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# Thomas Aquinas: Soul-Body Connection and the Afterlife

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Thomas Aquinas:  
Soul-Body Connection and the Afterlife

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## **Abstract**

Thomas Aquinas nearly succeeds in addressing the persistent problem of the mind-body relationship by redefining the human being as a body-soul (matter-form) composite. This redefinition makes the interaction problem of substance dualism inapplicable, because there is no soul “in” a body. However, he works around the mind-body problem only by sacrificing an immaterial afterlife, as well as the identity and separability of the soul after death. Additionally, Thomistic psychology has difficulty accounting for the transmission of universals, nor does it seem able to overcome the arguments for causal closure.

Thomas constructs his distinct philosophy of the soul by interpreting Aristotelian concepts in light of Catholic doctrine. His epistemology and psychology elucidate the relationship of the soul to the body. He maintains that the soul is the form of the body, the bridge between the corporeal and incorporeal worlds, and the first act of the body. This thesis explains Aquinas's concept of the nature of the soul, especially how it allows for the interaction of the intellectual soul with the body, and describes the influence of religious doctrine on his viewpoint about the afterlife and resurrection.

Elucidation of the philosopher’s psychology demonstrates that, in concluding that the soul is the form of the body, Aquinas eliminates the possibility of an immaterial afterlife. The effect of this sacrifice is a difficulty in clearly explaining how an immaterial form, the soul, continues to exist without a material body. Additionally, Thomas’s philosophy of the soul cannot account for causal closure, which entails that all physical effects must have sufficient physical causes.

This work provides a new angle on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas by focusing on the nexus of his philosophy of mind and his account of the afterlife. The reconstruction of his view of the resurrection, as informed by his psychology, presents a new interpretation of the philosopher, shining fresh light on how these accounts inform one another. Additionally, this composition’s criticisms of Thomas afford a new outlook to Thomistic philosophy, challenging his explanation of how humans complete universal thought in light of contemporary understanding of the physical world.

## I. Introduction

Thomas Aquinas constructs his distinct philosophy of the soul by interpreting Aristotelian concepts in light of Catholic doctrine. The philosopher gives special attention to those teachings regarding the afterlife and resurrection. This paper contends that Aquinas nearly succeeds in addressing the persistent problem of the mind-body relationship by redefining the human being as a body-soul (matter-form) composite. This move makes the mind-body interaction problem of substance dualism inapplicable because there is no soul “in” a body, as Avicenna suggests.

For Avicenna, the human being is a soul,<sup>1</sup> which uses the human body as a tool in order to acquire the primary elements of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> His substance dualism describes the soul as an immaterial substance that is independent of the body, but which uses the body to gain access to knowledge via sense perception.<sup>3</sup> In this scenario, the soul is “captain” of her bodily “ship.” Substance dualism has several problems, not least of which is explaining how the two substances causally interact.

The following explains Aquinas's concept of the nature of the soul, especially how it allows for the interaction of the intellectual soul with the body, and describes the influence of religious doctrine on his viewpoint about the afterlife and resurrection. I consider how the thinker addresses the problem of mind-body interaction, and argue that Aquinas's account manages to reconsider the relationship of soul to body outside the typical mind-body connection. He reframes the issue by redefining the human being as a composite, which makes the substance dualist's problem of mind-body interaction

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<sup>1</sup> Avicenna. *Metaphysics of the Healing*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young UP, 2005. p. 76

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>3</sup> Hasse, Dag Nikolaus. *Avicenna's De Anima in the Latin West*. London: Warburg Institute, 2000. p. 81, 92.

inapplicable. By defining the human being as a body-soul (matter-form) composite, Thomas eliminates the idea of a soul “in” a body.

Despite the creative workaround, Aquinas escapes the mind-body problem only by sacrificing an immaterial afterlife; this creates the problem of the identity and separability of the soul after death. The effect of this sacrifice is a difficulty in clearly explaining how an immaterial form (in this case, the intellectual soul) continues to exist without a material body. Indeed, his afterlife requires a bodily resurrection. Additionally, Thomistic psychology has difficulty accounting for the transmission of universals from material objects to the incorporeal intellect.

Finally, Thomas’s philosophy of the soul cannot account for causal closure, the idea that “If a physical event has a cause that occurs at  $t$ , it has a physical cause occurring at  $t$ ,” a stronger version of which would state that “no event has a physical cause outside the physical domain.”<sup>4</sup> The implication of this is that Aquinas would have to accept that either mental events have no causal power, or that mental events are in fact physical events (or argue against causal closure). Since the philosopher believes that the incorporeal soul is the act of the body, he would reject either of these conclusions.

This work provides a new angle on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas by focusing on the nexus of his philosophy of mind and his account of the afterlife. The reconstruction of his view on the Christian resurrection, as informed by his Aristotelian-influenced, but natural philosophy-heavy psychology, presents a new interpretation of the

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<sup>4</sup> Jaegwon, Kim. *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body problem and Mental Causation*. "Representation and Mind Series". Cambridge (Mass.): A Bradford Book, The MIT Press, 1998. p. 37.

philosopher, shining fresh light on how these accounts inform one another. Additionally, this composition's criticisms of Thomas Aquinas afford a new outlook to Thomistic philosophy, challenging his explanation of how humans complete abstract and universal thought in light of contemporary understanding of the physical world.

My research contributes to the work of Gyula Klima, who describes Thomistic psychology and its implications for the afterlife, particularly resurrection.<sup>5</sup> I describe the fundamental nature of Aquinas's epistemology for his philosophy of mind, and explicate the consequences for the philosopher's reliance on divine illumination for the recognition of universals. The failure of this essential element reverberates throughout Thomistic philosophy, affecting especially that which Klima defends: Thomas's solution for the interaction problem of substance dualism.

## II. Aquinas's Description of the Soul-body Relationship

### II. A. Definition of the Soul

This section explains Aquinas's definition of the human soul. In its three parts, I account for Thomas's description of the soul as a matter-form composite and as the first act of the body. As well, I explain how the dual nature of human beings allows for this type of soul in addition to making the human afterlife possible.

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<sup>5</sup> Klima, Gyula. "Man = Body + Soul: Aquinas' Arithmetic of Human Nature." Lecture. Notre Dame Philosophy Colloquium. Indiana, Notre Dame. 31 Oct. 1997. Fordham University. Web. Mar. 2010.

## II. A. 1. Human Being as Matter-Form Composite

The terms “soul,” “human soul,” “intellectual soul,” and “rational soul” are used interchangeably in this paper, and refer to Thomas Aquinas’s definition (that is, the soul is the form of the human being), which roughly correlates to the Aristotelian notion of rational soul (and does not postulate any separate soul with nutritive or vegetative powers, but encompasses these powers).

Thomas Aquinas believes the human soul is the form of the human being, which is a matter-form composite. For him, form is the “intrinsic constitutive element of the species...in sensible entities.”<sup>6</sup> Matter in general is the “stuff” of which creation is made. Prime matter is “the element of indetermination in corporeal beings.” It is the potential by which the actuating form makes a thing what it is. Prime matter does not, and cannot, exist on its own, because it has no accidental qualities such as quantity, nor is it a substance which makes a thing itself; it must be created informed by a form.<sup>7</sup>

Substantial form, that type of form which he ascribes to the human soul, is that “which determines or actuates *materia prima* to a specific substantial nature or essence.”<sup>8</sup> As substantial form, the soul is a part of a substance, but it is not a substance itself. The soul may exist separately from the body, and continue, after its death, in many of the capacities we think of as human. Substantial form is “that in virtue of which the material object is a member of the species to which it belongs,” and the structure or configuration

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<sup>6</sup>Aveling, Francis. "Form." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 6. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909. 15 Feb. 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06137b.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup>Aveling, Francis. "Matter." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 10. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 15 Feb. 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10053b.htm>>.

