



Keeping the Vision: Aquinas and the Problem of Disembodied Beatitude

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In the fall and winter of 1331 Pope John XXII found himself puzzled by the status of departed souls which are not only free of mortal sin but also not liable to any temporal punishment for mortal or venial sins. Do such disembodied holy souls already enjoy full beatitude, or will they enjoy full beatitude only after they are reunited with their resurrected bodies at the Last Judgment? John preached two sermons in which he took the latter position, igniting a storm of theological controversy that featured Thomas Waleys, Guiral Ot, Durand of St. Pourçain, and Jacques Fournier, who later became Pope Benedict XII, among the disputants. On January 29, 1336, Benedict issued his Constitution *Benedictus Deus* declaring that disembodied holy souls see the divine essence “plainly, clearly and openly” with a “face-to-face” intuitive vision in which they enjoy the divine essence forever without any acts of the theological virtues of faith and hope.¹

Doctrinally, *Benedictus Deus* proscribes the position that disembodied holy souls do not enjoy beatitude. Yet, as medieval historian Caroline Walker Bynum observes in her insightful discussion of the beatific vision controversy of the 1330s, thorny philosophical and theological questions remain.² These questions are rooted in the issue, left unresolved by Benedict’s Constitution, of whether there is an increase in the intensity of beatitude when a disembodied holy soul is reunited with its resurrected body. I will use some questions Bynum asks to clarify St. Thomas Aquinas’s account of disembodied beatitude first presented in Distinction 49 of his *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* and subsequently modified in the *Summa Theologiae*. Even in the *Summa* it may seem that Aquinas’s account remains vulnerable to a serious objection Bynum raises. After criticizing the radically alternative account of beatitude suggested by Bynum’s discussion of Dante and the 14th-century mystics Marguerite of Oingt and Mechtild of Magdeburg, I will develop an adequate answer to Bynum’s objection by drawing upon the

¹ Available online at <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Ben12/B12bdeus.html>.

² *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 279–317.

philosophical resources of the *Summa* and Aquinas's crucial distinction there between an increase in beatific extension and an increase in beatific intensity. I take Bynum's objection to be symptomatic of the fact that this distinction, though familiar to Thomists, is not generally known in the broader philosophical and theological community. In this essay I hope to help rectify that lack.

I

The view of disembodied beatitude Aquinas defends in Distinction 49 of his *Commentary* steers a middle course between the proscribed position, suggested by some of John's more extreme formulations, that a disembodied holy soul does not enjoy beatitude until it is reunited with its resurrected body, and the opposite position that being reunited with its resurrected body adds nothing to the beatitude already enjoyed by a disembodied holy soul.³ Aquinas maintains that (1) a disembodied holy soul does enjoy beatitude, and (2) this beatitude will increase in both extension and intensity after the soul is reunited with its resurrected body. To motivate Aquinas's view and to elucidate some of his terminology, it is helpful to see how such a view naturally emerges in response to Bynum's line of questioning. Taken to its dialectical outcome, however, this same line of questioning will also enable us to bring out the main weakness in Aquinas's earlier view of disembodied beatitude.

Let us begin with (1). Aquinas identifies the *ratio* or essence of beatitude with an act of the speculative intellect in which the will takes delight.⁴ It might be doubted that such an act is even possible for a disembodied soul. Echoing a concern John broaches in his sermons, Bynum begins by asking, "How can a soul in possession of full vision of God be distracted by anything? How, in other words, can a soul so beatified even notice—in the blinding light of God's presence—that its body is missing?"⁵ Bynum's initial question might be sharpened into the following epistemological objection: A disembodied soul experiencing beatitude would be so distracted by God's presence that it would not know that its body was missing. Hence the disembodied soul would suffer a deficiency of knowledge, or ignorance. Moreover, the deficiency would be the result of seeing God

³ See *In IV Sent.* d. 49 q. 1, a. 4, qa. 1. Translated by Peter A. Kwasniewski, Thomas Bolin, O.S.B., and Joseph Bolin in *On Love and Charity: Readings from the "Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard"* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), pp. 377–381. Henceforth, material from this sub-question will be referenced by page number only.

⁴ See *In IV Sent.* d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 2–3 (pp. 340–347 in the English translation).

