



PROJECT MUSE®

The Metaphysics of Gender: A Thomistic Approach

John Finley

The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review, Volume 79, Number 4, October 2015, pp. 585-614 (Article)

Published by The Catholic University of America Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2015.0031>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/637688/summary>

THE METAPHYSICS OF GENDER: A THOMISTIC APPROACH

JOHN FINLEY

*Kenrick-Glennon Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri*

BY ARGUING THAT the spiritually subsistent soul is nothing less than the form of the body, Thomas Aquinas makes of the human being a microcosm of creation, constituting the embodied, knowing, and free boundary between the spiritual and corporeal realms.¹ Yet precisely in light of this expansive view, which grants an esteemed status to the meaning of all things human, the Thomistic tradition's relative lack of inquiry into the metaphysical structures, meaning, and significance of gender is notable.²

¹ See *Summa contra Gentiles* III, c. 68; *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2. For systematic studies, see Anton Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1976); idem, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1963). Also Sophia Vanni-Rovighi, *L'Antropologia filosofica di San Tommaso d'Aquino* (Milan: Societa editrice vita e pensiero, 1972); Norbert Luyten, "L'homme dans la conception de S. Thomas," in *L'anthropologie de saint Thomas*, ed. N. Luyten (Fribourg, 1974): 35-53; Bernardo Bazan, "The Human Soul: Form and Substance? Thomas Aquinas's Critique of Eclectic Aristotelianism," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age* 64 (1997); Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003); W. Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993).

² Thomas Aquinas and his interpreters are hardly alone in this respect, as until the twentieth century human sexuality did not constitute a significant area of inquiry in Western philosophy. Still, Prudence Allen has shown that the topic has been addressed by many more thinkers than might be supposed. Her comprehensive *The Concept of Woman* (vol. 1, *The Aristotelian Revolution 750 B.C.-A.D. 1250* [Montreal: Eden Press, 1985]; vol. 2, *The Early Humanist Reformation 1250-1500* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]) is the best treatment of gender from the point of view of the history of philosophy.

The omission might be more understandable if gender constituted simply one branch among many stemming from the trunk of philosophical anthropology, but since human nature finds its concrete manifestation within a male or a female way of being and requires these for its continuation, inquiry into gender would be a natural extension of any account of human being as a whole. Currently, the meaning of gender and especially its connection to personal identity are in question owing to increasingly powerful technologies, cultural views of gender that argue for its social construction, and widespread debates over the status of homosexuality in civic life. My immediate reason for pursuing this topic is to see better what account Thomistic anthropology gives of maleness and femaleness, but I hope thereby to come to a deeper truth about humanness, or more precisely, to follow the Delphic injunction to “know thyself.”

The following analysis will offer a philosophic account of gender in its metaphysical structures, which is to say by way of limitation that it will consider neither the ethical dimension nor the question of gender identity as influenced by psychological and social factors.³ I will proceed through a dialogue with

For some authors who have looked closely at Aquinas’s own views, see note 4, below.

I here use the term “gender” to refer to the biological, sexual structures, and capacities in virtue of which humans have been traditionally referred to as male or female. Although the field of gender studies has often invoked the “sex/gender” distinction, I do not intend my use of the term “gender” to coincide with this distinction’s notion of gender as subjectively or culturally constituted personal identity, distinct from biological structure. For a view that supports the distinction, see Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in Linda Nicholson, ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997); also Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Judith Butler, with much of the postmodern feminist movement, opposes the validity of the distinction, arguing that the entire gendered reality is performatively constructed; see her *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1999).

³ While recent decades have seen an increasing range of investigations into the philosophy of gender, these tend to ignore metaphysical questions in favor of gender’s social structures and their relations to the biological realm. See, for example, Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Kessler and McKenna,

Thomas Aquinas, employing reflection on prephilosophic experience and the findings of modern biology in unison with Thomas's teachings on human nature to show how his general account can shed light on the gender question. My main thesis is that being male or female, while properly characterizing the composite human individual, stems primarily from the soul. Although this claim contradicts Thomas's explicit teaching, I intend to show that it aligns better with his own principles.

The aim of this essay, then, is not to articulate exhaustively what Thomas says concerning gender. The study of that topic has benefited greatly from the research of scholars like Joseph Hartel, Michael Nolan, Prudence Allen, Eric Johnston, Francisco Carrasquillo, and Hilaire De Romero.⁴ While all

Gender; Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Linda Alcoff, *Visible Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

By way of exception, early in the twentieth century Edith Stein approached the nature of woman from a metaphysical viewpoint in *Essays on Woman* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996); more recently, see Prudence Allen, "A Woman and a Man as Prime Analogical Beings," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992): 465-82; and Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). None of these three directly attempts a Thomistic account, though the Thomistic tradition forms much of the context for Stein's and Allen's work. Stein is concerned more with masculine and feminine personal characteristics than with the metaphysics of gender itself. Despite her keen phenomenological perceptions, some of her central claims—that man and woman constitute distinct species within humankind (*Essays on Woman*, 187), for example—are at least poorly expressed, though in other respects they align closely with certain positions this paper will defend. Allen's examination of woman and man employs Mieczyzlaw Krapiec's theory of analogy to focus on man and woman's identities, differences, and similarities. Her analysis contains some strong metaphysical insights couched in Krapiec's distinctive terminology. Witt's *Metaphysics of Gender* is really a work of social philosophy, but viewed through metaphysical categories. The argument for gender essentialism is compelling and would bear consideration alongside a Thomistic analysis.

⁴ Joseph Hartel, "The Integral Feminism of Thomas Aquinas," *Gregorianum* 77 (1996): 527-47; Michael Nolan, "The Aristotelian Background to Aquinas's Denial That 'Woman is a Defective Male,'" *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 21-69; Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 2; Eric Johnston, "The Biology of Woman in Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 77 (2013): 577-616; Francisco Carrasquillo and Hilaire De Romero, "Aquinas on the Inferiority of Woman," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87 (2013): 685-710.

agree that Thomas is mistaken on certain points, debates persist mainly over the question of what Thomas actually thinks regarding the status of woman. Some, like Nolan and Johnston, show ways in which Thomas's thought offers important insights into the feminine; others, such as Allen, Carrasquillo, and De Romero, argue for a more tentative stance toward Thomas. Either way, as Hartel proposes, once the faulty elements of Thomas's arguments have been sifted out of the picture, the task remains to reconsider gender against the background of modern science, within the context of Thomistic anthropology. Such a task is the goal of this essay.

After outlining Thomas's thought and noting some correctives from modern biology (I-II), I will propose a revised account of gender. This account will articulate gender with regard to soul and body (III), person and essence (IV), and modes of classification (V). I will then consider the formal definitions of male and female (VI). The essay concludes by briefly addressing two contemporary concerns: sex reassignment surgery and the intersex condition.

