: “The pathos of love, however, consists in an insurmountable duality of beings. It is a relationship with what always slips away. The relationship does not ipso facto neutralize alterity but preserves it. The pathos of voluptuousness lies in the fact of being two. The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into

its mystery.”<sup>44</sup> The character of true intimacy is unlike that of either dominance, in which the other becomes ours, or fusion, in which the other becomes us. In true intimacy—what Levinas refers to as “the pathos of love”—there is a paradox: the more two become one, instead of their alterity being diminished, dominated, or even eliminated, the otherness of the other expands and flowers; the depth of the union draws out an expansion of being that is identity. To become one with another, in this sense, is not to lose oneself; it is to gain oneself in a new, unimagined, unforeseen way. What’s more, as Hadjadj notes, it is a union that is yet still more expansive as regards alterity, for the union of the two not only retains and augments their own otherness, but it also brings about another other, the child. Hence, we see the fruitfulness of the union of two in love: the many become one while retaining and expanding the principle of their alterity, both as regards the deepening of their individual identities and the conception of new life.

So human generativity presents to the intellect something over and above the questions posed by generation considered generally: in order to provide an affirmative answer to the question “why give life?” the human being must unite himself with another. This union presents a paradoxical dynamic in which many can become one with neither the loss nor lessening of their otherness, but rather with the augmentation of their identity. Unity with another can seem by its nature to lead to the destruction of the identity of one or both of those being united. The unity of man and woman shows that this need not be the case: the two in becoming one not only can remain two—and become even more “two” in becoming more one—they can become three in becoming one. But the question of the nature of the difference remains: why cannot any two become one with this same fecundity? Why precisely the asymmetry of sexual difference? For, as we have now noted many times, in order to be fruitful, one must find another, but not just any other; one must find an other who bears the power of generation in the manner that makes the power whole. Why is there, then, specifically the otherness of sexual

difference? What does precisely human sexual difference present to the intellect that is unique?

### *The Place of the Person*

Before addressing these questions, we must first address a point that has been lying in the background: the centrality of the person. For one might note that almost all animals, and even some plants, reproduce sexually. Does this mean that the male and female cannabis plants somehow manifest the pathos of love as described by Levinas? While Dewan has drawn our attention to the love that all things—cannabis plants included—have for God, it is clear that the union of which Levinas is speaking is a union of persons. The type of union of which he speaks is only possible in the realm of the person. Non-personal living beings—plants and animals—can have modes of physical and even emotional union, but they cannot experience the “pathos of love” that results in the paradoxical coincidence of union and increased alterity. This is due to the nature of the unity that only a spiritual faculty makes possible.<sup>45</sup> Only a being with an immaterial faculty is able to bring another within itself in such a way as to comprehend not just the superficialities of that other, but also the essence of that other, without destroying the other.<sup>46</sup> The capacity for unification with another increases with the immateriality of being:<sup>47</sup> all living things, through their power of nutrition, excel at a kind of fusion; the food consumed by a living thing becomes one with the consumer. But the fare consumed does not fare so well; it must lose its being in the sea of the being of its consumer.<sup>48</sup> That which is unified is lost. Animals, through their powers of sensation, are able to bring others within them, to be formed by them, without destroying the objects of their sensory knowledge, but they only know the thing superficially, in its color, sound, scent, and so on. As such, as Aristotle noted when speaking of the irrational sounds of animals, another may become an object of pleasure or pain for the knower. Thus, an animal may treat the known one accordingly as the other

evokes either pleasure or pain. Only the immateriality of the human soul in its intellectual power allows the human person to bring another within itself in the fullness of the other without destroying that other. Thus, the person is able to move from calculations of pleasure and pain, to the wholly new order, the order of love, in which the good of the other is seen for his or her own sake. The other can be seen as receding back into the mystery of her origin and simultaneously enwrapped in the mystery of her destiny. This is the mystery of intimacy, which requires the mutual knowledge of two, free spiritual beings that surrender in love to this union.<sup>49</sup> Intimacy flows from the same font as theoretical knowledge—such as our knowledge of the definition of a triangle—but is not reducible to it. As such, the union to which Levinas refers and the paradoxical dynamic that follows from it is possible only among persons, among those with a spiritual power that allows the other to be received according to a certain fullness of his or her being. There is certainly more to say here, but, with this in place, we are finally in a position to understand more fully the otherness of the others of which Levinas speaks.