⁵ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, pp. 286–287.

face to face, making God, if not an outright deceiver, then at least the cause of ignorance in the disembodied holy soul. This consequence is unacceptable, for God is neither the cause of ignorance, nor does beatitude as a state of blessedness involve suffering any kind of deficiency as a result of beatitude itself. Therefore, it would seem that a disembodied holy soul cannot enjoy beatitude.

Aquinas claims that since the soul does not employ a bodily organ in its act of understanding, the soul's being reunited with its resurrected body will not bring it about that the soul understands but only that the glorified body no longer impedes the soul's act of understanding, as it did when the same body was corruptible.⁶ An analogy may help. I can simply see a mountain with one eye. Restoring my second eye would not bring it about that I simply see the mountain; I already do. At most, the normal functioning of my second eye would not impede the simple seeing already performed by my first eye. If my act of simply seeing the mountain essentially depended on my possessing a normally functioning second eye, then it would be plausible to suppose that my lacking a second eye would result in my not simply seeing the mountain. Similarly, if my soul's acts of understanding—including its vision of God and its knowledge of its own condition vis-à-vis its body—essentially depended on the functioning of any bodily organ, then it would be plausible to suppose that my lacking a body would result in my soul's inability to perform such acts.⁷ Yet Aquinas holds that my soul's acts of understanding are essentially independent of *any* normally functioning bodily organ, in precisely the way that my simply seeing the mountain with one eye is essentially independent of my possessing a normally functioning second eye.⁸ Consequently, the inference from the soul's enjoying beatitude without a body to ignorance in the soul as a result of its enjoying beatitude is unwarranted, and thus the epistemological

⁶ See *Commentary*, pp. 378–380.

⁷ Adding my second eye can improve my overall vision by providing stereoscopic perspective, thus allowing for more accurate judgments of distance and proportion. By contrast, Aquinas holds that adding a body does not improve the soul's overall act of understanding at all. For this reason, I speak of the addition of my second eye as not affecting the fact that I *simply see* the mountain with my first eye.

⁸ In particular, Aquinas holds that disembodied human souls have knowledge, not on the basis of information provided by the sense organs or through innate concepts, but rather through concepts supplied by God. God provides a disembodied soul with determinable concepts—e.g., *extended*—and the power of grasping them to such a degree that the soul perfectly understands every determinate concept virtually contained in the determinable—e.g., *human body with such-and-such dimensions that has decomposed by time t₁* (=my body that has now decomposed). See *STh* I-I, q. 89, a. 1. For more discussion of Aquinas's account of how disembodied human souls have knowledge see Peter S. Dillard, *The Truth about Mary: A Theological and Philosophical Evaluation of the Proposed Fifth Marian Dogma* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), pp. 52–54.

objection fails to show that beatitude is impossible for a disembodied holy soul.⁹

Let us now turn to (2), the claim that the beatitude enjoyed by a disembodied holy soul will increase in both extension and intensity after the soul is reunited with its resurrected body. According to Aquinas, there is an increase in beatific extension because the beatitude that previously applied only to the disembodied soul will come to apply to the soul in union with its glorified body.¹⁰ Explaining why there is also an increase in beatific intensity, Aquinas writes:

Now, every imperfect thing has appetite for its own perfection; and so the separate soul naturally has appetite for conjunction with the body; and owing to this appetite proceeding from imperfection, its activity which is directed toward God is less intense; and this is what Jerome says: that due to appetite for the body, the soul is held back from passing into the highest good with its whole intention.¹¹

As we saw in connection with the epistemological objection, a disembodied holy soul suffers no deficiency of knowledge as a result of its enjoying beatitude without its body. In particular, then, the soul knows that it lacks its body. Furthermore, both the body itself and the union of body and soul are ontologically good because they are created and ordained by God. Since the soul naturally desires the good—especially its own good—a disembodied holy soul naturally desires the ontological good of being united with its body. Knowing that it lacks what it wants, the disembodied soul experiences disquietude that is incompatible with full beatitude because the soul's delight in seeing God is lessened by its desire to be reunited with its body. Once this desire is satisfied after the general resurrection, the soul's beatific delight will be unhindered, amounting to an increase in beatific intensity.