<sup>8</sup>Aveling. "Form." The Catholic Encyclopedia.

that provides the object with the abilities that make the object what it is. For humans, those abilities are those of the rational animal.

To explain, Aquinas maintains that a human being is a single material substance. The philosopher understands the rational soul as the first principle of life<sup>9</sup> and as the substantial form of the body, which makes a human being their *composite*. "...[A human being] is said to be from soul and body as a third thing constituted from two things neither of which he is, for a [human] is not soul nor is he body."<sup>10</sup> This indicates that one body plus one soul equals a third, original material: the human being, which has a dual nature. In his words, "In complex substances there are form and matter, as in [humans] there are soul and body...the existence of the compound substance is not of form alone nor of matter alone but of the composed thing itself..."<sup>11</sup> This indicates that while a human is a single material substance, it still should be understood as having an immaterial soul, which continues after bodily death. Clearly, these two statements are difficult to reconcile.

Ultimately, humans are *animals*; the animal genus is *body*; body is *material substance*. When embodied, a human person is an "individual substance in the category *rational animal*."<sup>12</sup> The body thus belongs to the essence of a human being. This accounts for the material aspect of human nature. While the human soul must necessarily

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<sup>9</sup> Kretzmann, Norman. "Philosophy of Mind." Norman Kretzmann and Eleanor Stump, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 128.

<sup>10</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. "On Being and Essence." Trans. Ralph McInerny. *Selected Writings*. By Thomas Aquinas. London: Penguin, 1998. p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> Aquinas. "On Being and Essence." p. 32-33.

<sup>12</sup> Stump, Eleanore. "Resurrection, Reassembly, and Reconstitution: Aquinas on the Soul," in *Die menschliche Seele: Brauchen wir den Dualismus? The Human Soul: Do We Need Dualism?* Bruno Niederberger and Edmund Runggaldier (eds.), (Frankfurt-London: Ontos Verlag, 2006), p. 166.



be incorporeal, humans are also natural, which entails being at least partly matter. Thus, it is in the nature of a human to be soul and matter because sensation requires the body, but the senses also provide access to knowledge through perception. Because humans are composite beings, their essence is of matter and form.

Essence is “that through which and in which the thing has existence.”<sup>13</sup> As humans exist in both, so their essence is through both. Because of this, that the body (the physicality of human existence) “is an integral...part of animal and soul is not included in its meaning but supervenes on it and from the two, body and soul, the animal is constituted as from its parts.”<sup>14</sup> The soul as the body’s form can be understood when one compares Aquinas’ definition of matter (that which of itself exists incompletely), with his definition of form (that which gives existence to matter). An item is matter if it is changeable and can become different than it is; that is, matter is always potentially something else and exists incompletely. For example, bronze matter is potentially a statue, or also potentially a cymbal. When Aquinas says the body is of matter, it means the material body is only potentially a human being without the intellectual soul. Matter must be understood as the matter *of* something.

Alternately, the form of a thing is that whose enmattered presence is that matter’s being that very thing. For matter to be the thing, some form of the thing must be present in it. Consequently, what it is for human matter to be living human tissue simply consists in a human soul’s being wholly present in each part of the human. The human soul, the

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<sup>13</sup> Aquinas. "On Being and Essence." Ch. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 2.

body's form, is that which makes a thing's matter to be *actually* what it would have been or had been merely *potentially*.

Brian Leftow proposes a helpful analogy. He maintains that one can think of the soul, metaphorically, as a free radical. A free radical is a combination of elements that acts as a single unit in chemical reactions, but which is not bound into any larger molecule. Unstable free radicals have an available place in their structure which another atom or molecule can fill, creating a compound. Unstable radicals are prone to form a molecule of a compound, becoming a stable molecule. The radical persists as an undetached part of the resulting molecule—the structuring part. God creates a stable molecule (human being) and death detaches a part that leaves an unstable radical. Resurrection returns that part, forming the molecule as before.<sup>15</sup> This exemplifies the composite nature of the human being.

## II. A. 2. Soul as First Act of the Body

Thomas Aquinas takes this definition of the soul as matter-form composite further by detailing that substantial form is the act of the body; it is the principle of activity and provides existence for those things of which it is the essence.<sup>16</sup> Aquinas defines the soul as “the first principle of life of those things which live,” and the object of inquiry in this

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<sup>15</sup>Leftow, Brian. “Soul, Mind, and Brain.” *The Waning of Materialism*. Koons, Robert C., and George Bealer, Eds. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. p. 403.

<sup>16</sup>Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Part I, Question 66. Literally Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Second and Revised Edition, 1920.

paper is the human (rational or intellectual) soul, which is the incorporeal and subsistent “principle of intellectual operation.”<sup>17</sup>

Because the soul is the first principle of life, it is the intrinsic source and explanation for all vital activities, up to and including existence itself.<sup>18</sup> Some of the vital activities for which the soul is the source include perception, especially visual perception, a life activity. However the soul allows for visual perception, it is obvious that the eye itself (the organ of visual perception) is not the soul. Neither is any organ the soul; the soul itself is not corporeal.<sup>19</sup>

Bodies themselves are not necessarily alive, so no body (or organ) itself can have life essentially. But, a first intrinsic principle of life, which by its nature imbues other things with life, necessarily has life essentially. So, a soul, which is a first principle of life, cannot be a body (or organ).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, because the intellect is incorporeal, it does not even *use* a bodily organ for its own proper act, as “the operation of anything follows the mode of its being.”<sup>21</sup> That is, a corporeal body is not necessary for the fulfillment of an incorporeal action.

Things are alive by means of their being organized in a way that has the potential for life; this organization is the result of a body’s form. So, the first principle of life in a body is its form, the form of the matter-form composite of every human body. Thus, the soul is the function of a body or the effect of the body’s “configuration of physical

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<sup>17</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Part I, Question 75.

<sup>18</sup> Kretzmann. p. 129.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129-130.

<sup>21</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Part I, Question 75. Article 3.

components.”<sup>22</sup> A person is matter embodied by the intellectual soul. The human soul, intellect, is *realized* by the physical body. The soul does not “cause” the body to act; instead, the soul is part of a whole being, which is capable of action due to its organization. Form is matter’s act, its intended objective, its being-what-it-is,<sup>23</sup> much the way that a pyramid’s shape makes it a pyramid.<sup>24</sup>

Form’s being described as matter’s act indicates that, as Thomas says, “To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life of those things which live... Therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body; thus heat, which is the principle of calefaction, is not a body, but an act of a body.”<sup>25</sup> That is, form is that which makes a thing what it is. Humans live by virtue of their souls; the human form is the structure, or structuring force, of the body.

Form can be described as structure by comparing the soul’s structuring form to that of a molecule. What makes a DNA molecule a molecule of deoxyribonucleic acid, rather than any other kind, is its structure. This example also retains the concept of form as agent, however; as the structure of a DNA molecule causes the synthesis of proteins, so does the structure of the soul cause the vital act of body (understanding).<sup>26</sup> Form as body’s being-what-it-is means that the “form, through itself, makes a thing to

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<sup>22</sup> Kretzmann. p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Part I, Question 75. Article 7.

