



**PHILOSOPHICAL THERAPY:  
RETURNING TO FIRST PRINCIPLES – A MEDICINE AGAINST MODERNITY**

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**CLASS #1: WHAT IS THE HUMAN PERSON?**

**Two commonly held and apparently contradictory beliefs in our society:**

One, that we are entirely and fundamentally physical, bodily beings

Two, that we are, most fundamentally, our innermost, ineffable selves

Yet these two views have something in common: the material world is essentially meaningless and lacking purpose. No human nature. Therefore, inadequate support for human dignity.

Examples:

1) Animal vs. human life

2) Abortion and euthanasia

3) Human sexuality

4) Personal identity

## **How do we make sense of our lives as bodily *and* spiritual creatures, and of our special standing in the natural world, and of our inherent dignity and worth as human beings?**

What does our ordinary experience tell us? (We are both body and mind, or body and soul.)

But how is this?

Aristotle's hylemorphism (the soul is the form of the body)

Living things have *substantial* forms

And an "immanent teleology" (They can undertake activities that further their own good.)

Human souls are rational

And immortal (Aquinas's reasons for believing that our souls transcend material reality)

Genesis Chapter 1, verse 27: "So God created mankind in His own image."

From the Catechism, paragraph 356 and 357:

"Of all visible creatures only man is 'able to know and love his creator.' He is the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake, and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God's own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity.... Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of the person, who is not just *something*, but *someone*."



The four examples again:

1) Human vs. animal life (or AI)

2) Euthanasia, abortion

3) Human sexuality

4) Personal Identity

Conclusion: We are made for something, we have a nature and a purpose, and a glorious one.

### **Questions for Contemplation/Discussion:**

How do you conceive of your own identity as a human person? What does the way you think about your body or the way you present yourself reveal about your own conception of the human person?

How do you defend the dignity and meaningfulness of human life? What would this look like in an actual conversation? What questions could you ask to encourage people to think more deeply about the human person?

What does it mean to you to be a man or a woman? How does the hylemorphic understanding of the human person relate to your understanding of your sexual identity?

### **Suggested Further Reading:**

Michael Augros, *The Immortal in You: How Human Nature is More than Science Can Say*

Edward Feser, *Aquinas*

Edward Feser, *Philosophy of Mind*



David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*