I. THOMAS'S ACCOUNT OF GENDER

We can approach Thomas's philosophical understanding of gender by examining two of his especially relevant taxonomies of accident. The first, in the *Quaestio disputata de anima* (Q. D. *De Anima*, a. 12, ad 7) divides accidents in terms of the Porphyrian predicables, thereby articulating gender within the context of logical categories: genus, species, difference, property, and accident. The second, in *De ente et essentia* (*De ente*, c. 6), considers accidents with regard to their origin in form or in matter, resulting in a more metaphysical classification.

The passage from the disputed question *De anima* speaks of three sorts of accident.⁵ First, proper accidents, like risibility in

⁵ Q. D. *De Anima*, a. 12, ad 7: "tria sunt genera accidentium: quaedam enim causantur ex principiis speciei, et dicuntur propria sicut risibile homini; quaedam vero causantur ex principiis individui. Et hoc dicitur quia, vel habent causam permanentem in subiecto, et haec sunt accidentia inseparabilia, sicut masculinum et femininum et alia

humans, result from (*causantur ex*) the principles of the species and thus characterize all of its members. Thomas elsewhere refers to these accidents as “properties.”⁶ Second, inseparable accidents, including masculine and feminine, result from the principles of the individual through permanent causation, adhering to particular human beings in lasting fashion. Third, separable accidents, like sitting or walking, result from the principles of the individual through temporary causation; such accidents only accrue to particular humans at particular times.

Thomas does not limit the category of inseparable accident to gender, as he mentions “other accidents of this sort,” yet he does not specify what these others are. On the one hand, the text seems to allow that features like eye and skin color, bone structure, vocal quality, and even native temperament could be considered inseparable accidents, since they fit the criterion of resulting from the principles of the individual through permanent causation, unlike sitting and reading which come and go.⁷ On the other hand, the other examples of inseparable accident in Thomas’s writings do not suggest a determinate answer to this question.⁸ Whether or not gender is in fact the only inseparable accident of human beings, it is distinct from possibly inseparable accidents such as eye or skin color, owing to the presence of particular organs, activities, and teleologies that characterize one gender or the other.

If inseparable accidents result from the principles of the individual, which principle or principles in the individual originate gender? Thomas addresses this question in chapter 6 of *De ente*, while articulating a more metaphysical classification of accidents. Because substances like humans are composed of

huiusmodi; quaedam vero habent causam non permanentem in subiecto, et haec sunt accidentia separabilia, ut sedere et ambulare.”

⁶ *De Spir. creat.*, a. 11; *STh* I, q. 77, a. 1, ad 5.

⁷ Porphyry’s text itself gives “black skin color” as an example of inseparable accident (*Isagoge*, c. 5). Thomas uses this same example in his division of accidents in *De ente*, c. 6 (see below).

⁸ *I Post. Anal.*, lect. 14; *De ente*, c. 6; *De Pot.*, q. 5, a. 7, obj. 3 and ad 3; *I Phys.*, lect. 6.

form and matter as principles, certain accidents follow from (*consequuntur*) form while others follow from matter.⁹

Thomas describes four sorts of accident, two following from form and two following from matter. First, among those following from form, understanding and willing occur entirely within the spiritual powers of the soul and consequently have no share in matter—though, to be sure, they depend on the disposition of physical organs. Second, other accidents following from form, like sensation, do have a share in matter since they properly reside in the composite substance. Accidents following from matter will always have some relation to form since matter on its own is pure potency, uncharacterized by any feature. So, third, among accidents following from matter some relate to a special form (*formam specialem*); thus masculine and feminine follow from matter, but precisely in relation to the form of “animal.” A sign of this connection is that once the form of animal has departed, gender properly speaking no longer remains, just as an eye of a corpse is called an eye only equivocally. Fourth and finally, other accidents following from matter relate to a more general form, as one’s skin color occurs through matter’s relation to the form of some elemental mixture. The color thus remains even after the person has died.

⁹ *De ente*, c. 6: “Quia enim partes substantiae sunt materia et forma, ideo quaedam accidentia principaliter consequuntur formam et quaedam materiam. Forma autem invenitur aliqua, cuius esse non dependet ad materiam, ut anima intellectualis; materia vero non habet esse nisi per formam. Unde in accidentibus, quae consequuntur formam, est aliquid, quod non habet communicationem cum materia, sicut est intelligere, quod non est per organum corporale, sicut probat philosophus in III de anima. Aliqua vero ex consequentibus formam sunt, quae habent communicationem cum materia, sicut sentire. Sed nullum accidens consequitur materiam sine communicatione formae. In his tamen accidentibus, quae materiam consequuntur, invenitur quaedam diversitas. Quedam enim accidentia consequuntur materiam secundum ordinem, quem habet ad formam specialem, sicut masculinum et femininum in animalibus, quorum diversitas ad materiam reducit, ut dicitur in X metaphysicae. Unde remota forma animalis dicta accidentia non remanent nisi aequivoce. Quedam vero consequuntur materiam secundum ordinem, quem habet ad formam generalem, et ideo remota forma speciali adhuc in ea remanent, sicut nigredo cutis est in Aethiope ex mixtione elementorum et non ex ratione animae, et ideo post mortem in eis remanet.”

In distinguishing the third and fourth sorts of accident Thomas acknowledges the difference noted above between gender and non-organ-specific, non-teleological accidents like eye color or skin color, which might be considered inseparable accidents. That he does so within *De ente*'s more metaphysical division, and not the disputed question *De anima*'s more logical division, suggests that the latter is unable to get at this kind of difference.

Combining the two passages, we see that Thomas's account holds that gender is an inseparable accident following from matter, though only present when a "special form"—an animal form—is present. Gender is the only example given of such an accident, which raises the question as to whether gender is in fact a metaphysically unique sort of accident.

Thomas appears to give two reasons for assigning gender's origin to matter rather than to form. One reason is grounded in the difference in activity of the two genders; the other reason is grounded in their shared essence, or species. With regard to the first, Thomas holds that because the male and female are, respectively, the active and passive principles in generation, the male is a truer generating agent than is the female.¹⁰ His semen contains the active causality necessary for reproduction, while the woman supplies material causality in virtue of her imperfect generative power. Since any agent seeks to produce its likeness as far as possible, a given act of generation naturally tends toward a male offspring. What explains the coming-to-be of a female is an accidental alteration in the male's semen, as Thomas notes in the *Summa* (*STh* I, q. 92, a. 1) and as Aristotle explains in book 10 of the *Metaphysics* (*Metaphys.* X, c. 9), a text Thomas directly invokes for the claim in *De ente* that gender stems from matter. Depending on the way in which the seminal matter has been affected, a male or female will result, which indicates that gender originates from matter rather than form. Thomas does not deny that the human reproductive

¹⁰ *STh* I, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1; III, q. 31, a. 5, corp. and ad 3; III, q. 31, a. 4, corp. and ad 1; III, q. 32, a. 4, corp. and ad 2; *ScG* II, c. 89. For the way in which the male's active causality in generation is linked with the formal principle, see *ScG* II, c. 89, esp. nn. 7-8; *STh* III, q. 33, a. 1, ad 4; q. 33, a. 4.

power flows from the soul (as do all powers); rather, he claims that this power is more perfectly actualized in the case of a man and less perfectly actualized in the case of a woman, owing to a defect in the matter.¹¹

The second reason for maintaining that gender follows from matter is present in the same passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In Thomas's exposition of that text (X *Metaphysics*, lect. 11), he holds with Aristotle that because difference in form as intelligible structure entails difference in species, accidents proper to the individual must originate from matter rather than from form.¹² Human males and females clearly share a species, which means that their differences could not originate from their form as the intelligible structure of humanness present in both of them. Instead, relying on the first line of reasoning given above, Aristotle and Thomas are able to hold that gender, while proper to the genus "animal," originates from the side of matter, that is, from the semen insofar as it is or is not affected a certain way.