### *A Hermeneutic of Gift*

Two become one, but they do so in such a way that the otherness of each is neither diminished nor destroyed but rather flourishes and flowers in multiple modes of newness. But what is the nature of the otherness of the others? May any others be united as Levinas suggests, or is there some order and distinction among those being united, beyond the difference of number? To explore the nature of the alterity at the heart of the transcendental inclination to bring about new life, at the heart of the pathos of love, we must now look to the work of St. John Paul II and seek to uncover what he referred to as the hermeneutic of gift; for the paradoxical dynamic of which Levinas speaks can only manifest itself within the context of gift. Let us, then, quickly explore this hermeneutic of gift.<sup>50</sup>

In the giving of any gift, there is an inexorable order: there is

an order of giving and receiving mediated by the freedom of each involved in the act, for a gift is not truly a gift if it is not freely given and freely received. There is one who must first, in freedom, offer the gift in a movement toward the other that initiates the exchange. This movement or procession is "outward." It characterizes the masculine and thus marks one mode of otherness. There is another, however, who must, in freedom, accept and receive the gift. This inward receptivity characterizes the feminine within the dance of gift.<sup>51</sup> Thus, we mark the other mode of otherness: femininity. And so, finally, we arrive not only at two others, but others who are distinct in the way that they manifest the dynamic of gift that lies at the heart of the deepest levels of interpersonal communion. In his body the male manifests the masculine role in the dynamic of gift. In her body, the female manifests the feminine role. Their bodies thus manifest the dance of personal communion.

We must, however, be quick to note that this relationship is immediately reciprocal: the giver cannot be a giver without the act of receptivity of the receiver, hence, in receiving the receiver thereby becomes a giver and the giver a receiver.<sup>52</sup> The giver can only truly give with the reception of the gift. Further, it is such a gift that it can only become most truly what it is if it is met by the gift of the other.<sup>53</sup> Hence, in the act of receiving, there is a giving which renders the giver, in turn, the receiver, and the receiver the giver. The difference therefore is in the priority of order. If there is to be true generativity, reciprocity is demanded. Each is both giver and receiver. However, we must look yet more deeply into this dynamic, for, while the man represents the initiator of the gift, he is never the first giver; he must always first receive.

In the rapport between man and woman, there is a yet more complex dynamic, a dynamic brilliantly captured in the famous depiction of the creation of Adam by Michelangelo: a lonely Adam seeks that other through whom he might most fully return the praise of glory to the Father, through whom he might respond to his transcendental inclination precisely as a person.<sup>54</sup> He is powerless to produce this

other on his own. He can only seek for her among those things that already are, among the stars in the heavens, stones and gems that speckle the ground, and the plants and animals that roam the earth. He finds them all wanting. Eve, the woman, is thus given to Adam; she is quintessentially gift. Waldstein quotes a beautiful passage from the *Theology of the Body*:

It seems that the second creation account has assigned to the man “from the beginning” the function of the one who above all receives the gift (see Gen 2:23). The woman has “from the beginning” been entrusted to his eyes, to his consciousness, to his sensibility, to his “heart;” he, by contrast, must in some way ensure the very process of the exchange of the gift, the reciprocal interpenetration of giving and receiving the gift, which, precisely through its reciprocity, creates an authentic communion of persons. . . . The man’s act of self-donation, in answer to that of the woman, is for him himself an enrichment.<sup>55</sup>

The gift is a free act of God—and of Eve. In answer to his seeking, God and Eve present Adam with a gift unlike any other he has been given in the garden. For this gift is given in her own freedom and dignity. She is not like others that can and must be used. She is a gift who must neither be used by him nor assumed into his self. She is given in her femininity; she is given in her capacity to receive Adam and, in so doing, receives both an ever-greater flowering of herself, and a new life within her in the child. Adam receives her in his masculinity; he receives her as able to give himself to her freely. Having received her from the Father, he is able to initiate the gift to her through which he answers the transcendental inclination to love God through the celebration and augmentation of the being that flows freely from him.

