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# Recovering the Soul: Interpreting Baruch Spinoza's Doctrine of Mind-Body Identity in the Light of Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysical Theory of Form and Matter

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Guy Stephen Blakemore entitled "Recovering the Soul: Interpreting Baruch Spinoza's Doctrine of Mind-Body Identity in the Light of Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysical Theory of Form and Matter." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Philosophy.

Richard E. Aquila, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Sheldon M. Cohen, Kathleen E. Bohstedt, Thomas E. Burman

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Interim Dean of Graduate Studies

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INTERPRETING BARUCH SPINOZA'S DOCTRINE OF MIND-BODY IDENTITY  
IN THE LIGHT OF THOMAS AQUINAS'S METAPHYSICAL THEORY OF  
FORM AND MATTER

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Guy Stephen Blakemore  
May 2007

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Carolyn Berg-Blakemore, without whose support, encouragement, and dialogue I would not have been able to pursue doctoral studies or complete this project, and to my four sons, Isaac, Jonathan, Jesse, and Ian, who have believed in their dad even when he was not sure he could finish the course.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recognizing my debts, I wish to express, first of all, my deep gratitude to Richard E. Aquila for his incredibly helpful guidance as my dissertation director. He first introduced me to Spinoza's philosophy, and made Spinoza comprehensible to a fledgling philosophy student. His philosophical rigor and subtlety as a thinker challenged me to sharpen my own reasoning about the issue I have argued in this dissertation. In addition to Dr. Aquila, I want to thank Sheldon Cohen, not only for his gracious willingness to continue on my committee even after taking an early retirement, but also for opening up Thomas Aquinas's thought to me. Also, my gratitude is expressed to Dr. Kathy Bohstedt for her input in my thinking about issues related to philosophy of mind. Dr. Thomas Burman, of the History Department, has my thanks for helping me in the matters of Latin translation and interpretive nuance that were involved in the writing of this dissertation.

Beyond these four persons who directly engaged my work, I must express my appreciation to some other significant persons. First, Dr. John Hardwig, who is Chair of the Philosophy Department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, took an interest in my success, even without being personally acquainted with me. For his encouragement and the very concrete administrative aid he provided me in being able to continue my work as a student and "finish the course," I say thank you. Second, I would be remiss not to acknowledge my former professor, Ralph C. Wood, of Baylor University, who has been an intellectual mentor for over a decade and a half. Last and most of all, I would like to thank my wife and children for the many hours they allowed me to put into this dissertation. Those were hours I was not at home being husband and father. They also have my deepest love.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the doctrine of mind-body identity in Baruch Spinoza to discover if there is something in his metaphysical doctrine that is analogous to the way that Thomas Aquinas views the nature of the relationship between mind and body in human beings. The argument put forth in this work is that Aquinas's hylomorphism, in which the human soul is the *form* of the human person, both bodily and mentally, is echoed in Spinoza's doctrine of the *conatus*. No dependence upon Aquinas is implied in this comparative study, but merely the argument that the ways that Spinoza and Aquinas conceive of the mind-body relationship specifically, and human existence more broadly, have some very interesting parallels that have not been observed sufficiently by other interpretation of their work. Furthermore, it is a part of the purpose of this dissertation to suggest that the ways that Spinoza and Aquinas analyze the nature of human existence in the universe, especially organic existence, can provide helpful insights that could enrich contemporary philosophy as it tries to work, in conjunction with modern science, to understand the way that mind and body are present in human beings.

The study is divided into six chapters which provide the following steps in the argument. The first chapter introduces the problems related to the subject of mind and body in both Spinoza and Aquinas, establishing the parameters of the research. Chapter two looks at the Aristotelian background of hylomorphism and argues that it is still a philosophically respectable theory. Aquinas's further development of the doctrine of hylomorphism beyond Aristotle's own foundational theory is the focus of the third chapter. Chapter four turns to Aquinas's discussion of the nature of mind and body

identity. The next chapter deals substantively with Spinoza's doctrine and in a preliminary way points to the affinity he has with Aquinas's doctrine. Chapter six points explicitly to their similarities and shows how each of them argued for the immortality of the human "soul." In this chapter, suggestions are made as to how Spinoza and Aquinas can be dialogue partners in contemporary philosophy of mind.



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## Chapter 1

### On Being Rationally Alive: Why Compare the Doctrines of Thomas Aquinas and Baruch Spinoza

#### The thesis of this project

Very little scholarly attention has been given to the topic that this dissertation addresses. So the thought that one could compare Thomas Aquinas's and Baruch Spinoza's respective doctrines of the relationship between mind and body, at first glance, might strike many as philosophically fruitless. One might assume that only a collision of jarring opposites could be produced in the endeavor. This is understandable, given that Spinoza has been for many years considered to be a debunker of medieval and pre-modern philosophical systems of thought. He has been considered by most to be, in the words of Dan Levin's subtitle to his biography of Spinoza, "the young thinker who destroyed the past."<sup>1</sup> A good many of Spinoza's interpreters assumed him to be only a kind of super-Cartesian who drove the conclusions of Descartes' definition of Substance to its logical conclusions. Hence, Spinoza's ontological monism, where *Deus sive Natura* is the only Substance, has been considered a thorough refutation of the kind of Christian ontology that one could assume is at work in Aquinas and others. As well, a good many Christian philosophers and theologians have dubbed Spinoza an enemy of the faith.

This dissertation is, therefore, a kind of minority report. For its author is convinced that such a radical line of demarcation is unwarranted regarding Spinoza and

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Levin, *Spinoza: The Young Thinker Who Destroyed the Past*, (New York: Weybright and Talley), 1970.

the medieval philosophical scheme. The thesis I propose to explore is this: Thomas Aquinas and Baruch Spinoza offer philosophically interesting and helpful ways of conceptualizing the so-called mind/body problem that, upon close exegetical analysis of the doctrines they advance, show a remarkably complementary, if not similar, commitment to a version of what is today referred to as the “dual-aspect” theory regarding the relation that exists between mind-body. As such, their perspective is, as well, a kind of “identity theory.” I shall argue that Spinoza’s doctrine as expressed in the *Ethics* – that “mind and body are one and the same thing; conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension” (III, P 2, S) – gives post-Cartesian expression to a philosophical insight about the essential oneness of a human being’s existence that can be shown to have very much in common philosophically with Aquinas’s definition of a human person as a “rational animal,” i.e., an individual thing that is simultaneously and essentially mental and physical. One implication of this, which will hopefully become evident, is that one can find considerable help in interpreting Spinoza’s much-discussed doctrine of the identity of mind and body if one first understands Aquinas’s doctrine of hylomorphism rightly and then sees Spinoza’s body-mind oneness doctrine as a further philosophical development of hylomorphism, complementary to Aquinas’s thought.

In the course of the research, it will be demonstrated that the similar hylomorphic doctrines that one can find in Aquinas’s and Spinoza’s identification of body and mind differ significantly from many contemporary versions of the identity theory. Neither Aquinas nor Spinoza granted ontological primacy to the physical. But, neither did they countenance any sort of idealist primacy of the mental. Nor did the various kinds of

dualist ontologies of psycho-physical parallelism or simultaneity fit their demands. The same could be said about non-reductive physicalism. This is because, in the similar doctrines that they espouse, the descriptors “body” and “mind” should not be thought of primarily as substantives in themselves, but instead are designators of irreducible features of a single entity, i.e., the human person. In Aquinas’s metaphysics, this notion of singularity of essence is expressed via the phrase “rational animal.” Rationality is, for Aquinas, the intrinsic reality – the Form – of our bodily existence (our animality) *qua* actually existent entity; it is not something supervening upon or emerging from a preceding biological state of affairs. But, as will be shown, “Rationality” considered as the Form of the human body must not be thought of as a *thing* that exists. Rather, it is, in Aquinas’s view, a subsistent *principle* that is necessary for an adequate metaphysical account of the fact that *rational* animals – bodies that self-consciously know and reason – exist in the first place. Similarly, Spinoza expresses a very similar view of the coextensive reality of the body and what he calls “its idea.” He treats the extended body and the mental awareness of that body as the (ultimately) single state of affairs that is a human being’s existence. He does this through his development of the concept of *conatus*. For Spinoza, as I shall show, each individual thing – ordinary particular – is made to be the very thing that it is by a conatic essence specific to itself; and *conatus* is a principle in Spinoza’s metaphysics that in fact makes everything alive (*animata*) to some higher or lower degree.

I want to argue that *conatus* and *anima* are, for Spinoza, closely related concepts. The *conatus* of a *res* in Spinoza’s metaphysics can be seen in one sense to be analogous to the essence of a thing that makes it to be – and therefore to be “alive” – in a particular

way.<sup>2</sup> He describes *conatus* in III, 7: “The striving *by which* each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the *actual essence of the thing*.”<sup>3</sup> My reading can take into account the general observation that being *animata* is a term, for Spinoza, that is related to the concept *mens*. Also, the term is hardly used in *Ethics*. However, what I want to demonstrate by my reading is simply that being *animata* in Spinoza’s metaphysics implies, for him, that there is a *something* (which I argue is related to the notion of *conatus*, but not explicitly described as such by Spinoza) and this something can be equated with the sort of thing that Aquinas calls the *anima*. Furthermore, my reading shows how being *animata* means more for Spinoza than simply having *mens*. *Namely*, the concept of an organism *being* animated or living can be taken to mean, in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, precisely being *actualized* (i.e., “conatically” actualized by an organizing principle) in such a way as to have a mind. This way of reading Spinoza has the advantage of showing that the mind does not just attend in parallel fashion the body, but suggests how we can read Spinoza as positing that mind and the body are “one and the same thing.” In his metaphysics, I shall argue, this is the case because, for him, each of these Modes, as he calls them, are the manifested features of a conatic essence expressed in or through the specific conatic essence of each human being’s life.<sup>4</sup>

As is the case for Aquinas in his theory of the soul as the Form of the body, we will see that the concept of conatic essences (*anima*) is, in Spinoza’s estimation, a

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Miller, “Spinoza’s Axiology,” <http://post.queensu.ca/~miller/Papers/Spinoza's%20axiology.pdf>, 152.

<sup>3</sup> My emphasis. Through out this work all references to Spinoza’s *Ethics*, *trans.* Samuel Shirley, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> This raises the question of the reality of Attributes and the question of whether the modes of the Attributes of thought and extension are real or only ways of conceptualizing the one reality. This question is related to issues that will be addressed more fully in Chapter 5.

necessary description of what enables the “one and the same thing-ness” of the mind and body. Therefore, for both Aquinas and Spinoza, descriptions of the body’s relationship to the mind in any particular instance – any ordinary (human) particular – can only be adequate when discussed in terms of a unified human essence that accounts for the irreducible identity of mind and body in that individual. In their metaphysical discussions of the psychophysical phenomenon that is a human being, neither the physical body nor the mind can be considered to be more fundamental causally. Body does not “cause” mental powers, nor does the mental “cause” bodily activity. That claim (at least in Spinoza) is uncontroversial. It is more controversial to claim such a thing for Aquinas, but I think it is true for him as well, strictly speaking. What I want more specifically to argue is that for both philosophical schemes the ultimate “cause” in regard to the active life of human persons is the particular life (*anima/conatus*). Spinoza would, I think, find a point of agreement with Aquinas where the latter writes that we do not speak of the mind knowing something, but the person, and similarly that the arm does not lift a weight, but the man. For each of them the mental activities and the bodily movements of a human being are the acts of a single living entity.<sup>5</sup> The *anima* (soul or *conatus*) is the reason for this oneness of existence, in both philosophers’ views. And the *anima* is itself an essence that is an organizing principle that cannot be reduced to purely physical descriptions, but cannot be adequately described in strictly dualistic terms either (Augustinian or Cartesian or otherwise).

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<sup>5</sup> At this point the fact that Aquinas calls human beings “primary substances” and Spinoza considers them to be “modes” of the One Substance is not in view. For both, the particular human we might refer to as mental and physical is a specific entity.

## Secondary source considerations

The research of others – most notably Henry Wolfson – provides a background for this present work. Wolfson famously, and controversially, argued in his now classic *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Process of His Reasoning* that Spinoza can most helpfully be interpreted when one reads him as interacting with and being influenced by medieval philosophical categories. *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, presents Spinoza as a kind of latter-day Aristotelian, i.e. holds that Spinoza essentially seizes the Aristotelian categories (as did Aquinas) of form and matter and then translates them into his categories of thought and extension.<sup>6</sup> Wolfson also makes a significant argument that Spinoza’s theory of the natures of a mode of extension and the idea of that mode is essentially a restatement of Aristotelian hylomorphism.<sup>7</sup> One possible way to interpret the implication of Wolfson’s reconstruction of Spinoza’s thought is to see Spinoza as Aquinas’ “philosophical cousin,” at least. Such a reading suggests that Thomas’s philosophy -- as a thirteenth century construct also influenced by Aristotle, but developed beyond Aristotle’s – and Spinoza’s views might be fruitfully compared and contrasted as Aristotelian philosophies of hylomorphism, broadly defined.

Wolfson also contends that Spinoza’s development of the categories *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* is best understood as Spinoza’s engagement in dialogue with Thomists on the nature of God as cause and the world as effect. Wolfson asserts that “Spinoza’s description of these two phrases seems to be a modification of the description given by Thomas Aquinas” and that Spinoza’s reason for the “modification of

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<sup>6</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, Vol. I, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 234.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 46 – 48.



[Aquinas's] description can be adequately accounted for.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, while Spinoza is developing his metaphysical argument, he is engaged in dialogue with the intellectual legacy of Aquinas as a background, even where he nuances his concepts in contradistinction from the medieval Christian.

Very few scholars have taken Wolfson's proposals as a starting point for interpreting Spinoza. Perhaps Thomas Cook is no doubt correct in his assessment of this circumstance. He argues that viewing Spinoza as a more medieval figure makes him seem to contemporary philosophers to be “out of touch with philosophical questions and issues of current interest.”<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Bennett's assessment of Wolfson is exemplary of the general attitude. “[Wolfson's] labor and learning are awesome, but the philosophical profit is almost nil.”<sup>10</sup> E. M. Curley, another of Spinoza's recent respected commentators, agrees with Bennett's assessment, but demurs from Bennett's total disregard of Spinoza's scholastic background.<sup>11</sup> While the thesis of this project will not address the question of Wolfson's scholarship analytically, it is his insights that point us in a helpful direction for this further and more focused analysis of Spinoza's thought in relation to Aquinas.

Others beyond Wolfson have also charted similar waters. Before Wolfson's work, Dunin-Borkowski, in *Der Junge Spinoza*, brought attention to the formative

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 16. Wolfson points out that Spinoza denies the Thomist notion of God as “an intelligent and purposive cause” and that Spinoza also defied their notion of God as only immaterial substance, which allowed him to develop his idea of the modes of substance, both extend and mental. One question, however, to look at is how the Thomists themselves might have departed from Thomas's idea of the analogy of being and his philosophy of participation in God's being.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Cook, <http://fox.rollings.edu/~tcook/personalpage/SpinozainEnglish.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1984), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton, N J: Princeton University Press, 1988), 137, n 2.

influence exerted on Spinoza's theory of the Attributes of the one Substance by certain seventeenth-century Christian discussions on how to understand the relationship of the "persons" of the Trinity.<sup>12</sup> In the centuries between the thirteenth and the seventeenth, Aquinas's treatment of the Trinity proved to be mightily influential in Catholic and Protestant theology.<sup>13</sup> This does not suggest Spinoza's dependence upon Aquinas, much less a commitment to Christian dogma. Dunin-Borkowski rightly concludes that Spinoza totally rejected the Christian dogma of Trinity. Nevertheless he contends that he paid due attention to the philosophical exposition of the distinction of persons in the unity of the Trinity that Christian theology offered. This was a conceptual framework for Spinoza's doctrine of the unity of the infinite Attributes of Substance. Once again, there are interesting possibilities raised for purposes of historical interest, at least to the effect that Aquinas and Spinoza might be considered together for philosophical purposes.

Even more directly related to the thesis of this present project, Efraim Shmueli persuasively argues that Spinoza's much-discussed lack of clarity in his theory of Attributes can be adequately understood as Spinoza's endeavor to reconcile the intellectual heritage of medieval subjectivism (nominalism, from Maimonides) regarding attributions made of God and that of medieval objectivist (realist) views. Shmueli contends that Spinoza actually spans the divide in a way that harkens back (even if unintentionally and independently) to Thomas's basic view of the issue.<sup>14</sup> Aquinas has been called a "moderate realist," because he argued that the distinctions and similarities

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<sup>12</sup> Stanislaus Von Dunn-Borkowski, S. J., *Der Junge de Spinoza* (Muenster, 1920), 340f; 451; 489f.

<sup>13</sup> M. William Ury, *Trinitarian Personhood: Investigating the Implications of a Relational Definition* (Eugene, Oregon, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001), 215 – 224.

<sup>14</sup> Efraim Shmueli, *Journal of Religious Studies*, 6-7 (Fall 1978- Spring 1979), 61 – 72, 71.

that we perceive among things must be real if they have existence in our minds.

Regarding the distinctions between the Attributes of God, therefore, Aquinas argued that they are real as “distinctions of reason,” but “in their highest form the Attributes are identical with each other and with the simple divine essence.”<sup>15</sup> Shmueli has argued that one can discern an influence of Aquinas (indirectly) on Spinoza’s concept of Attributes. He argues that Spinoza’s treatment of the Attributes of Substance was a reinvigoration of the medieval debate about the nature of universals, especially as to whether any predication could be made of God.

Ultimately, Shmueli argues that something akin to Aquinas’s notion of “the analogy of being”<sup>16</sup> allowed Spinoza to develop a view of the Attributes that was neither a nominalistic view nor a strictly realist view. Thomas viewed the divine Attributes as truly aspects of God’s essence, but known in our experience and conceptual framework by analogy. He argued for this understanding because of his doctrine of God as the Act of Being. By this ontological starting point, Aquinas could argue that the being of creation participates in the Being of God. Shmueli’s interpretation of Spinoza in the light of this Thomistic view is that it formed a significant portion of the philosophical backdrop against which Spinoza developed his notion of Attributes.

Seeing the indirect influence of a Thomistic doctrine is helpful, Shmueli concludes, in addressing the much discussed issue of how Spinoza really viewed the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 68.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 67 – 68. “In general it was Thomas’s position that terms signify God to the extent that our intellect knows Him. Attributes are predicated of God neither universally nor equivocally but analogically. The divine perfection, like his wisdom or goodness, exists in God in a super-eminent and infinite (i.e., unique and most perfect degree). The Attributes really exist in God and can be properly predicated of him. The analogical sense, however, does not mean that we have an adequate positive idea of what is objectively signified by the divine attribute.”

ontological status of the Attributes. According to Shmueli, Spinoza's thought was consonant with a general "Thomistic" analysis, i.e., that Attributes are real entities. Our intellect, therefore, conceives Attributes as the true and real features – not simply subjective delineations – that are present to us as "characterizing" the essence of Substance. "The attributes are forms of God's potency and, thus, aspects of natura naturans, not just ways of thinking, not abstractions. They are inseparable in reality, though distinguishable in kind. . . Distinctions are not divisions."<sup>17</sup> However, the Attributes are not constitutive of Substance according to Aquinas. Aquinas denies a constituting role to the Attributes of God because, on his view, God is simple (in the sense that God is not a composite of any other concepts or principles or entities or stuff that could be considered more properly basic than the essence of God itself). However, the Attributes of God that we can name do indicate something real about God as God relates to the world; that at least is Aquinas's view. Observing this about Aquinas's understanding of God, we can see why Shmueli argues that a Thomist background for Spinoza's metaphysics would make him not to be a nominalist. Spinoza, Shmueli concludes, is not ultimately a nominalist about Attributes, but embraces a way of conceiving universal statements about God which echoes Aquinas. "The basic view, then, of Spinoza [on the Attributes] is the Thomistic view of the attributes (universals) as extra-mental realities without being distinctly existent on their own, not the [nominalist/subjectivist] view of Maimonides."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

## **The contribution of this project**

The foundational thesis of this project is not, therefore, unprecedented, even if contemporary scholarship has tended to downplay it. What will be offered is an analysis of the metaphysical views that each of the two philosophers presents in the hope that two distinct but related contributions might be made. The first is a demonstration of a metaphysical view about the identity of mind and body that the two share. Such an approach need not imply that Spinoza is in any way indebted to Thomas's metaphysics, as an informing influence. Nor will it be argued that Spinoza's and Thomas's larger metaphysical programs are ultimately compatible. Yet, if it can be demonstrated that Spinoza's doctrine of mind-body sameness can be legitimately read as a post-Cartesian development that expresses a nuance of a general "Thomistic" view, Spinoza scholarship, as well as Thomistic scholarship, might develop a new and enriching dialogue. The second thing that this analysis will allow is a kind of dialectical engagement of the doctrines of each with the other, one in which Aquinas's and Spinoza's thought might engage one another in fruitful exchange.

