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PREVIEW RESPONSE

The Unity of Human Flourishing: An Ontological, Anthropological, and Theological Perspective



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Tyler VanderWeele's multidimensional account of flourishing raises a question that resonates with my research on intellectual and moral virtues: what grounds the unity of human flourishing across its diverse dimensions?

Aquinas's thought offers a fruitful perspective by connecting metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, and theology. Truth and goodness are convertible with being yet formally distinct: they express different aspects of reality as intelligible and desirable. The human person, understood as a substantial unity endowed with intellect and will, is capable of knowing the truth and of freely pursuing the good. These capacities are distinct yet intrinsically interconnected, expressing the unity of the person in her engagement with reality.

From this perspective, intellectual and moral virtues perfect distinct yet interconnected dimensions of human agency. Their distinction does not imply separate forms of flourishing, since both contribute to the perfection of the same person. Yet this unity is not merely structural; it is also teleological. Human capacities and virtues are directed toward the fulfillment of the person, whose deepest aspirations for truth and goodness ultimately point beyond any finite achievement.

This perspective may enrich VanderWeele's distinction between temporal and eternal flourishing. The goods of temporal life possess genuine value and contribute to human fulfillment. Yet, in the Christian understanding, our ultimate fulfillment lies in communion with God, the source of all truth and goodness—a fulfillment that exceeds what human capacities can achieve on their own and is received as a gift of grace. This vision also invites universities to view the pursuit of truth and the formation of moral character as mutually enriching dimensions of human flourishing.

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