<sup>24</sup> Kenny, Anthony. *Aquinas on Mind*. London: Routledge, 1993. p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 75, Article 1.

<sup>26</sup> Kenny. p. 147, 149.

be actual since it is itself essentially an act; nor does it give existence by means of something else.”<sup>27</sup> Form gives existence, or being, to that matter it structures.

## II. A. 3. Human Dual Nature

For Aquinas, all things are either corporeal or incorporeal, except human beings. The human soul accounts for the “peculiar character” of humans, who bridge the two types of substance. It is the very nature of human beings to link these two worlds; thus, only living, form-matter composites can truly be called human; dead bodies are “human” only analogously or equivocally.<sup>28</sup> When the soul leaves the body, the remaining corpse is human-shaped lump of matter, probably prime matter.

The benefit provided by the soul’s substantial nature is that it allows for immortality by permitting the soul to survive bodily death. However, this makeup of the soul also threatens the unity of the human being because the “rational animal” appears to have two natures: the corporeal, animal nature and the incorporeal intellect. Not only do these natures seem incompatible,<sup>29</sup> this philosophy also veers dangerously close to a Platonic conception of the soul (wherein the soul is the essence of a person, and simply takes on and discards the body like clothing), which Thomas rejects.

Platonic philosophy identifies the human with the soul, and maintains that the soul simply uses the body, being related to it accidentally. Aquinas rejects accidental relation of the body to the soul, because the soul is embodied for its benefit, in order to

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<sup>27</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 76, Article 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 8.

<sup>29</sup> Kretzmann. p. 134.

complete the essential human activity of understanding. Therefore, he maintains the intellectual soul is united to the body substantially. That is, the soul is the actuality to matter's potentiality.<sup>30</sup>

Because of Aquinas's conception of the soul as form, the typical mind-body problem is inapplicable; there is no "interaction" between the mind and the body in the way Avicenna articulated the problem. The soul does not drive the body; instead, the soul structures the body something like software that determines both the organization of the body and its encoded action, or behavior. That is, the causal relationship between the soul and the body is not like a captain and her ship,<sup>31</sup> but the form could be said to have causal influence in that the composite (form-matter) has configuring power, as intellect (activity) is implemented in the body (potentiality) and since knowledge takes place, at least at some level, via the senses.<sup>32</sup> This affirmation highlights Aquinas's dedication to a non-Platonic or even anti-Platonic notion of the soul.

Though the human soul does not depend on the body, it is perfected in the body. Part of its nature is spiritual, as the corporeal is for the benefit of the incorporeal. The body-soul composite is of matter *and* soul, however, so it differs from typical material forms, which are only found in matter (and thus depend on matter). This is the result of the dual nature of humanity, which bridges the spiritual and material worlds by means of its intellect and its animality.

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<sup>30</sup>Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 76, Article 6.

<sup>31</sup>Although Descartes (interpreting Avicenna) uses this analogy, it is not perfectly symmetrical, as a ship without a captain and a body without a soul would not be said to act similarly. For example, a ship with no captain wanders aimlessly on the water; while a body without a soul simply decomposes.

<sup>32</sup>Stump. *Aquinas*. "[T]here is no efficient causal interaction between the soul and the matter it informs, and all human cognitive functions can be implemented in the body." p. 210.

In sum, the soul is stated to be both an abstract (meaning conceptual, universal, and essential, without material accidents) form (an act of body) and a concrete particular thing, which seems contradictory, but Aquinas accepts that the soul is a thing and a state, an abstract form *and* a live thing.<sup>33</sup> As a state and a thing, the soul is able to outlast its body. For Aquinas, all states are particulars individuated by their bearers, but at least one state (that of human organization) can float free of its bearer. The consequence of this, for Thomas's philosophy regarding the afterlife, is obvious: the soul can disconnect from the body after its death and remain in an altered, but substantial, state until the resurrection of that body.

## II. B. Knowledge, Perception, and the Problem of Universals

### II. B. 1. The Corporeal Nature of the Body and the Incorporeal Nature of the Soul

Despite its spiritual nature, the intellectual soul is the lowest intellectual substance, compared to other intellectual substances, such as the angels and God. As “the act of a physical organic body having life potentially,” it must use the senses to gain knowledge. That is, the senses require the “corporeal instrument” of the body, to which that individual soul is united.<sup>34</sup>

A human being is a material thing inasmuch as material things are composed of form and matter. Take a sample of water as an example; water is one material thing.

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<sup>33</sup>Stump, Eleanore. "Non-Cartesian Substance Dualism and Materialism without Reductionism," *Faith and Philosophy*, 12 (1995) pp. 505-531. "(T)he soul is (a) configurational state which is...subsistent, able to exist on its own apart from the body." p. 519.

<sup>34</sup>Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 76, Article 5.

Water's form is a state, an abstract thing. The existence of water "just is a water-form being wholly present at each point in a parcel of matter."<sup>35</sup> The implication of this for human beings is that a human just is the human form (soul) wholly present at each point in a parcel of matter (body). For Aquinas, the subject of perception is the whole animal, not any subsystem. For Aquinas, higher rational processes have no bodily organ. Yet, understanding Aquinas's account of perception is necessary to comprehend his account of the soul, as the soul and body interrelate upon the human's own proper act of understanding universals.

Like Aristotle, Thomas describes cognition as requiring the knowing becoming like the thing known. This means that immaterial things can only be understood by means of an immaterial process; likewise, material objects require being sensed by material bodies. Because the soul, or intellect, is immaterial, humans are capable of cognizing the natures of all bodies (recognizing universals). Yet, such ability is not part of the body's own nature, because it is corporeal, and universals are incorporeal. If the intellectual principle were in the nature of the corporeal body itself, then that principle would not be able to recognize the natures of all bodies.

That is, Aquinas rejects the idea that the human is only the soul, because he believes sensation is necessary for human experience. For this reason, he insists that the body and the soul are essential. Despite human animal nature, the soul is not matter, not even incorporeal or spiritual matter. If the intellectual soul were matter, it would not be able to understand immaterial universals, which is necessary for the more important,

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<sup>35</sup>Leftow. p. 404.



spiritual, nature of the human being. Aquinas accepts that “whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.”<sup>36</sup> If this is the case, then in order for the soul (receiver) to understand (receive) immaterial universals, it must have the same nature as the universal. As such, a material soul necessarily would entail that forms are only received and understood by the soul individually, disallowing any knowledge of universals. The soul is immaterial not simply because it is form, but also because of its having operations (the vital activities of the agent intellect) which are independent of matter.

Obviously, though, our intellect does have cognition of itself (as is apparent in self-reflection) and the use of universals, so the intellective principle cannot be found in the nature of the body itself. Because it is capable of recognizing bodies, therefore, it can neither be a body nor use a body. Thus, anything we know about bodies, we gain through use of our senses. Thus, intellect depends upon the senses for data, but does not process that data by use of a corporeal body or organ.<sup>37</sup>

Because the human soul is not material, it must be incorporeal. Intellective cognition, a vital activity which is performed by the soul without use of the body, distinguishes the human from other types of souls. Since intellective activity is not performed with a body, then the body is not necessary for the first act of the human. Indeed, the soul is the “principle of intellective activity.”<sup>38</sup> The soul, identified with the rational nature and essential function of the human being, could not be considered the

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<sup>36</sup>Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 75, Article 5.