In the course of the dissertation, Aquinas's and Spinoza's conceptions of the question of mind-body identity can be seen as part of a larger philosophical issue: The very fact of life in an essentially material world. In Spinoza's case this is captured in his doctrine that while all of reality (the One Substance) is essentially extended (as well as mental and infinitely modal in unknowable ways). Life is also ubiquitous. However, his ontology allows for a subtle discrimination about what "being alive" means, so that the "aliveness" of a rock is not identical with the "aliveness" of a slime mold nor the "aliveness" of a slime mold the same as that of a lobster, nor is the lobster's way of being

alive the same as that of a primate or a human. On Aquinas's view, a distinction between animate and inanimate is perhaps more clearly drawn. However, life is not, for him, a supervening aspect that emerges from or supervenes upon an otherwise lifeless material world. He insists that being alive is a particular way that many entities are in fact material.

For both philosophers, the fact that one is dealing with life that is manifest in living things, some of which, at least, have self-consciousness, is a matter of no small consequence.<sup>19</sup> The reality of self-consciousness (especially in humans) emerges for both as an expression of the way that humans are alive as material creatures. Hence, self-consciousness is not a Cartesian mystery for either one. Rather, it emerges from the very fact of the way that human beings are physically alive. This is not to conflate consciousness or self-consciousness with life, but to acknowledge that both Spinoza and Aquinas see the former as a higher-order feature that life expresses. In allowing the analyses of each of these men to engage the other, one might move some direction toward a better grasp of the larger issue of consciousness as a feature of living things.

If Aquinas and Spinoza offer a similar way of conceiving the issue of mind-body metaphysics that offers a new way of probing into the questions raised in philosophical reflection, then this dissertation might point contemporary philosophers to an important resource. Should that be the case, then Bennett's disdain for the "medieval setting" of

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<sup>19</sup> That Descartes' metaphysics left Western philosophy with a view of the extended world that saw living things mechanistically is well attested. However, much of contemporary philosophical reflection is still captive to Descartes' siren call. Consider, for instance, the options that frame the discussion today: (1) either we must "explain" causality of the mental and physical interaction or (2) we feel we must jettison the non-material altogether. This is the legacy of Descartes' schema not Spinoza or Aquinas.

Spinoza's thought might prove to be shortsighted. Rather than being a philosophical albatross around Spinoza's neck, an affinity for a post-Cartesian Thomistic analysis of the mind-body "problem" might prove, instead, to provide him with philosophical wings. That metaphor implies a claim that is, no doubt, a controversial one in contemporary philosophy, but is one I hope to defend.

### **A summary of the argument**

This thesis of this dissertation as I have tried to sketch it above is not, I admit, immediately apparent, so careful exegetical and interpretive work will be essential to the project. Each philosopher must be allowed to speak on his own terms, so that what he says can be expounded within the larger context of his ontological commitments. Doing this, some important interpretive questions that are perennial issues in Aquinas and Spinoza studies respectively, regarding each of their doctrines of the relationship between mind and body, must be addressed in ways that prove integrative and reconciling.

Let us begin with Aquinas. He describes the "intellectual principle, which is called mind or intellect," as not only incorporeal but as "a substance, that is, something subsistent" (*Summa* I a, Q 75, a 2). Aquinas argues further that the "intellectual principle," which is the human soul, is the Form (in the Aristotelian sense) of the human body, but because intellect performs operations (the act of knowing) that do not ultimately depend upon any bodily mechanism, the "intellectual principle" is itself a substantial Form in its own right. If one were to leave Aquinas's doctrine there, possibly a straightforward substance dualism would fit him, but his analysis does not stop there. He contends vigorously that a human being must be conceived as "a rational animal," with animality and reason seen as "one and the same thing" (I a, Q 76, a 3). This claim

cuts against a dualistic interpretation of Aquinas. Here Aquinas would seem to be offering a medieval theory of mind-body metaphysics that can be described as a version of identity theory, where a human being's body and mind are essentially the same thing, i.e., the human being in question.

There is no shortage of commentators who claim that such a way of describing the state of affairs that attends the presence of rational consciousness in human beings is self-contradictory in Aquinas's basic Aristotelian metaphysics. How can it be, the question is put, that the intellectual soul can be the Form of the body if it is itself an entity in some way. Forms do not exist – except conceptually – apart from the physical things that are “informed” by them. Absent the thing so “formed” the essence itself can no longer be thought of as persisting. Aristotle certainly seems to have affirmed this. But the notion of a subsistent *anima*, not only raises questions about the cogency of Aquinas's theory of the nature of the soul; it also raises the question of how human beings can be analyzed as essentially “rational animals” if a substantial soul is, ontologically and existentially speaking, a prerequisite existent in the hylomorphic entity. Here the critique is that Aquinas cannot provide an adequate analysis for the ontological oneness of a human being's physical existence. Despite his remonstrations, Aquinas is – so his critics claim – a substance dualist *simpliciter*. His arguments notwithstanding, many contend, either one can conceive of an intellectual soul as a Form (Aristotle) or as a subsistent entity (Descartes), but it cannot be both.

This thesis will argue that one can make sense of Aquinas's claim about the subsistent nature of the soul as a Form and allow him to be consistent, and perhaps even convincing. In order for that to happen, though, we must unpack the meaning of his



description of the soul as an intellectual principle. Essentially, *anima* must be understood, in Thomistic terms, as a *principle* that is the essential cause (in the Aristotelian sense) of the organization and interrelatedness of the component parts of the human body. *Anima*, as a principle of the organization of matter, is the ultimate reason that rationality is enabled as a feature of the world of extension in the life of the biological creature called human. In other words, for Aquinas, this “intellectual principle” is a feature of the biological life of a human being when one is considering that life biologically.

In Aquinas’s argumentation, an “intellectual principle” is conceivable as a pre-existing organizational force, whose existence makes possible the subsequent existence of real primary beings – i.e., primary substances. As an organizational force, *anima* is properly thought of as a subsisting entity that is a real feature of the world; however, this subsistence does not entail its being conceived as an independently existing entity. As a subsisting entity, therefore, this principle is (at least potentially) conceptually independent of the actual organism it enables to exist as a rational animal, even if it only has real concrete existence in the life of that actual organism. Hence it is conceivable as an independent feature of the world and as having its own reality and subsistence, although not existing as an actuality on its own. Such a reading of the issue would enable us to contend that the concept *anima* is a necessary descriptor (even if one uses another term), designating a real subsistent feature of the world. That would not, however, cause us to have to commit to a Cartesian view of the soul as an entity that exists in itself.

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is crucial to show that Aquinas does not promote a self-contradictory theory, much less that he is a closet dualist. Without this

preliminary explication and analysis of his metaphysics, his hylomorphism will prove to be no help at all in considering the puzzle of Spinoza's own purported obscurity in his claim that the human mind and the human body are "one and the same thing." Properly interpreted, however, Aquinas is self-referentially coherent and therefore a helpful lens through which to read Spinoza. Showing this to be the case for Aquinas's general metaphysics will be the first challenge that we will address.

Spinoza, similarly, has presented his own challenge to his interpreters. His oft-cited and commented-upon definition of the identity of mind and body has provided no small amount of stress for his best interpreters; and Michael Della Rocca speaks for many where he describes Spinoza's statements on the identity of mind and body as "one of the most famous and puzzling claims in the *Ethics*."<sup>20</sup> How are we to understand the argument of *Ethics* III, P 2, sch. where he contends that body and mind are "one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension"? Spinoza certainly sounds as if he is promoting a numerical identity between a mode of extension and its idea or between the body and mind.<sup>21</sup> Given the causal and conceptual barrier that Spinoza insists is a feature of Attributes in *Deus sive natura*, how can a Spinozistic metaphysics allow for this identity? Those who wish to defend the idea that Spinoza is promoting numerical identity have offered hypotheses including dual-

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1996), 118.

<sup>21</sup> Aquila, Richard E. "The Identity of Thought and Object in Spinoza," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. XVI, No 3, July, (1978). "Spinoza defends a form of the 'identity theory' with respect to mind and body." Aquila contends that Spinoza's conception of said identity is "unique in the history of philosophy" and that this uniqueness is what makes Spinoza's doctrine "incredible." Cf. Della Rocca, p 119-120 for another interpretation of Spinoza as holding a numerical identity theory. Cf. Henry Allison, *Benedict De Spinoza* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), p 89 and R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) for interpretations of Spinoza that deny he sees this relation in terms of numerical identity.

aspect theories, parallelism, and Curley's fact-proposition interpretation. More recently, Della Rocca has offered a semantic reading of Spinoza in which the concept of the referential opacity of specific contexts and Spinoza's own parallelism are the undergirding of his identity theory.<sup>22</sup>

However, many of the readings mentioned above leave us, in Spinoza studies, with a functional dualism in Spinoza's metaphysics that in practice is ultimately no different than Descartes' substance dualism. For instance, parallelism allows for what Bennett calls a "mapping"<sup>23</sup> of the mental with the physical. Parallel tracks, even on the same road, are still ontologically distinct entities. Modes, understood along the lines of parallelism, end up being conceivable only as twin realities. But Spinoza's encumbering description – "one and the same" – seems *prima facie* to be claiming more. Human beings, in Spinoza's ontology, may not be substances, but parallelism strikes me as denying the essential singularity of *anima* or essence in each ordinary particular that Spinoza wanted to contend for in *Ethics*. Parallelism misses Spinoza's rather obvious insistence that two modes are two necessary descriptions of a human being's life, but that *qua* necessary descriptors they are descriptions of one and the same *res* (thing). In the interpretation offered by parallelism, however, the modes may be related, but they are not the "same thing." I believe Spinoza's metaphysics would not countenance that. Thus, a better explication is called for.

If Books III and IV of the *Ethics* are meant to follow from Books I and II, in Spinoza's strategy, then the functional dualism that parallelism leaves us with cannot be

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<sup>22</sup> Della Rocca, 118 – 140.

<sup>23</sup> Bennett, 127 – 153.

what he envisions by his causal and conceptual boundary between extension and thought. Only if a human's mind and body are together a singular entity that is "one and the same thing" can Spinoza legitimately argue that emotions, desires, and volition are really the mental expression of bodily needs and encounters in the world. Unless this oneness functions in Spinoza's metaphysics in a way that is consistent with his causal boundary, the idea of the body – the thoughts reflecting the affections of the body that are that idea – and the body along with its affections are really two things in function. The living human organism – a specific and single *conatus*, I argue, for which Spinoza vigorously contends – lives, as a result of the dual functioning that parallelism entails, two lives rather than one. Parallelism misses Spinoza's intention, I shall argue, because what Spinoza wants to claim in II, 7 is not the existence of parallel orders (ideas and things), but the essential sameness of the orders. In other words, Spinoza is arguing that when we speak of "things" (here Spinoza gets sloppy in his terminology, equating things and modes of extension) and ideas of "things," we are not speaking of two distinct realms, but of a singular reality that is only adequately described in terms of two distinct descriptors. These descriptors are the modes in which the one single entity manifests its essential conative life. That, at least, seems to be the implication that Spinoza draws out in Books III and IV of *Ethics*.

In this regard, dual-aspect theory is probably a better way to envision the intent of Spinoza's doctrine. However, it fails, as well as do some others, to give an adequate explication of the essential unity for which Spinoza's doctrine of mind-body unity seems to call. The explanation of Spinoza's metaphysics that dual-aspect explanations generally offer simply takes for granted that there are singular and irreducible ordinary particulars.

Thomas Nagel is representative in this regard. Defending himself against Searle's treatment of his position on mind and body, Nagel writes: "Searle identifies me as a defender of property dualism. I prefer the term 'dual aspect theory,' to express the view *deriving from Spinoza* that mental phenomena are the subjective aspects of states that can also be described physically."<sup>24</sup> This move, of course, solves the ontological and functional unity problem that, I contend, some versions of the parallelism doctrine fail to solve. Yet it does so without providing an adequate explanation for why Spinoza might contend for such unity in ordinary particulars *qua* ordinary particulars. The standard expressions of dual-aspect theory seem to me simply to beg the whole question that drives Spinoza's ontology in *Ethics*. Furthermore, dual-aspect theory tends to identify the question of the ultimate identity of the individual modes (minds and bodies) as only resolvable, for Spinoza's metaphysics, in God or Nature, where the ultimate unity of the Attributes (Thought and Extension) is grounded. The unity of ordinary particulars, therefore, is pushed back into the realm of the unknowable and the unaccountable. It could be the case that Spinoza forces us to do this and was not concerned with the unity of ordinary particulars *qua* the particular *res* that each particular in fact is. However, given the import that the identity doctrine seems to play for Spinoza, we owe it to ourselves to see if his philosophy might not provide us with resources for understanding how he might indeed envision the unity issue in regard to the concept of *conatus*.

In any case, we cannot avoid putting the questions to Spinoza regarding both the "real distinction" of the Attributes and the "real distinction" of the Modes of those

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<sup>24</sup> "Searle: Why we are not Computers," reprinted in Thomas Nagel, *Other Minds: Critical Essays 1969 – 1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96 – 110, at 105 n 6.

Attributes. Related to this is the question of whether or not the Attributes and their Modes are ultimately objective, and if so how, or are subjective ways of our knowing. This is a debate of no small consequence and controversy in Spinoza studies.<sup>25</sup> And dual-aspect theories do not help us at this point. In this project it will be shown that, for Spinoza, the Modes are real features of things and are really distinct from one another. Hence, if dual-aspect theory sees the Attributes as really identical in God and really distinct only in our ways of considering God, as “aspects” thereof, then it offers a further problem for adequately interpreting Spinoza. Since dual-aspect theories do not address the question of what provides the constitution of the singularity, in function and existence, of a particular *res* (singular ordinary particular) in the first place, the dual-aspect description of Spinoza’s ontology is superficial. Hence the need to examine, as this dissertation will do, the import of Spinoza’s doctrine of *conatus* as the singular essence of an ordinary particular that has dual-aspects to its singularity.

What I hope to offer is an alternative to dual-aspect theory as a description of what Spinoza is after, although it currently comes closest to expressing the impetus of Spinoza’s thought. The focus of this present work upon *conatus* will provide what dual-aspect theory requires, i.e., an accounting for the constitution of the singularity and unity of the “one and the same thing” that is expressed via mind and body. Clarity in this regard requires us to concentrate upon the conatic essence of a single ordinary particular (human or otherwise, but for our purposes especially human) in order to establish that the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Timothy Sprigge, “Spinoza: His Identity Theory”, in *Philosophy Through its Past*, ed. Ted Honderich (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 149 – 158 for a discussion of the various approaches taken to this issue and the implications that they have for interpretation.

unity of the *res* in question is real, not simply a function of our way of regarding the object of our analysis.

If Shmueli is correct, as quoted above, then the Attributes are, for Spinoza, real distinctions, even if they are not divisions of Substance or do not constitute Substance. It is worth the effort, therefore, to see if Spinoza might also be able to assert the reality of the distinction between the modes of the Attributes while nonetheless allowing for the unity and singularity of each ordinary particular in itself as an ordinary particular. In other words, we can assert the singularity of a single particular in a way that truly goes beyond regarding them merely as different aspects of an underlying single Substance. Spinoza, it will be argued, far from rooting all distinctions merely in our understanding and establishing all unity in the One Substance, contends for the unity of the “one and the same thing” as being rooted in the essence of the *res* that is “one and the same thing” that is “expressed” both as a particular body and as “the idea” of that body. This project will endeavor to show that the identity of mind and body as “one and the same thing” is, in Spinoza’s ontology, a necessary feature of the essence (the *conatus*) of the entity in question in each case, *qua* the existent essence that it is. This, I contend, is ultimately what Spinoza is seeking to establish in propositions 7 and 13 of Book II. If Spinoza actually does conceive of the situation in this manner, his position is, therefore, reminiscent of Aquinas’s claim that it is not the soul or mind that knows, nor the hand that lifts. Rather, as Aquinas contends and Spinoza could, I argue, affirm, it is the person who knows or lifts.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In Spinoza’s case he argues in III, 2 on the basis of II, 7 that “the body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest.” He intends to help his readers see

In regard to this area of Spinoza's thought, Hans Jonas's observations are to the point. Recognizing that Spinoza's central concern in *Ethics* is "a foundation for psychology and ethics," Jonas rightly observes that the metaphysics of Spinoza enable him to produce what other modern philosophers up to his time had not, namely, a theoretical construct in which "an organic individual is viewed as a fact of wholeness rather than of mechanical interplay of parts."<sup>27</sup> Even more, Jonas contends, Spinoza's metaphysics allowed him to continue to provide the modern period a great paradigmatic gift: "For the first time in modern speculation, a speculative means is offered for relating the degree of organization of a body to the degree of awareness belonging to it."<sup>28</sup> In other words, Spinoza offers, according to Jonas, a conceptual framework in which mental states are features of a physical organism and the physical states of said organism are conditions (but not causes) of mental awareness.

Building upon Jonas's claims, we can begin to understand a bit more clearly how to translate what Spinoza means by the Latin verb *expressa* when he says in II, P 7, sch. that mind and body as the same thing (*res*) that is simply differently "expressed" via respective reference to either the Attribute of thought (of which minds are the modes) or the attribute of extension (of which bodies are the modes). Many of Spinoza's interpreters see *expressa* in this scholium to proposition 7 in Book II as meaning something equivalent to the meaning of the word "described." What has been greatly under analyzed, however, in Spinoza studies concerning this "puzzling claim" is the

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that neither of these modes can determine the other, because they are not distinct from one another on a more fundamental level, i.e., the existing human being who is the source of activity as a single *conatus*.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism," in *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Marjorie Grene (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973), 269.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 271.



relationship that such a statement has to his more basic concept of physical organisms as living entities. Yet this is the very issue upon which Spinoza builds his theory of mind in II, 13. Taking Jonas's observations into consideration, we can begin to see Spinoza's use of the term *expressa* in more than nominalist terms. *Expressa* can be taken to refer not primarily to the act of our describing or expressing something we observe (nominalism), but rather it might be seen as a function of the essence of the thing itself which is given existential "expression" (objectivism) in distinct modes of existence. This will mean that the thesis I put forth regarding Spinoza's theory sees the unity of any distinct ordinary particular -- which, of course, are the product of a specific and unique *conatus* that essentially establishes and maintains any ordinary particular in question as a distinct particularization of the essence of the One Substance that exists for us in the really distinct Attributes of Substance. However, in this context, distinct modes are not thought of by Spinoza as being thing-like in essence. In the strictest technical terms for Spinoza, a particular mode that is a body and the particular "idea of that mode" which is its mind are the ways that the singular entity (the *res*) exists in the world. What is "expressed" in the Modes of Extension and Thought is the organizational complexity of a *physical* entity that is capable of *thought*. And the greater the complexity of the physical organization, the more capable, in Spinoza's view, is the organism of higher-level thought.<sup>29</sup> The distinct modes of extension (its body) and "the idea of that mode" (its mind) by which the organism is "expressed" are "one and the same thing" in the context of the organism's singular life *qua* physically organized living entity. But the modes are not in themselves

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<sup>29</sup> Spinoza's pan-psychism is not counter intuitive regarding our common understanding that all things are not alive. There is room in his doctrine to account for different definitions of the equivocal term "alive."

things or essences, rather the organism that exists with the modal features of mind and body is itself the thing under consideration. The distinct modes of thought and extension are features of its life expressed via the two Attributes of *Deus sive Natura* of which human rationality can be cognizant.<sup>30</sup>

To clarify the emphasis I am placing on the *difference* between the concepts “distinct modes” and “distinct things,” we can contrast Spinoza’s view to that of Descartes. While we cannot take the time to consider the complexities and controversies of Cartesian dualism, it is uncontroversial to note that a Cartesian mind is in itself a thing with particular existence quite apart from the body with which it is associated in existence. And the mind is not only distinct from, but is in some significant ways cut off from all other entities. (Consider his dependence upon the goodness of God to assure the dependability of his ideas of the world and other minds.)<sup>31</sup> This of course means for Descartes that he is fundamentally “a thinking thing” – a mind or soul. But in Spinoza’s

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<sup>30</sup> Jon Miller (see note 2) observes the import of *conatus* in Spinoza’s thought in a way that complements the concerns of this present thesis. He contends: “The introduction of *conatus* and the emphasis on the power of acting necessitates the introduction of another factor into the discussion. It may be that something is useful if it furthers (or at least does not inhibit) our ability to act so as to preserve our being. Spinoza thought, however, that we have *two* radically different powers of action and as a result, he thought there were two radically different orders of value. To explain this—that is, to explain why he thought that we have two different powers of action and, consequently, that there are two different orders of value—a digression into his metaphysics is necessary.” But Miller ultimately embraces parallelism uncritically in his interpretation of Spinoza’s metaphysics. “As the metaphor of parallelism suggests, the two orders—the mental and the physical—run parallel to one another without ever intersecting. A thought can lead to another thought but it can never produce or otherwise affect a body, and vice versa. It is true that substance is changing (or: appears to our intellects as though it were changing); and since we perceive substance under the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension, the changes happen simultaneously. But there is an insurmountable conceptual barrier between the thinking and the extended realms, such that interaction between them is impossible.” Hence, we are again left with a lack of explanation as to how such parallel tracks are one. The reading offered in this project can allow for Miller’s notion of dual axiological realms within the human being, but can underscore better than parallelism how the values after which humans “strive” because of their *conatus* are ultimately united as human values, rather than values of the body and values of the mind.