Two points are worth noting in regard to this second line of reasoning. First, Thomas does not simply deduce that, since individual differences cannot originate from form, gender must therefore originate from matter. Rather, following Aristotle, he solves the difficulty raised in the premise by invoking facts apparently observed in the biological and psychological realms, and connected with the notion that the male is active and the female passive. To be sure, Thomas's principles *could* allow one to reason that gender must stem from matter since individual differences cannot originate from form; but Thomas himself

¹¹ *STh* I, q. 77, a. 6; III, q. 31, a. 5, ad 3. The biological account presumed by Thomas is in Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals*, 1.1, 2, 19-23; 2.1, 3-5; 4.1-3, 6, 8. Also Aristotle's *History of Animals*, especially 4.11; 9.1. Aristotle's account of male and female in these texts is biologically exhaustive and philosophically fascinating. For Thomas's use of Aristotle in this context see Eric Johnston, "The Role of Aristotelian Biology in Thomas Aquinas's Theology of Marriage" (Ph.D. Diss., The Catholic University of America, 2004).

¹² See X *Metaphysics*, lect. 11 (especially nn. 2131, 2134). Parenthetical numbers in references to the *Metaphysics* commentary refer to paragraph numbers in the Marietti edition.

does not take that route alone. That he does not indicate the weight he gives to Aristotle's observations and to the active-male/passive-female distinction. Either way, a question remains as to how Thomas's account would be affected if either or both of these notions were shown to be faulty.

Still, and this is the second point, there may be another reason that Thomas is reluctant simply to deduce the origin of the genders from matter. This reason has to do with the uniqueness of gender as an accident—something that both the disputed question *De anima* and *De ente* suggest, and that lecture 11 on book 10 of the *Metaphysics* confirms. On the one hand, male and female resemble white and black in constituting individual contrary differences among human beings, and thus could not originate from the form as species-giving structure. On the other hand, unlike black and white, male and female are proper affections or attributes (*passiones*) of the genus “animal.”¹³ The passage from the *Metaphysics* commentary (similar to the account in *De ente*) states that gender has a particular connection to the essence of an animal in a way that colors do not. A sign of this essential relation is that “animal” shows up in the very definitions of male and female, while it need never be mentioned in the definitions of black and white.

Perhaps because gender stands out metaphysically among other (possibly) inseparable accidents like color, Thomas refrains from simply applying to it the same sort of deductive reasoning as he does the others. While the ultimate conclusion is the same for all individual accidents—that they originate from matter, not from form—Thomas adds reasons for his conclusion in the case of gender, and he qualifies the conclusion through the reminder that gender relates in a particular strong way to the form at hand. Thus, although “inseparable accident” works as a classificatory label, one wonders how gender's uniqueness as an individual accident could be further articulated.

Before concluding this exposition of Thomas's account, I should note that gender's origin from matter does not mean that it has no metaphysical bearing on the soul. In a number of

¹³ Ibid. (n. 2134).

places Thomas refers to the commensuration or essential relation that each human soul has to its body.¹⁴ Once a soul of this body, he maintains, always a soul of this body—which allows for even separated souls to be distinguished from each other. While the soul on its own is not gendered—just as the soul on its own possesses no sensation—presumably the soul of a human male can be derivatively considered a male soul, and the same in the case of the female, since the soul’s identity is marked by its being the soul of the male or female body. One’s gender, then, as following from the “principles of the individual,” characterizes the individual person as a whole.

II. A BRIEF EVALUATION OF THOMAS’S ACCOUNT

Thomas’s logical classification of gender as an inseparable accident makes sense. Being male or female pertains not to the species at large, but to individual members of it. Moreover, contemporary biology’s understanding of genetic and chromosomal patterns strikingly shows how the principles of the individual exercise “permanent causation” in their originating one gender or another.¹⁵ All the same, that gender seems to be in a class by itself, even among inseparable accidents, calls for further metaphysical inquiry.

Such inquiry presupposes engagement with Thomas’s metaphysical articulation of gender, namely, that it is an accident following primarily from a substance’s matter, in relation to a particular sort of form (animal). Thomas rightly holds that being male or female cannot stem from form as essence, or in-

¹⁴ See, for example, *ScG* II, c. 81; also *De Spir. creat.*, a. 9, ad 4. In *ScG* IV, cc. 81, 88, while discussing the theological doctrine of the resurrection of the body, Thomas argues that the risen body will be numerically the same as the body that existed on earth, owing to the numerical sameness of the soul throughout. Both male and female bodies will rise.

¹⁵ From the standpoint of contemporary science, Nicanor Austriaco argues that biological determination of gender, while crucially involving the presence or absence of the Y chromosome, can only be explained at the level of entire genetic systems. The findings of systems biology, Austriaco maintains, accord well with Thomas’s hylomorphism. See Nicanor Austriaco, “The Specification of Sex/Gender in the Human Species: A Thomistic Analysis,” *New Blackfriars* 94 (2013): 701-15.

telligible structure, of the human species, which is common to all humans. Thus, if the claim that gender follows from matter simply means that it originates from the individual as such and not from the principles that are common to all humans, Thomas's reasoning would be indisputable. Notably, such reasoning would leave open the question as to which of the individual substance's principles originates gender: substantial form (soul), or matter (body), or somehow both? Yet Thomas appears to answer this latter question, too, in claiming that alterations in the semen account for one gender or the other. That is, he holds not just that gender stems from the principles of the individual (as opposed to "form" in the sense of human essence), but also that being male or female stems concretely from the side of one's matter rather than from one's substantial form, or soul.