<sup>37</sup>Kretzmann. p. 132-133.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 131.

first intrinsic principle of a corporeal creature's vital activities if it were identified with a corporeal body. As the principle of intellectual activity (which is not only incorporeal but does not *use* any corporeal organ), the human soul is capable of subsisting on its own and must be a substance in its own right.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the human rational soul is necessarily an incorporeal substance capable of surviving the death of the human body. So, the subsistence of the human soul is due to its being essentially incorporeal, which is the result of its being "the vital activity of intellectual cognition," which is an activity in which the body does not share.<sup>40</sup>

## II. B. 2. Knowledge and Perception

Humans are rational animals, in that reason is more suited to humans than sensation. Humans use the senses for life, but also in order to acquire cognition, a purpose for which they were designed by God. Aquinas's benevolent God designed humans in the best possible way for the purpose of gaining knowledge. The human soul, as a single substantial form providing the potential for rational thought, makes humans "in God's image." Because cognition depends on the senses, sense perception's purpose is to serve the intellect. The proper activity for a human is thinking and understanding, and humans even have a natural desire for knowledge. The cognitive faculties are organized to satisfy that desire, and God has ensured human access to knowledge.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 75, Article 2c.

<sup>40</sup> Kretzmann. p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136-138.

Thomas agrees with Aristotle that “to think is to speculate with images.”<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, he maintains that the human understands via the soul. Mental states require the brain and body, because this is where and how our sense faculties encode and realize experience, which is the ultimate source of human knowledge. (While the soul may exist separated from the body, during this divided state, it cannot do all the things humans do. Because the human soul is the constitutive element of the nature of a human substance, when it is detached from the human body, it is incomplete. Thus, a soul with no body is “unnatural,” because it is divorced from the potential for sensation, the basis for thought.) Differences in body do affect intellectual understanding, because change in matter affects the way matter realizes its substantial form.

Intellectual thoughts are based on brain “phantasms,” which are “physically encoded and realized ‘images’,”<sup>43</sup> and can be understood simply as “forms existing in matter.”<sup>44</sup> The realizations of phantasms are the medium in which embodied thinking takes place. So, intellectual operations have neural correlates. Thomas insists on brain-generated phantasms, but this is not a one-one correlation. That is, Aquinas still insists the intellect has no organ, and focuses his conception of the nature of the soul on this fact. This lack is central for Aquinas, for it allows for the soul’s continued existence after the death of the body. Because intellect is not identified with a function of the brain, it is capable of maintaining some vital activities even without the body.

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<sup>42</sup> Aristotle. J.A. Smith, trans. *De Anima*. “The Internet Classics Archive.” 431a, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Leftow. p. 406.

<sup>44</sup> Pasnau, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. p. 312.

Thomas Aquinas's account of knowledge tracks sense data from its source in the corporeal to the incorporeal intellect. When a sense organ senses, it is affected by a sense-perceptible thing, and the sense organ becomes actually as the sense-perceptible thing is. That is, corporeal things make physical impressions on the corporeal organs of the "external senses." The internal sense impressions are transmitted to the internal senses which store and process them. Internal sense, or "phantasia," produces and preserves sense data, or phantasms, for the use of the intellect. There are two powers in the intellect, the agent and the possible intellects. The agent intellect acts upon phantasms to produce "intelligible species," the primary contents of the mind. The possible intellect stores those intelligible species. This process allows human understanding of universals by virtue of the soul's being the form of some matter.

To explain, the soul has two powers. First, by the action of corporeal organs, the soul understands things as they exist in individual matter, gained by the senses through their cognition (only) of individual objects. Second, the intellect cognizes the natures of things, which exist in material individuals or the intellect, gained from those individual objects. Humans cognize these material natures as they are abstracted from individual matter. Thus, human intellect gets from an individual material thing by use of the senses, to the nature of a thing by use of the active intellect, which is beyond the capacities of the senses.<sup>45</sup>

Intellectual knowledge is caused by the senses (on the part of phantasms), but the phantasms alone are not enough; they require being made actually intelligible to the

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<sup>45</sup> Kretzmann. p. 139.

intellectual soul. (The soul requires the phantasms for knowledge while enmattered.) The phantasm is the door or mirror by which the spiritual and the physical worlds are capable of interaction, with the result of human knowledge of universals.<sup>46</sup> Employment of universal concepts requires the human soul; this is the difference between the human and animal souls.

## II. B. 3. Implications of Knowledge and Sense Perception to Thomas's Account of the Soul

Aquinas preserves the unique nature of the human soul by insisting on its difference in kind from that of an animal. The difference is found in the mind's content. He bridges the angelic with the animal worlds by asserting that humans are able to access the nature of material things (quiddities) within material particulars by use of the agent intellect, as divine beings do directly. This bridge is the agent intellect. The agent intellect, which is active and creative, converts the corporeal into the incorporeal, as well as the particular into the universal (by the same operation). In this way, it abstracts intelligible species (which are like itself in nature).<sup>47</sup> However, Thomas cannot account for how this creation and conversion actually takes place; he must rely on innate divine illumination.

Divine illumination, in concert with the senses, allows humans to recognize the eternal, immaterial natures of changing, material objects, and provides humans with the

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<sup>46</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 84, Articles 6, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Pasnau, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*. p. 313.

capacity to recognize self-evident truths. Aquinas relies on God to solve the mystery of human cognition,<sup>48</sup> stating:

And so, in a way, all knowledge is imparted to us at the start, in the light of agent intellect [a faculty of the human soul], mediated by the universal concepts that are cognized at once by the light of agent intellect. Through these concepts, as through universal principles, we make judgments about other things, and in these universal concepts we have a prior cognition of those others. In this connection there is truth in the view that the things we learn, we already had knowledge of.<sup>49</sup>

The philosopher acknowledges that mental states require brains and bodies to “encode” sense perceptions and the realizations of sense experience. Thus, Thomas agrees that differences in the brain influence the intellect, because differences in matter are reflected in that matter’s substantial form. Intellectual thoughts are *based in* phantasms produced by the brain in correlation to the sense organs, but however those phantasms are physically encoded, this correlation does not entail that reason has an organ (or that a malfunction in the body reflects a fault in the soul), simply because this type of thought requires divine intellect. (Divine intellect is put into the soul by God at the creation of a human being, and so is not required to be ongoing.) That is, Thomas must admit that “every intellectual substance possesses intellective power by the Influence of the Divine Light.”<sup>50</sup> When the soul separates from the body at death, it understands in this way, “by means of species received from the influence of the Divine Light.” Such knowledge is not perfect (as the separated soul cannot turn to the phantasms for understanding and is in

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<sup>48</sup> Pasnau, Robert, "Divine Illumination", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/illumination/>>.

<sup>49</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Truth [De veritate]*, tr. R.W. Mulligan, *et al.*, Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954. Question 10, Article 6c.

<sup>50</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 89, Article 1.

an unnatural state), but is confused.<sup>51</sup> However, it does not cease to function completely, because a soul's existence entails its functioning.<sup>52</sup>

The best knowledge (clear understanding of abstract concepts, the recognition of universals) takes place by the soul when it is enmattered, with the realizings of phantasms. Phantasms are generated by the brain, and so intellectual operations have a correlate, but this correlation is not one to one but many to one. That is, thought content can differ despite the same sense experience. Different thoughts can be brought about by the same sense perception. Because of this difference, it is clear that not all thought is physically encoded in the phantasms; there must be something else (the agent intellect) which allows for the highly abstracted nature of the universal.