Unfortunately, Aquinas's view now appears vulnerable to a more serious objection. Elsewhere in *Distinction 49*, he asserts that "since it is the end to which all desires are referred, beatitude must be something such that, when one has it, *nothing further remains to be desired*."¹² If the essence of beatitude precludes any desire, then a disembodied holy soul desiring to be reunited with its body cannot experience beatitude *at all*. This consequence flatly contradicts

⁹ Might an overwhelming vision of God after death yet before the general resurrection simply "blind" the soul to its condition vis-à-vis its body? Only if the soul's acts of understanding, including its understanding of its own condition vis-à-vis its body, essentially depend upon the presence of a functioning body is it plausible to suppose that a disembodied soul would suffer beatific "blinding." Yet Aquinas denies that the soul's understanding essentially depends on bodily functioning.

¹⁰ See *Commentary*, p. 379.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 379–380.

¹² *In IV Sent.* d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4 (349 in the English translation), emphasis added.

Aquinas's opinion that such souls *do* experience beatitude, albeit with a lesser intensity than after the general resurrection. Bynum makes the point in her discussion of Bonaventure, though the same point applies to Aquinas's view of disembodied beatitude in his *Commentary*:

Yet if the separated soul in possession of the beatific vision still yearns for body, that soul has hope for something it does not possess. There cannot however, says Bonaventure, be hope (which is a recognition of incompleteness) where there is completion. There cannot be any need or lack where there is possession of God. The contradiction persists.¹³

Dialectically, Bynum's line of questioning can be seen as proceeding from distraction to disquietude. The problem is no longer that a disembodied holy soul is so distracted by its intellectual vision of God that it is ignorant of the fact that its body is missing. The problem now is that a disembodied holy soul's longing to be reunited with its missing body is incompatible with the blissful peace, completion, and rest of beatitude.

Perhaps in light of this difficulty, in the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas modifies his account of disembodied beatitude.¹⁴ As before, he argues that since beatitude is an act of understanding and such acts do not essentially depend on bodily functioning, neither does the act of beatitude, in which case a disembodied holy soul can enjoy it. However, Aquinas now claims that after a disembodied holy soul is reunited with its resurrected body, although there is an increase in beatific extension there is *no* increase in beatific intensity.¹⁵ The significance of this reversal is not immediately obvious, since at times Aquinas continues to affirm that its separation from its body holds the holy soul back from tending with all its might to the vision of God's essence.¹⁶ For then it would seem that the soul either longs for its missing body or at the very least hopes to be reunited with its missing body. Because feelings of disquietude or acts of hope are incompatible with the enjoyment of beatitude, contrary to Aquinas's opinion expressed in the body of the article a disembodied holy soul cannot enjoy beatitude at all—or so Bynum might argue.

Yet before we explore the significance of Aquinas's change of mind, we do well to consider whether his *Commentary* view of a disembodied soul both enjoying beatitude and desiring to be reunited with its resurrected body is actually vulnerable to Bynum's objection. A reply in defense of Aquinas's earlier view might begin by distinguishing between unfulfilled desires which involve longing and

¹³ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 252.

¹⁴ See *STh* I-II, q. 4, a. 5.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, ad. 5.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, ad. 4.

a kind of anticipation which does not. My desire to be with a person I love who is absent involves a longing for the person that prevents me from being at peace. On the other hand, a disembodied holy soul may desire reunification with its resurrected body, not by longing for it, but merely as something good it confidently expects to occur. Given Aquinas's definition of hope as an act whose object is a possible future good that is arduous to attain,¹⁷ a disembodied holy soul does not hope for reunification with its body. For the holy soul has already attained everything it wants for itself: namely, the vision of God. Since it does not desire *any* possible future good for itself, let alone a possible future good for itself that is arduous to attain, the holy soul does not hope for the future good of reunification with its body. It merely expects and is certain that this future good will occur.

In fairness to Bynum, there remains a lingering worry about Aquinas's earlier view of disembodied beatitude. The worry turns on Aquinas's claim that the disembodied holy soul naturally has an appetite for conjunction with the body. From this claim, it is reasonable to infer that the disembodied holy soul loves its body and hence desires reunification with it. Admittedly, in desiring reunification with the body it loves the holy soul does not hope *on its own behalf*, since its will rests in the soul's vision of the divine essence. Yet it is far from clear that the holy soul does not hope *on behalf of another* that it loves—namely, its own body. According to Aquinas, hope includes an agent's desire that another loved by the agent attain a possible future good it is arduous for the other to attain, as for the agent itself.¹⁸ Certainly reunification with the holy soul is a possible future good for its body. Moreover, this possible future good is obviously arduous for the body to attain, because the corpse either lying in the grave or decomposed cannot even begin trying to attain this good for itself. It is entirely helpless without an act of divine power. Finally, the soul desires this possible future good for the body as for itself, since the soul desires that the very beatitude it already enjoys be extended into the body. These observations imply that the disembodied holy soul hopes after all: not on behalf of itself but on behalf of its body. And we have seen that *any* hope is incompatible with beatitude.