<sup>31</sup> “The Fifth Meditation,” trans. John Cottingham, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 48 f.

view it makes no sense to talk this way. Not merely his pursuit of the implications of the Cartesian definition of Substance to its logical conclusions causes him to reject this kind of dualistic theory of human nature. He is, as well, concerned to show how body and mind are essentially descriptors of the “one and the same thing” that is expressed as (or through, depending upon how one interprets the ontological existence of the Modes) distinct Modes and, therefore, conceived as a Mode of extension when considered from one perspective and conceived as a Mode of thought when viewed in a different light. The distinct Modes, then are not distinct things to be defined as entities, but are rather more aptly understood to be real features of existent things that are really distinct *qua* Modes from one another.

Given that we are capable of encountering the existence of the One Substance (Reality) in only two of the infinite Attributes of God, our understanding can experience and describe all of the ordinary particulars that we name only as physically extended (a body) and/or as mental (a mind). This means that the Modes *qua* features of the one thing that is “expressed” through them have boundaries imposed on their adequacy for describing reality. So, mental Modes describe only phenomena that fit within the general Attribute of Thought. And a similar rule fits for bodily Modes and the Attribute of Extension. (Herein is the ontological foundation for the so-called causal boundary between Extension and Thought and their various Modes.<sup>32</sup>)

Jonas’s interpretation of the significance of Spinoza’s emphasis on the relationship between organizational complexity and the degree of awareness that an

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<sup>32</sup> See Della Rocca for a discussion of the causal boundary, especially in the light of the opaqueness of contexts in which we experience events and things, 121 – 129.

organism is capable of is certainly consistent with Spinoza's discussion in II P 13 where Spinoza intends to bolster, by way of a metaphysical demonstration of the nature of "bodies," his earlier claim that (I, P 7, sch.): "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two different ways." In the Scholia, Lemmas, Proofs, Corollaries, and Axioms that Spinoza introduces for the purposes of demonstrating how to conceive of "the union of mind and body" he seeks to account for the underlying principle(s) that account for the ongoing identity of individual entities. It is quite significant and telling, I argue, that he does this in a proposition that is interested in the relationship between mind and body. He informs us, however, that he is prompted to do this because of his conviction that "nobody can understand [the union of mind and body] adequately or distinctly unless he first gains adequate knowledge of the nature of the body."

Spinoza contends straightforwardly in this proposition that bodies are distinguished not as primary substances as they are in Aristotle, but on a distinction of motion and rest. And the motion and/or rest of any particular body is determined by a prior body, *ad infinitum*. Yet, when he speaks of what he calls "composite bodies," i.e., those that are made up of many different components, Spinoza must introduce the concept of *conatus*, although he does not introduce it as a term until much later in the work. I am suggesting that he must have in mind here, at least, something analogous to *conatus* in this proposition, even if he does not use the term, because he has to speak, when considering complexly organized living entities, of how composite bodies or, as he says, "individual things," *preserve* their own natures. Spinoza must have conceived of some principle that could account for modal identity over time, given his monism, since

he denies that individual entities are in any way substantial in their existence. Instead, they are products or “effects” of interactions with other modes – determinations established by changes in motion or rest between bodies and between complex organisms. Again Jonas’s observations are instructive: “The continuity of determinateness [of a thing’s identity] throughout such interactions (a continuity, therefore, not excluding change) bespeaks the self-affirming ‘*conatus*’ by which a mode tends to persevere in existence, and which is identical with its essence. Thus, it is the *form* of determinateness, and the *conatus* evidenced by the survival of that form in a causal history, i.e., in *relation* to co-existing things, that defines an individual.”<sup>33</sup>

What Jonas, and many others apparently, have failed to notice, however, is that such a conceptual framework was offered centuries before in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. It is articulated in his particular development of a doctrine of hylomorphism that he received from Aristotle. This failure keeps scholars from recognizing a helpful archetype by which one could better understand the intent of Spinoza’s much and variously interpreted claim. Building upon Aristotle’s definitions, but going beyond them, Aquinas contends that *anima rationale* is the formal essence that causes (in the Aristotelian sense of an essential or formal cause) a human body to be the kind of body it is and produces in the *union* of form and matter a human person who is an irreducibly singular “substance” that is inherently minded as a feature of biological existence. While form and matter, as technical metaphysical concepts, are alien to Spinoza’s ontological vocabulary, a careful reading of Aquinas will show that, although in different terms and

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<sup>33</sup> Jonas, 265.

based on a distinct ontology, the great medieval Aristotelian-Augustinian synthesizer discussed a human being's minded physical existence in a way that predates Spinoza's analysis of the mind and body as "one and the same thing, conceived under different attributes." John O'Callaghan comments on the general orientation in Aquinas's thought that this present project will demonstrate in the course of its own exploration and analysis:

. . . for Aquinas we live but *one life*, the life of a rational animal. . . Aquinas argues that the principle of rational life just is "one and the same thing" as the principle of animal life in the human being. Thus the life of the mind or intellect is identically the life of the animal that is human. . . Aquinas leaves no doubt about his desire to emphasize the absolute unity of human life in all its manifestations; animal could not be included in the definition of man, *if the principle of animal life were not "one and the same thing" as the principle of rational life in man.*"<sup>34</sup>

The description of mind and body as "one and the same thing" that is conceptualized in two distinct ways, based on the ontological difference between the attribute of extension and the attribute of thought, is perhaps rhetorically a Spinozistic novelty. It is not, however, a philosophical innovation altogether. Aquinas, as O'Callaghan suggests, contends in his essential definition of a human being as a rational animal for a similar sense of identity between the mind and body of a human person when he, in the *Summa*, argues that *anima rationale* is the Form that causes a particular person's body to be what and to be all that it is. "Rational soul" is not in Aquinas's thought a term that refers to the mind strictly defined or to the mental "aspect" of a human being. Instead, it is a term that denotes some essential principle (an essence) that

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<sup>34</sup> John O'Callaghan, "Aquinas Rejection of Mind," *The Thomist*, vol 66, no. 1 (January 2002), 49. My emphasis.

accounts precisely for the human body being the kind of body that it is – a body capable of rational life.

Foundational for both Aquinas and Spinoza is the conviction that human beings are in every aspect of their life and every phenomenal feature of their existence a part of the material world. Human nature, therefore, must be described philosophically in such a way that the essential nature of human beings is conceived in terms of active agency and passive receptivity, rather than simply in terms of the Cartesian mind-body dualistic split. By active agency I mean that both Spinoza and Aquinas begin with the empirically immediate idea that humans are actors in the world they perceive. By passive receptivity I indicate their shared conviction that human beings – both physically and mentally – are acted upon by features or entities of this same perceived world. And they are acted upon in both modalities by the very same world. This focus on agency means for Aquinas and Spinoza that, from an even more fundamental metaphysical commitment on their part, when one is philosophically analyzing human beings the real issue is not body/mind interaction, but what it means to be a singular *living* agent in the world.<sup>35</sup>

The problem of body/mind interaction is not a question they are troubled with, contra Descartes and other dualists. Nor are they troubled with trying to account for the

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<sup>35</sup> This way of envisioning the state of affairs that is a human being's existence is what undergirds both Spinoza's and Aquinas's epistemologies. They are not worried about whether or not one can have adequate knowledge about the world. Instead, both of them argue, that epistemological certitude is possible into the very nature of reality. This certitude is possible for them, without reference to the concurrence of God or the veracity of God (ala Descartes, and in some ways Augustine in his doctrine of divine illumination of the mind.) Instead, certitude is possible because in the world an action upon the body is ultimately an action upon the mind, because it is an action experienced by the embodied knower. The act prompts intellectual awareness and reflection. While their epistemological commitments are beyond the scope of this present analysis, and are quite discreet in their particulars, nonetheless both of them can contend for adequate knowledge of the world on the basis of their monism regarding the relationship between mind and body.

presence of mindedness in an otherwise materialistic world, as though one must be able to describe how mind is, if not actually produced by some physical feature of the world, then in some other way added on to it. Neither dualism nor emergentism nor supervenience as metaphysical problems troubles them. While dualism and various forms of physicalism are often seen as the two mutually exclusive options in contemporary philosophy, Hilary Putnam's evaluation is informative, I think, where he describes present-day philosophy of mind as methodologically Cartesian.<sup>36</sup> The metaphysical schemes of Aquinas and Spinoza avoid, however, the dilemma that methodological Cartesianism creates, because in both of their philosophical anthropologies, the concept of *anima* plays the critical role. Furthermore, as I shall emphasize, neither of them employs this concept in a univocal and exclusive sense in reference to human beings as does Descartes and all other mechanistic physics of early modern philosophy. Both of them, rather, employ the term to describe states and features and components of living beings generally and human beings particularly. In so doing, both of them endeavor to express their metaphysical understanding of the relationship of the body and the mind in terms of what it means for a human being to be irreducibly mental and physical with neither "mode" (not Aquinas term) being more ontologically foundational.

This reading leads to a second interpretive issue. I suggest that Spinoza's view of how a thing's conative essence organizes it is quite similar to Aquinas's notion of "soul" conceived as subsisting form. The soul, for Aquinas, is a metaphysical principle that is

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<sup>36</sup> Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 110 and 170.



the essence that makes a living thing to be what it is, and therefore has a logical and (in some sense) ontological priority with respect to the existing entity. Similarly, the essence of a thing in Spinoza's thought – its *conatus* – is a metaphysical principle that must be understood as having a logical priority in understanding the thing and a metaphysical priority as a principle that organizes the entity in question to be what it is and to sustain its identity across time. So soul in Aquinas functions in a way that is analogous to the notions of essence and/or *conatus* in Spinoza. "Mind," thereby, is not a synonym for "soul," but is the feature of living organized beings that have, on the basis of the essence that organizes their existence, rational consciousness. Hence, for neither Spinoza nor Aquinas does the term "mind" name either an independently existent entity in human beings. Whereas "mind" does not, for Spinoza, denote a feature of human beings that is a radical departure ontologically from the "essence" of living things generally, he would not enter into disputation with Aquinas where the latter contends that "rationality" is unique to human beings. Jonas notes in this regard that "the universality of the principle [of anima and the attendant presence of "thought"] by no means obliterates those distinctions in nature by which we speak of animate as against inanimate things, of sentient as against merely vegetative organisms, and of conscious and reasoning man as against unreasoning animals."<sup>37</sup>

### **The contemporary relevance of this project**

Historical interest in Thomistic and Spinozistic scholarship motivates this work. But that interest is not exhaustive. In so far as this thesis can help point Spinoza

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<sup>37</sup> Jonas, 271.

interpretation toward a vantage point in which his doctrine of the modal identity of mind and body can be better accounted for than on a dual-aspect theory – which seems to me to be the best of the current interpretations – it might also allow contemporary philosophers to see that Aquinas, rightly understood, might equally be appropriated as a helpful historical resource (in concert with Spinoza) for current metaphysical analysis of the intricate relationship between human mentality and biology as features of the world. The language of *anima* might indeed need to be recovered.

Thus, the final aspect of this thesis will be to consider how the issues raised in the exegetical and interpretive analysis of Aquinas's and Spinoza's doctrines might adequately address some contemporary issues in cognitive science and the philosophy of mind and body. One could say that this project ultimately seeks to point to a Thomistic-Spinozistic trajectory for contemporary questions, rather than merely sufficing as a study of Thomas and Spinoza in historical detail.

The philosophical helpfulness of this perspective on the nature of mind and body identity can be seen when one considers the length of time that philosophers have contemplated, discussed, and offered various theories to “solve” the mind-body problem. Strenuous and laudable philosophical efforts notwithstanding, the relationship of mind and body in human beings remains a conundrum in contemporary philosophy. At least one philosopher has outright argued that “we cannot solve the mystery.”<sup>38</sup> Colin McGinn contends that understanding how biology and conscious thought (or consciousness of thought for that matter) are related might be beyond the mental ability of human beings,

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<sup>38</sup> Colin McGinn, “Can We Solve the Mind Body Problem, *Problems in Mind: Readings in Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Jack S. Crumley II (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Co., 2000), 543.

just as other perceptual and conceptual issues are “closed” to certain mental systems. Our mental awareness and capacity to form explanatory concepts, as a feature of our biological make-up, might be (and most likely is) thus cognitively closed.

The invisible parts of the electromagnetic spectrum are just as real as the visible parts, and whether a specific kind of creature can form conceptual representations of these imperceptible parts does not determine whether they exist. Thus cognitive closure with respect to P does not imply irrealism about P. That P is (as we might say) noumenal with respect to M does not show that P does not occur in some naturalistic scientific theory T – it shows only that T is not cognitively accessible to M. Presumably monkey minds and the property of being an electron illustrate this possibility. *And the question must arise as to whether human minds are closed with respect to certain true explanatory theories.* Nothing, at least, in the concept of reality shows that everything real is open to the human concept-forming faculty -- if, that is, we are realists about reality.<sup>39</sup>

Most of the current debate in philosophy of mind operates on the presumption of, as Jaegwon Kim notes, “the ontological primacy or priority of the physical in relation to the mental,” so that the physical properties of things are regarded as “*basic* and what mental features *they* have is wholly dependent on their physical nature.”<sup>40</sup> For most who concur that this description adequately expresses the state of affairs of our conscious physical lives a further conclusion follows. It is simply assumed that if one rejects the ontological priority of the physical then one is saying “that there are things in the spacetime world other than physical things, like Cartesian souls, or at least that some things in the world have certain properties that are independent of their physical nature.”<sup>41</sup> In any case, as Kim further observes the quandary of the mind-body relation continues to challenge us to resolve two issues that present themselves in our lived experience.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 544.

<sup>40</sup> Jaegwon Kim, *Philosophy of Mind* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 12.

“If we are prepared to embrace reductionism, we can explain mental causation. However, in the process of reducing mentality to physical/biological properties, we may well lose the intrinsic, subjective character of our mentality – arguably the very thing that makes the mental mental. In what sense, then, have we saved “mental” causation? But if reject reductionism, we are not able to see how mental causation would be possible. But saving mentality while losing causality doesn’t seem to amount to saving anything worth saving. For what good is the mind if it has no causal powers? Either way, we are in danger of losing mentality. That is the dilemma. . . .

. . . It is not happy to end a book with a dilemma, but we should all take it as a challenge, a challenge to find an account of mentality that respects consciousness as a genuine phenomenon that gives us and other sentient beings a special place in the world and that also makes consciousness a causally efficacious factor in the working of the natural world. The challenge, then, is to find out what kind of beings we are and what our place is in the world of nature.”<sup>42</sup>

But perhaps the difficulty resides in the very nature of the thing being conceptualized. Is the mind body “problem” really a problem in the way that some think it is? Does causality and interaction really present us with an insoluble puzzle? Perhaps the very starting point of our consideration is wrongly placed and we are trying to “solve” a problem that is actually rooted in some previously instantiated state of affairs. Conceiving of mind and body rather as states of a single entity’s unified life, that is itself the product of an essence giving principle, is a better way to approach the subject. It will, at least, consider some issues that drop off the table of discussion in much of contemporary philosophy’s “methodologically Cartesian” approach. The approach of Aquinas and Spinoza is to look beyond the phenomena of mind and body and to seek for a cause of the profound unity of the mental and the physical.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 237.

## **The procedure of the project**

Toward the ends described above, the dissertation will unfold in the five subsequent chapters to follow: The second chapter will deal with the Aristotelian roots of Aquinas's hylomorphism as the foundation upon which the "Angelic Doctor" developed his metaphysics of mind/body and human personhood. Here we want to look at the philosophical motivations that drove Aristotle to such a doctrine, especially noting the questions he thought could be answered by his view of act and potency as fundamental ontological principles at work in the world. This distinction becomes the basis upon which he developed his particular usage of the Platonic categories of "Form" and "Matter," giving him a significantly different ontology of plurality in unity. Chapter Three will build on this chapter and will focus on Aquinas's further development and *unique* expression of the Aristotelian doctrine. This chapter is foundational for what we must consider in the fourth and fifth chapters.

The fourth chapter will focus attention specifically on the challenge of interpreting Aquinas's view of human *anima* – the "intellectual principle" of human existence – as both a substantial Form and a subsistent principle in its own right. This will enable us to understand Aquinas's doctrine of human being's as "rational animals." It will also make it clear how Aquinas's doctrine of mind-body can be understood as a version of identity theory, very much a medieval anticipation of the kind of identity that Spinoza wanted to assert. Hence, in Chapter Five, utilizing the insights of the third and fourth chapters, we consider how best to understand Spinoza's doctrine of *conatus*/essence. Here we will consider Spinoza's ontological commitments to Substance and its modes in the light of the category of *conatus*/essence. We will show how the

“Thomistic” reading offered in these pages can be helpful in addressing issues related to Spinoza interpretation that other interpretations miss.

In the final chapter we will draw out some of the conclusions of this work and also consider how to understand their respective doctrines regarding the state of the soul after the death of the body. For Spinoza this doctrine is cast in terms of the immortality of the mind. For Aquinas it is presented in light of the Christian doctrine of resurrection. We shall endeavor only to suggest ways that these doctrines can be made intelligible in the light of their other ontological commitments. It will be argued that these doctrines, while perhaps not convincing to scholars, need not be viewed as dangling issues that are incoherent in the larger schemes of their particular philosophical commitments. As a final task, suggestions will be offered as to the philosophical import of the confluence of Spinoza's and Aquinas's doctrines, namely ways that the study of human existence might be recast as a unified enterprise in the *search* of the body's mind and the mind's body.

## Chapter 2

### **Hylomorphism: The Essences that Enable Substances**

As a first step into our critical comparison of Aquinas's and Spinoza's philosophical analysis of the nature of the mind-body distinction in human beings, we must understand what the doctrine of hylomorphism of the Aristotelian-Thomistic variety actually entails. The import for this dissertation of gaining clarity about this doctrine is apparent. This must be done before we may look to Spinoza's philosophical demonstrations in order to show how hylomorphism, as a theoretical construct, can help us understand the meaning of Spinoza's assertion that mind and body are "one and the same thing, expressed in two different modes." This will allow us, then, room for the argument put forth in this thesis that the respective conceptual schemes of the medieval Angelic Doctor and the "young thinker who destroyed the past" actually offer views of the unicity of the human person as a psycho-physical entity that are philosophically quite similar. Furthermore, careful consideration of Aquinas's metaphysics of mind and body, will allow us better to judge how their theories may also differ.

In this chapter, therefore, we turn our attention to the seminal development of the doctrine of hylomorphism that one finds in Aristotle's metaphysics. Here we engage a view that takes seriously a view of all individual physical particulars as metaphysically composite in nature. This general exposition of the Aristotelian background of Aquinas's doctrine will thus help us understand more completely, in the next chapter, what motivates Aquinas to contend that a human being is a *compositum*, i.e. a unitary entity produced by the union of matter and a "substantial and subsistent form" – soul. In turn,

then, we will be able to show in the following chapters what Aquinas's doctrine of mind-body relation and interaction really involves. So doing, we will be able to correct some misinterpretations of Aquinas on this point. However, the present chapter will only very briefly outline the major premises of Aquinas's own formulation of the doctrine of hylomorphism and will give its main attention to an analysis of the theoretical problems that motivated Aristotle's development of his hylomorphic view of "primary substances." This Aristotelian background is the foundation upon which Aquinas built his system, but he also went beyond it in his own particular development of the doctrine of hylomorphism. In turn, understanding Aquinas's dependence upon and distinction from Aristotle, will be an important bridge for our latter forays into philosophical territory that analyzes Spinoza's doctrine of *conatus* as involving something very similar to Aquinas's understanding of the form or essence of an individual entity.

Considering Aristotle's foundational role in this theoretical analysis is important, given that the Aristotelian background of the doctrine of hylomorphism being considered is regarded as suspect by many philosophers, quaint by others, or of only historical interest by, perhaps, a majority. Perhaps we can at least provide an account of Aristotle's reasoning that allows us room for the suggestion to be made later in this dissertation, i.e., that hylomorphism can be a helpful concept in contemporary analyses of mind-body. At best, it will help establish that such a claim for hylomorphism is cogent. Also, by considering Aristotle's development of this theory, we will be able to see how Aquinas nuances hylomorphism in very important and philosophically justifiable ways that part company with Aristotle.