For example, on two occasions one may receive the same sense impression (such as “dark motion”) and on one occasion receive the intelligible “live mouse” while on the other “moving shadow.” Such a difference is amplified when one considers the experiences of multiple subjects; it is intuitive that while we may experience identical sense data, something happens between the “external world” and its perceptions and rational thought, and obviously our “higher” (rational) intellectual activities differ greatly. Thus it is clear that the brain, as physical organ, is involved in knowledge in general, but not in abstract and universal thinking, with the perception of universals, which is completed by the rational soul.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 3.

<sup>52</sup> Pasnau, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*. p. 370.

<sup>53</sup> Leftow. p. 406-409.

The implications of Aquinas's epistemology for his theory of the soul are obvious. His theory of knowledge explicates the relationship between the soul and body without the problems associated with the Platonic mind-body connection, and makes possible the sort of afterlife required by the Catholic Christian tradition. However, this same opportunity is where Thomas's argument for the knowledge of universals breaks down: he cannot account for knowledge without divine assistance, which does not allow for a naturalistic explanation of human rational insight, instead relying on supernatural intervention. Because he defines the soul as the form of the body, and because he maintains that the human being is a soul-matter composite, he is still a dualist of sorts and cannot bridge the gap between the corporeal and the incorporeal worlds naturally.

### III. Afterlife

#### III. A. How Aquinas's Soul Allows for the Afterlife

The human soul is a substance, so it may exist after the death of the body. Without a body, however, the soul is incapable of expressing normal human action. This requires that the afterlife take place within a resurrected body. Yet, the concept of resurrection presents some problems for Aquinas.

First, he has difficulty accounting for the individuation of the soul. The thisness (quiddity, haecceity) of an object is the object's having the form which configures it in this way. That is, the human's substantial form makes the human person who and what



she is, by configuring prime matter, “that which is in potency to substantial existence,”<sup>54</sup> in the configuration that is, for example, Krista. Krista is distinguished from another human being by the matter, which underlies the configuration. After Krista’s death, her intellectual memories (memories of universals), intellectual abilities, and will are continuous with those she had during her life.<sup>55</sup> However, Aquinas believes a human being is not simply the sum of its body and soul parts. That is, though a soul as part of a person is sufficient for a person (and can exist on its own), it is not identical to the person. The substantial form of a human being is not a human being, but is sufficient for the existence of a human being.<sup>56</sup>

The constituents of a normal person are soul and body; however, humans continue to exist in unnatural, abnormal states, such as in death, with the absence of body. A human being is not identical to the substantial form, but is “identical to a substance in the species of rational animal,” which is normally the composite but can sometimes be constituted by one of its metaphysical components. Stump maintains, “[A]lthough a person is not identical to [a person’s] soul, the existence of the soul is sufficient for the existence of a person.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *The Principles of Nature. (De principiis naturae.)* Translated by R. A. Kocourek in *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nature*. St. Paul: North Central Publishing, 1948. Joseph Kenny, O.P., html ed. <<http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas>>

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 79, Article 6.

<sup>56</sup> Stump, Eleanore. “Resurrection, Reassembly, and Reconstitution: Aquinas on the Soul,” in *Die menschliche Seele: Brauchen wir den Dualismus? The Human Soul: Do We Need Dualism?*. “...although the metaphysical constituents of a human being normally include matter and a substantial form, Aquinas thinks that a human being can exist without being in the normal condition in this way, because what constitutes a human being is not the same as that to which a human being is identical.” p. 167.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167-8.

A human being is made this particular individual by virtue of its being a configured form in relation to this very matter.<sup>58</sup> The soul is the one substantial form that makes *this* matter the human being Krista. The soul, as the form of the body, is a substance that is not caused from its individual parts.<sup>59,60</sup> In this way, the soul is not reducible to the material body. “[T]he soul makes matter be not just human, but also *this* human being...this particular individual.”<sup>61</sup> So, the Thomistic soul begins as a state of the human being but persists after the person’s demise.

### III. B. Catholic Doctrine on the Soul and Resurrection

According to Catholic doctrine, as stated by Aquinas and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the soul is real and distinct from the body. Its incorporeal nature is required for its survival of the death of the body, and necessitated by the nature of the afterlife. The soul is the principle allowing for vital activities, so it is responsible for both nutritive and vegetative qualities as well as for consciousness. Capable of “subsisting in itself,” it is thus neither corporeal nor dependent upon the body.<sup>62</sup> The “spiritual soul,” according to the Church, is created immediately by God and is immortal, as it does not perish when the body does, and remains, suspended, until bodily resurrection.<sup>63</sup> By

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<sup>58</sup>Stump, Eleanore. *Aquinas*, (in the series *The Arguments of the Philosophers*). London and New York: Routledge, 2003. p. 208.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 195-6.

<sup>60</sup>Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 76, Article 1.

<sup>61</sup>Stump. *Aquinas*. p. 207-8.

<sup>62</sup>Maher, Michael and Joseph Bolland. “Soul.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 14. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. 18 Jan 2012 <<http://newadvent.org/cathen/14153a.htm>>

<sup>63</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994. Paragraphs 366-68, 382.

resurrection of the body, Catholic doctrine means the resurrection of actual human flesh, as we know it now (weak and mortal); however, when resurrected, the body will be *changed*.<sup>64</sup>

Here, Thomas's philosophy on the soul and its relationship becomes an article of faith; he can be understood as having set Catholic doctrine, as the Council of Vienne of 1311 defines the rational soul as the form of the body.<sup>65</sup> This entails that the soul is substance, but one which is incomplete without the body, since it has a "natural aptitude and exigency for existence in the body, in conjunction with which it makes up the substantial unity of human nature." Therefore, it is the natural state of the soul to be in relation to the body, though its "higher operations" are independent of bodily organ, so the soul is not "wholly immersed in nature," according to the Church. This final statement is not in agreement with Thomistic philosophy, but is the result of Platonic influences of Aquinas's contemporaries.<sup>66</sup> Relatedly, according to the 4th Lateran Council (in 1215), all humans "will rise again with their own bodies which they now bear about with them."<sup>67</sup> Only the body must be resurrected, because the soul cannot die. The resurrection of the body takes place at the end of the world, when all the bodies of every previously living person rise from the earth and are reunited with their respective souls, in order to share in their fate at Judgment. Then, bodies and souls will never again be

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, Paragraphs 990, 1015

<sup>65</sup> Council of Vienne; V Lateran; Brief of Pius IX, 15 June, 1857.

<sup>66</sup> Maher. "Soul." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

<sup>67</sup> Maas, Anthony. "General Resurrection." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 12. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 12 Feb. 2012 <<http://newadvent.org/cathen/12792a.htm>>

separated.<sup>68</sup> Our definitive state, as humans, is as body-soul composite. This state is disrupted by death, but rectified upon resurrection. Death is simply the separation of the body from the soul, and after death the body disintegrates but the soul waits for judgment and resurrection.<sup>69</sup>

The resurrection of the body is an article of faith based on Hebrew and Christian scripture, as well as on Christian tradition. Scripture speaks clearly on this issue, and of course, Thomas must fall in line with scripture. For example, in Job, it is stated “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end [God] will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see [God] with my own eyes—I, and not another...”<sup>70</sup> This entails that everyone will thus rise with their entire bodies, and these bodies will be our very own bodies; the ones we had in life. Our bodies will be perfectly restored, not as they were originally, but having spiritual natures.