Contemporary biology has shown that the female reproductive abilities are not imperfect versions of the male abilities. Man and woman do not, respectively, supply the active, formal principle of generation and the passive, material principle of generation.¹⁶ That a man's production of semen and a woman's ovulation each supply distinct elements of the offspring's genetic material reveals that in this capacity the two are co-contributors to the offspring.¹⁷ Since man and woman do not

¹⁶ It should not be inferred from this that there is no place for the active/passive distinction in a philosophical account of male and female. The question as to how the sexes are each causal and active in the processes of generation is an important one, requiring a separate study that takes into account relevant biology. My point here is simply that Aristotle and Thomas were mistaken in this particular application of the active/passive distinction. One should keep in mind, too, that Thomas's embryology requires him to account for the presence of the initial, vegetative soul of the offspring (*ScG* II, c. 89). If, as a contemporary Thomist would hold, the spiritual human soul and it alone is present throughout the offspring's life, then neither parent needs to contribute the kind of formal causality that Thomas sees as necessary in the male.

¹⁷ In one sense the female contributes more than the male, providing not just half of the chromosomal structure, but also most of the organelles and instructional proteins for the embryo's development. See David H. Nguyen, "What Does the Egg Cell Contribute to the Zygote?" (<http://everydaylife.globalpost.com/egg-cell-contribute-zygote-32248.html>). By "co-contributor," then, I mean that male and female both contribute distinctively, crucially, and on the same level: that of the material. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

relate generatively as perfect to imperfect, it is not the case that any given act of generation seeks the male. As contemporary science shows, male and female are equally intended at the biological level.¹⁸ Thus, Thomas's empirical reason for assigning gender's origin to matter (his first reason, mentioned above) is no longer tenable. The remaining question is whether his second reason holds: whether one should deduce that gender follows principally from one's matter and not from one's form, since an individual difference cannot follow from form.

III. GENDER AS REGARDS SOUL AND BODY: A REVISED ACCOUNT

Here I will argue, within the context of Thomistic principles, that being male or female follows more from substantial form than from matter. In developing the argument I will respond to three objections.

Evidently, man and woman in their normal, mature states possess distinct organs for particular purposes. As Aristotle and Thomas argue, male and female differ from black and white by containing the substance's essence within their definitions: this is because gender involves a particular function and *telos* in the substance, while other (perhaps inseparable) accidents like black, white, or blue-eyed entail no distinct organs and serve no particular purpose.¹⁹

The presence of an organ indicates a particular configuration of matter for the sake of one of the soul's powers, which in turn flows from the essence of the soul.²⁰ Distinct organs serving particular powers cannot be originated by elemental mixtures as

¹⁸ Interestingly, contemporary biology reveals that the man's semen plays the determining material role in the offspring's gender, since roughly half of his sperm carry X chromosomes and the other half carry Y, while the woman's egg always carries an X, indicating that the woman is an agent whose effect resembles herself as far as possible.

¹⁹ Of course, Thomas is aware that unlike all other inseparable accidents, gender involves determinate physical structures and functions. He speaks of the distinctly female "power" (*virtus*) in *STh* III, q. 31, a. 5, corp. and ad 3. In *STh* III, q. 32, a. 4, obj. 2, corp. and ad 2, Thomas notes how the female power is active in one respect, but not with respect to the male and not in conception itself. In this connection see note 39, below.

²⁰ *STh* I, q. 77, aa. 6-7; a. 7, ad 1.

can black and white, a point Thomas presupposes in comparing sensation and blackness in the passage from *De ente* quoted above.²¹ The soul itself arranges material structures as organs so that they might fittingly serve as means through which the soul's various powers can operate effectively: "the soul constitutes diverse parts in the body, even as it fits them for diverse operations."²²

Gender, as its organs manifest, occurs foundationally at the level of the soul's vegetative powers. These, like the powers of sensation, flow from the soul's essence but find their existence and activity within particular bodily organs that the soul as form actualizes and shapes over time. As with the sensory powers, were the soul to leave the body the generative powers would no longer remain, strictly speaking. Yet unlike the sensory powers, the generative powers never exist and act in a way that all humans share; instead, roughly half of all humans possess the generative powers and organs that we call male, and the other half, those we call female.

The generative powers of man and woman should be considered, strictly speaking, "cogenerative," since they possess a twofold formal object, distinguished hierarchically. As "-generative," they possess the same ultimate object, namely, procreation of another, while as "co-", their proximate objects differ by way of involving distinct sexual organs and activities, yet in relation with each other. The ultimate object of the cogenerative powers points to the unity of nature shared by man and woman, since another of the same species, whether male or female, is generated. The proximate object of the cogenerative powers points to the distinction within that nature as found in man and woman, albeit only at the level of the reproductive capacities. Given distinct proximate objects and activities of the male and female organs, pointing in turn to distinct powers as cogenerative in each case, the anatomical structures and living activities of male and female indicate that

²¹ See also *Q. D. De Anima*, a. 8, ad 16; a. 10, ad 2; a. 13, ad 6.

²² "anima constituat in corpore diversitatem partium, prout congruit diversis operationibus" (*Q. D. De Anima*, a. 10, ad 17).

one's gender follows from one's soul, or substantial form, since matter is not the kind of principle that can arrange itself in a determinate structure for a particular purpose. Put simply, distinct proximate objects, activities, and organs point to distinct (cogenerative) powers, which point to distinction originating from substantial form.²³

To be sure, gender intrinsically concerns matter, for like sensation it involves animality and thus physicality in its meaning and actuality. Any argument that would reify the soul as distinct from the body will fail, for, as Thomas strongly argues and experience attests, man is not a soul clothed with a body.²⁴ Integral to the soul's essence is that it is the act of a body, and integral to "this soul's" essence is that it is the act of "this body."²⁵ Hence gender is not a characteristic in or of the soul, as though the soul could be considered a substance in its own right with this particular accident. Instead, like sensation, gender is a characteristic of the composite substance, stemming from the soul. My argument concerning gender is not meant to emphasize the distinction between form and matter, but to indicate how intimately the body's organization and development flow from the soul. Hence we can provisionally locate gender, with sensation, in the category of accidents that stem from form and have a share in matter: the second group described in chapter 6 of *De ente*.²⁶

Further development of this account of gender can best occur by engaging three important objections.

Objection 1. The first objection is that gender and its entire physical development is crucially connected to particular genetic

²³ *Q. D. De Anima*, a. 9, ad 14. This is not to say that certain forms of evolutionary process could not have been involved in the coming to be of the human body as we know it: the question of a thing's being is distinct from that of a thing's coming to be. Here the point is that one cannot account for the being of an organ that serves a power of the soul without invoking the soul—substantial form—as that which actualizes and structures matter for the sake of the composite's activities.

²⁴ *STh I*, q. 75, a. 4.

²⁵ *De Spir. creat.*, a. 9, ad 4.