It is open to Aquinas simply to deny that the disembodied holy soul loves its body the way one person loves another person. But then, Bynum might protest, the holy soul seems entirely *indifferent* toward its body. For the soul does not desire reunification as a future good for itself; the soul has already attained every good it wants

¹⁷ See *STh* I-II, q. 40, a. 1.

¹⁸ See *STh* II-II, q. 17, a. 3.

for itself. Nor does the soul desire reunification as a future good for its body, since unless the soul loves its body it is obscure why the soul would desire something good for the body that requires an act of divine power. Such indifference of the holy soul vis-à-vis its own body smacks of an unpalatable and heretical Gnosticism. Indeed, Aquinas himself suggests that the separated holy soul loves its body by having a natural appetite for conjunction with it. If such an appetite is *not* natural love of the soul for its body, Bynum might reasonably ask, *what* is it?

Fortunately, besides hope, love, or indifference, another option is available to Aquinas for understanding a disembodied holy soul's attitude toward reunification with its resurrected body. Specifically, Bynum overlooks the possibility of confident expectation that is devoid of hope or any unfulfilled desire whatsoever and also avoids indifference. We shall see how the full force of Aquinas's mature position emerges when a holy soul's confident expectation of being reunited with its resurrected body is linked with there being no increase beatific intensity but only of beatific extension when reunification occurs—the very point about which the Angelic Doctor changed his mind.

II

As an interlude, I turn to the radically alternative account of beatitude suggested by Bynum's discussion of Dante, Marguerite of Oingt, and Mechtild of Magdeburg.¹⁹ No mere flight of poetic fancy or mystical meandering, it can be regarded as a brilliantly audacious twist on the Franciscan tendency to identify the essence of beatitude with *fruitio Dei* rather than *visio Dei*. Just where Aquinas's account appears to founder, the dynamic alternative offers an initially attractive way out. Thus let us consider it carefully.

We have been assuming that beatitude, whether in a disembodied holy soul or in a holy soul reunited with its resurrected body, is essentially a peaceful state of completion and rest devoid of all yearning. The dynamic account challenges that assumption. In the closing cantos of the *Paradiso*, as he approaches the very heart of heaven Dante encounters an enormous white rose where the Blessed Virgin Mary presides over the saints gathered among its petals and the angels swarming around the blossom like bees. The poet then describes the rapture in his own soul:

Thus my mind, all rapt, was gazing, . . . ever enkindled by its
gazing

¹⁹ I do not mean to suggest that Bynum attributes this exact account to all three of these writers, but only that she attributes to them a common conception of the nature of beatitude which strongly suggests the account I shall describe.

[M]y own wings were not sufficient . . . , save that my mind was smitten by a flash wherein its wish came to it. Here power failed . . . but already my desire and my will were revolved, like a wheel that is evenly moved, by the Love which moves the sun and the other stars.²⁰

In Bynum's vivid phrase, Dante "prolonged yearning until the resurrection—perhaps even into eternity—and projected the motion of desire onto heaven itself."²¹ For Dante, desire as yearning is a permanent condition of human being. Not only does the disembodied holy soul yearn to be reunited with its body; after the general resurrection, the blessed person who is a composite of soul and body loves God with a yearning that, paradoxically, grows ever stronger the more it is satisfied in an eternally revolving cycle of desire and fulfillment.

Marguerite of Oingt expresses a similar conception of eternal desire when she compares the saints' enjoyment of God's "sweetness" to fish satiating their insatiable thirst by drinking from an infinite sea:

The saints will be completely within their Creator as the fish within the sea; they will drink to satiety, without getting tired and without in any way diminishing the water[T]hey will drink and eat the great sweetness of God. And the more they eat, the more their hunger will grow. And this sweetness cannot diminish any more than can the water of the sea.²²

Mechtild of Magdeburg employs the same image in her description of the reunited soul and body of a blessed person enjoying eternal life with God:

. . . and in [His] Triune-ness,
Soul and body fly and play,
They romp according to their hearts' desire more
and more
And drink [there] like fish in the sea.²³

Even after a holy soul is reunited with its resurrected body, then, on the dynamic conception of beatitude suggested by Dante, Marguerite, and Mechtild there is never any completion because the blessed person continues yearning for ever deeper union with the God. Yet there is also peace and rest because, paradoxically, in an eternity of such yearning each and every desire for ever deeper union with God is satisfied.