Additionally, the Gospel of John instructs, “Do not be amazed by this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear [God’s] voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.”<sup>71</sup> Clearly, resurrection is ingrained within the scripture of Christianity.

Christian tradition makes faith in the resurrection a requirement of all believers, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As stated by St. Augustine, “no

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<sup>68</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994. Paragraphs 176, 177.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, Questions 990, 992-1004, 1016-1018.

<sup>70</sup> Job 19: 25-27, New International Version.

<sup>71</sup> John 5:28-29, New International Version.

Christian should have the slightest doubt as to the fact that the bodies of all men, whether already or yet to be born, whether dead or still to die, will be resurrected.”<sup>72</sup>

Athenagoras, a “Father of the Church” and a scholar living in the second century,<sup>73</sup> states even more clearly that any concerns regarding how the resurrection takes place should be laid aside, as God’s “power is sufficient for the raising of dead bodies...[God] will, when they are dissolved, in whatever manner that may take place, raise them again with equal ease [as their creation].”<sup>74</sup> While the resurrection is an article of faith, it is also rationally congruous within Aquinas’s view, because the soul has a natural propensity for the body, and so their perpetual separation would be unnatural. Furthermore, because the body and soul together were good or evil during life, they must be judged and rewarded, or punished, together at Judgment. Finally, since their separation leads to imperfection, their unity in the afterlife leads to the soul’s consummation of happiness for the good. However, the resurrection would be unnecessary without the fall; “in a state of pure nature” no resurrection would be required.<sup>75</sup>

In conclusion, Thomas’s account of the soul fits well with Catholic doctrine because if the soul is *not* the form of the body, and is independent but making use of the body, then this opens the possibility for the pre-existence of souls, (as there would simply be no reason for God to wait until conception to create the soul) which he adamantly rejects. He refuses to accept such a possibility because of his deep conviction that the

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<sup>72</sup> Augustine. *Enchiridion*. Ch. XXII, 84.

<sup>73</sup> Peterson, John Bertram. "Athenagoras." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 23 Mar. 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02042b.htm>>.

<sup>74</sup> Athenagoras. “On the Resurrection of the Dead.” Chapter 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994. Paragraph 976.

soul, as the form of the body, must be created with the body in its natural state, as God creates things “as they are naturally complete,” and the soul is naturally complete when united with the body.<sup>76</sup>

### III. C. Resurrection

It might seem as if the soul would have to be a separate, independent substance in order to survive the death of the body; if this is the case, then resurrection requires substance dualism, which Thomas rejects. Yet, he believes the soul persists after the death and corruption of the body, and is capable of existence, separated from the body between the time of death and the resurrection. Aquinas believes in a different sort of dualism, one guided by scripture. The philosopher knows that human beings are only dust, but that the dust has a soul capable of returning to God after life.<sup>77</sup>

For him, the rewards and punishment of the afterlife are not only spiritual. Resurrection is an important part of his philosophy on the soul. The human is fulfilled and complete in the body, so the hereafter will take place with souls enmattered in resurrected bodies. In addition to spiritual reward, humans will enjoy material and physical blessings. Because Aquinas’s soul requires a body for its actions, the afterlife’s soul will also be punished or rewarded in corporeal existence. This also has effects for the individuation of the soul. Because individuals are held responsible for their earthly

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<sup>76</sup> Pasnau, Robert. *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. p. 116-118.

<sup>77</sup> Stump, Eleanore. *Aquinas*, (in the series *The Arguments of the Philosophers*). London and New York: Routledge, 2003. p. 192.

actions, the separated soul must be identical with a particular human being. Aquinas accounts for this by explaining the soul as configured in relation to specific matter.

Aquinas states clearly his stance on resurrection, and uses it to back up his philosophy of justice; that is, the promise of resurrection compensates Christians who suffered in this world through a heavenly union with the divine. He says, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, it follows that there is no good for human beings other than in this life.”<sup>78</sup> Resurrection provides the impetus for people to sacrifice pleasures in this life. Thus, it seems essential that Thomas’s description of the soul’s relationship to the body account for resurrection.

Aquinas believes the human who has prepared for the afterlife both morally and intellectually will be rewarded more greatly; however, all reward is through the grace of God. He also believes beatitude will be conferred according to merit, and will render the person better able to conceive the divine. Aquinas accordingly believes punishment is directly related to earthly, living preparation and activity as well.

#### IV. Weaknesses and Counter-arguments

##### IV. A. Interaction

Any substance which understands forms as universals must necessarily not be a matter-form composite, like a human being. A human being is one actually existing, single material substance (which is the body-soul composite), but it also has an intellectual soul (which is the form of the body). While human souls are immaterial, they

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<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 461, 473.

are nonetheless forms of the physical body. Aquinas says, “something one in nature can be formed from an *intellectual substance* and a body,” and “a thing one in nature does not result from two permanent entities unless one has the character of substantial form and the other of matter.”<sup>79</sup> That is, a single substance is created by the composite of matter and form, which is allowed by the special relationship of matter to form (that of actual to the potential). Therefore, the composite is not what understands the immaterial universals, but the soul itself, alone. Humans (as composite beings) were made for rational thought, but only the soul understands universals; this allows the human soul’s operations that are independent of matter.

In this way, Aquinas reframes the mind-body connection and escapes the interaction problem, but this opens him up to another, potentially fatal, flaw. The weakness of his argument is that it is not clear how such a soul could separate from the body and survive its death, despite his protestations that this act of the body is also substantial. Aquinas maintains that the human soul is an abstract form and a concrete particular thing. He has accounted for the soul as the form of the body. It is intuitive, however, that such forms would have to be Platonic (that is, an incorporeal, abstract idea, having the highest level of reality and to which humans have access only through the world of perception and sensation) if they can be said to depart from the body and remain in existence with some function until the time of the resurrection and judgment, as required by Christian doctrine. Aquinas, of course, would never accept his philosophy as

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<sup>79</sup>Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles of Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Literally translated by the English Dominican Fathers. Volume I. London: Burnes, Oates, and Washborne, Ltd., 1924. Book II, 56.



Platonic, especially on this account, because he insists that matter is for the edification of the soul. Plato maintains that the soul simply “uses” matter, but that matter is unnecessary.

If the soul is a state, it must be one that can exist apart from that which bears it. Though the concept of the free radical is helpful as an illustration of the soul as form, it fails to exemplify this aspect; the free radical is not immaterial. The soul as organizing force of the body may be fatal to Aquinas’s psychology. If the soul is seen as a sort of genetic code or as software to the body’s hardware, however, it may be possible to imagine its survival in an immaterial state, to be employed (later, during the afterlife) in organizing prime matter once more.

A counter-objection might suggest that the soul survives between death and resurrection, but is "activated" again upon the resurrection. It does not seem likely that Aquinas would be willing to accept that the soul is totally incapacitated until Judgment, since he insists that the soul retains its proper operations: will, intellectual memory, and understanding.

#### IV. B. Separation, Continuation, Individuation, Identity, and the Resurrection

This state of affairs, wherein the soul begins as a human state but persists after death, presents a particularly difficult problem for Aquinas. Thomas insists that the human soul can survive the death of the body; this much is essential for Catholic doctrine. Yet, he also insists the human soul is substantial form and the proper function

of the human being. Thus, he must account for the form of a material object's continuing to exist despite the cessation of that object's existence.<sup>80</sup>

Thomas does not appear to appropriately answer the question of individuation. The individuation of a disembodied soul is an historical problem within his own context (unlike the problem of causal closure, which is contemporary), and was recognized earlier by Boethius, who stated that things which are individuals are discrete only numerically, and differ only accidentally.<sup>81</sup> Aristotelians (like Thomas) believe we are form-matter composites. Individuation of the soul, after the death of the body, must be accounted for by one of the three types of substances: form, matter, or their composite.