²⁶ I mean "form" here to refer to substantial form, or the soul, and not form in the sense of the entire intelligible structure of the essence.

networks, and especially to the X/Y or X/X chromosome pattern found in the sperm and egg.²⁷ In this light, one could argue that modern biology reintroduces an empirical reason for supporting Thomas's view that connects gender differentiation with matter. In one sense, I fully agree. Yet I would argue that this connection confirms not that gender stems from matter primarily, but that matter and form are utterly proportioned to each other, as we now see in ways that even Thomas never could.²⁸ That an X/X is needed for a girl, or an X/Y for a boy, are no more arguments for matter as primary cause than is the fact that a human sperm and egg are necessary for a human being at all. In any process of coming to be, artistic or natural, the matter requires previous disposition of some kind in order for the desired form to occur. While temporal priority exists in the material disposition (perhaps one could predict which gender would characterize the potential offspring if one were able to know in advance which of the millions of sperm would fertilize the egg), the actuality and character of the being itself originates more from the substantial form.²⁹

Objection 2. The second objection to gender as stemming primarily from the soul is the familiar one that Thomas addresses in *lectio* 11 on book 10 of the *Metaphysics*.³⁰ The objection states that a difference in form constitutes a difference in species, and since men and women obviously share the same species, their difference must derive fundamentally from matter. Even the fact that gender is primarily an attribute of the

²⁷ See Austriaco, "The Specification of Sex/Gender."

²⁸ For Thomas's own insistence on this point, see *ScG* II, c. 81.

²⁹ *STh* I, q. 76, a. 1. Here Thomas follows Aristotle, who in *Physics* 2.1 argues that while form and matter together constitute a nature, form does so primarily. Austriaco, "The Specification of Sex/Gender," argues from contemporary biology that even the presence or absence of the Y chromosome is insufficient on its own to establish gender differentiation; rather, entire genetic systems are at play. Such an account points to substantial form as determinative, actualizing and coordinating the physical networks. For matter as temporally prior to form in generation, see *ScG* II, c. 89, esp. n. 17.

³⁰ Thomas argues that a difference in form entails a difference in species in many places; see, for example, *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 4, a. 2.

individual calls to mind matter as principle of individuation and of features proper to the individual as such.³¹

W. Norris Clarke, seeing the importance of the soul/body proportion yet wishing to avoid species-making difference, argues that while gender ontologically begins at the level of matter, it comes to characterize the soul through the soul's relation to its particular body.³² As mentioned above, in chapter 81 of book 2 of the *Summa contra Gentiles* and other passages Thomas refers to the way in which particular matter contributes to distinction among souls. He speaks of the diversity of souls that results from the "diverse commensuration of souls to bodies,"³³ the distinction between souls "according to diversified matter,"³⁴ and even the fact that because of their mutual proportion, souls "receive" from their bodies.³⁵

Yet in these passages Thomas accounts, respectively, for the continued numerical distinction of souls after death, for distinct degrees of intellectual ability among human beings, and for the presence of certain traits in a child's soul that resemble similar traits in the parent's soul. That is, Thomas employs the notion of the soul's commensuration to particular matter either to account for the sheer fact of numerical distinction between souls, or to explain variations among humans involving accidental differences or differences of degree within the workings of some power of the soul. Material disposition, for example, can affect the operation of one's sensory and intellectual powers; it can certainly affect one's native temperament, as well as other accidental characteristics.

Gender, though, concerns a wholly different kind of distinction between humans, since it involves its own powers, organs, activities, and purposes. The evidence does not suggest that, on Thomas's principles, the particular body to which a

³¹ For matter as principle of individuation, see *De ente*, c. 2; *ScG I*, c. 44; *Super Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3; *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 1; *STh I*, q. 75, a. 4.

³² W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 103-4.

³³ *ScG II*, c. 81.

³⁴ *STh I*, q. 85, a. 7, ad 3.

³⁵ *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 9, ad 7.

soul is commensurated can account for the presence of such realities. Matter does not form itself into particular organs; the soul does so, for the sake of the particular powers that work through those organs. The position I have argued affirms the notion that particular souls are essentially commensurated to particular bodies, but claims that within this commensuration, gender begins at the level of the soul and is received into the corresponding matter, accordingly designated by the chromosomal pattern. The question thus remains: how does such an account avoid considering man and woman as distinct species?

A proper response to this objection depends on correctly seeing the kind of power that gender is and the nature of that power's function. Thomas indirectly compares the powers of the soul to units of a number: if one is present or absent, a different kind, or species, exists.³⁶ Such powers contribute to the constitution of a distinct kind, like winged as opposed to four-legged, or feathered as opposed to scaled. The presence of a sixth sense, for instance, would presumably indicate a distinct species of human. Yet gender is not like a sixth sense, in two ways. First, gender posits no further power in virtue of which the animal's essence is determined; rather, it concerns precisely the maintenance of the essence that the other powers constitute. Thomas notes that the generative powers are the only ones that intrinsically concern the good of the whole species; as oriented toward the species itself they cannot in themselves constitute new species.³⁷

Second, gender concerns a *cogenerative* power, which, as such, lacks the independence proper to any of the other powers of the soul. Unlike other powers that exclude their contraries in being and in account (thus winged excludes four-legged, and feathered excludes scaled), gender's nature presupposes one like itself and thus depends on its contrary in being and in account.

³⁶ *STh* I, q. 76, a. 3; *De Spir. creat.*, a. 3. Thomas's exact language is usually to compare the different sorts of soul (vegetative, sensitive, intellectual) with species of number, but implied here are the sets of powers that a given soul comprises for the sake of its nature and end. See also VIII *Metaphys.*, lect. 3 (1722-27) for an analysis of different ways in which forms are like numbers.

³⁷ *ScG* III, c. 123.

By way of the cogenerative relation, male is defined in terms of female, and vice versa. The male and female powers are distinct not simply in the way that the five senses are many sense powers, but as mutually dependent contributors to one action: generation. It is as though male and female constitute, at the reproductive level, the integral “parts” of the human essence. Thus, instead of holding that gender as stemming from substantial form would constitute a new essence, one could maintain that the human essence itself includes and demands the gender distinction as present at the level of individual form and matter, and originarily at the level of form, which makes the matter to be a “particular thing” (*hoc aliquid*).³⁸

Objection 3. A third objection to the position that gender stems from the soul might take issue with the way in which I have described the cogenerative powers. This objection could claim that there is really only one reproductive power in human nature and that this power is capable of being manifested in two ways, depending on the body to which the soul is united. Consequently, being male or female stems rather from matter than from form, or soul.³⁹

By way of response, it may be said that the clearest way to determine a multiplicity of powers is to examine the powers’ activities, typically revealed by distinct objects and organs.⁴⁰ Plainly, consideration of the human reproductive power reveals not just distinct organs, but also distinct activities and proximate objects: testes produce sperm while ovaries produce eggs; the male organs are capable of cogenerating an indefinite number of offspring within a nine-month period, while within the same time a woman’s organs can cogenerate—but also sustain and nourish—at most a small number of offspring. The same analysis reveals distinct reproductive powers even within one gender, most clearly in the case of woman, who possesses

³⁸ *De ente*, c. 2.