## **An overview of Aquinas's theory**

Aquinas's definition of individual entities as "primary substances" – and the pluralist ontology this entails – is well known. Employing Aristotle's general conceptual framework, he conceives of each human being as a basic particular entity that is constituted as a composite of what one could call more basic forces, i.e. form and matter in union with one another. He embraces this description for human beings, furthermore, because of his doctrine of matter. Since matter, as we shall show, in Aquinas's view, is not only non-self-organizing, but never really exists apart from organization, all material beings are necessarily (metaphysically) composite beings. These composite beings are the ordinary particulars of our experience and are the epistemological starting point for all our knowledge. Not simply following Aristotle, but further developing his insights, Aquinas contends that primary substances are ontologically basic entities upon which all other Aristotelian categories of existence depend. This is, of course, the famous substance/accident distinction. Philosophy must pursue, however, an even more fundamental question, in Aquinas's mind. The question: *How* does a particular thing have existence, in the first place, as the thing it *is* with all of the various predicates (both essential and accidental) that one may establish are true in regard to that entity's existence? The issue at stake in this question is one that requires us to discern within the world itself the principle(s) by which one might provide an account of the particularity and specificity of existence of individual entities. And in this question we find an echo of the concern raised in chapter one regarding the ordinary or standard dual-aspect theory regarding mind-body relatedness that some of Spinoza's interpreters embrace.

With Aristotle, Aquinas argues that no existent thing *qua* the particular substance that it is can be conceived to be self-explanatory or self-defining. Rather, each entity we experience is analyzable into more fundamental constituents. Stated differently, the question philosophy must pursue, in Aquinas's view, is what principle or principles are at work making the thing in question to *be* the particular thing that it *is*.<sup>1</sup> "Form" and "matter" are simply terms that name these fundamental principles. This analysis, however, does not imply that either of the principles – form or matter – can be considered to be itself a thing that has its own particular existence. Rather, these two together are the component principles of specific entities. And it is the entities themselves that have existence as particular, unique beings whose essences *qua* individual being are incommunicable, even if they share some features of organized existence with other beings (members of the same species). The essence that an entity is has to be, in Aquinas's view, seen as something other than either the matter or the form that are component principles of the thing's existence; it is also more than the relationship that exists between the matter and the form. Only of any entity that has a particular and unique essence, Aquinas contends, can we say properly that it exists. Hence, only ordinary particulars are adequately called substances.

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<sup>1</sup> The ambiguity of the copula is well known in Aquinas. Being something entails a question of actual existence and the question of identity as a particular entity. The entire work *On Being and Essence* is motivated by Aquinas's desire to get clear about the relationship between these two things and the distinction between these two different implications of the verb to be. For a good discussion of the objections to Aquinas's use of the copula in philosophical reasoning see Fredrick Copleston, *Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 82 -89. See Gyula Klima on the copula in Aquinas's thought: "Aquinas' Theory of the Copula and the Analogy of Being," *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy*, vol. 5, 2002, <http://www.pla.uni-bonn.de/EnglishPages/start.htm>.

In *De Ente et Essentia* (*On Being and Essence*), he provides analysis of the constituent elements or principles (form and matter) that are necessary descriptors in any account of the existence of every being. Aquinas asserts,

In composite substances we find form and matter, as in man there are soul and body. We cannot say, however, that either of these is the essence of the thing. . . . the essence of a thing is that which is signified by the definition of the thing. The definition of a natural substance, however, contains not only form but also matter; otherwise, the definitions of natural things and mathematical things would not differ. . . Nor can it be said that essence signifies *the relation* between the matter and the form or *something superadded* to these, for then the essence would of necessity be an accident and extraneous to the thing, and the thing would not be known through its essence, contrary to what pertains to an essence. Through *the form, surely which is the act of the matter, the matter is made a being in act and a certain kind of being*. Thus, something that supervenes does not give to the matter existence in act simply, but rather existence in act in a certain way . . . When such a form is acquired, we do not say that the thing is generated simply but only in a certain way.<sup>2</sup>

The crucial concept in this analysis is that “form” is the “act of the matter.” What Aquinas means by the use of this ancient way of describing the conditions under which a thing can exist can be understood as follows. There is a feature of reality (what he calls a form) that causes any specific ordinary particular in question to be the particular thing it is. Since each particular that we ever encounter exists not only as itself, but it also exists as a particular kind of thing, when we define an ordinary particular in terms of its whatness, we are, Aquinas argues, identifying a feature of reality that the specific ordinary particular we are analyzing shares with other entities that are similar to it. Following Aristotle’s lead, Aquinas concluded that the specificity of material organization that simply *is* the ordinary particular must be the result of some principle that is distinct from

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<sup>2</sup> All of the following quotations from *De Ente et Essentia* are taken from *On Being and Essence*., Armand Maurer (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968). The present citation is from Chapter 2, 149. Emphasis mine. Herewith, Mauer.

the material composition itself. The active force, therefore, should be conceived as a real aspect of the state of affairs in the world of our sensory experience. Because principles such as these are an *active* feature of the world, they are part of the cause, in Aquinas's view, that results in a particular arrangement of matter being, for example, an apple tree rather than a sheep. Form is the active feature that accounts for the specificity of material organization. As Thomas puts it, 'form' names how "the matter is made a *being in act* and a certain kind of being." Matter as such, he concluded, could not be self-arranging, nor self-moving.<sup>3</sup>

The analytical conclusion he reaches – that there is a distinction between form and matter – did not suggest to Aquinas that this difference (between matter and form as constituents of existent essences) implied an ontological dualism of being in things.

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<sup>3</sup> *Contra Gentiles*, 2, 54. Since, at least, Descartes gave philosophical expression to Newtonian principles in physics, thereby creating the now-famous (or infamous) Cartesian dualism, the dominant approach to the physical world and to living things has been to conceive of the world mechanistically. Aquinas would find this quite curious, since the principles that organize matter are not themselves material. They may, of course, be measured physically. However, that would not, he might argue, rule out the necessity of distinguishing between the material components of physical structures and the non-material (although physically measurable) principles that "informationally" organize them. A mechanistic view, therefore, in current debates in biology shapes the dialogue between the two opposing camps. Hence, one can find in both Neo-Darwinian (N-D) theories and the proponents of Intelligent Design (I-D) an unquestioned assumption: that the best way to understand the function of living things is to conceive of them as highly intricate machines. The difference between N-D and I-D is not mechanism, but the way the design of these "machines" came about. For N-D it is "blind chance." For I-D the design itself bespeaks a designer. Neo-Darwinian evolution contends that matter is, in a sense, self-arranging and Intelligent Design theory posits that it has been arranged by an intelligence. The fundamental question that a metaphysics of form and matter in Aquinas's philosophy raises is whether or not the mechanistic model itself is adequate. Mechanism assumes a kind of ultimate "lifelessness" of the world, a world of chemicals, molecules, and forces. But, it is question worth exploring the radical ontological distinction between elements and organisms, *qua* material, and the "information" that facilitates a particular arrangement in matter. Philosophically analyzing the process by which the matter that is arranged via DNA *information* comes to be capable of said arrangement, does not commit one to a dualistic or non-scientific view of the relationship between matter and form. It does, however, take as a serious philosophical question the nature of the *information* that enables material organization in the first place. For an interesting defense of Aristotelian hylomorphism see John Goyette, "Substantial Form," in *The Thomist*, Vol 66, No. 4 (October, 2002), 519 - 534. "...the mechanical explanation of the functions of the body may explain how the parts of the body work together, but it does not explain why the material elements are found together in such and such an order in the first place, nor how this order is maintained."

Neither matter nor form has real existence apart from the primary being which exists as the *compositum*. Furthermore, neither matter nor form can be considered to be more fundamentally the thing itself. The primary being/substance (the essence) that results from this union of form and matter, thereby, is a particular *kind* of entity that is more than either the matter of which it is made or the form which creates in union with the matter “a being in act.” Again, each defined primary substance (ordinary particular) is an essence on Aquinas’s view, and this essence is something more than its matter or its form or the “relationship between matter and form.” This entails that, for Aquinas, any primary being *qua* the essence that it is cannot be viewed as a supervenient feature. Neither can an essence be thought of as an emergent reality over and above the relation of the union of matter and form. Rather, the essence is the entity we are considering; it is simply analyzable in terms of its matter and form.

The distinction between “form” and “matter” is the product of an even more fundamental level of analysis, which Aquinas picks up from Aristotle, as well: the distinction between “potency” and “act.” As Joseph Owens notes regarding Aristotle’s metaphysical reasoning, “Problems emerging from matter and form, such as the identity of the material and formal elements in the *one thing*, seemed soluble only in terms of potency and act.”<sup>4</sup> It is important, therefore, to have an adequate idea about the Aristotelian background of this metaphysical concept to help us understand the Thomistic application of it later. So, let us now consider the analytic considerations that produced this theory of bi-integrant composition in Aristotelian metaphysics.

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being and Act in Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1963), 403. “A special treatment of act and potency is therefore quite in order after [books] *ZH*” [in *The Metaphysics*].” My emphasis.

## Aristotelian background

### Substance and accidents

Aristotle develops his understanding of the essential singularity of each primary substance as a result his view that individual concrete entities – ordinary particulars – are ontologically foundational. Therefore, they have epistemological priority. He develops this notion as a result of his logical analysis of the ways that our language enables us to describe the world out of our immediate experience; for him, language follows thought. As Fredrick Copleston has said of Aristotle’s theory of the relationship between language and thought, language is “built up as an expression of thought and this is especially true of philosophical terms.”<sup>5</sup> The objects of our awareness present us with things whose existence can, and must by virtue of the logic of our language, be analyzed in terms of “categories” or “topics” of being.

By Aristotle’s analytics, we predicate of each item in our catalogue of experience either that they are a determining feature of something, or alternatively, themselves an existent entity that undergoes such determination: for example, the color of a person’s skin considered as a color versus the skin in which the color exists. The technical expression Aristotle gives to this analysis of what our experience of the world requires of us takes the following form. For some *X* that we describe with reference to another thing *B*:

1 – *X* is understood to exist as a feature of *B*

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<sup>5</sup> Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 280. For Aristotle’s development of his logic see: *Categories* and *Topics*, where he posits a ten-fold linguistic division of predicates. But in *Posterior Analytics*, A 22, 83, a 21ff, b 15, ff, the ten-fold division is reduced to eight. Here *cheisthai* and *echein* are relegated to items of other categories.

- 2 – **B** does not exist as a feature of anything, but is simply itself.
- 3 – **X** has no existence except as a feature of **B**
- 4 – **B** can exist in the absence of **X**
- 5 – **X**, therefore, (by 2 & 4) is not essential to the definition we have of **B**
- 6 – **B** gives existence to **X** (by 3)
- 7 – **X**, therefore, (by 2 & 6) we could never call a particular entity
- 8 – **X**, furthermore, (by 3) is not reducible to **B** essentially
- 9 – Hence, **X**, exists, but only in **B** and not as **X** per se
- 10 – **B**, therefore, exists as **B** but not in anything else<sup>6</sup>

In *The Categories*, the examples Aristotle gives are knowledge (**X**) and the soul (**B**) or the color white (**X**) and a body (**B**). He contends that knowledge is real when it is in a knower, but there is nothing called “knowledge” that has any existence on its own, but only when predicated of a knowing subject. Similarly, a white body can exist as qualified by the whiteness of it, but that whiteness does not exist as a subject of discussion anywhere except in that body (or another body in which whiteness is instantiated). On the basis of this, Aristotle reasoned that we are correct to describe some items in our catalogue of experience as the “substances” in which other states of affairs exist. The other states are called accidents. These substances cannot, in Aristotle’s view, be thought of as existing *in* anything more properly basic than their own actual existence. These individuals that provide the locus for the states of affairs that depend upon them or

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<sup>6</sup> “The Categories,” ch. 2, 5 – 6, *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed., J. L. Ackrill (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 5 – 11.

existence are *protai ousiai* (primary beings).<sup>7</sup> Such primary beings are, by definition, one and the same thing with themselves regardless of the accidents that accrue to them.

### **Actuality and potency**

In the actual existence of each *prote ousia* one observes changes, development, or alterations in the act of its being what it is essentially. Because of this Aristotle posited that there is a distinction in *prote ousia* that must be marked between what he called the “actuality” and the “potency” of these ontologically foundational entities. By this discrimination, Aristotle was attempting to provide a philosophical insight into the nature of the sensory world that is filled with beings that are not static in their existence. Reflecting on the intractable nature of our sensory awareness that presents us a world in which change is the rule, Aristotle, via metaphysical analysis, set out to define the ontological status of change.<sup>8</sup> According to Aristotle, in the actuality of a primary being’s state of being, as it is at any given moment in its “act of being,” there is specific and focused potential inherent in them to become other things. However, the potential to become some other actuality is not unlimited in the particular being under consideration. Rather, the potential is a “potency” – a power or capability – that is limited by the essence of the being. And this endeavor ultimately led him to formulate his understanding of the way that “form” and “matter” function as descriptors of the ontological reality of change in *protai ousiai*.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Generally *protai ousiai* is translated “primary substances.” This translation is not incorrect, but it misses some of Aristotle’s metaphysical impetus, which was to discuss the activity of existing. Aristotle is endeavoring to describe what has existence and how. So, “primary being” is an activity, i.e., a *being*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. “Change, as found in sensible things, serves therefore as the basis for the study of act and potency. The goal of the investigation, however, lies beyond the order of change.”



## The pre-Socratic background of Aristotle's metaphysics

The conceptual parameters of the philosophical discussion that Aristotle inherited had been established in pre-Socratic philosophy by the juxtaposed theories of Heraclitus and Parmenides. These, of course, were mediated to Aristotle via Plato. It will help us understand the logic of Aristotle's metaphysics if we can place it in the historical philosophical context in which he applied his logical analysis. Understanding the process of his logic may, in turn, allow for a more adequate assessment of what hylomorphism (expressed via Aquinas and Spinoza) might provide contemporary discussions of the relationship between mind and body.

At one pole of Aristotle's philosophical world stood Heraclitus and his doctrine of change as the only real feature of the cosmos. For Heraclitus, the "flux" is what really exists. Discussion about constancy of entities was in some measure an abstraction, since the constant movement from what is to what is not yet is the only reality that there is.<sup>9</sup> However, the universal flux was ontologically enabled by what Heraclitus described as a cosmic order (*Logos*). This *Logos* he conceived of as the essential harmony that the tension of becoming and ceasing to be manifest in the sensible world. "The cosmos works," he proclaims, "by harmony of tensions, like the lyre and bow." Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange has accurately characterized Heraclitus' ontology: "in the process of becoming, which is its own sufficient reason, being and non-being are dynamically

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<sup>9</sup> *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, trans. Brooks Haxton (New York: Penguin Press, 2001), 25. "By cosmic rule, as day yields night, so winter summer, war peace, plenty famine. All things change. Fire penetrates the lump of myrrh, until the joining of bodies die and rise again in smoke called incense."

identified.”<sup>10</sup> Since for Heraclitus “becoming” is the ontological fundament of reality, there can be no ultimate differentiation between things, because a constant reordering is the only essence that really exists ultimately. Change is all there is; hence, there is not any real ordinary particular that could be conceived of in any fundamental terms.

When considering the physical world, Heraclitus would reject the distinction that Aristotle would later develop between “act” or what is “actual” and “potency,” that which is possible but not yet existing in actuality. These differentiations are, ultimately, nothing but mere human conceptual imposition, by Heraclitus’ lights. Our minds are the source of the ideas of specific things. He says, “While cosmic wisdom understands all things are good and just, intelligence may find injustice here and justice somewhere else.”<sup>11</sup> He argued, therefore, “that the principle of contradiction is not a law of being, not even of the intelligence. It is a mere law of speech, to avoid self-contradiction.”<sup>12</sup> If the process of becoming is the only reality that exists, then no particular state of affairs in the “flux” of the process is real *qua* the particular state of affairs that it is. Rather, the only reality it enjoys is its part in the flow of the flux – the “war” of now-being and coming-being. Change, for Heraclitus, is all that we must affirm as ultimate and finally real. Here is the genius of Heraclitus’ metaphysics. By this perspective on the ontologically foundational role that change has in the world, he offers a theory for change – the flux, and the necessary “conflict” that is the flux – that is ontological, rather than empirical. He

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<sup>10</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1950), 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 39. Heraclitus stands, as does Parmenides, in the philosophical tradition that sees human intelligence as not a part of the world as it is, but apart from it. Aristotle, as will be shown, conceived of the human mind as part of the physical world, hence, the metaphysical basis for his realist epistemology.

conceived of our world as unity in diversity. As Fredrick Copleston observes, “For him the conflict of opposites, so far from being a blot on the unity of the One, is essential to the being of the One. . . . the One only exists in the tension of opposites.”<sup>13</sup> By so defining reality, he denies any principle of continuity between moments of existence. Fire, therefore, is the perfect elemental metaphor for Heraclitus to utilize.

Parmenides, on the other hand, contended on the basis of his attention to the logic of linguistic expressions that a radical counter-proposal had to be affirmed. His view was that the determinations of being that our language reflects drive us to only one conclusion: that Being “is” and, therefore, non-Being “is not.” Contra Heraclitus, this draws us irresistibly, Parmenides argued, to the logical conclusion that change, not constancy is the illusion. Any notion we have of change is a mere fiction that we perceive by the senses. Philosophical analysis can allow us to get “behind” our sensory experience and understand the absolute, impassible oneness that is Reality. Of necessity the One – i.e., Reality – is identical with itself. This law of identity and the law of non-contradiction together mean that our intellects wrongly attribute change, becoming, and passing-away to the nature of the One Reality. To be philosophically honest, Parmenides concludes, our thought, as revealed by grammatical analysis, should affirm this analysis of being. “For thou couldst not know that which is-not (that is impossible) nor utter it; for the same thing exists for thinking and for being” (Fr. 2).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Parmenides contended that the force of “true belief” will not “allow that, beside what is, there could arise anything from what is not.”

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<sup>13</sup> Copleston, 40.

<sup>14</sup> *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle*, ed. Reginald Allen (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 45.

How could what is thereafter perish? And how could it come into being? For if it came into being, it is no, nor if it is going to be in the future. So coming into being is extinguished and perishing is unimaginable. Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there more here and less there, which would prevent it from cleaving together, but it is all full of what is. . . . Wherefore all these are mere names which mortals laid down believing them to be true – coming into being and perishing, being and not being, change of place and variation of bright and color” (Fr 8).<sup>15</sup>

Parmenides offered the philosophical discourse of his day a logical deconstruction of our illusory notions about the reality of ordinary particular items.

### **Aristotle’s counter-proposal**

#### **The logic of change and unity**

In both Heraclitus’ and Parmenides’ doctrines, we are presented with the long-standing question of the ontological status of change and individuation in the sensible world. One could say that they struggle with the status of ordinary particulars and the relationship that exists between the myriad of ordinary particulars in our experience of the world. They provide starkly divergent answers, even as they agree that any ideas we have about the world that are based on empirical data are mere conventions, if not illusions. In their agreement, they raise the question of whether or not our experience of the world is, at the bottom, founded on some feature of the world. This is where Aristotle’s assessment had to begin.

On his view, the fact that either of these pre-Socratics offered to assert any philosophical claims, at all, about the nature of the world belied their conclusions that our language is merely conventional and not, at its philosophical best, correspondent to some extra-mental reality. Any linguistic expression is, by its very nature, an assertion about

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 46.

the way things are per se. When he began to address the issues as laid down in the polarities offered by the pre-Socratic dichotomy, he embraced two assertions as starting points for philosophical inquiry. The first was epistemological, i.e., that the experience we have of change in the world is a feature of reality to be granted a large measure of significance, even if we find reason to qualify it in order to clarify our claims of knowledge. At this point, he seems to have taken Heraclitus seriously. Yet, with his second starting assertion, which entailed a claim about logic, he seems to have sided with Parmenides against Heraclitus's nominalism. His second assertion was this: the principle of non-contradiction is a logical law that has the force of objective truthfulness. Therefore, he could allow this logical principle to coexist concurrently with his epistemological allowance of the import of sensory experience. We will consider the work that this second assertion did in Aristotle's philosophy in interaction with a Heraclitean doctrine of non-constancy before we look at the way he addressed the theory of Parmenides on the basis of the first assertion, i.e., that sensory experience ought to be afforded a large measure of significance.

Based on the logic of the law of non-contradiction, Aristotle argued against Heraclitus and his disciples as follows. "We shall reply to this theory that "although that which is changeable supplies [Heraclitus and his followers], when it changes, with some real ground for supposing that it 'is not,' yet there is something debatable in this; for that which is shedding any quality retains something of that which is being shed, and something of that which is coming to be must already exist."<sup>16</sup> Aristotle saw in the

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<sup>16</sup> Metaphysics, bk. V 1010 A, 311, in Allen, 311.

process of change more than Heraclitus was able to allow (at least from what we know from his extant writings). Even the very reality of change in the world implied a level of continuity. To explain: if our intellects can recognize *a process* of change and becoming, Aristotle argued, then the principle of non-contradiction – which demands that nothing can both be and not be simultaneously – is an epistemological corollary of the empirically perceived process of change. The Stagirite thinks it is self-contradictory to say that change is all that there is and then to contend that our language about change (the law of non-contradiction) is simply a convention imposed on us by our language. To recognize that particulars are (even momentarily) identical with themselves, but pass away and some other particular in the next moment exists where that particular had existed (think of Heraclitus’s river example) is to acknowledge that there was something that both was and now is not; but that something is the ontological predecessor of the state that followed it.

This being the case, for Aristotle, the law of non-contradiction itself is rooted in the very flux that Heraclitus posits as ontological finality.