According to this account, the only thing Aquinas can rely on for individuation is the immaterial concept. This is because the composite, which is alive and individuated, does not exist after the death of the body and before the resurrection, so individuation cannot be ascribed to it. Individuation cannot be ascribed to the form itself, because though humans are formally different than other animals, humans are not differentiated by their forms because the human form is the form for the entire species. That is, all humans have the form "human," and once the soul is disembodied, there is no matter by which it can be differentiated. Form individuates things formally differentiated, such as a human from a dog. Things that are formally alike must be individuated by material, but all human disembodied souls are immaterial, and so all human disembodied souls are

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<sup>80</sup> Kenny. p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Boethius. Second Commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*, iii, 11. Translated from *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii In Isagogen Porphyrii commenta*, Samuel Brandt, ed., ("Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum," vol. 48; Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1906), pp. 234.14–236.6.

formally alike: There is no differentiation of the incorporeal soul in this framework. Individuation cannot be explained by Thomas's own principles. Thus, Aquinas is left without individuation of souls after their deaths, and it is not obvious how the individual human souls can re-form their previous bodies, leaving Aquinas's afterlife far different than that elucidated in scripture.

Thus, it is unclear whether Thomas's philosophy accounts for the identity of the human person whose body is resurrected. He has not described how the soul maintains its individual identity after death, through the bodiless time before resurrection. The philosopher admits that parts come and go during earthly life, but maintains that identity is carried by species, which includes form.<sup>82</sup> The problem is that this does not entail individual human souls, as the species (simply, "human") is carried by the rational soul (which belongs to the species in general). So, though the soul maintains continuity after death, it does not necessarily entail *individual* continuity.

Aquinas attempts to account for the human soul's separation from the body at death by placing it firmly between the two worlds of material and immaterial forms. Material forms cannot be separated from the body. The organization or structure of a material object cannot be completely disconnected from the matter of that object. Immaterial forms, on the other hand, are not enmattered; they can be considered intellectual organization. Because the human is the link between these two extremes, the human soul is capable of existing after the death of the body, but it loses many of its functions, and cannot be considered a fully human being. Again, Aquinas insists that the

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<sup>82</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Book IV, Chapter 81.

soul can be separated from the body (as it is substance) but because this separation is unnatural, some essential human functions (notably, the type of knowledge that requires sense perception) are lost.

#### IV. C. Causal closure

Finally, Aquinas's account of the human soul cannot conflict with the causal closure of the physical world. The difficulty of causal interaction, based in physics, is not bridged by his description of knowledge; that is, the philosopher still maintains that there are physical effects from incorporeal causes. In contemporary philosophy, physicalism, the position that everything that exists is physical, maintains the thesis of the completeness of physics, or, relatedly, causal closure. However, one need not accept physicalism to grant causal closure, which simply states that nothing nonphysical can have any physical effect, even within the bodies of conscious beings.<sup>83</sup>

Causal closure entails that "all physical effects are fully determined by law by prior physical occurrences."<sup>84</sup> More definitively, the claim is that "every physical effect has an immediate sufficient physical cause, in so far as it has a sufficient physical cause at all."<sup>85</sup> Most clearly of all, "if you start with some physical effect, then you will never have to leave the realm of the physical to find a fully sufficient cause for that effect."<sup>86</sup> If

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<sup>83</sup> Papineau, David. "Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism." *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*. Brian P. McLaughlin, ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. p. 54.

<sup>84</sup> Papineau, David. "The Rise of Physicalism." *Physicalism and its Discontents*. Carl Gillett and Barry Loewer, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Papineau. "Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism." p. 59.

<sup>86</sup> Papineau. "The Rise of Physicalism." p. 8.

non-physical events cause physical events, then those events must be supervenient on physical events.<sup>87</sup>

What evidence can be found for causal closure? It follows from the first law of thermodynamics, but extensive, conclusive evidence for it did not emerge until the 1950s. The conservation of energy is now considered one of the most basic, fundamental laws of nature.<sup>88</sup> However, the law was not fully established until mechanics described it mathematically, the concept of a single underlying quantity (of changing form) was proposed for different natural processes, and apparently non-conservative forces (even physiological “vital forces”) were re-defined by more fundamental conservative forces.<sup>89</sup> The conservation of energy is not inconsistent with *sui generis* deterministic forces, and emergentists posited such forces until the mid-twentieth century. Since then, however, detailed modern physiological research has virtually ruled out any “such anomalous physical processes.”<sup>90</sup> Biochemical and neurophysiological forces seem to describe the entirety of cellular events.

Since the 1950s, there has been general scientific consensus on the completeness of physics, and recognition that such a “vital force” would effectively break the first law of thermodynamics, the law of conservation of energy.<sup>91</sup> The Thomistic soul can, in this context, be considered a vital force, as it is the vital function of the human being.

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<sup>87</sup> Stoljar, Daniel, "Physicalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2009 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/physicalism/>>.

<sup>88</sup> Papineau, David. “Appendix: The History of the Completeness of Physics.” *Thinking about Consciousness*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002. pp. 232-256. p. 244.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245-6.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255

However, conservation laws disallow the possibility of vital, mental (or “special”) forces. Fundamentally, “special” forces previously considered outside the physical realm have reduced to basic physical forces, and physiologically, organic processes fully described by normal physical forces have accounted for “special” forces.<sup>92</sup> The Thomistic soul can, in this context, be considered a vital force, and this requires Thomas to either reconsider his philosophy of mind, or question the first law of thermodynamics.

Causal closure poses obvious problems for substance dualism, because the principle maintains that physical events do not have non-physical causes. This entails that non-physical mental states cannot affect physical entities, and there is an unbridgeable breach between the mind, or soul, and the brain. This worry may not apply to Thomas’s account of the relationship between the soul and the body, given as he does that the soul is itself a substantial entity even when detached from the body.

Indeed, it would seem that causal closure would not present a problem to Thomistic dualism when one realizes that Thomas places the action of recognizing universals within the capacity of the soul alone. This entails that the soul itself is *being*, an unqualifiedly subsistent entity.<sup>93</sup> However, when one realizes that Thomas has simply pushed back the interaction problem of substance dualism from body and soul to brain and intellect, it becomes clear that causal closure does pose a problem for his metaphysics.

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<sup>92</sup> Papineau. “The Rise of Physicalism.” p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> Klima, Gyula. “Man = Body + Soul: Aquinas’ Arithmetic of Human Nature.” Lecture. Notre Dame Philosophy Colloquium. Indiana, Notre Dame. 31 Oct. 1997. Fordham University, 28 Jan. 2009. Web. Mar. 2010. p. 13.

With this in mind, it is not apparent that Thomistic psychology (as it relies on his epistemology) is compatible causal closure. If things in the non-physical realm have physical effects, according to this principle, it is because those causes supervene on physical causes. That is, mental causes are not ontologically different than physical causes,<sup>94</sup> and mental states supervene on brain states. For Thomas, this would entail that the workings of the soul simply are the workings of the brain. Accepting causal closure and this explanation would commit him to accepting the soul as corporeal, which he would obviously be unwilling to grant.