³⁹ In essence, Thomas holds this view: man and woman possess the reproductive power in more and less perfect ways, respectively, owing to physical factors. Aristotle details how woman’s imperfectly realized power entails her distinctive abilities in the generative realm (*On the Generation of Animals* 4.1, 2, 8). See also note 11, above.

⁴⁰ *STh* I, q. 77, a. 3.

powers for both reproduction and sustenance of offspring. Because the cogenerative powers share the same ultimate object, namely, reproduction of another human, they can be grouped under one type of power, analogous to the way in which the five senses can be grouped under one type of power. Yet because the cogenerative powers do not share the same proximate object, as their organs and activities manifest, they remain distinct powers as co-contributors to human generation.

If the soul derivatively assumes one or another cogenerative power because of the matter primarily, does the soul in its own right originate a reproductive power at all? If it does not, then it could not be the soul of a human animal, for Thomas clearly maintains that all powers of the human being ultimately flow from the essence of the soul. If the soul does, in its own right, originate a reproductive power, then according to the objection this power would have to be a “generic” reproductive power, either abstracting from both male and female, or including both. The former alternative is incoherent within a Thomistic metaphysics, since powers are only intelligible in light of the particular acts through which the powers reach their fulfillment, and no act corresponds to an abstract reproductive power. The latter alternative would mean that upon the soul’s union with the body, an entire set of the soul’s powers would be in principle denied the possibility of fulfillment. Each human would naturally possess built-in frustrations on the metaphysical level, which opposes Thomas’s thought and the majority of human experience.⁴¹ Being male or female, therefore, follows

⁴¹ See *ScG* II, c. 79 for an instance of a text in which Thomas notes that natural appetite cannot be in vain. Clarke, in fact, states that “the human soul in each case has to operate and express itself through this particular body, which allows some of its many potentialities to develop, others not, and some more than others. Thus a human soul operating in a male body just cannot conceive, bear in its womb, and give birth to a human child, because it has no womb with which to do so” (*The One and the Many*, 103). An implicit ramification of this view is that each soul has natural potencies which in principle can never be actualized. It is unclear how such a scenario would be distinct from the situation of one born without eyes or ears. Such restrictions are of a very different sort from those given by mere material disposition, which prohibit some humans from playing professional basketball or acing IQ tests.

principally from one's soul, in relation to that soul's correspondingly disposed body.

IV. GENDER AS REGARDS PERSON AND ESSENCE

Unlike all other features included in human nature as such, a particular sort of correlation exists between gender and the existing person. One can think of the human essence absolutely, in abstraction from any given human being, as comprising soul, body, reason, free will, sensation, growth, and reproduction—yet reproduction in fact never exists just as such, but always by way of a split into the either/or displayed by the cogenerative powers. The human essence considered in itself includes male and female; only a consideration of that essence as actually existent entails male or female.

If, then, gender can be located with sensation in the category of accidents that stem from form but share in matter, within this category a real difference exists between accidents that flow from the nature itself, like sensation, and an accident like gender that flows from the nature as it exists in this or that individual. We saw earlier how Thomas uses similar language in the disputed question *De Anima* (a. 12, ad 7), noting that inseparable accidents like masculine and feminine result from the principles of the individual rather than those of the species. A brief look at Thomas's reasoning here will indicate an important way in which gender *can* be said to follow upon matter.

From the metaphysical viewpoint, a human form must be joined with human matter if *any* powers of the soul are to exist.⁴² In one sense, soul and body are more closely connected than are any of the soul's powers with the soul, or any of the body's qualities with the body.⁴³ For the soul's relation to the body pertains to the soul's very essence, while the powers are

⁴² Here I refer to the coming-to-be and existence of the human being in its natural state. Clearly, Thomas holds that after death the soul can exist with its spiritual powers—albeit in an incomplete manner; see *De Pot.*, q. 3, a. 10, ad 16; *De Spir. creat.*, a. 2, ad 5; *STh* I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 6.

⁴³ See *De Spir. creat.*, a. 2; *Q. D. De Anima*, a. 9.

distinct from the essence as “proper accidents,” or “properties.”⁴⁴ Human form and matter fundamentally constitute human nature itself; they *are* the principles of the species in any human being.⁴⁵

The majority of the powers flow simply from the human form as joined with human matter, which is to say that these powers are present whenever any human soul/body composite is present. They exist in all instances of human nature. This is what it means for certain powers—sensation, reason, and so on—to flow from the principles of the species. But one sort of power does not flow simply from the human form as joined with human matter. The cogenerative powers flow not from the principles of the species, but from the principles of the individual, namely, from the human soul as informing “this” matter: dimensive, or designated, matter, which is the principle of individuation.⁴⁶ What distinguishes matter simply speaking from designated matter is that the former is the principle of potency to substantial form, while the latter refers to matter precisely as the subject of dimensive quantity, the divisibility of which allows for more than one instantiation of human nature.

To say that the cogenerative powers follow from the soul as informing designated matter means that these powers, unlike the other powers of the soul, do not characterize the human substance simply speaking, but that substance together with an accident: dimensive quantity (which includes position).⁴⁷ In this sense, one’s gender is not as close to one’s being human in the first place as are the other powers of the soul. Because the cogenerative powers flow from the soul as joined with designated matter, they are proper, one might say, more to the human *individual* than to the *human* individual. Gender, therefore, does follow upon matter in the sense that only the soul

⁴⁴ *De Spir. creat.*, a. 2, corp., ad 4, ad 5, ad 19; a. 11; *Q. D. De Anima*, a. 12, ad 7; *STh* I, q. 75, proem.

⁴⁵ *STh* I, q. 75, a. 7, ad 3.

⁴⁶ *De ente*, c. 2; *STh* III, q. 77, a. 2; *Super Boet. De Trin.*, q. 4, a. 2, corp., ad 2, ad 3; *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 2, ad 1.

⁴⁷ *STh* III, q. 77, a. 2; *Super Boet. De Trin.*, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3.

considered as united with “this matter”—the principle of individuation—originates one gender or the other.⁴⁸

All accidents other than gender that stem primarily from the soul characterize the entire species. On the side of the individual, gender differs metaphysically from other possibly inseparable accidents inasmuch as it characterizes the being’s structure, activity, and purposes. Features like eye color or skin color are more easily called accidents (in the Porphyrean sense of the term) of the individual, whereas one’s gender involves the intrinsic structure of the individual substance through the soul’s powers. Thus, a *sui generis* inseparable accident has come to light as something that, metaphysically speaking, might be called the primary attribute of the existing person. I mean this not in the sense of primarily constituting what it means to be a person, but as what first and intrinsically follows from the presupposed being of a human person, which includes rationality, sensation, bodiliness, and individuality.⁴⁹ While gender stems from the soul in relation to individual matter, it is ultimately proper to the concretely existing composite in a way that no other accidental feature is. Not surprisingly, in coming to know another as a person (and not simply as useful to some end) the first thing one generally seeks to know, at least implicitly, is whether the person is a man or a woman.