In this unfolding of being, we see a kind of cascade of the dynamic of gift: God is the paradigmatic masculine in whom all gifts find their ultimate origin. All being stands as receptive to this gift. The more deeply a being is able to receive, which is to say the richer

its essence,<sup>56</sup> the more profound, and thus the more other, its being. Sexual difference manifests this dynamic of giving and receiving in the morphology of the human body. Hence, we have established a reason for the nature of the asymmetry that constitutes sexual difference: it presents the human intellect with the contours of the dynamic of gift that underpins all reality, a dynamic in which human destiny likewise lies.

### *A Divine Comedy*

So, what does sexual difference present to the mind? Perhaps we can say that the particular nature of human sexual difference presents the human person with a kind of icon of both his origin and his destiny: existence begins in a kind of filiation and it ends in a marriage. All existence begins in receiving all it is and has from the Father. All human being, by its destiny, if the story is allowed to unfold as it is written, ends in marriage. The unique mode of personal existence of the human person, who is both body and spirit, permits the manifestation of this dynamic in a singular way. Precisely because of the intellectual nature of man, he is able to receive another within himself. We call this spiritual mode of oneness with another knowledge. But the knowledge of which we now speak is not like that of knowing abstractions, such as the definition of a triangle or even of justice or love. It is an act of gift and surrender that can only take place with another person. It requires two persons engaged precisely as persons, in their freedom and dignity, in an act of mutual surrender in which both offer themselves as gifts to the other. The result of this pathos of love is the expansion of being, both of the individual being and identity of those given and taken in the act of mutual self-gift, and the creation of the new being of the child. The bodily expression of this is the sexed body, male or female. These specific bodies, like in kind, but distinct according to modes of the reciprocal giving and receiving of gift, are defined in this modal distinction by their embodiment of this dynamic.

If the spouses miss the mark, if they slip from the paradigm of gift, of true intimacy, into one of the other modes of union—into either fusion or dominance—the “magic” of the paradox is lost: instead of each augmenting his or her own being, being is rather diminished and lost. As Marcel noted, the choice is stark: that between being and nonbeing, hope and despair, life and a kind of suicide. The way of intimacy is participation in the love song of creation. The way of fusion and dominance destructively twists the tuning pegs of reality. True human intimacy precisely points the human person to the divine intimacy in which destiny lies.

### *Conclusion*

We have mapped a movement toward the ultimate ends and therefore meaning of sexual difference. Distinction, that the power of generation is divided, leads to the need for unification of that which is divided; it leads to community. Difference within the division, the asymmetry of sexual types, leads to unique modes of fruitfulness. If the evolutionists are right, difference led to the conditions under which reason itself could flourish. With reason, with *logos*, now, a different kind of community is possible and necessary. There is a move from community to communion, from bonds of pleasure and utility to true friendship, from instinctual responses of pleasure and pain to free choices of love and self-sacrifice. The unique union of man and woman founded upon sexual difference—and precisely the sexual difference of an intellectual being—is the foundation of human community. It points the human intellect to that communion in which its very destiny lies. Sexual difference implies a fruitful union of persons; it implies intimacy. It is the fruit of the affirmation of the goodness of being, the praise of the glory of God. It demands of reason that it make this proclamation of being. But to what end? Scripture tells us that the proclamation of the goodness of being ends in another marriage—the marriage of the human person with God. And yet we know that man’s end is bound with knowing and

being known. John attests: “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). And Paul adds: “Then I shall know fully, as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). This is the union of the divine Bridegroom with the His Bride, the Church. Marriage, the union of man and woman, precisely as man and woman, is its mirror, its sacrament. Yet at times, we are terrified of this destiny:

Do not let me hear  
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,  
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,  
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God.  
The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the Wisdom of humility: humility is endless.<sup>57</sup>

We human persons, capable of intimacy, with each other and God, resist—for we fear to lose ourselves—we fear the loss of either domination or fusion. But God offers us marriage, human and divine, with its paradoxical effect that, if we can enter into this belonging with the wisdom of humility, then, instead of losing that which is given, we will receive it back a hundredfold. Human sexual difference offers to the human mind a kind of sign or sacrament of the destiny of the human person. It is a destiny of belonging, of communion, that, as Eliot says, costs not less than everything, but returns more than everything in return:

But to apprehend  
The point of intersection of the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint—  
No occupation either, but something given  
And taken, in a lifetime’s death in love,  
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.<sup>58</sup>

Sexual difference points the mind to the paradoxical “death in love” that is man’s destiny: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:25).

## Notes

1. Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, in *Introductory Readings in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. C. D. C. Reeve and Patrick Lee Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2015), 66 b-c. This article is based upon a presentation of the same name offered at the Catholic Women's Forum conference, "Man and Woman in Dialogue: On Identity, Complementarity, and Mission," June 26, 2019, Washington, DC.
2. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker" in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1950), 123–24.
3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros. 1948) I. q. 92, a. 1
4. Thomas Aquinas, *The Principles of Nature*, trans. R. P. Goodwin (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965), 22.
5. For a more detailed discussion of the definition of sexual difference, see Timothy Fortin, "Finding Form: Defining Human Sexual Difference," *Nova et Vetera* 15, no. 2 (2017): 397–431.
6. Thinking of the question in these terms was first brought to my attention by St. Thomas: See *ST I*, q. 92, a. 1.
7. This, of course, does not mean that, for instance, we don't need teachers to help us learn, or parents to feed us when we are infants, but rather that the capacity to enact the power is integral within the individual.
8. See *ST I*, q. 92, a. 1.
9. See, for example Bernice Wuerthrich, "Why Sex? Putting Theory to the Test," *Science* 281, no. 5385 (September 25, 1998): 1980–982.
10. See David C. Geary, *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), 16–18, and Linda Mealey, *Sex Differences: Developmental and Evolutionary Strategies* (San Diego: Academic Press, 2000), 44–47.
11. See Laurence D. Hurst, "Why are there only two sexes?," *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 263, no. 1369 (April 22, 1996): 415.
12. Linda Mealey, *Sex Differences*, 47–50.
13. See Hurst, "Why are there only two sexes?," 415–22, and Laurence D. Hurst and William D. Hamilton, "Cytoplasmic Fusion and the Nature of the Sexes," *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 247, no. 1320 (March 23, 1992): 189–94.
14. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), 53.
15. Thomas Aquinas, *The Principles of Nature*, trans. R. P. Goodwin (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1965), 22.
16. For the *locus classicus* of the nature and role of final causality within an explanatory framework, see Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 2.
17. *ST I*, q. 77, a. 4.
18. *Ibid.*