Generally those who argue in this manner overlook both the being (*ousia*) and what it means to be; for it is necessary for them to assert that all attributes are accidental and that there is no such thing as “being a man” or “being an animal.” Now, if there is such a thing as “being a man,” it will not be “being nonman” or “not being a man” (its negatives): for it has one meaning, namely, to define the being of something. And to signify its being means that its being means that its being is not something else. But, if “being a man” means “being nonman” or “not being a man,” then a man’s being will be something else. Hence they must argue that there cannot be such a definition of the being of anything . . . . But if all statements merely predicate accidents, then there will be no first point of reference since accidents always are predicated about something as a subject. It

would be necessary, accordingly, to proceed thus to infinity; but this is impossible.<sup>17</sup>

The reality of change imposes on us the law of non-contradiction and, ultimately, the metaphysical conclusion that there is something that both changes and remains. Without this first principle, Aristotle reasoned, thought is impossible (“it would be necessary to proceed to infinity”). “Aristotle, against Heraclitus, holds that the principle of non-contradiction and the further law of identity are laws of reality, not merely of the inferior reason and of speech, but of the higher intelligence, and primarily of objective reality.”<sup>18</sup>

In order to define the changing entities a definition of their essence is involved.

However, a definition implies, by its very nature, the awareness that the thing defined is “not-this-other-thing” in its own existence. Hence, Aristotle argued that Heraclitus’s idea – that only change is real – collapses because he can only see the essences of things as accidents in motion, which entails the inability to ever attain a “first point of reference since accidents always are predicated about something as a subject.”

Such an infinite regress must ultimately undercut any claim to philosophical certitude about the ontological nature of things. Heraclitus cannot argue for change as the foundation of reality if change is really all there is, Aristotle is saying, because he has no epistemic warrant for such a claim. Any epistemic warrant for claiming that change is real in the world must rely on some true *ousia* that is the Being of the things that are undergoing change. Aristotle considered that the *logos* posited by Heraclitus could not do this. So, for Aristotle, the continuity of being, conceived as a unified whole in which

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<sup>17</sup> *Metaphysics Gamma*, 4, in *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans., Richard Hope (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 72.

<sup>18</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, 39.

modification and change within and between individuals occurs – rather than a flux of discrete moments – is a foundational doctrine of first philosophy. Without this, in some form, philosophy cannot proceed. What had to be accounted for and defined in Aristotle’s view is the feature of reality that allows for there to be continuity in things in the midst of change. To this we will return below, but before that we must consider Aristotle’s second metaphysical obstacle – Parmenides’ monism.

Heraclitean ontology had exacted from its detractors an account of constancy in the sensible world, but the Parmenidian pole of Aristotle’s philosophical context demanded a response to its own untenable conclusion. An adequate explanation of change and individuation as real features of an essentially unitary and continuous reality had to be provided. While Aristotle’s teacher, Plato, had attempted to answer Parmenides’ challenge by positing an unchanging world of intelligible Ideas that is unified by the Good as the ultimate “form” of all reality, Plato’s peripatetic student found this wanting. The radically dualistic distinction of Plato removes the essence of a thing from the thing, thereby creating a logical confusion and metaphysical nonsense.<sup>19</sup> It also failed, in Aristotle’s view, to address the very weakness of Parmenides’ theory that Plato wanted to undercut.

In Aristotle’s view, Parmenides and his school inflated the consequences of their version of the law of contradiction – “what is cannot come to be, since it is already, and nothing can come to be out of what is not, since there must be something underlying.”<sup>20</sup> This principle, taken as first philosophy, fails to draw significant linguistic distinctions,

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<sup>19</sup> *Metaphysics*, A, 991 b and M, 1079 b, 24 – 26, Hope. For a good discussion of Aristotle’s treatment (and possible misunderstanding of Plato) see Copleston, 292 – 301.

<sup>20</sup> *Physics* Book I, Ch. 8, Ackrill, 90 – 91.



Aristotle concluded, about the ways in which continuity and concurrence work in the sensible world. Not-being, as a negation, he argued, can simply be the acknowledgement of the finitude of a particular entity under consideration. In this regard, to posit “not-being” is not a denial of Being itself (as Parmenides suggested); rather it is simply a notation of lack in the particular entity under consideration. As Aristotle reasoned, “We too say that nothing comes to be simply out of what is not; but that things do come to be in a way out of what is not namely by virtue of concurrence. A thing can come to be out of the lack, *which in itself is something which is not*, and is not a constituent.”<sup>21</sup> The notion of lack, therefore, points to a state of affairs – an absence. An absence, for Aristotle, is, when considered per se, actually nothing. Yet, the very idea of “the lack” entails in itself the idea of a concurrent already-existing reality that could suffer this lack. As Copleston comments on the implication of Aristotle’s logic at this point, “If Parmenides were to object that [this doctrine of privation] is tantamount to saying that a thing comes into being from not-being, Aristotle would answer that it does not come into being from its privation merely (i.e. from bare privation), but from its privation *in a subject*.”<sup>22</sup> So, to speak of a “lack” is not the same thing as speaking of Non-being as though it were an entity or some principle in itself, thereby positing an absurdity as the source for the coming-to-be of other things. Aristotle wanted philosophers to realize that the very concept of lack entails a concept of something that could lack, or as we might more clumsily say, something that is also *not* something else. Each thing that actually is, is simultaneously not something else; so its very identity

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> Copleston, 311.

requires that it lack some feature that would make it something else. This suggests that the new thing that comes from the lack is not per se arising from already existing being: “it does not come into being from being precisely as such, but from being which is also not-being, i.e., not the thing which comes to be.”<sup>23</sup>

### **Foundations of act and potency**

Hence, in his view, not all language of not-being implies a “violation of the principle that everything either is or is not.”<sup>24</sup> Existence itself, Aristotle would contend, requires even Parmenides to declare, at least, that existence (what *is*) is not non-existence (what is *not*). Parmenides’ own linguistic negation (the “is-not”) posits a *concept* of non-existence as part of the order of knowledge of the world. Aristotle further reasons that if we accept that every specific thing *in our experience* exists as a particular, specific entity, it follows that each of the existent entities that we know exists as what it is by concurrently not being something-else. Coterminous, for Aristotle, with this dialectical analysis is the view that something which is, yet which is not-something-else, can be the source of the coming to be of another, if the other that “comes to be” does so as a result of being “in potential” as an aspect of the already existing entity.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Aristotle is not here completely refuting Parmenides’ epistemological foundations. Zeno, for instance, might attempt to assert that Aristotle is avoiding the real issue, i.e., that our experience of change is just an illusion, therefore not a reliable. However, the extent to which Aristotle refutes Parmenides’ logic that EVERYTHING either “is or is not” *simpliciter* destroys much of the analytical motivation for embracing his subsequent radical doubt about the world of the senses and its relationship to Reality. Of course, Aristotle does not suggest that non-being is something or a reality. Rather, he merely demonstrates that Parmenides own logic posits “not being” as an epistemological corollary to the being that Parmenides insists is all that there is. Hence, Parmenides’ logic has to entail something that his ontology denies, which is self-refuting since he was trying to demonstrate that the order of knowing demanded that being be understood to be one.

<sup>24</sup> Physics, Book I, Ch. 8, Ackrill, 90-91.

An example Aristotle offers, in chapter 8 of Book I of *The Physics*, is that of a doctor and the acts performed by the doctor that lead to healing. A doctor heals, paraphrasing Aristotle, out of his actual doctor-ness. Such a defined, existent identity entails by its very nature certain possibilities. But the state of affairs called the health of X that is sick – before it is brought about through the art of healing – is non-existent or not an actual feature of the world when considered as an actually existing thing (X’s mode of existence.) However, it neither arises from non-being precisely per se, nor, in Aristotle’s doctrine, from a concrete already instantiated and actual being – the present concrete state of the doctor or the patient. Rather, the act of healing comes to be out of the possibility inherent in the state of affairs we call medical knowledge and practice as that is embodied in the actual doctor. Garrigou-Lagrange illustrates Aristotle’s position on the reality, but non-actuality of potential by referring to sculpture. “For Aristotle, that which is in process of becoming cannot arise from an actual being, which already exists. The statue, in process of becoming, does not come from the stone that already exists. But the thing in process of becoming was at first there in potency, and hence arises from untermiated being, from real and objective potency, which is thus a medium between the existing being and mere nothing.”<sup>25</sup>

By positing the notion of potentiality as distinct conceptually and ontologically from actuality, Aristotle thought he could avoid the trap Parmenides had seen in some of the ancient discussions of becoming and of change, while not falling into the pit that Parmenides had dug for himself. Aristotle’s metaphysics allows him to posit “Being” – a

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<sup>25</sup> Garrigou-Lagrange, 39.

la Parmenides – as the ontological starting point: “‘being’ is used in various ways, but always with reference to one principle.”<sup>26</sup> But, he need not deny, he thought, the ontological status of individual existents and change that our encounter with the world suggests to us. In fact, Aristotle thought he could account for the ontological reality of these changing particulars in a way that Parmenides’ own logic suggested, but did not pursue. In his defense of the legitimacy of metaphysics, as he defines it, Aristotle gives at some length a demonstration that “Being,” understood as a unity that exists in the dynamic interplay of actuality and potency, is the true first principle. If that is the case, then it follows that Unity of the Parmenidean variety is not a fundamental ontological concept. It also follows that Heraclitus’ flux is not an adequate theory of reality, for Heraclitean “war” cannot account for what unity there actually is in reality. A different basis for the unicity of reality from those of the two pre-Socratic theorists must be provided. Aristotle argues the point on the basis of Parmenides’ logical/linguistic analysis of statements.

For some things are said to “be” because they are substances; others because they are modifications of substance; others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance or of terms relating to substance, or negations of certain of these terms or of substance. (Hence we even say that not-being *is* not-being.) . . . Hence the study of all the species of Being *qua* Being belongs to a *science which is generally one*, and the study of several species of Being belongs to the

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<sup>26</sup> Metaphysics VI (III). G.E.L. Owen’s reading of Aristotle’s semantics has been quite influential; and it runs counter to the reading of Aristotle’s metaphysics of “Being” offered here. In Owen’s view, Aristotle does not intend for us to understand the “science of being *qua* being” as a demonstrative endeavor that can establish theorems that correspond to the objective composition of entities. Rather, in Owen’s mind, Aristotle is providing us with a linguistic turn that inquires about our own semantics in order to clarify for ourselves the meanings of the conceptual term “being.” See Owen’s “Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle,” in *Plato and Aristotle in the Mid-fourth Century*, ed. Ingemann During (Grotteborg: Humanities Press, 1960). For a critique of Owen see Kyle A. Frazer, “Aristotle on the Separation of Species-Form,” *The Thomistic Institute*, 2001. <http://www.swgc.mun.ca/animus/1999vol4/fraser4.htm>.

specific parts of that science. Now if Being and Unity are the same, *i.e.* a single nature, in the sense that they are associate as principle and cause are, and not as being denoted by the same definition (although it makes no difference but rather helps our argument if we understand them in the same sense), since “one man” and “man” and “existent man” are the same thing.<sup>27</sup>

Being is, for him, the ontological homogeneity of the act of existing. In that sense, then, the act of being that is also the unity of reality. Reality is singular in the sense that all that is just is “Being” (the fact of existence and all existent things). On this basis, then, Aristotle contends, with Parmenides, that Being is the starting point of philosophy and that the one reality we have is a unity, contra Heraclitus. However, that identification of all things as sharing the act of being, Aristotle contended, could not then become the basis for a doctrine of unity that denied a plurality of beings and the modifications that exist among all the members and within any particular member of that plurality.

Aristotle was motivated, it would seem, by the desire to maintain the view that thought and knowing are themselves part of the very same reality that we are analyzing in philosophical inquiry. Our experience, he argued, presents us with features of being that, considered epistemologically, establish for our thinking the particular identities of unique beings. Statements about the identity of things in the realm of being entail definitions, because to identify a being adequately we define it for ourselves. (This is as true for nominalists as much as realists.) Such definition, furthermore, entails non-identity, *i.e.*,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

each thing that is a specific particular is also – by its very definition – not something else (even being is *not* non-being).<sup>28</sup>

Something like this non-identity principle is the foundation upon which Aristotle builds his metaphysical view that “a lack” is a real feature inherent in things that have being. Since a lack, by definition, entails the absence of one state of being in an ordinary particular, it therefore becomes the fundamental concept upon which Aristotle asserts that there is such a thing as possible or potential being in entities that have a specific kind of existence, i.e., his primary substances. By such a conceptualization, he is able, he thinks, to avoid Parmenides’ critique – that being cannot come from what is not nor can being come from what is already actually being. The doctrine of potentiality as a real feature of actual being provides him an analytic solution that accounts for becoming in the world. “Coming-to-be” arises from the potentiality inherent in the lack of each primary substance – a lack that is part of its essence, but that does not entail an inability to become. Becoming is, therefore, a real feature of the world, but it does not arise out of nothing *simpliciter*. The lack is not *qua* a lack something concretely actual, but it is an aspect of the already existent. What is left, then, for Aristotle, is to demonstrate how we can conceive of “possible being,” or potency as a feature of the world and how that would be related to the actual existence of *protai ousiai*.

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<sup>28</sup> The true import of Aristotle’s analysis can be lost if we do not keep in mind that his discussion of being (*ousia*) and not-being is treating this issue in terms that do not easily translate into English. As with Aquinas later, Aristotle’s designation “being” should be conceived of as a gerund like description of action in the existence of an entity. He does not consider “not-being” to actually be some feature of reality. This is obvious, it would seem, from his famous rejection of the possibility of a vacuum in nature.

## Form and matter

In accounting for both continuity and possibility Aristotle felt he required more qualification of the nature of potency and actuality in his metaphysics. Regarding the actuality of an entity, Aristotle embraces Plato's category, "form," as an adequate description of that by which existent things are known to be the particular things that they are: form is the actual principle that "acts" to make a being the *prote ousia* that it is.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the individual being is the substantial subject with which philosophy has to work in the task of understanding: "It is because the *protai ousiai* are subjects for all the other things and all the other things are predicated of them or are in them, that they are called substances most of all."<sup>30</sup> Form functions in two ways in Aristotle's physics; the first is epistemological and the second ontological. Form is epistemic, of course, in an *a posteriori* fashion in Aristotle's philosophy. It is known to us in experience, contra Plato. However, the knowledge of the true nature of any primary being is the knowledge of it as a particular form (i.e., of a particularized form). This epistemological primacy of form is expressed in the *De Anima*, where Aristotle begins to consider what it means to call the soul the form of the body. There he says that form is the concept or principle "in virtue of which [any thing we are considering] is then spoken of as a particular [a this]."<sup>31</sup> It is this understanding of the form that enables Aristotle to posit that "*protai ousiai* are subjects for all the other things and all the other things are predicated of them or are in

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<sup>29</sup> *De Anima*, II, 412a 8-9. Ackrill, 165.

<sup>30</sup> *Categories*, 5, 15 – 18. Ibid, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *De Anima*, Ibid. Joseph Owens drives home the epistemological function of form in Aristotle's philosophy. He points out the difficulty involved when describing what form presents us with. He contends that in Aristotle's metaphysics the form of an entity is what we recognize as the "this" of a thing's identity. "The form, then, as separate at least [as a notion in our thinking about the material object in question] from the matter, is in Aristotelian terminology a 'this though not a 'singular.' 388 – 395.

them.” Specific particulars are the means by which we begin our knowledge of the world, for by or in them we engage the “this-particular-kind-of-thing” that a particular “this” is.

But the epistemological function is only part of the meaning of form in Aristotle’s thought; it also is the ontological reason that any particular “this” about which we might predicate existence is what it is. He is no nominalist about *eidos* or form. As we have noted, a *prote ousia* is the substance about which we predicate other things and the substance in which other predicated categories exist. However, he describes the form that makes any primary being what it is as having an existence that is more than simply the primary being *simpliciter*. He also claims, controversially among some of his interpreters, that the form that is the essence of a primary being can be described as being substantial in a secondary and derivative sense. Since primary beings share features of being with others that are like them, Aristotle contends that the species, general description is the object of science; it is *deutrai ousia* – being in the secondary sense. The factor that motivates Aristotle’s thinking at this point seems to be the similarity of essence that many entities obviously share. On this basis he contends that form is an ontological or metaphysical principle that is not simply predicated tautologically of an entity, but is, at least partially, explanatory of how a thing comes to be what it is.<sup>32</sup>

Form, while it only exists in the thing that is “formed,” nonetheless is not reducible to the primary being so formed. This is true of manufactured artifacts, in an obvious way.

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<sup>32</sup> This is the impetus of Aristotle’s use of the well-known “four causes.” Form is necessary to account for why any particular existent is the particular existent that it is. Cf. *Metaphysics, A*, Hope.



It is evident, accordingly, that the form, or whatever we want to call the shape of the perceived object, is not produced; nor is there ever any production of it; no intrinsic nature is ever made. For an intrinsic nature comes to be *in something else* made by art or by nature or by some power. It is a bronze sphere that is made out of bronze and ‘sphere,’ since one makes a form enter into this matter, and thus the result is a bronze sphere. . . . It is evident, therefore, from what has been said, that what we have called the form or essential being is not produced, but *that it is the combined form-in-matter that is produced, and that in everything that is produced there is matter, and that any object is, on the one hand matter and, on the other hand, form.*<sup>33</sup>

And in a parallel way this predetermining nature of form is also predicable of things in nature, i.e., entities that are endowed with life.

All things begin in their primary being, as syllogism begin by stating what a thing is; so from being come all becomings. Natural growths follow this same pattern. For *the seed is productive* in a manner analogous to art, *since it has the form potentially; and that from which the seed comes is somehow like its offspring.* . . . For, as it is the bronze sphere that is produced, not ‘sphere’ or bronze, and likewise in the production of the bronze itself there must always be present both a material and a form in the production of any primary being. . . . However, we may note a peculiarity of the production of primary beings: another primary being, the producer, must pre-exist in complete realization for example, an animal, if an animal is to be produced.<sup>34</sup>

Form is, therefore in Aristotle’s view, a kind of principle that accounts for the existence of the primary being. Indeed, it is the actuality of a particular entity’s being. Aristotle reasoned, as we have seen, that some principle had to be the source of the dynamic of actuality in things. While it would be meaningless to ask why a particular man is the man that he is – “It is pointless to ask why anything is itself” – one can wonder, Aristotle allowed, what causes a primary being to be the *kind* of entity it is.<sup>35</sup> Since everything exists as a particularized reality, something causes the matter to be that particular rather than another, for matter per se can be many different things. Primary

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<sup>33</sup> *Metaphysics*, Z, 8, Hope. My emphasis.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 9, 1034 a, 30 – 1034 b, 21. My emphasis.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 17, 1041a 13 – 14.

beings are definite in identity. Therefore, Aristotle reasons, as Joseph Owens observes, that “a Being is a ‘what,’ i.e., something definitely determined by its form and so distinguished from all other kinds of things.” Owens continues, “The form causes that ‘definiteness’ in the matter, and is therefore the cause of its Being. ‘Being’ evidently means [for Aristotle] ‘being so and not so.’”<sup>36</sup>

If form, according to Aristotle, is a principle that explains the existence of a material being because it is involved directly in its being what it is, then the matter, as the physical stuff that things are *qua* physical, is also an explanatory principle. He referred to them both as causes, but by “causes” he meant something much more than what we mean by cause and effect. He viewed these two principles as fundamentally necessary to explain the existence of primary being (along with, of course, the efficient and final causes). Since physical things are, indeed, particular in their essence and at the same time capable of both change of existence while remaining within their own essence (acorn to oak tree) and radical change into other kinds of things (acorn eaten becomes pig), philosophy must attempt to describe the dynamic that would account for this. Form is particularizing, so the source of the possibility of change he assigned, reasonably enough, to the material stuff that was organized to be a particular expression of a form.

The material reality (what later philosophers would call extended reality) that one is considering in a primary being is, Aristotle contended, both a “being so and not so.” It has, in other words, a lack and a potentiality because it is *formally* a particular being composed of matter. As was described above, Aristotle conceived of change in entities

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<sup>36</sup> Owens, 376.

as produced in a subject – a *prote ousia* – but not in the subject as it actually existed at any given moment. Change is rooted in potential that is inherent in the subject, whose essence entails a lack, i.e. something that the primary being is not, but is capable of becoming because of the nature it has. This lack was not simply nothing for Aristotle, but was an aspect of the subject’s existence which allowed for certain kinds of potency to be true of the subject.