If gender as regards the person is something like the primary attribute, with regards to the human essence it can be considered both a mode of the essence and a part of it. I mean the term “mode” here to refer to one and the same essence’s distinct way of existing, and not to a distinction in kind.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Gender, then, accompanies matter considered precisely as divided from—and hence as implying the presence of—at least one other human.

⁴⁹ “Person” is defined as an individual substance of a rational nature (*STh* I, q. 29, a. 1).

⁵⁰ Thomas employs “mode” (*modus*) in a very similar way in *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 5, ad 23; some other places where he indicates a related understanding of “mode” are *De Pot.*, q. 9, a. 2, ad 1 and ad 6; V *Metaphys.*, lect. 3 (783). While writing this essay I found that William E. May employs the notion of a mode of the human species in his articulation of the gender distinction. See his *Sex and the Sanctity of Human Life* (Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Press, 2004), esp. chap. 5. Edith Stein holds that gender stems from the soul, and sees this connection as resulting in a male and a female “species,”

Human nature is configured from the soul to the body so as to exist in two distinct ways: as male and as female. Both present what it is to be fully human, but both are required for the fullness of the human essence. To illustrate this notion it may be helpful to consider Thomas's comparison of male and female with odd and even.⁵¹ No number exists without being odd or even; the nature of number intrinsically demands the odd/even distinction as the most immediate, consistent, and fundamental division of number; and the nature of number is not compromised by existing as odd or as even. Just as odd and even are each fully number, and yet each gets at something of number that the other does not, similarly, male and female each constitute an equally full participation in human nature, but the participation of each includes something that the other lacks and that can be completed only by that other. As well, odd and even, while not mutually relational in their being, are difficult to understand and articulate apart from the other, in this sense resembling male and female, which are mutually relational in their being, not to mention in their intelligibility.⁵²

Thinking of male and female as distinct modes of the human essence (and not distinct kinds, on the one hand, or merely distinct instances, on the other hand), presupposes that male and female each bear human nature fully and equally, though in different ways or modalities, corresponding to the cogenerative distinction. Yet this very distinction shows one way in which human nature is limited as present in a man or in a woman,

both of which exist within the human species. See Stein, *Essays on Woman*, 187. For Stein, "species" here means simply a permanent, unchanging category (173). Still, to my mind this is a mistaken articulation, for it both opposes the usual meaning of species, especially in the biological realm, and suggests the sort of difference that simply separates the sexes without sufficiently relating them.

⁵¹ See X *Metaphys.*, lect. 11 (2128). The comparison may have originated with the Pythagoreans, as Aristotle relates in *Metaphysics* 1.5.986a22-b1.

⁵² Euclid's definitions of odd and even denote the intelligibility of odd as dependent on that of even (*Elements*, book 7, definitions 6-7). Against the Pythagoreans, Thomas agrees with Euclid. See note 51, above, and IV *Metaphys.*, lect. 16 (728).

In saying that male and female depend on each other and are mutually relational "in being," I simply intend to point out that neither gender, as gender, can reach its fulfillment apart from the other.

since only both together can accomplish reproduction. Here the notion of “part” clarifies the manner in which gender is a mode of the essence. One might say that every human individual (Socrates, Plato, Diotima, and so on) is a part—but a part of the human race, not of human nature itself, which does not necessitate any particular person. Male and female, by contrast, are analogous to integral parts of the very nature, since correlative powers proper to the nature itself exist in both genders. Considering the gender distinction in such terms reveals the equality but also the complementarity of man and woman.

V. THE CLASSIFICATION OF GENDER

Gender has come to light as something metaphysically unique, for nothing else in human nature qualifies as an attribute stemming from the soul, characterizing the individual as such, and constituting a partial mode of the essence. This uniqueness relates to the fact that, as has been shown, gender does not fit comfortably into two classifications that Thomas employs in articulating attributes: the disputed question *De Anima* division of proper, inseparable, and separable accidents; and the fourfold division of accidents in *De ente*. While gender can be considered an inseparable accident, and a feature stemming from the form with a share in matter, neither of these notions sufficiently differentiates the metaphysical sort of thing that gender is.

Crucial here is the fact that the way in which male and female are “parts” of the human essence involves relationality. The two classifications just mentioned consider a substance as complete, and as bearing particular features within its completeness. The difficulty is that although in a certain sense it is clearly meaningful to speak of man and woman as possessing distinct characteristics, such an expression can tend to present man and woman simply as complete substances characterized by particular attributes. Each effort to subsume the substances as gendered within classifications of the sorts described attempts to

render the substances intelligible in their own right, this time taking stock of gender-related characteristics.

Presupposed, though, by any articulation of attributes belonging to man and woman as complete in themselves is the fundamental fact that as a procreator neither man nor woman is complete in the first place. My possession of human nature allows me to exist on my own; to possess accidents of size, shape, color, place, time, and position; to eat, sense, and think on my own. I cannot, though, produce another like myself on my own. Instead of articulating man and woman simply as distinct beings in virtue of particular sorts of features, the more complete expression recognizes that only human nature in its fullness procreates, and that this occurs through a particular union and relationship of mutual activity between its “parts,” man and woman.

The cogenerative relationality of the genders involves two aspects. On the one hand, insofar as a human possesses a nature with a generative power that has as its object a new being of the same nature—the descending relationship of parent to offspring—the gendered human can be considered without explicit reference to the correlative gender. Yet insofar as this human’s generative power, as cogenerative, is ordered to its object specifically and only through order to yet another object—the lateral relationship of male to female—the gendered human appears as an intrinsic part of the duality that alone constitutes the nature in its fullness and thereby continues it.

This analysis helps clarify the notion of man and woman as partial modes of the human essence. Like odd and even, man and woman possess distinct features; but unlike odd and even, man and woman’s possession of these features occurs within and is for the sake of a relation of union and mutual activity between each other. Man and woman viewed precisely as such are relational—and in this context, partial—modes of human nature.

VI. THE DEFINITIONS OF MALE AND FEMALE

How, then, are the genders defined? With a slight modification, the articulations given by Aristotle and Thomas suffice: the male is what cogenerates in another; the female is what cogenerates in itself.⁵³ A brief examination of the definitions not only reilluminates certain points clearly supposed by Thomas, but also emphasizes certain points that he does not seem to have developed. First, the verb “cogenerate” indicates that man and woman actively participate together in the work of generation and that neither is a generator on its own—which, in Thomas’s view, the male more nearly is.⁵⁴ Second, implied in the notion of generation is that the generated being is like the parents. The cogenerative powers aim at the continuation of the parent species and hence could in no way constitute a new species. Third, the fact that male and female are defined with reference to each other as cogenerators indicates the relationality within one and the same nature that entails two modes. Man and woman, as such, differ by way of correlativity involving joint participation in generation, which itself illuminates, by working through, the characteristics proper to man and to woman. As relational, man and woman are not easily placed in classifications that presuppose distinct beings as each possessing, through characteristic attributes, the intelligibility of a complete nature. Fourth, the activities of cogenerating in another and in oneself, which properly distinguish man and woman as such, denote the formal proximate objects of the

⁵³ Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals* 1.2.716a14-15; Aquinas, VII *Metaphys.*, lect. 4 (1344). Here Thomas only explicitly voices Aristotle’s definition of male; that he would similarly accept Aristotle’s definition of female is unclear, though there is no reason to think he would not.