²⁰ Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, III. *Paradiso*, Part 2. Trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), canto 33, lines 97–99 and 139–145 (cited in Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 304).

²¹ Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 305.

²² Marguerite of Oingt, *Speculum*, chapter 2, paragraphs 16–17. Quoted by Bynum in *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 335.

²³ Mechtild of Magdeburg, *Das fließende Licht*, book 5, chapter 25. Quoted by Bynum in *The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 339.

These poetic and mystical visions suggest that the essence of beatitude is not an act of the speculative intellect in which the will takes delight, but rather an act of yearning love in the following infinitely iterated series: The person satisfies her yearning to love God to some degree D by loving Him to that degree, knows that He can be loved to an even greater degree D^* , and yearns to do so; the blessed person then loves God to degree D^* , knows that He can be loved to an even greater degree D^{**} , and yearns to do so; and so on, *ad infinitum*. Intuitively, there can certainly be different degrees to which something is loved. Perhaps there is a maximum degree to which any ordinary being can be loved. But in the case of God, Who is infinitely good and thus worthy of love commensurate with His goodness, it is reasonable to infer that there is no maximum degree to which He can be loved. No matter how much one loves God, one can always love Him even more.²⁴ A person may be said to enjoy beatitude if and only if her soul is characterized by some stage of the foregoing series. The iterative account is a dynamic conception of beatitude because blessed persons undergo real changes as they come to love God more while still yearning to love Him more and more throughout all eternity, though God does not undergo any real changes Himself.

No less than Aquinas's account, the iterative account allows for disembodied souls to enjoy beatitude. According to the iterative account, beatitude is essentially a state of loving God while knowing that He can be loved to an even greater degree and yearning to do so. Such a state is perfectly compatible with also knowing that one's body is missing and desiring to be reunited with it. Nor does the iterative account attribute any deficiency of knowledge to a disembodied holy soul. It is by "projecting yearning into eternity" that the iterative account promises to avoid the main difficulty confronting Aquinas's view of disembodied beatitude. The difficulty, recall, is that in yearning to be reunited with its missing body a disembodied holy soul either experiences disquietude or continues hoping for something, both of which are incompatible with beatitude, or else is entirely indifferent toward the fate of its own body. On the iterative account, yearning for something one lacks is a permanent condition of beatitude. In particular, even at the stage when the holy soul is reunited with its resurrected body, the blessed person does not cease to yearn for something she lacks because she yearns to love God to a greater degree than she does at that stage. The yearning experienced

²⁴ For any blessed human being, might there be a point beyond which she is incapable of loving God any more than she already does even though God is intrinsically capable of being loved more? Or could God bestow upon her a greater and greater capacity for loving Him with no upper bound? I shall not explore this issue here, for as I will explain below there is a more pressing question about the dynamic conception of beatitude that needs to be addressed before this and other subsidiary questions are taken up.

by a disembodied holy soul would be incompatible with such a soul's enjoying beatitude only if there were some later stage of embodiment beyond which all yearning ceased. However, there is no such stage. Therefore, the yearning of a disembodied holy soul for its missing body does not preclude the soul from enjoying beatitude—any more than her yearning to love God to a greater degree than she already does precludes a blessed person who is a union of soul and body from enjoying beatitude. The permanent presence of yearning in beatitude might be also objectionable if some act of yearning were left forever unfulfilled. Yet the projection into eternity of the iterated series of yearnings associated with each blessed person ensures that each and every act of yearning is eventually satisfied, and hence that no act of yearning is left forever unfulfilled.

A trickier question is how blessed persons can continue to yearn without also continuing to hope; if they cannot, then the iterative account conflicts with the teaching of *Benedictus Deus* that all acts of the theological virtue of hope cease in beatitude. A proponent of the iterative account might reply that there is an important sense in which acts of hope do cease during beatitude, though acts of yearning to love God more and more do not cease. Sometimes we hope for things we believe are possible which really are not. Suppose that someone in this life hopes to love God perfectly—i.e., to a degree beyond which it is impossible for that person to love Him more. At some point, perhaps after death yet before the general resurrection, the person realizes that neither she nor anyone else can love God to a maximal degree but only to greater and greater degrees. The person then ceases hoping to love God “perfectly” while still yearning to love Him more and more. In this sense, the proponent of the iterative conception might propose, in beatitude there are no acts of hope as a specifically theological virtue.