Furthermore, Thomas wants knowledge to bridge the corporeal and incorporeal realms, but he seems unable to describe how it is that humans recognize universals, or how, in thinking, the immaterial universal is used by the material human. It is clear that we do make use of universals; this is necessary for such human rational tasks as doing philosophy or using abstract concepts. Yet, Thomas must posit divine illumination—divine intervention of a sort that allows for linking the physical and nonphysical worlds—to deal with this issue. Divine illumination cannot be accounted for physically; the very role it plays in Thomistic philosophy is to bridge this gap.

Causal closure is potentially devastating for Thomistic philosophy, because it claims the physical realm is sufficient for explaining any physical effect. As such, mental causes cannot have physical effects. Therefore, the soul cannot affect behavior, and Thomas's account of the relation between the incorporeal and corporeal worlds cannot account for the transmission of universals.

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<sup>94</sup> Papineau. "Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism." p. 55.

The intellect must supervene on brain states if the intellect is going to account for any effect in the physical world, as is clear from Papineau's argument which states the completeness of physics coupled with causal influence and the absence of universal overdetermination requires the reader to accept the identity of the mental with the physical.

“Premise 1 (the completeness of physics):  
All physical effects are fully determined by law by prior physical occurrences.  
Premise 2 (causal influence):  
All mental occurrences have physical effects.  
Premise 3 (no universal overdetermination):  
The physical effects of mental causes are not all overdetermined.  
Conclusion:  
Mental occurrences must be identical with physical occurrences.”<sup>95</sup>

It is unlikely that Thomas would be willing to accept that mental events cannot cause physical events and can only be posited outside the physical realm, considering his conviction that the soul is the first *act* of the body. As the first act of the body, the soul is the vital function of a human being. If the definition of the soul is the actualization of a physical potentiality, then it seems that the soul is essentially the manifestation of the link between the incorporeal and corporeal. At least, the human capacity to recognize universals requires bridging the material and immaterial worlds, in this case something immaterial (universal) causing a physical effect (human behavior).

Additionally, Thomas admits that the unembodied soul is crippled by its lack of a material organ with which to act. Again, Thomas describes the soul as the act of the

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<sup>95</sup> Papineau, David. “The Rise of Physicalism.” p. 9.



body. With no body, there can be no action. The soul informs the body and allows its function; thus, without said body, no function would be possible: a hardship for his theory.

The only other option offered by causal closure is that physical effects are overdetermined by mental effects, but Thomas cannot accept this conclusion because he refuses to allow the dependence of the intellect upon any corporeal body. That is, he cannot identify the universalizing capacity with any organ, as it belongs to the soul alone. Thus, if mental events do not have causal power (as is required by causal closure), he is forced to conclude that the mind is at least reliant on, if not identified with, the brain, or parts of it. Aquinas cannot accept that the mind is reliant on the brain, however, because if it were, it would not be able to function at all when separated from the body after death. And, while he maintains that the separated soul is somewhat diminished in its capacities, he claims it is still able to perform some of the essential functions of understanding, if that understanding is “confused and general,” and of universals only.<sup>96</sup>

Thomas could maintain non-causal incorporeal realms, but (according to physicalism *and* according to his account) humans could not have knowledge of them except by introspection. The theologian accepts that “the intellective soul does cognize all true things in the eternal reasons,” and maintains that humans are able to recognize truth when exposed to it, but cannot account for how this would happen in the incorporeal realm, because he rejects innate knowledge.<sup>97</sup> Aquinas has to rely on God’s light (which

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<sup>96</sup> Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. Question 89, Article 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, Question 84, Article 5.

he believes is provided internally from the beginning of human life, not ongoing) for knowledge of universals.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, in any case, these mental occurrences would not be causal and would not affect behavior.<sup>99</sup> Yet, of course, Thomas is committed to nonphysical causes (philosophical ideas) having physical effects (humans philosophizing). His reliance on divine illumination is just the weak link of his argument, broken by causal closure.

Attempts have been made to discredit causal closure by questioning exactly what is meant by “physics” and concluding that the definition of this term is either meaningless or entails less than physicalists maintain. Defining physics or the physical is difficult. However, what is included in the physical can be described narrowly and preserve the conclusion of the causal argument. That is, the physical can be defined as “the same general kind as are recognized by current physical theory” or simply be described as microscopic (that is, “composed of entities below a certain size”), non-mental or non-biological, and preserve causal closure.<sup>100</sup>

Thomas, were he alive today and aware of quantum mechanics, might at this point argue that mental properties are emergent, and that these emergent properties have causal powers by virtue of downward causation.<sup>101</sup> Emergent properties are often described as novel properties that “emerge” from parts of a whole and the way those parts are put together, but which are not explicable by the parts themselves. That is, an object may

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<sup>98</sup> Pasnau, Robert, "Divine Illumination", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/illumination/>>.

<sup>99</sup> Papineau. "The Rise of Physicalism." p. 10.

<sup>100</sup> Papineau. "Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism." p. 58.

<sup>101</sup> Crane, Tim. "The Significance of Emergence." *Physicalism and its Discontents*. Carl Gillett and Barry Loewer, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. p. 207.

have a property or a power that the parts of that object cannot or do not fully explain, which are not predictable from the sum of those parts.<sup>102</sup> This implies that it is possible for mental properties to have causal powers that cannot be explained fully by the causes of the physical brain. In this case, causation moves from the macro level to the micro. However, it entails that either there are mental causes for physical effects (which boils down to substance dualism and its attendant interaction problem), or that these effects are caused by the physical (and that related mental phenomena are non-causal), which is effectively epiphenomenalism.<sup>103</sup>

Furthermore, quantum mechanics cannot be seen as providing space for mental causes via downward influence, for while the indeterminism of modern quantum mechanics states that certain physical effects are statistical, rather than deterministic, and have no sufficient determining cause, those random physical effects have their probabilities fixed by sufficient immediate physical causes. So, if causal closure includes the physical determination of physical probabilities, then causal closure is safe.<sup>104</sup>

In effect, causal closure requires either type identity of non-physical properties with physical properties of a physical cause, or it requires supervenience of non-physical properties onto physical properties. Thus, the evidence for the completeness of physics demands that the mind is constituted by the brain, which appears to exclude Thomistic dualism. Thomas's philosophy cannot withstand causal closure, especially because his

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211-212.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>104</sup> Papineau. "Causal Closure of the Physical and Naturalism." p. 59-60.

account of knowledge hinges on divine illumination, which does not explain the transmission of universals from the incorporeal realm to the corporeal brain.

## V. Conclusion

This thesis has explicated the connection, for Thomas Aquinas, of psychology and the afterlife. The resurrection of the body, as required by Christian doctrine, provides the philosopher with an opportunity to highlight the benefits of his philosophy of mind. Aquinas properly elucidates the interaction of soul and body by redefining the human; however, in doing so, he creates a new problem, that of how the soul survives the death of the body.

Aquinas, adhering to Christian doctrine, maintains physical and spiritual reward and punishment after death. By accepting the essentiality of both body and soul, he allows for a heaven and hell described in scripture and church dogma. Thomas must depend upon physical resurrection to account for the Christian afterlife, and does not give a clear answer to the question of how the human soul survives in the intervening state between human death and resurrection.

Ultimately, I have provided criticisms of Thomas Aquinas that question his account of universals by applying contemporary understandings of physics as well as on his traditional natural philosophy. Thus, the philosopher fails to explain the mind-body connection in a way that allows for the separability of soul from matter, an immaterial afterlife, and accounts for the interaction of material and immaterial things.

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