The Aristotelian definitions employ the verb “generate” (*generare*). My use of “cogenerate” (perhaps ponderous) is meant not just to clarify but also to indicate a subtle way in which the definitions as originally articulated register a particular view of gender. Surely Aristotle and Thomas would not disagree that male and female are cogenerators, yet they understand that mutuality as founded upon the possession/privation distinction, which allows for male and female to be considered as more separate than they are.

⁵⁴ *ScG* II, c. 89.

cogenerative powers as either male or female. These objects point to gender as stemming foundationally from the soul of the person since the powers possess distinct proximate objects, functions, and organs.

Thus far, notably, these definitions do not necessarily reveal anything distinctively human. Gender exists in humans insofar as they are animals, though it also exists most meaningfully in human animals insofar as human procreative activity is integrally marked by rational choice.⁵⁵ By nature, the generative act is a human act and not just the act of a human. Thus, what is distinctively human in gender comes to light most manifestly in the “co-” dimension of the cogenerative relationship, to the extent that deliberation, choice, and love are integral moments within human sexual activity, which thus transcends merely instinctual limitations. The reason it is generally considered problematic if the sexual act fails to occur within the context of mutual consent is that such a scenario presents a cogenerative act without the “co-” aspect as distinctively human. Since the entire act is cogenerative, if one aspect lacks a distinctively human structure, so does the whole. The generative end may be reached, but in a manner that has violated the very kind of being that is generated.

In a way, the distinctively human dimension is less apparent on the “-generative” side of sexuality, since biological processes may play out regardless of human intentionalities. Still, the presupposition of mutual love in the “co-” dimension places the generative dimension in a higher context than that of mere species continuation. The generative activity itself, that is, parallels the status of the human being as desirable not just on

⁵⁵ This essay concerns the human animal. Still, the argument for gender as stemming primarily from soul could hold for some other animal species. Species with gender characteristics vastly different from our own, such as sequential hermaphroditism or parthenogenesis, ought to provoke inquiry, especially into the animal form, or soul, which is educed from the potency of matter and is thus tied to the contingencies of matter in a way the human soul is not. See *De Pot.*, q. 3, aa. 8-11; *De Spir. creat.*, a. 2, ad 8. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for directing my attention to parthenogenesis.

account of the species, but also for its own sake.⁵⁶ Just as gender in humans transcends its origin from the physical to the spiritual realm, so its activity and purpose become procreative in the truest sense of that word. When do we ever make or produce something without love as in some way the context for our making? We make in virtue of loving something or someone else, or even ourselves. In procreation we can see the highest form of human “making” as a natural dimension of love. In loving another like myself, I can procreate one like myself. Further, as Thomas points out, generating another like oneself in the case of a human being involves continued rational and affective dimensions beyond those of the sexual sphere, since the mature human only comes to be after an extensive period of support, nourishment, training, and education.⁵⁷

CONCLUSION

At this point we have reached the boundary between a consideration of gender simply from the structural or ontological level, which this essay has purported to be, and a consideration that reaches into the ethical, social, and psychological realms. Still, seeing man and woman as articulated above can help us better think about them in all aspects of life. The argument may also provide an angle from which to address philosophically some of the present social and ethical problems concerning gender, reproductive technology, and the family. From a broader anthropological and metaphysical point of view, the argument suggests that essence and substantial form be approached in light of the “category” that gender constitutes. How does the notion of a relational mode affect our understanding of an essence? How do we understand substantial form as originating something at the individual level? How does gender, as primary characteristic of the individual, reveal the unity of soul and body in the person? Perhaps an understanding of gender as a mode of the essence occurring at the individual

⁵⁶ *ScG* III, c. 113.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* c. 122.

level illuminates the ordering of nature to person in human being.

There are two phenomena, visible in contemporary society, that might be interpreted as refuting my argument for gender as stemming principally from the soul. The first is sex reassignment surgery (SRS); the second is the situation of intersex persons who, from birth, either possess elements of both genders, or cannot be determined accurately to be male or female. Concerning the first, I grant that if SRS could actually change one's gender, it would be more difficult to see how gender stems from the soul. The fact is that while SRS can, with partial degrees of success, replace certain organs, it leaves the patient sterile.⁵⁸ A defining actuality of the power at issue has been eliminated, such that one's gender is not simply changed; it is to a great degree lost.

Concerning the second phenomenon, the intersex condition is clearly an exception among human births.⁵⁹ Yet since gender involves a power of the soul working in and through the physical realm, the possibility of deficiency or abnormality endures, just as it does in the powers of sensation. Aside from the assistance of medical technologies in such cases, it is crucial to recall that one's gender, though integral to the person, is neither the defining nor the most important aspect of the person.

Along these lines, in an expansive look at living beings Thomas articulates the place of gender in human life:

And as among animals there is a vital activity nobler than generation, to which their life is principally directed; therefore the masculine sex is not in continual union with the feminine in perfect animals, but only at the time of coition; so that we may consider that through coition male and female are made one. . . . But man is yet further ordered to a nobler vital activity, which is to understand. Therefore there had to be a greater reason for the distinction of

⁵⁸ See <http://www.surgeryencyclopedia.com/Pa-St/Sex-Reassignment-Surgery.html>; <http://science.jrank.org/pages/6096/Sex-Change.html>. Also Katrien Wierckx, et al, "Reproductive Wish in Transexual Men," *Human Reproduction* 27 (2012): 483-87.

⁵⁹ Leonard Sax, "How Common is Intersex? A Response to Anne Fausto-Sterling," *The Journal of Sex Research* 39, no. 3 (2002): 174-78; Austriaco, *The Specification of Sex/Gender*, 714.

these two forces in man; so that the female should be produced separately from the male; and yet they might be fleshly joined as one for the work of generation.⁶⁰

The ultimate telos of the human being, involving the flourishing of a life suffused with knowledge and love, reminds us that relationality and fruitfulness occur in realms higher than the physical. If, with Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, one were tempted to picture the human being simply as a longing half, the passage just quoted offers a larger view. In his own way, Thomas calls to mind Socrates' and Diotima's ascent to the Beautiful.

⁶⁰ *STh* I, q. 92, a. 1. Translation adapted from the Dominican Fathers (New York: Benziger Bros., Inc., 1947).