His reasoning, as has been suggested above, was that both the continuity and the mutability of the world had to be accounted for. Since he thought he had established philosophically that one is justified in the beliefs that nothing can come from nothing, that modifications of existence and of existent things are real, and that change could not be so radical as to lack any continuity with precursor states, he then moved to provide some philosophical account for the continuity of these modifying entities out of which new states (or beings) arise. The paradigmatic example here is the development of an oak tree from acorn to mighty arboreal giant. How does this change occur, without denying the continuity between the acorn and the oak tree? Further compounding the issue is the reality that acorns do not always or only become large trees. Wild pigs eat acorns; and when this is done the acorn ceases to exist not only *qua* acorn, but *qua* vegetative entity altogether. But, obviously as pigs eat many acorns in the wild, more pig is produced. In Aristotle’s view this sort of development left us faced with the necessity to account for continuity within the one reality in which all things exist. Aristotle reasoned that the material stuff that was the acorn(s) has as a feature of its existence the potentiality of becoming pig-matter, even while being a particular kind of material being. Another way of saying this is that the physical stuff that took the form of acorn has the

capacity of losing, under certain conditions, the form of being an acorn and can be incorporated into the physical make-up the gormandizing swine. When this occurs, the matter of the acorn is radically transformed (one might even say the matter is re-formed) into something that it was not prior to the consumption. If the acorn is not eaten, however, then under the right efficient conditions the form of oak tree will drive the oak tree to move from the acorn stage of its existence to a *telos*.

This *telos* is not something imposed on it but something that is inherent to its organization as a material entity. It is, as it were, its striving to continue to be – more completely – what it is essentially. This inherent drive to continue in existence and to flourish in its organized essence is, by Aristotle, labeled an *energeia* or “entelechy.”<sup>37</sup> In Aristotle’s metaphysics, this drive or possibility of striving toward an end is an aspect of the actual being of the thing, even if it is not exercised or operative at any given time. Placing himself in direct opposition to another school of thought on the meaning of “act,” Aristotle argued: “There are some, such as the Megarians, who say that there is a power only [when actively operating] and that there is no power apart from its operation: that when not engaged in building, a person is not able to build, and that he is a builder only when he is in the act of building, and so forth.”<sup>38</sup> Aristotle sees such thinking as leading to absurdities. He distinguishes between the actual performance of a capacity and the actual possibility of performing it. In both instances a power is present, he contends; otherwise, we cannot account for change as a reality. “These doctrines [those denying

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<sup>37</sup> *Energeia* is the Greek word Aristotle uses for “act” or actuality. At times, he uses another word, closely associated with *energeia* in his metaphysics, *entelecheia*, which implies fulfillment or fullness of the act or activity under consideration. Cf. Owens, 405. Owens calls this “a peculiarly Aristotelian word.”

<sup>38</sup> *Metaphysics, Theta, 3, 1046b, 29 – 33.*

potential power in the act of being what a thing is essentially] take away all possibility of change and of coming into being.” But if, as Aristotle demonstrates, change in the condition of an entity or its relationship to things around it is real, then he is right to insist that we must conclude that “power and act differ; hence, those doctrines which present power and act [as identical concepts], are trying to deny a difference that is far from trivial.”<sup>39</sup> The import of this analysis, in Aristotle’s metaphysics, is that “something may be capable of being without actually being, and of not being, yet be.”<sup>40</sup> Critically important here is Aristotle’s idea that only things that are actually existing are capable of producing change in themselves or in other things. It is for this reason that he closely associates the concept of “act” (*energeia*) with the term *entelechy*. But for Aristotle *entelechy*, in its close association with *energeia*, qualifies its verbal counterpart, allowing him qualify *energeia*, in contradistinction to the “Megarians,” to mean more than movement, i.e., powers in operation.<sup>41</sup> He concludes: “The word ‘actuality’, which is associated with ‘fulfillment’ (*entelechy*), has been derived from movements, though it can be applied in other ways. . . .”<sup>42</sup>

This concept, then, means that the *actuality* (the formal cause that acts *qua energeia*) of things that “are or come to be naturally,” gives to the primary beings as concrete particulars the possibility of future states of being that more fully express the essence of their own existence. These primary beings have, in other words, a capacity, whether exercised or not, to strive to express their own particular nature in the most fully

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 1047 a, 12 – 29.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> See page 26.

<sup>42</sup> *Metaphysics*, Theta, 3, 1047 a, 30.

adequate and flourishing way. A living entity's nature is "also its form or primary being or the culmination of its becoming," or we might say, "the nature of anything is," for Aristotle, "in some sense its primary being."<sup>43</sup> From within the nature of a "natural" being the source of its growth and "the processes of becoming" arise as part of its very nature. Hence, the very nature of a living or natural thing is the source of "movement" in its life-cycle, "because this source is inherent in them, either potentially or completely." The possibilities for becoming are inherent in living things because as an *entelechy*-act there is an organization and orientation toward *energeia*-act that will, under proper conditions, allow for flourishing of these things in their own natures. They have in them a given striving to maintain their existence and to flourish as the things that they are.

Because of this inherent capacity for change that is a part of the nature or actuality of "natural" beings, and since *protai ousiai* by definition are things that are not something other than themselves, Aristotle reasoned that it must be matter, rather than form – the definitional essence -- that undergoes potential change. The potentiality for change in the *prote ousia*, *qua* material entity is the metaphysical counterpart of the formal act – exercised or unexercised – of the possibility for growth, movement, sustaining, and flourishing that is inherently involved in the entity's nature. Only particular material entities that have "received" form exist, so existent matter is always matter that has been organized to be something definite. Matter receives form as the principle that accounts for the fact that a primary being is "a definite abiding something – flesh, bones, a

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<sup>43</sup> In this definition we see the ontological primacy of *protai ousiai* and the distinction that Aristotle will labor to draw between nature or form or essence and primary being later in the *Metaphysics*. There is some logically necessary distinction that entails a likely ontological distinction, but existentially there can be no distinction.

syllable, or anything else. And, for the Stagirite, ‘to be a definite abiding something’ is simply *to be*.<sup>44</sup>

Definiteness of existence is to be a *this*. Statements about being are then statements about a particularity of being. Being-statements are about what a thing is being. Aristotle concluded that if form is the essential definition of a thing epistemologically, then in material entities the material component of their existence, when considered *per se* must therefore be nothing else but a principle that is defined simply as the *capacity to become something particular*. This is what he meant by Prime Matter. It might not be readily discernible that this is a coherent notion. Yet, if one takes Aristotle to mean, by prime matter, something like a principle of physics that is the physical basis for any and all existing particular entities, but it is itself not definable except as this underlying principle, his theory begins to sound much more like the discussions in contemporary particle physics.<sup>45</sup>

### **Hylomorphism as coherent and compelling**

It must be admitted that the kind of hylomorphic metaphysics that emerges from Aristotle’s considerations about potency and actuality has been subjected to serious

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Owens shows how the concept of form works its way throughout the *Metaphysics* so that by the close of book *Zeta* “Being is reduced to the formal cause, the primary instance of Entity within the sensible [material] thing.”

<sup>45</sup> In the vast array of physical theories of the sub-atomic world, a kind of consensus might be achievable if one could say that, in some ultimate sense, all matter is in the final analysis energy. Energy is a physical feature, but it is surely not conceivable as a particular thing. If Prime Matter is conceived, then, as a principle of physical reality that can be formed via some other principle that accounts for a particular arrangement of this physical field of energy (prime matter) into some specific manifestation called matter, then the purported absurdity that some see in the idea of Prime Matter might very well disappear. This would be consistent, arguably, with a popular theory among physicists today. See, Bennett, for an argument that Spinoza held to a theory similar to this view of fields (of energy) as the ultimate constituents of the extended world.

criticism by some of his commentators and by modern scientific principles.<sup>46</sup> Something as occult sounding as an *entelechy* in the biological (animal or plant) nature of a thing or a substantial form that literally shapes an entity in its physical appearance and orients that entity toward a particular function or end, has struck many as an unnecessary postulation if not an implausible construct. “Of the Aristotelian four causes, the formal cause has been the subject of the greatest attack. Modern science has, of course, always made use of material and efficient causality. And the notion of final causality, although criticized by the founders of modern science as well as contemporary scientists, has never been subject to the same kind of critique as the notion of substantial form.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, Aristotle felt compelled to the conclusion that the Platonic concept of form (even though highly modified by Aristotle) was a necessary description of a certain principle in a thing that made it to be what it is. As well, it is a thing’s form that entails the subsistence of potential states of being prior to their actual existence. However, he thought that these states can so subsist only as a not-yet-realized feature of a material entity that is, at each moment of its existence, fully actualized in a condition of real being. Again, the acorn and the oak are instructive. To be an acorn is both to be a particular material thing, but to be *qua* acorn a moment in the essential nature of being an oak tree. That is, while an acorn, in one sense, is one thing and an oak tree another, an acorn is merely an episode in the journey of being an oak tree. It is the oak that defines the acorn not the reverse.

This is the background in Aristotle’s thinking for what others call, in contemporary terms, his philosophy of mind (the subject which concerns this

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<sup>46</sup> Goyette, 520 ff.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.



dissertation). We shall have greater chance to defend hylomorphism as a philosophical attempt to describe the existence of the mind when we turn our attention to Aquinas's mind-body philosophy in chapter four. But, at this point we should note that for many of his interpreters, Aristotle's hylomorphism, when transferred to his anthropological theories, becomes problematic, if not incoherent. A thorough defense of Aristotelian hylomorphism is not possible in the limits of this thesis. However, it should be noted that Aristotle's hylomorphism does not imply a dualism of the material and the immaterial, if one wants to interpret the term immaterial as a synonym for "spiritual," although medieval theologians and philosophers certainly interpreted him as providing a philosophical underpinning for their thoughts on this matter. And in chapter four it will be argued that on the most fundamental level even Aquinas's doctrine, as he develops in conversation with Augustinianism, Avicennianism, Averroism, and Bonaventurianism, does not imply the kind of dualism that troubles many philosophers.<sup>48</sup>

Bernard Williams represents one philosopher who appreciates and yet has big reservations about Aristotle's hylomorphism. For Williams hylomorphism gets especially problematic when one begins to consider how to analyze human beings in light of the doctrine. When one allows, as does Aristotle, that "soul" is the "form" of the

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<sup>48</sup> This is not a denial that Thomas' doctrine of the survival of the soul after death is not a problem for contemporary philosophy or his doctrine of the resurrection. Rather, it is a claim that what Owen Flanagan has called the "manifest image" of the soul in its Cartesian perspective is not Aquinas's. Cf. Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Hence, the problems that beset dualism are not problems that Aquinas has to face, because his hylomorphism does not suggest the kind of dualistic view that Descartes holds. We shall have to address the "solution" to the issue of personal survival after death that Aquinas holds, as well as the idea of the resurrection, but those issues must be discussed in Aquinas studies in terms that go well beyond the familiar boundaries that Cartesian dualism suggest.

individual human being, Williams gets worried. He critiques Aristotle's doctrine, therefore, and contends:

[It] earns its reputation as everybody's moderate metaphysics of mind, I believe, by in fact wobbling between two options. In one of them, so does basically appear only adjectivally, and while the doctrine is, so far as I can see, formally consistent, it is only a polite form of materialism, which is cumbersome, misleading, and disposed to point in the wrong direction from the point of view of deeper theoretical understanding. It also has precisely this disadvantage of readily sliding into the other view, in which soul tries to transcend its adjectival status, and become the bearer of personal proper names: in that form, it yields us a notion of person which is a type-notion. . . . One last point. A strength of hylomorphism, particularly in its more materialistic version, is that it does point to human being as a basic concept in the philosophy of mind, and, consequently, in ethics.<sup>49</sup>

Williams' assessment of hylomorphism fails to see that addressing the very idea of a non-material force that gives organization to material stuff cuts to the very heart of the question in contemporary studies in physics and biochemistry. (His concerns about soul becoming "the bearer of personal proper names" that yields "a notion of person which is a type-notion" will be addressed later on in chapter four.) Only by concluding ahead of time that the concepts physically inherent and material are somehow synonymous term is it possible for him to suggest, however, that hylomorphism is a "polite form of materialism." Rather, it is a pre-scientific analysis of how the material world could be understood as organized (formed) in the first place by some physically measurable or describable principle that is not matter strictly speaking. We should be able to distinguish, it seems to me, between Physicalism (i.e. the belief that we are not dealing with occult "non-physical" entities when we are analyzing the items of physics) and Materialism (that the physical world is describable in purely material terms).

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<sup>49</sup> Bernard Williams, "Hylomorphism," <http://www.uwichill.edu.bb/bnccde/PH19c/hylomorphism.html>.

Contemporary science – both physics and biology – raises questions about the nature of the relationship between the material entities that populate the universe and the energy or forces that enable them to be what they are. In physics, the Big Bang Theory implies that at the beginning of the universe an energy of some kind was unleashed that continues to produce all of the forces that then enables material entities (atoms, molecules. . . stars, planets, living beings, and humans) to form.<sup>50</sup> In quantum mechanics the distinction between particles (matter) and waves (energy) is blurred, when one begins to perform calculations and observe phenomena. Biologically, the discovery of DNA as an “information” bearing molecule enables us (perhaps it requires us) to distinguish between the matter that is the molecule, including its chemical compounds, and the *information* that is contained within that chemistry and that molecule. It is just begging the question, it seems to me, to simply posit that the information is the matter that is conveying the code that organizes a particular being to be the kind of being it is. The DNA molecules are similar *qua* matter, but they convey remarkably different information and enable profoundly different life forms, because of that informational, rather than material, difference. Nancy Pearcey argues a position very similar to the one I am suggesting where she observes, “Encoded messages [sic] are independent of the physical medium used to store and transmit them. If we know how to translate the message in a DNA molecule, we could write it out using ink or crayon or electronic impulses from a

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<sup>50</sup> By this “energy” I am not positing the existence of God, rather observing what physicists themselves have concluded. Something precedes matter, at least as we conceive it. And the forces that originally begin to draw the material universe into a cohesive and coherent organization are themselves describable as physically measurable, but not strictly quantifiable in material or extended terms. See Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001) for a clear discussion on the level of a non-expert regarding this way of looking at the physics of the universe.

keyboard. We could even take a stick and write it in the sand – all without affecting its meaning.”<sup>51</sup>

What Pearcey observes as true about the material medium not affecting the meaning of the DNA “message” is also true about the effecting of the “message” in a particular instance. There is a hylomorphic interplay between the matter that carries the form that the DNA information entails and the form itself, which then produces a material being whose existence expresses that form in a concrete specific and incommunicable entity. As well, some principle of the world must account for how this informing principle is effected in the actual life of a living entity. Robert Sokolowski argues for the import of this as well. He posits that “it is the plant or animal form that encodes itself in the DNA, and that the form is what the DNA serves to communicate. The form is both speaker and message in DNA.”<sup>52</sup> John Goyette agrees with this conclusion.

... the information contained in the genetic material is a kind of expression of the form that is analogous to human speech and serves as a kind of intermediary between form and matter. This may seem somewhat farfetched, but it is worth noting that Aristotle frequently refers to a thing’s form as its *logos* – speech, formula, definition. When Aristotle calls the form a *logos* he is not simply referring to the form as it exists in the mind of the knower; rather, he is indicating that human speech is itself a reflection of the intelligibility of the form that is in the matter. . . . the discovery of DNA lends greater credibility to Aristotle’s notion of form by showing that it is not merely a projection of the human mind. . . . To the extent, then, that contemporary science has shown that DNA is a “genetic code” or “blueprint,” for a living organism, it reveals the inadequacy of a purely mechanical explanation of life and seems to point instead towards the Aristotelian notion of substantial form.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Nancy Pearcey, “DNA: The Message in the Message,” *First Things* 64 (June/July 1996): 13 – 14. Pearcey’s way of phrasing is loaded, as the concept of message might imply a message-sender.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Sokolowski, “Formal and Material Causality in Science,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 69 (1995): 64.

<sup>53</sup> Goyette, 528.

John Peterson agrees with the problematic nature of all reductionism that would too hastily dismiss the complexity that is involved in the existence of the material universe (any “polite” or impolite form of materialism or other totalizing view). He helpfully critiques a reductionism that would attempt to decry the necessity to posit some dynamic interplay of forces to account for the physical world. His argument can assist us in at least appreciating the attempts of Aristotle to describe the complexity of the world. It also might help establish the necessity of something like hylomorphism for our thinking about the complexity of the material world of experience, even if that doctrine haunts us with an idea that Williams finds troubling – that talk about “soul” might imply a “bearer of personal names yielding us a notion of person as a type-notion.” Rather than dismiss that issue up front, and see it as a detrimental possible implication of hylomorphism, we might want to take seriously the necessity to posit hylomorphism (or something like it) and then see what it helps us account for phenomenologically.

Peterson observes that reduction of any kind is a “mistake in logic,” which cannot be avoided by any sort of monistic reductionism in the realm of physics or metaphysics.

Materialists say that all is matter, idealists say that all is mind, and neutral monists say that matter and mind are appearances of some more basic stuff into the definition of which neither matter nor mind enters. But any philosopher who says that all is G, regardless of what G stands for, identifies G with the highest genus. Otherwise he says that G falls under a wider genus, H. And then he countenances that possibility that H has some species besides G. . . . Put generally, if it is true that all is G then all difference within G must be due to something besides G. No genus explains its own differences, because difference is outside the definition of genus and anything that is implied by genus. No sooner, then, do philosophers who say that all is G recognize difference in their world than they admit features about the world that fall outside of G.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Peterson, “Reductionism in Metaphysics: A Mistake in Logic,” *The Thomist*, Vol. 64, No. 2, April 200, 301 - 302.

Peterson obviously sees reductionism as an equal opportunity fallacy.

Materialists cannot be nominalists in their explanation of difference in the world, without positing that something (a knower that discriminates about matter) is also present in the world. “Then they are dualists and not materialists.” Similarly, Idealists cannot explain difference simply by mind, “otherwise differences in mind explain differences in mind;” but this conclusion has to allow for difference to be part of the purportedly unified and totalizing genus, mind. But if they suggest that something else (matter) explains differences among mental things, they are admitting something besides mind. “They then abandon idealism in favor of dualism.” In like manner neutral monists fail “to have their cake and eat it, too.” While philosophers like James and (the early) Russell might remonstrate that their monism allows for the diverse appearances of our experience to be grounded in neutral being, rather than matter or mental naming, Peterson retorts that the difference they might endeavor to argue for really makes no difference. “If the various appearances have a foundation in reality then neutral being is no bare identity but itself contains *differences*, quite apart from any differences that are introduced by us. But since difference is not due to genus, it follows that some *real thing* besides neutral being causes these differences within neutral being. And then neutral monism [as with materialism and idealism] fails again.”<sup>55</sup>

The above arguments address, I think, those who, like Bernard Williams, would argue that hylomorphism is just a polite form of materialism, but what about the other of his concerns – the potential in hylomorphism for the soul to become the bearer of

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid 303 – 304.

personal properties. In chapter four the interpretation of Aquinas's mind-body metaphysics will go a long way toward address this question. At this point in the present work, however, we can make a preliminary observation. As will be argued later, on Aristotelian and even Thomistic terms, the soul, if it is seen properly as a principle that enables a primary being/substance to exist *qua* human, does not necessarily entail that the soul will then become a bearer of personal properties. Of course, it might be called such in a highly qualified way, as where Aquinas argues that the entire soul is named by the highest "act" of which it is capable. The soul, as the informing, life-instantiating and organization producing principle in the human composite, could be called – loosely – by the personal names and properties of the primary being. However, strictly speaking, if the soul is viewed as the "information" that makes a human being human, then the comparison offered above to DNA helps us begin to quell some fears that Williams and others might have. It is the person, Aquinas would say, that becomes the bearer of personal names and properties, but since the person is formed by the organizing principle of the soul, then one might, speaking broadly, refer to the soul in personal terms. Aquinas, who saw the issue of personhood more clearly than Aristotle, would have no problem allowing for this usage. However, he would insist that this is not to speak of the soul proper. Hence he says, "the person knows, not the soul."

### **Summary**

To summarize Aristotle's intellectual motivations that have been discussed above, we can observe that in his estimation the nature of change and identity across change necessitates the doctrine of form and matter. Without the reality of the relationship between form as the locus of actuality and matter as the ontic seat of potentiality, one

could only be left with the absurdity that all ordinary particular things had arisen from nothing. Furthermore, in his mind, since these ways of being (form and matter) are through analysis distinct from each other, one ought to, for the sake of the most adequate explanation, conceive of them as discreet principles at work in reality. This means, therefore, that in an Aristotelian metaphysics each and every individual entity, what he calls a primary being, is analyzable as a composite of the material stuff that makes it up and the form that accounts for the particular arrangement of the material stuff. “The composite Being is not just the sum of its material parts. The form cannot be conceived as just another material part.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Owen, 376.