19. David Puts, "The Evolution of Human Mating: David Puts at TEDxPSU," TEDx Talks, published on April 18, 2014, 15:27, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXQwtTONLv&t=675s>.
20. For a discussion of the evolution and necessity of paternal investment, see Geary, *Male, Female*, 97–119.
21. David C. Geary, *Male, Female*, 118.
22. I concur with Aquinas on the point that the act of the intellect is not the act of a material organ, but that it does utilize the brain in order to provide its object. Hence, the development of such an organ is necessary for human reason. See *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2–3.
23. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. B. Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1252a 26–28. I am grateful to the work of Fabrice Hadjadj for drawing my attention to this text. His discussion thereof can be found in Fabrice Hadjadj, *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille? Suivi de La Transcendance en culottes* (Paris: Salvator, 2014), 65–68.
24. *Genesis* 2:18, *NAB*.
25. Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Albert Cook (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1967), lines 165–246.
26. Perhaps it is worth noting here that, when viewed through a biological lens, the question of why there are male and female seems to resolve the question: Why are there males? Consider, if nature were to move the human species back towards asexual reproduction, from the point of view of reproduction, which sex would flourish and which would decline? In order to reproduce asexually, all the human female would need is one strand of DNA. The male, by contrast, lacks all of the organs that would be necessary for asexual human reproduction. So, the question could be reframed: Why does nature bear the cost of producing the male when all he does is provide one strand of DNA?
27. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1162a 16–29.
28. Please note that, in this discussion on Aristotle, I do not mean to imply that there are not significant and manifest problems with his understanding of the nature of male and female. These problems—principally, the notion that the female is a misbegotten male—are well known. My intention here is not to engage in an historical analysis of Aristotle's assessment of male and female, but rather to see what of value can be gleaned from his insights.
29. See Puts, "The Evolution of Human Mating." Also, see David C. Geary, *Male, Female*, 97–119, and "Evolution and Proximate Expression of Human Paternal Investment," *Psychological Bulletin* 126, no. 1 (2000): 55–77.
30. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a 7–15. For commentary on this text, see Hadjadj, *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille?*, 68–72.
31. Hadjadj, *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille?*, 70–72.
32. *ST I*, q. 29, a. 1.

33. Hadjadj, *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille?*, 71. English translation taken from Hadjadj's presentation in English of an abridged version of the references essay in New York City: Fabrice Hadjadj, "That Hidden Companionship, Stronger Than Loneliness—2014 New York Encounter," New York Encounter, January 26, 2014, 29:45–59:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWOoPLsHYdM&t=1774s>.
34. Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1966), 14.
35. *Ibid.*, 26.
36. I am certainly mindful of the possibility that one could choose to have children for purely selfish, reductive reasons. I would consider this a corruption of that which is implied in the question posed by the possibility of generation.
37. *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2.
38. See *ST I*, q. 75, a. 5.
39. *ST I*, q. 75, a. 6.
40. Hadjadj, *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille?*, 71.
41. Lawrence Dewan, "Natural Law and the First Act of Freedom: Maritain Revisited," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 238.
42. For Hadjadj's discussion of this text, see *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille*, 57–60.
43. For the discussion to follow, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 85–86.
44. *Ibid.*, 86.
45. For a general discussion of the powers of the soul and the progression of those powers through the various modes of living things, see Stephen Brock, *The Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas: A Sketch* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 51–82.
46. I am grateful to Dr. Angela Franks for pointing out the relevance of the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar to the current point and to a broader epistemological discussion of the nature of the relation of subject and object. Though they are of great relevance, I shall have to leave further discussion of such themes to a future work. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Logic, Volume 1*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 61–102.
47. *Ibid.*, 72–82.
48. Hadjadj, *Qu'est-ce qu'une famille*, 74–77.
49. For a fascinating discussion of intimacy, see Kenneth L. Schmitz, "The Geography of the Human Person," *Communio* 13 (Spring 1986): 27–48.
50. For the following discussion, see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans., Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 13:3–17:6.
51. The distinction between the outward and the inward was first suggested to me many years ago in a conversation with David L. Schindler.
52. For a discussion of reciprocity, see David L. Schindler, "Catholic Theology, Gender, and the Future of Western Civilization," *Communio* 20 (Summer, 1993), 206–208.
53. It strikes me that here we meet the meaning of the *Filioque*.

54. For the following reflections, I am much indebted to a presentation given by Michael Waldstein: Michael Maria Waldstein, "Reception as the Masculine Role in Nietzsche and John Paul II," delivered at the Catholic Women's Forum conference, "Man and Woman in Dialogue: On Identity, Complementarity, and Mission," Washington, DC, June 26, 2019.
55. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 17:6. Quoted in Waldstein, "Reception as the Masculine Role in Nietzsche and John Paul II."
56. See Timothy Fortin, "To Be from Another: Nature, Sexual Difference, and the Gift of Existence," *Forum: Supplement to Acta Philosophica* 3 (2017): 265–66.
57. T. S. Eliot, "East Coker," 125–26.
58. T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1950), 136.