Many more questions could be raised about the dynamic conception of beatitude.²⁵ However, they are all moot because there is a fundamental problem with that conception. Beatitude is not something we can non-miraculously experience in this life.²⁶ Yet if the

²⁵ For example, the iterative account requires that blessed persons in eternity inhabit some kind of time, since they undergo real changes and such changes take place in time. Does that conflict with the timelessness of eternity? It might be countered that although, strictly speaking, only God is in eternity, there are independent reasons to hold that blessed persons inhabit some kind of time. One of the traditional “dowries” of the glorified body is agility, or the body's ability to move instantaneously wherever the soul desires. Even instantaneous movement requires some kind of time (such as the “aeveternity” Aquinas postulates to explain the angels' instantaneous movement). It might be argued that whatever kind of time is required for the agility of glorified bodies is adequate for the progression of yearning in blessed persons.

²⁶ In *STh* I, q. 12, a. 11, Aquinas argues that we cannot naturally see God in this life; however, God can and has miraculously bestowed a vision of His essence upon some, such as Moses (see *ibid.*, ad 2.) My point below is the dynamic of beatitude has the unacceptable

essence of beatitude is merely satisfying one's yearning to love God to some degree by loving Him to that degree while knowing that He can be loved to an even greater degree and yearning to love Him to that greater degree, then plainly a person can satisfy this condition prior to her death without God's miraculous intervention. Indeed, any pilgrim on earth who grows in love of God while desiring to love Him more already enjoys beatitude. Since no one can non-miraculously experience beatitude in this life, it follows that the iterative account of beatitude as a dynamic unfolding is false.²⁷

Various attempts to meet this objection are either implausible or ad hoc. For example, it might be urged that there is still an act of theological hope during this life, and thus no true beatitude, because the pilgrim still yearns to love God to the maximal degree; it is only after death that she realizes the impossibility of doing so, and thus only then that she ceases hoping for it. Yet anyone possessing the virtue of charity in this life realizes that loving God to a maximal degree is impossible because charity is based on faith which understands God not as a *finite* good, which is contrary to faith, but as an *infinite* good.²⁸ Or it might be stipulated that beatitude simply cannot begin until after the loss of the body in death. But this stipulation is entirely arbitrary given the identification of beatitude with a state of satisfying a yearning to love God while also knowing that He can be loved even more and yearning to love Him even more. If enjoying beatitude consists in being in such a state, then since someone can naturally be in such a state before she has died she can also naturally enjoy beatitude before dying.

In criticizing the iterative account suggested by the dynamic conception of beatitude, I do not mean to reject any account of beatitude as *fruitio Dei*. There may very well be other, more sophisticated versions that merit consideration. My point is that the difficulty we encountered with Aquinas's account should not make us more receptive to the dynamic conception that can be retrieved from Dante, Marguerite, and Mechtild, for the latter is just as problematic, if not

consequence that we can and many of us do *non-miraculously* attain the beatific vision in this life.

²⁷ Commenting on a passage from Marguerite of Oint's *Speculum*, Bynum observes that Marguerite "speaks of seeing God's face when our souls leave our bodies. She does sometimes use the category of 'separated soul,' and she seems aware that it would be dangerous to claim *visio Dei* in this life" (*The Resurrection of the Body*, p. 336, footnote 68). Unfortunately, Marguerite seems unaware that this very claim is a consequence of the dynamic conception of beatitude to which she is drawn.

²⁸ Charity is a supernaturally infused virtue, but it is not something miraculous in the sense of being a perceptible effect that surpasses the powers of human nature and that is produced by God. If it is insisted that the pilgrim still has faith and that iterative beatitude only begins when this faith ceases after death, it then becomes apparent that what really makes for beatitude is not an act of yearning, as the dynamic conception has it, but an act of seeing, as Aquinas claims.

more so. Instead, let us return to St. Thomas's claim in the *Summa Theologiae* that there is an increase in beatific extension without an increase in beatific intensity.

III

To situate Aquinas's claim in its proper theological and metaphysical context, I will begin by looking in a somewhat unexpected place: his discussion of liability to punishment as a consequence of Original Sin. Given that punishment and reward are correlative concepts and that beatitude is a kind of reward, a better understanding of Aquinas's view of punishment in the *Summa Theologiae* may shed light on his view of beatific intensity in the same work.