## Chapter 3

### Aquinas's Version of Hylomorphism

The relationship between Aristotle and Aquinas is well-established. However, the extent to which Aristotle's philosophy is a "source," rather than a mere backdrop, for Aquinas's own philosophy is debated.<sup>1</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this project to enter into the scholarly debate as to the best way to understand Aristotle's contribution to Aquinas's thought, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the reintroduction of Aristotle to Christian Europe was a profoundly significant development. Some scholars insist that Aquinas was significantly different from Aristotle in the results of his philosophical reflections, yet it is demonstrable from the writing of Thomas that he, at least, thought he was interpreting and expanding upon the philosophical insights of Aristotle. It is also demonstrable that Aquinas takes the seminal work of Aristotle and utilizes it in order to create a theory of hylomorphism that is distinguishable from his peripatetic tutor. To Thomas's utilization of Aristotle and his development of the insights afforded by the latter's hylomorphism we now turn our attention. Understanding him at this point is a

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<sup>1</sup> Etienne Gilson contends that Aristotle's philosophy is not technically source for Aquinas, because Aristotle has no doctrine of the distinction between being and essence and, therefore, lacks a doctrine of Creation, which Aquinas defends and demonstrates. Furthermore, Aristotle's God is, in Gilson's view, not the Act of Being, as Aquinas describes God, but is, rather, merely the Act of Thought. Gilson, therefore, represents the thought that Aristotle was less a source and more of a template for Aquinas's philosophical project. However, Lawrence Dewan critiques this way of viewing Aristotle's import for Aquinas in "Aristotle as a Source for St. Thomas's Doctrine of esse," *The Thomistic Institute 2000*, <http://www.ne.edu/Departments/Maritain/ti00/dewan.htm>. Dewan sees Aristotle's development of the distinction between potency and act as a very significant development upon which Thomas advanced. Dewan argues that just such a distinction allowed for a "causal hierarchy and a causality of being as being." This in turn allowed for "the distinction between *esse* and essence in later philosophy, St. Thomas's in particular," which was, in Dewan's view, "an appreciation of the implications of causal hierarchy for the doctrine of the primacy of being in act."

crucial component for understanding how to read and interpret, as we will in chapter four, the specifics of the Angelic Doctor's doctrine of mind and body identity.

### **Essences, identity, and Being**

When Aquinas analyzed the world in terms of the complementary distinctions form/matter and act/potency which are necessary to account for the existence of every ordinary particular, he was driven to make a further distinction. Aquinas saw that behind these concepts there was an even more basic metaphysical distinction that one has to make, i.e., the distinction and the relationship between *esse* (Being) and *ens* (a being) or *essentia* (Essence).<sup>2</sup> This discrimination in Aquinas's philosophy was developed as he considered that the act of *being* some particular essence and being *an essence* were distinct metaphysical issues. Taking Aristotle's *Categories* as a starting point, Aquinas reasoned that the relationship between a primary entity (substance) considered as an essential particular in the world and the fact of its existence could be analyzed as a distinction of significant import. Just as in Thomas's Latin *essentia* was a derivative of *esse*, he saw philosophically *esse* proper (existence, the act of being) to be more fundamental as a metaphysical principle. We shall attend to this radical distinction in a subsequent section of this chapter. At this point we must look at how the notion of *essentia* as the act of *esse* shaped, in Aquinas's thought, a metaphysical understanding of the nature of an individual primary being (*ens*).

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<sup>2</sup> The following analysis of Thomas's thought comes from Armand Maurer translation of *De Ente et Essentia – On Being and Essence* (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968). Although this is a relatively early work in Aquinas, he never moved fundamentally from the arguments set forth in this work in a systematic fashion.

*Esse* (Being), Aquinas informs his readers, has two uses, which Aristotle had noted: “Taken in one way it is divided by the ten categories [of Aristotle]; taken in the other way it signifies the truth of propositions” (*De Ente*, 1, 2). The difference between these two uses can be understood in the following way. The first of these notions defines for us two items in our catalogue of experiences, i.e. that which we may properly predicate – entities and features we encounter “in” those entities. “In the first way nothing can be called a being unless it is something positive in reality. . .” (*De Ente*, 1, 2). Here Aquinas is recognizing that we cannot speak of anything that is completely nothing (as with Parmenides and Aristotle, Aquinas recognizes this as absurd). According to the second way that the term “being” is used, however, we *can* and do speak of “what is,” by way of affirmative propositions about the states of affairs of which we are speaking, but the affirmations, even though the latter may not name any truly positive “essence.”

For example, when we say that the Rhythm and Blues musician, Stevie Wonder, is blind, we are positing a true state of affairs, since he is, in fact, blind. In this sense, we posit “the blindness of ‘Stevie Wonder’” as a true state of affairs of our world. Many people, furthermore, are blind; hence, blindness can be called, in a way, a feature of the world. However, blindness is an “essence” (or a “being”) only in the most qualified sense, since *essentially* blindness is really a privation or an absence, even though it is present to us as a feature of the real condition of some primary beings. The same could be said of all privative designations in Aquinas’s view. On the basis of this kind of reasoning, Aquinas says, “. . . in the second sense [of the term being], anything can be called a being if an affirmative proposition can be formed about it, even though it is nothing positive in reality” (*De Ente*, 1, 2). Aquinas contends, however, that the term

*essentiae* can only be properly and adequately and completely understood to refer to “being” in the first of the two senses of being; it posits something in reality.<sup>3</sup>

Aquinas’s reasoning is both semantic and philosophical. The semantic assertion is about the meaning of *essentia* is related, as a derivative of the *esse*, to the (also derivative) verbal noun *ens*. Philosophically, however, Thomas’s argument is that if *ens* most properly names items that are present as real singular entities, then *essentia* as a derivative of *esse* in relation to *ens* must name only those particulars that “posit something in reality.” Without this qualification, the logical conclusion of taking *essentia* in the second sense of *esse* would be absurd: we would be saying “essence” can name even beings that are in themselves ontological negations, i.e. non-essences such as blindness. “Blindness” names a feature of our experience that is fundamentally a “lack” or privation or negation of a positive activity – seeing. In this sense, then, even a privative state is really “existent” states in the world, but they are real only as a lack of some activity that is actually present in the world. So, we can speak equivocally of the essence of blindness. However, should ‘essence’ be understood as referring in the strictest sense to particular a entity in the second sense of *esse*, we would have to defend the logical absurdity:  $E = \sim E$

Thomas wants to make it clear that ‘essence’ in the strictest sense names only that which can be defined as a particular “what.” In other words, essence, in his view, cannot name those states of affairs that are negations or privations of some active feature of our world. The only essences are those things which are active principles in our world. For

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. *Nomen igitur essentiae non sumitur ab ente secundo modo dicto; aliqua enim hoc modo dicuntur entia quae essentiam non habent, ut patet in privationibus; sed sumitur essential ab ente primo modo dicto.*

example, sight is receiving light and sensible form into the eye – that is the essence (definition) of sight. Or, as Aquinas defines in the *Summa*, as was indicated in chapter one, rational animality is the essence of being a human.

So, ‘essence’ is a term that, with regard to logical function, just is the what-ness of an entity. As Thomas E. Dillon says of Aquinas’s argument in this section of *De Ente*, “. . . ‘nature’ is another name for the essence of a thing [in Aquinas’s view], since, as he explains, it is the essence of a thing which makes it intelligible. In short, then, essence is something that is possessed by all real beings and only real beings, and it is the principle of their intelligibility.”<sup>4</sup>

And so the Philosopher says in V *Metaphysicae* cap. 4 (1014b36) that every substance is a nature. But the term nature used in this way seems to signify the essence of a thing as it is ordered to the proper operation of the thing, for no thing is without its proper operation. The term quiddity, surely, is taken from the fact that this is what is signified by the definition. But the same thing is called essence because the being has existence through it and in it. (*De Ente*, 1)

The last sentence of the above quote indicates to us the metaphysical import of *essentia*. Looking at the Latin text will help to make this clear. Aquinas asserts: *Quiditatis uero nomen sumitur ex hoc quod per definitionem significatur. Sed essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse.* The relation between *essentia*, *ens* and *esse*, as well as *quiditatis* is a complex one in this passage. What Aquinas is contending is that just as the *quiditatis* or the what-it-is-ness of an ordinary particular is the very reality that is captured linguistically in its definition, so essence is more than the counterpart of a true proposition; it is the principle of existence by which a particular being has being as a definable and knowable existent entity in our world. Etienne Gilson

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<sup>4</sup> Doctoral dissertation, *The Real Distinction Between Essence and Existence*, Thomas E. Dillon, Notre Dame, 1977.

reminds us that this does not entail, in Aquinas's metaphysics, that the essence is the source of the being of the primary substance (particular). Nonetheless, Aquinas's position is that essences are real principles of being, present in the world as the organizing forces in which and by means of which substances receive their particular being as part of a species.<sup>5</sup>

Thus in *Metaphysicae* V, com. 14, the Commentator explains the cited text from Aristotle by saying that being, in the first sense, is what signifies the essence of a thing. And since, as said above, being in this sense is divided into the ten categories, *essence signifies something common to all natures through which the various beings are placed in the various genera and species*, as humanity (human nature) is the essence of man, and so on. (*De Ente*, 1)

It is a tautological maxim of epistemology that no *res* (thing) has a general existence in the world, but instead exists (has being) only as a specific entity (*ens*). But, in Aquinas's view, since sensible things all exist in a material universe and, by Aristotle's analysis, have the potentiality to become other things, something must cause the material stuff to be P rather than Q. That something is the essence, conceived of as the combination of form and matter in co-inherence. Hence, the particular what-ness of a specific being (*ens*), is not merely a mental description imposed upon an entity by our minds which conceive of it as a particular essence. That *ens*, rather – by Aquinas's lights – can only have its being (*esse*) as a particular *essentia*, and our minds simply recognize the essence (or form) of the thing that makes it what it is concretely. (This epistemological theory grows out of Aquinas's commitment to a fully hylomorphic metaphysics in which essences are part of the world of human experience, but only *in* the specific entities of our acquaintance.)

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<sup>5</sup> See E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 448, n. 30. Hereafter, Gilson.

This conception of the metaphysical significance of essence is tied to Aquinas's contention, quoted above, that "essence" also entails the concept of the "proper operation" of a thing (*res*).<sup>6</sup> Aquinas is arguing here, in Aristotelian fashion, that something must account for the fact that things have an operation proper to them and that that operation itself is not self-explanatory.<sup>7</sup> Hence, Aquinas tells us that essence is "also called 'form', because it signifies the *determination* of each thing, as Avicenna says" (*De Ente*, 1). It is clear later in *De Ente* that Aquinas is using 'form' here in a specialized way, namely as the whole nature or essence of the thing under consideration. This is obvious since Aquinas in the context of this portion of *De Ente* says that the term "form" can be utilized as a kind of synonym for *essentiae*, only because "form" signifies the determination (*certitudo*) of each thing, i.e., it speaks of the concrete specific, unique truth that can be predicated of a *res*.<sup>8</sup> He is clear, in chapter two of *De Ente*, that in what he calls composite substances form and matter are found together as essential to the entity.

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<sup>6</sup> On the difficulty of translating the Latin term *res*, which can be translated thing; event, business; fact; cause; property, see Theodor Haecker, *Vergil: Vater des Abendlandes*, (Frankfurt am Main and Hamburg: Fischer Bucherei, 1958), 131 – 132. He considers *res* to be one of the *Hertzworter*, heart-words, for the Latin tongue, in which is concentrated something of the genius of the language. *Res* must be considered a term of some ambiguity, almost a place holder, but not necessarily indicating itself a metaphysical commitment as to the nature of the entity for which it holds a place. *Res* need not name items of our experience that we could think of in atomistic substantialist terms. This is especially important when considering Aquinas's account of the "participation" of all *ens* as things in Being. The same can apply for Spinoza's usage in the light of his discussion of modes of substance.

<sup>7</sup> Note the similarity here to Spinoza's definition of "essence" in Ethics II, def. 2. "that without which the thing (*res*) can neither be nor be conceived, and, vice versa, that which cannot be or be conceived without the thing."

<sup>8</sup> "*Certitudo*. The Arabic term which the mediaeval translator rendered [from Avicenna] by this Latin word has the meaning of perfection or complete determination. On the one hand it signifies the objective truth of a thing, on the other the precise and clear knowledge of it." A. M. Goichon, *La Distinction de l'Essence et de l'Existence d'après Ibn Sina* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1937), 34, n 7. Referenced in Maurer, 31, n 8.

But it cannot be said that either one of these alone is called the essence. That the matter alone of a thing is not its essence is evident, for through its essence a thing is knowable and fixed in its species and genus. But matter is not a principle of knowledge, and a thing is not placed in a genus or species through it but through that by which a thing is actual. Neither can the form alone of a composite substance be called its essence, though some want to assert this. It is evident from what has been said that the essence is what is signified through the definition of a thing. Now the definition of natural substances includes not only form but also matter; otherwise there would be no difference between definitions in physics [physical sciences] and in mathematics. Nor can it be said that the definition of a natural substance includes matter as something added to its essence, or as something outside its essence. This is the kind of definition proper to accidents; not having a perfect essence, their definition must include their subject, which is outside their genus. It is evident, therefore, that essence embraces both form and matter. (*De Ente*, 2 [1])

What Aquinas is arguing here is that an ordinary particular, what he calls a natural substance, cannot be adequately defined apart from the physical existence that it has. The material existence of the entity is its natural substantiality. Its form (what makes it the kind of thing it is) is actual only in union with the matter of the physically existent entity. The matter he has in mind at this point of the argument is the “prime matter” of Aristotelian metaphysics. Aquinas is establishing that matter is essential to the definition of natural substances. However, matter *qua* matter does not instantiate the specificity of being – the species and genus – of a thing (*res*). Aquinas is describing here how “form” is the organizing principle of an ordinary particular (or a primary, natural substance) by which it is *qua* physical an actual concrete being. However, “form,” when conceived of as this organization-giving property or cause, cannot be the essence of an individual material substance, because natural substances have as a part of their definition the material stuff which, *qua* organized by form to have a “proper operation,” is essential to their actual existence as to their defined essence.



If there is, then, any cogency to the notion that matter, considered simply as a physical and potentially measurable reality, does not organize itself into specific units of material being – which is what Aristotle argued at length -- then the formal principle that does account for the physical organization of the entity, and allows the physical entity to have an “operation” proper to it is distinct from the matter, but not separable from it. So, “form” is not the “essence” any more than “matter.” “The essence, according to which a thing is called a being (*ens*), cannot be either the form alone or the matter alone, but both, though form alone is in its own way the cause of this being”(De Ente, 2 [3]).<sup>9</sup>

The import of all this is that Aquinas conceives of *essentia* as, on the analytical level, the definition of what an ordinary particular is. But it is so, because the material ordinary particular actually is what its definition entails; and it is so because of the organization-giving form that shapes matter. Thus, when Aquinas speaks of essences (he often means just ordinary particulars). In these cases, he is thinking of entities that are encountered in sense experience of the extended or physical world. “Essences,” in this sense, exist, he is arguing, because matter and form are co-operatively co-inhering in the primary being (Aristotle’s term). This action causes the primary being (natural substance/ordinary particular) to be the particular thing it is by giving it – in actuality – proper and unified operation.<sup>10</sup> To speak of it having its proper operation “in actuality”

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<sup>9</sup> The Latin text reads: *Quia esse substantiae compositae non est tantum formae neque tantum materiae, sed ipsius compositi; essentia autem est secundumquam res esse dicitur: unde oportet ut essentia qua res denominatur ens non tantum sit forma, neque tantum materia, sed utrumque, quamvis huiusmodi esse suo modo sola forma sit causa.*

<sup>10</sup> Here we should recall the “four causes” of Aristotelian metaphysics. These “causes” are not causes in the sense that we often think of them in the analysis of cause and effect. Rather, the “causes” are principles necessary to describe and account for the actual existence of a particular being or entity. The formal and material “causes” are the analytically necessary descriptions of the aspects of the entity’s own being. Of course, the “efficient cause” is Aristotle’s – and Aquinas after him – recognition that substances

also recognizes that an “essence,” if only considered as truthful *predication* of a being without regard to its existence, could be said to have a proper function merely *in concept*, as well, as e. g., when we discuss the species concept “horse” in isolation from actual horses.<sup>11</sup> However, our concepts are dependent upon the actual entities. Only the actual concrete entity itself can truly be an essence. Matter and form, as analytical concepts, are both subsumed under the definition of the essence, because *qua* causes of a thing's existence matter and form both co-inhere *in* an essence to make it what it is. We must, therefore, consider the roles that matter and form play in this respect.

### **Materia signatum/designatum**

The state of affairs that results in the actual existence of any particular entity is, in Aquinas's view, the union of matter and form. This union is what Aquinas means by a composite being. What Aquinas means by this notion is that every physical entity that we encounter is constituted by two distinguishable principles. These principles, in Aquinas's theory, are what Copleston describes as “the primary co-constituents of a material thing.”<sup>12</sup> They are the irreducible *principia entis* (principles of actual existence) that are required to account for the existence of any particular thing. However, neither

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are dependent upon other substances for their own existence as embodied forms in the physical world. The “final cause” points to, as is well-known, Aristotle's convictions about the teleological way the substances function. While a full-blown analysis of Aristotle's final cause is not possible here, it can be observed that final causality does not need to entail a commitment to any sort of theological assessment about the origins of substances nor of the universe itself. (Aristotle's “Unmoved Mover” is not a creator.) Instead, the final cause can be considered in terms of the ends toward which entities tend in sustaining their existence and that the idea of a species essence has within it its own particular strivings for survival and flourishing. This would be an analytical distinction that Aristotelian metaphysics could make between the formal cause as instantiating and the final cause as sustaining in accounting for the existence of any natural substance.

<sup>11</sup> Kant's statement that “existence” adds nothing to the concept of 100 thalers, is true when thinking about the essence of 100 thalers solely *qua* definition. However, an existent 100 thalers is quite distinct from the concept of 100 thalers, if one is engaged in the activity of paying a bill.

<sup>12</sup> Copleston, *Thomas Aquinas*, 89, n 1.

form nor matter in general (primary matter) can be considered to be physical entities properly so-called. The formal element and the material element in an entity are necessary elements of an entity, because they provide an account of the physical existence of an entity. However, they do not, in themselves, define the essence of the entity so described, e.g., to be Socrates is to be Socrates – not generically a human being. To be Socrates is to be a particular human body “informed” by the substantial form humanity.

Socrates’ particular essence is, as Aquinas views it, not some idealistic essential nature (as a Platonic metaphysics might have to argue), but is the particular identity of an irreducibly material entity. Matter, therefore, is essential to the definition of Socrates, but matter must be understood always, Aquinas contends, in its relationship to particular forms. Each entity must have, according to Aquinas, a substantial form that causes the matter of the entity to be the kind of thing that it is. This concept – “substantial form” – takes the place of the concept of “immanent entelechy” that one finds in Aristotle’s terminology. The substantial form is the particularizing information that gives to any being its form of existing. In material beings (as opposed to angels or pure intelligences, in Aquinas’s view), this substantial form is what causes, for example, a maple tree to be a maple tree, rather than a sage brush. The matter that is “informed” in a particular entity thus cannot be first matter (*materia prima*), in Aquinas’s metaphysical construct, because “matter cannot be said to be [*esse*]; it is the substance [the particular, essential thing] itself which exists.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 54. A passage from his early writings illustrates Aquinas’ thought on this point, which never substantially changed. “Note that although [first] matter in its nature is *neither*

This has important implications for Aquinas's ideas about the nature of the physical structure of any ordinary particular. Following Aristotle, Aquinas conceived of matter, when thought of as the physical stuff out of which things are composed, as being purely the potential to become a specific ordinary particular.<sup>14</sup> On this basis, Aquinas asserts the confusing claim that "designated matter" is the "principle of individuation" between particular physical entities. In *De Ente*, Aquinas asserts that "matter is the principle of individuation," but it must be realized, he contends, "that the matter. . . is not just any matter but only designated matter." By designated matter, Aquinas explains, "I mean that which is considered under determined dimensions" (*De Ente*, 2 [4]).

In order to understand what Aquinas means by such a description, we must be clear about what he does not mean. First, he does not envision a dualism that our world participates in of pure form versus pure matter. This, in fact, is precisely what he does not want to posit. He is clear in *De Ente* in his insistence that the *essentia* of an *ens* that is a physical particular is the identity of a being that is informed matter or materialized form. But his way of articulating this dipolar operation "must not be taken to mean that the form [of an *ens*] existed with some kind of universal status before the tree came into existence."<sup>15</sup> The universality of the form that beings of a similarly definable nature

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formed nor formless (as bronze in its nature is neither shaped nor shapeless, *it never exists stripped of form and lack of form*, but sometimes takes on one form and sometimes another. By itself it can never exist for it has no form of its own and so – because actual existence comes with forms—matter *by itself* never exists actually but only potentially. Nothing actually existent then can be called first matter " (emphasis mine). All quotations in this dissertation from *Summa contra Gentiles* are taken from the translation at *The Jacques Maritain Center*, [http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/gc4\\_81.htm](http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/gc4_81.htm).

<sup>14</sup> One qualification is important. For Aquinas, the "heavenly bodies" were not made of the same kind of matter as the physical bodies of earth. Things of which the matter is the same are mutually interchangeable and mutually active or passive, as is said (*De Gener.* i, text. 50). But heavenly and earthly bodies do not act upon each other mutually. Therefore their matter is not the same.