Aquinas maintains that just as a murderer's liability to punishment is imputed to his limbs insofar as they are moved by his will to commit murder, even though his limbs themselves are not individually responsible for the murder, so Adam's liability to punishment for sinning is imputed to his descendants because his will is active in them through the process of generation, even though his descendants themselves are not personally responsible for his sin:

We would not reckon murder committed with the hand to be the hand's sin if we could think of the hand in itself out of the context of the body; we talk of it in that way only when we think of the hand as part of a whole man moved to sin by the source of such movements in men. In the same way, the disorder inherited from Adam by any particular man is not voluntary with that man's will, but voluntary only with Adam's will which activates all those born from him by the movement of reproduction, just as the will of man activates all his limbs . . . And just as a sin of action is a *sin of the man*, but not a sin of the limb committing it (except insofar as the limb belongs to the man as a whole); so too inherited or original sin is a *sin of human nature*, not a sin of this or that person (except insofar as that person is receiving his nature from the first parent).²⁹

Let us concentrate on the distinction Aquinas draws here between guilt as individual responsibility and guilt as mere liability to punishment. We seek to understand how the latter sort of punitive liability relates to, as I shall call them, *punitive extension* and *punitive intensity*, respectively.

To bring out these conceptual connections, consider a thought experiment. Suppose that I commit a robbery and am sentenced to fifty years in prison. Following Aquinas, we may say that my fingers are not individually responsible for the robbery but that they are liable

²⁹ *STh* I-II, q. 81, a. 1. For its lucidity, I have used Timothy McDermott's translation of this passage in his *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1989), p. 264.

to punishment because they were activated by my will in committing the crime. Suppose, furthermore, that while I am in prison I begin to undergo the bizarre change of growing additional fingers: One morning I wake up to find that I have eleven instead of only ten fingers, and each day after that I grow a new finger until I have several dozen fingers on both hands. It seems to correct to say that although these additional fingers were not activated by my will in committing the robbery, nevertheless they are liable to punishment for the crime because I am substantially present in every part of my body—both new and old—and I am personally responsible for the crime. In support of the conclusion that my additional figures are also liable to punishment, it may be observed that it would be ridiculous for my jailers even to consider somehow trying to free my new fingers in order to prevent them from being unjustly punished for the robbery! My substantial presence in the new fingers, combined with my personal guilt for the robbery, is sufficient to establish my new fingers' liability to punishment for the robbery, though not their individual guilt.³⁰

When I grow the new fingers, clearly there is an increase in my punitive extension. For the total extent of my body subject to punishment is greater than it was before I grew the new fingers. There would also be an increase in punitive extension if I simply gained weight during my prison sentence. Is there also an increase in punitive intensity? In one sense, it is possible for there to be such an increase. For example, my uncomfortable restlessness at being confined would extend throughout my body, including my extra weight or my new fingers. But in another sense, no matter how great an increase there is in punitive extension, there is no increase in punitive intensity. The punishment to which parts of my body are liable is the same—fifty years in prison—no matter how much weight I gain or how many new fingers I grow. It has nothing to do with my psychology. If by some miracle I sprouted fifty new fingers the first night I spent in prison, then all my fingers, both new and old, would still be liable to fifty years' imprisonment as punishment for the robbery I committed. This liability is due to the fact that I am personally responsible for the robbery and that I am substantially present in all my fingers.

³⁰ In passing I mention the issue—tangential to our concerns in this essay—of how punitive liability for Original Sin is legitimately imputed to Adam's descendants. Supposing that there was a first human who became aware of God only to disobey Him, how do this person's descendants become liable to punishment for that sin if the first sinner is not substantially present in his descendants the way I am substantially present in the parts of my body? I believe that we must understand human nature not merely as a shared essence but as something like a shared tool, one person's misuse of which may prevent us all from attaining a common goal. An initial analogy is that of a team member who misuses his athletic nature by taking steroids, resulting in disqualification of the entire team from winning the pennant even though the other members are not personally responsible for his infraction. I hope to return to this issue in future work.

This train of reflection explains why Aquinas might have changed his mind about whether there is an increase in beatific intensity after a disembodied holy soul is reunited with its resurrected body. Obviously there is an increase in beatific extension, since the beatitude which applied to the disembodied soul before the general resurrection comes to apply to the entire holy soul/glorified body composite. Given the correlative character of punishment and reward, the disconnection between an increase in punitive extension and an increase in punitive intensity would seem to indicate that there is a similar disconnection between an increase in beatific extension and an increase in beatific intensity. A variation on our thought experiment bears out this conjecture. Suppose that, rather than commit robbery, I provide the police with information that leads to recovery of a wealthy magnate's kidnapped child. The magnate rewards me by giving me an estate on the French Riviera for life where all my needs and desires are fulfilled. While living on the estate, as in the previous version of the thought experiment I begin to grow new fingers on both hands. Despite the fact that there is an increase in remunerative extension, since the total extent of my body subject to reward increases, there is no increase in remunerative intensity, since the reward to which the parts of my body are liable remains exactly the same: lifetime ownership of the French Riviera estate. In particular, my new fingers are liable to this same reward because I am personally deserving of it and I am substantially present in my new fingers.

Suppose that I am already enjoying the wealthy magnate's reward and also know with absolute certainty that while continuing to enjoy it I will grow new fingers on both hands. Clearly I do not want anything else for myself, since all my needs and desires are already fulfilled. What is my attitude toward the possible future good of my reward being extended into my new fingers? I do not have any unfulfilled *longing* or *yearning* for them to receive the reward I already enjoy. I do not *love* my new fingers as myself and *desire* them to attain the possible future good of receiving this reward which it is arduous for them to attain (since they do not even exist yet); hence I do not *hope* for my new fingers to receive it. Consequently, when I grow the new fingers there is no increase in my remunerative intensity through the fulfillment of some unfulfilled desire on my part.

What of the lingering worry that a disembodied holy soul is totally indifferent toward its body? Regarding the thought experiment of the wealthy magnate, Bynum might counter that unless there is an increase in remunerative intensity in the form of my fulfilled desire when my reward is extended into my new fingers, I am indifferent toward them and the possible future good of my current reward being extended into them even though I confidently expect it to occur. *Mutatis mutandis*, it seems that unless there is an increase in beatific intensity when a holy soul is reunited with its resurrected body, the

soul is indifferent toward its resurrected body and the future possible good of soul-body reunification even though the soul confidently expects this occurrence.

In fact, contra Bynum, on Aquinas's view in the *Summa Theologiae* it is precisely because there is *no* increase in beatific intensity once the holy soul is reunited with its body that any indifference is avoided. There is no increase in beatific intensity because all the desires of a disembodied holy soul are already fulfilled in its vision of the divine essence. In particular, the soul's desire that it will be reunited with its body is already fulfilled because (1) it is already true that the soul will be reunited with its body, and (2) the soul already firmly knows this truth based on its vision of the divine essence. The soul does not desire *that it is reunited with its body now*, which would be an unfulfilled desire; the soul only desires *that it will eventually be reunited with its body*, which is a desire that is already fulfilled.³¹ Moreover, given the soul's absolute certainty that this desire is already fulfilled, a disembodied holy soul possesses a confident expectation that is incompatible with any indifference towards its body. For indifference towards X requires the absence of any desire towards X, fulfilled or unfulfilled.³²

We have seen how Bynum objects to the possibility of disembodied beatitude based on the work of some of Aquinas's 14th-century successors. Sympathetically construed, her objection has force against Aquinas's earlier view of disembodied beatitude in his *Commentary*. Developing a cogent reply to Bynum's objection based on Aquinas's later view in the *Summa Theologiae* highlights the importance of properly understanding how hope, expectation, desiring that something is so, and desiring that something will be so all differ, as well as how these differences relate to Aquinas's eventual denial of an increase in beatific intensity. It is a measure of the philosophical and theological depth of Aquinas's mature account of disembodied beatitude that it decisively answers Bynum's objection and seamlessly meshes with Benedict XII's *Benedictus Deus. Soli Deo Gloria*.

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³¹ Desiring that one has X and desiring that one will have X are no less different than desiring that it is sunny right now and desiring that it will be sunny tomorrow.

³² In terms of our thought experiment, while already enjoying my reward I would also desire and be absolutely certain that the magnate will eventually cause me to grow new fingers. My fulfilled desire toward my new fingers is ipso facto a desire of mine toward them, and thus incompatible with my being indifferent toward them. My firmly knowing that my desire is already fulfilled would be an attitude of confident expectation.