<sup>15</sup> Copleston, *Thomas Aquinas*, p 95.

share, while real, is not existent apart from the individual primary being to which the form applies. This analytical proposition significantly shapes Aquinas's epistemology in

*Summa Theologiae*

The object of every sense faculty is a form existing in corporeal matter, and so, since this sort of matter is the principle of individuation, *all the faculties of the sense part of man know only particulars*. . . . it is proper for [the human intellectual capacity] to know *forms which, in fact exist individually in corporeal matter*, yet not precisely as existing in such or such individuated matter. Now to know something which in fact exists in individuated matter, but not as existing in such or such matter is to abstract a form from individual matter, represented by sense images. Thus we have to say that our intellect understands material things by abstraction from sense images. . . .

I claim that whatever pertains to the definition [*rationem*] of any species of material reality, for instance stone or man or horse, can be considered without individuating conditions which are no part of the definition of the species. And this is what I mean by abstracting the universal from the particular . . . . (*Summa*, Ia 85, reply and ad 1)

While he does not suggest a dualistic view of things, Aquinas nonetheless believes that the two *principia entis* (principles of being) are really distinct, when considered as principles necessary to account for the singular and unified existence of a primary being. Hence, we see the second of our needed clarifications for understanding Aquinas. The universal forms that define species do have an extra-mental, real existence, though not as "universals" in a Platonic sense. The mind abstracts to gain clarity about the particulars in its field of sensory experience, but in so doing is not simply nominally applying descriptions. Rather, the human intellectual capacity – when it thinks clearly – constructs a reliable picture of reality that has adequate correspondence to a true state of affairs in the extra-mental world. "Necessarily distinct as determining principles but not ontologically separate" seems to be what Aquinas wants to assert regarding the form and matter that together comprise the essence of particular beings. This conception is

reflected when he describes what makes for falsity in understanding the relationship between form and matter.

Therefore when it is said that that understanding is false which understands a thing other than as it is, the statement is true if ‘other than’ refers to the thing understood. For if the understanding is false whenever one understands a thing to be other than it is; hence *the understanding would be false if one should abstract the species of stone from matter that he would understand it to exist apart from matter, as Plato held*. The proposition would not be true if ‘other than’ were taken as referring to the one understanding. For there is not falsity if the mode of understanding in the one who understands is different from the mode of existing in the thing – a thing understood is in the one who understands in an immaterial way, according to the mode of the intellect, and not in a material way, according to the mode of material reality. (*Summa Theologicae*, 1a, 85, ad 1)

With this in mind we can then better see what Aquinas means in *De Ente* when he says that the principle that makes *ens* to be an individual is “designated matter” or matter “considered under determined dimensions” (*De Ente* 2 [4.]). To get to the meaning of Aquinas’s terminology here, we should reflect on the way his technical metaphysical language changes in regard to “designated matter.” Armand Maurer notes that while Aquinas uses the word ‘determined’ to qualify ‘matter’, following Avicenna in *De Ente*, he adopts a different concept in later works (*In II Sentences.*, d, q. 1, a. 4 and *In Boethius de Trinitate*, IV, 2, ad 3) written shortly after *De Ente*. In these works, he chooses Averroes’ concept ‘undetermined dimensions’ over the idea of ‘determined matter’ to account for individuation.<sup>16</sup> The difference in these two descriptions seems to be a semantic clarification that does not change Aquinas’s fundamental position in *De Ente*. Rather, the term ‘undetermined’ allowed Aquinas to acknowledge that matter could be “designated” (in the sense of being specific and particular, rather than matter in general)

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Maurer, 37, n 12.

without being “under determined dimensions.” One of the reasons for this change would seem to be that he came to see that growth and change in primary substances would entail a change in dimensions. Aquinas would not want to allow the implication that the primary substance’s *essentia* as an individual had become a different *essentia*, simply because the dimensions had changed.

What Aquinas wanted to do in this analysis was to insist that if matter is truly a part of the essence of Socrates, then the matter of which we speak has to be a specifically designated material organization. But furthermore, if matter is essential to Socrates’ identity as a living, breathing, rational *ens*, then the material that Socrates is *qua* rational and living must be – in some way – unique to Socrates. It is a part of his *essentia*. It could not, in other words, be matter in general or “first” matter. Were this not so, one could conclude that the distinction between Socrates and other entities is illusory or, at least accidental and not a matter of substantial identity. Thus, even the matter of Socrates must be differentiable from all other material beings, if Socrates *is*, in fact, a specific “what,” or a *quiditas*. This implies, in Aquinas’s hylomorphism, that the material which is Socrates is unique to him, so that the Athenian philosopher has to have “this particular bone and this particular flesh” as part of his essence.

More fundamentally, however, Aquinas’s emphasis on signified or designated matter seems to develop in his metaphysic because he somewhat deviates from Aristotle somewhat concerning the nature of matter and its relationship to form. The departure is not radical, but it is more fully apparent in Aquinas’s metaphysics of matter than in Aristotle’s. Designated matter is the only kind of matter that we can know about, because only designated matter actually exists. More fully than Aristotle spelled out,

Aquinas clearly taught that prime matter is purely an idea we posit through the process he calls “precision” or abstraction; it does not actually exist. What actually exist are material particulars and the informed matter that makes them up.<sup>17</sup> In *Boethius de Trinitate*, Aquinas asserts that “form is not individuated in that it is received in matter, but only in that it is received in this or that distinct matter, and determined to here and now.”<sup>18</sup> The notions “here” and “now” are Aquinas’s ways of referring to the individual (the primary substance).

They indicate “*hæc caro et ossa*”. And they are only possible by reason of (informed) matter, the ground of divisibility and location in space. Still, it must be noted that “*materia signata quantitate*” is not to be understood as primordial matter having an aptitude towards fixed and invariable dimensions. The determined dimensions that are found in the existing subject are to be attributed, St. Thomas teaches, to matter as “individuated by *indeterminate dimensions preunderstood* in it.”<sup>19</sup>

The distinction that Aquinas draws was perhaps not lost on Aristotle. However, Aquinas’s doctrine of creation, which Aristotle lacked, would have informed his thinking on this topic. Matter was eternal, in Aristotle’s view. He could conceive of it in some Platonic way as the eternally uncaused and undetermined substance that is the foundation of all physical reality. While he rejected Plato’s dualism and was willing to grant that matter was a principle of being (unlike Plato), Aristotle’s idea of the uncaused eternity of matter was another of his Platonic hold-overs. Aquinas, on the other hand, could not

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<sup>17</sup> At this, one might call to mind Spinoza’s later claim that what exists are Substance and its Modes. The Attributes (Thought and Extension) do not exist. While this point of Spinoza’s philosophy is hotly contested by his interpreters, the view that Extension as an Attribute of Substance does not exist, except in its Modes has real resonance (possibly) with Aquinas’ view of Prime Matter, i.e., that it is a proper and necessary abstraction from nature of the world, but it does not exist, because no matter ever exists unformed in some way.

<sup>18</sup> *Boethius de Trinitate* Q. iv, a. 1

<sup>19</sup> *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10053b.htm>, (Boeth. de Trin.", Q. iv, a. 2; "De Nat. Mat.", vii.) The concept of “preunderstood” means, for Aquinas, something like “already existing as a form for understanding”.



embrace this conceptually for theological, as well as philosophical, reasons. In the *Summa Theologiae*, I a, Q 66, a 1, he contends that matter was created together with form. Only one substance could be so basically simple as to be indefinable, for Aquinas. That would be God. As a created reality, therefore, Prime Matter had to be conceived of as having an essence, however vaguely.

However, the conception of matter as the physical (or extended) stuff out of which all things are made is, the thought, an irreplaceable one. All of our understanding, according to Aquinas's epistemology, begins with the real, the concrete being. But in our experience we encounter any number of primary substances (ordinary particulars) that undergo changes. As an explanation for this, we must infer the coexistence of matter and form – the determinable and determinant. We may, as Aquinas does in *De Ente*, 2 [11], “prescind”<sup>20</sup> from the existential situation of real entities in our endeavor to understand them. By so doing, we “bracket” the material particularity of the entity under consideration and strip matter, by abstraction, of this or that determination. In other words, we may by analysis consider the material element apart from all its determinations. However, if we achieve abstract consideration of matter apart from that (formed particularity) by which alone we can know it, then there is, in Aquinas's view, nothing about which we could be speaking, because have we stripped it mentally of the

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<sup>20</sup>The term translated in the referenced passage as ‘precision’ is the Latin *praecisio*. Maurer comments on the significance of this term in Aquinas: “[Praecisio] Precision is a mode of abstraction by which we cut off or exclude something from a notion. Abstraction is the consideration of something without either including or excluding from its notion characteristics joined to it in reality” (Mauer, 39, n 15).

potentiality of definiteness in union with form. Hence, for him, even prime matter exists only insofar as it is *essentially* the potential to be concrete physical ordinary particulars.<sup>21</sup>

As Francis Aveling has noted regarding Aquinas's doctrine of matter:

Matter is neither realizable nor thinkable without its correlative. The proper object of intelligence, and likewise the subject of being, is *Ens, Verum*. Hence St. Thomas teaches further that primordial matter is "a substantial reality" (i.e., a reality reductively belonging to the category of substance), "potential towards all forms, and, under the action of a fit and proportioned efficient cause, determinable to any species of corporeal substance" (In VII Met., sect. 2); and, again: "It is never stripped of form and privation; now it is under one form now under another. Of itself it can never exist" (De Princip. Natur.) . What has been said may appear to deny to matter the reality that is predicated of it. This is not the case. As the determinable element in corporeal substance it must have a reality that is not that of the determining form. The mind by abstraction may consider it as potential to any form, but can never overstep the limit of its potentiality as inexistent (cf. Aristotle's *ti enyparchontos* (Phys., iii, 194b, 16) and realized in bodies without finding itself contemplating absolute nothingness. Of itself matter can never exist, and consequently of itself it can never be thought.<sup>22</sup>

On this basis, Aquinas concludes, "It is clear, therefore, that the difference between the essence of Socrates and the essence of man lies solely in what is designated and not designated" (*De Ente* 2 [5]). This concept is rooted in the view that all things that exist in the realm of sensible objects are, by definition, "informed" material. On this view, prime matter is, in itself, a mere abstraction, and therefore not definable.

The metaphysical significance that *materia signata* has for Aquinas's view of the ontological particularity and identity of primary substances can be seen if we consider how he deals with the idea of "species form" in relation to the individual. He takes it as a

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<sup>21</sup> (*De Princip. Naturæ*) Prime Matter, Aquinas teaches in this treatise, "has its being by reason of that which comes to it, since in itself it has incomplete, or rather no being at all." So, the essence of Prime Matter is to become particulars, but this essence implied an identity, in Aquinas' mind. Therefore, one is justified to say that Prime Matter has a nature. This analysis allowed him to square, he thought, Aristotle's doctrine with his Christian commitments to the doctrine of God as Creator of all things.

<sup>22</sup> Frances Aveling, "Matter," *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10053b.htm>.

given of our experience that the concept we have of “species” corresponds to a real feature of the world. Any species is not, in itself, a universal *existent* reality.

Nonetheless, the concept that we have of individuals as members of a class of entities that share certain features is a true concept and not simply a nominal classification, even if the “species” has no existence outside the mind.<sup>23</sup> Socrates *is* the informed designated matter that one could point to and name “Socrates.” However, something makes Socrates to be the kind of thing he is as Socrates. The thing that makes him to be the *quiddity* that is Socrates is the form of humanity. However, ‘humanity’ does not name a particular thing, but signifies “that by which man is man.” Humanity is, in Aquinas metaphysics, the “special form” that marks and makes the difference between human beings and other beings. “Humanity is a term signifying a certain form, called the [*forma totius*] form of the whole [species]. (*De Ente* 2 [9]) Yet, that form which makes Socrates to be a human being is only part of the *ens* that is Socrates, because the definition of man includes matter, generically conceived, and the material aspect of the “definition” or identity includes a particular arrangement of matter – “this flesh and bones.”<sup>24</sup>

This view of matter establishes, for Aquinas, a certainty that no *ens* (being) can share its particular *essentia* (essential identity) *qua ens* with any other *ens*, not even one

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<sup>23</sup> Copleston notes: “St Thomas did not think of forms as first existing separately and then being individuated, for the forms of sensible objects do not exist in a state of temporal priority to the composite substances; but the idea of individuation is certainly due originally to the Platonic way of thinking and speaking of forms. . . . it would not become an historian to turn a blind eye to the Platonic legacy in Aristotle’s thought and consequently in that of St Thomas” (*A History of Philosophy*, vol II, 328.)

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas’ views on prime matter in relation to form distanced him from the prevalent Augustinian idea of his day that within matter was embedded *rationes seminales* as some sort of vague preliminary force that allows matter to be self-arranging (within the providence of God). Copleston notes: “St. Thomas certainly employed the term *rationes seminales*, but he meant thereby primarily the active forces of concrete objects, e.g. the active poere which controls the generation of living things and restricts it to the same species, not the doctrine that there are inchoate forms in prime matter.” Cf. *Summa* I a, 115, 2; *De Veritate*, 5, 9, ads 8 and 9.

that has the exact same *forma totius*. By bracketing the question of Socrates' particular physical existence, Aquinas is able to ask the question how Socrates could share features of existence with other entities of his kind, and yet be distinct from them and have an unshareable particular essence. Performing this act of bracketing, we can acknowledge that the species form that is the nature "humanity" is only a part of Socrates, when considered as a particular man. But it is the part that organizes the designated matter that *is* Socrates, making it to be a man instead of his being some other kind of entity. It is this species form that establishes in the physical world the proper operation in which Socrates engages as a particular man, i.e., as an individual and particular "rational animal"<sup>25</sup> (*De Ente* 2 [4]). Socrates is not, however, identical with the humanity per se that makes him to be human. Neither is the humanity that makes him human identical to the essence of Socrates. Were that later statement not true, then every human, in Aquinas's view, would be Socrates. So, Aquinas asserts, "If the nature of the species is signified with *precision* from *designated matter*, which is the principle of individuation, then it [the nature of the species] will have the role of a part"<sup>26</sup> (*De Ente* 2 [11]). There must be some other feature that is also essential to the existence of an ordinary particular.

In other words, if when we analyze the essence of Socrates we can bracket for the sake of philosophical analysis the material that he is, then we are able to see that something must make him to be the particular physical entity he is. Looking at the form for this, we nonetheless realize that it cannot be the principle of individuation alone. His particularity is instantiated only, therefore, in the union of form with matter. Other

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<sup>25</sup> Quoting Averroes approvingly, Aquinas agrees that "Socrates is nothing else than animality and rationality, which are his quiddity."

<sup>26</sup> Emphasis is mine. See above note, 86.

beings can share the form of humanity with him, in Aquinas's view, but no other entities can share the designated matter that he is. The particularity of his identity within his species is absolutely a function of the designated (undetermined) matter that is Socrates. So, the reason that an *ens* cannot share its essence with any other is clear. The matter of Socrates is designated through the organizing influence of the form. This form establishes for the designated matter a "proper operation." One might actually say that the "proper operation" of the physical, living body named "Socrates" just is another way of describing the *materia signata* that is Socrates. One way of speaking identifies the activity that the material entity performs the other denotes the entity so acting. Therefore, as a particular composite, Socrates is the specific material entity that is the composite *ens*. Because of this analysis, Aquinas can contend that Socrates – and all composite substances – are irreducibly both form and matter in union. The implication of this, then, is that the being (*esse*) of a being (*ens*) is incommunicable, because the *ens* is a particular essence, that is a body with an operation proper to it. This is what Aquinas means when he says that matter is the principle of individuation.

### **Materia designata and diachronic identity**

As individuated in designated matter, an essence obviously undergoes many changes to its material make-up. This is not only true in cases of radical change – as with the acorn-to-oak tree scenario. It is just as true in cases involving less radical, but nonetheless real changes, as in the growth, maturity, and aging of an animal. What does it mean to say that something is the same entity, if its changes materially? In other words, material change raises for Thomas's metaphysics the question how can one speak of designated matter being part of the essence of a primary being, if the matter changes

over time – not just its shape, but the actual material stuff that is involved in its essential existence.<sup>27</sup> This is the question of diachronic identity.

Aquinas addresses this issue in *Summa contra Gentiles* in a passage that is concerned with how to explain the Christian doctrine of the continuing identity of persons upon the “resurrection” from the dead. He argues there that the answer starts with a metaphysical, rather than a theological one.

In a man's body while he lives, there are not always the same parts in respect of matter, but only in respect of species. In respect of matter there is a flux and reflux of parts: still that fact does not bar the man's numerical unity from the beginning to the end of his life. We have an example in a fire, which, while it goes on burning, is called numerically one, because its species remains, though the wood is burnt out and fresh wood supplied. So it is in the human body: for the form and species (kind) of the several parts continues unbroken throughout life, but the matter of the parts is dissolved by the natural heat, and new matter accrues by nourishment. But the man is not numerically different by the difference of his component parts at different ages, although it is true that the material composition of the man at one stage of his life is not his material composition at another. So then, for numerically the same man to rise again, it is not requisite for all the material that ever entered into his composition throughout the whole course of his life to be gathered together and resumed, but just so much of it as suffices to make up his proper bulk and stature. (*Contra Gentiles* 4, 81)

Identity across time is not, Aquinas says, dependent upon the specific *materia signata/designata* that comprises the primary being at a given moment (at least not in the case of human beings). Rather, the thing that instantiates and maintains identity in the face of corporeal difference is the life (*anima*) that gives to the living entity its proper operation and its material organization. At issue, for Aquinas, is the question of the identity of the primary being that has to be considered as a being in act, not an entity with a static existence. This question could not arise, in Aquinas’s view, for non-living

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<sup>27</sup> Such a question drove pre-Socratic reflection, as is obvious in Heraclitus’ famous embrace of the dictum that change is all there is, i.e. that there is no diachronos identity. However, this is an issue that raised metaphysical concerns among the early modern Rationalists, as well as the Empiricists.

entities, because if a statue, for instance, were not always the same matter, it could not be the same statue. Its identity as that particular statue is tied not only to the form it has but the specific granite it is chiseled from. That granite shape that is that granite statue.

Living entities pose a different problem, he thought, for the issue of identity.

More than merely a traceable history is needed to maintain a cogent doctrine of the metaphysical identity of a living entity, for Aquinas. A traceable history could, he might say, be a nominal, rather than an essential, description. Identity requires – to borrow Aquinas’s distinction in a different context – a real relation, not a relation of reason. This realness of the relation is rooted in Aquinas’s understanding, informed by Aristotle, of the primordial nature of a primary being. Thus, Aquinas conceives of identity in living beings across material changes as a result of the relationship between form and matter. The size of a body and some features of its shape, as such, are accidents. For Thomas, no accidental feature can account for the individuality of its own subject. Features such as quantity and some shapes result, by his lights, in corporeal substance by reason of matter. And as was discussed above, prime matter, as an abstraction, has a relation to shape and size, etc that is resultant, arising from prime matter’s relation to form.<sup>28</sup> Matter is actually necessary a priori (i.e., prime matter) in the existence of an entity. However, it is only granted dimensions through the organizing influence of form which makes matter to have concrete existence in a primary being. This process or relation is what Aquinas refers to as "inseparable concomitants that determine it in time and place."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> (*De Nat. Mat.*, iv).

<sup>29</sup> (*De Princip. Individ.*).

Earlier in this chapter we discussed the semantic changes Aquinas embraced regarding the dimensions of *materia designata*. This change and its import are now seen for the importance they have in his metaphysics of essential identity. He dropped the Avicennian notion of ‘determined dimensions’ for that of ‘undetermined dimensions’. In his later works he discusses the identity of a primary being *qua* materially in terms of its matter being "individuated by indeterminate dimensions preunderstood in it."<sup>30</sup> The substantial form that grants the dimensional quality of a primary being in material terms is the explanation of the reality we recognize in individual entities, i.e. that an individual can vary in dimension without losing its identity. A propensity to sustain its organization, even through material changes, is granted to the primary being through the principle of its substantial form.

It is this same substantial form that can arrange all the various material particulars of a living entity into a singular being is, for example, the various bodily parts that make-up the human body: soft tissue, blood, bone, mucous, as well as heart, lungs, stomach, and brain, etc. In an argument to establish that Christ had to have a human soul, Aquinas indicates that the soul as the substantial form of the human person is what makes the human body to be human in all its parts functioning together. “For flesh and the other parts of man receive their species through the soul. Hence, if the soul is absent, there are no bones nor flesh, except equivocally, as is plain from the Philosopher (*De Anima* ii, 9; *Metaph.* vii, 34).” (*Summa* III, Q 4, a 3, reply)

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<sup>30</sup> " *In Boeth. de Trin.*", Q. iv, a. 2; "*De Nat. Mat.*", vii.



## **Only one substantial form**

Just as Thomas insisted in his more mature teaching that an *ens* is has an *essentia* that is a singular, incommunicable reality, so he came to argue that each *ens* is made to be the essence that it is because the *materia signata* is organized with its proper operations by one substantial form.<sup>31</sup> He rejected the view of some of his time held regarding the nature of composite substances, namely that each composite substance had a plurality of organizing substantial forms that organized its physical existence. The concern that shaped his thinking in this regard had, once again, to do with the concept of essence and the attendant notion of the definition of a being. His reasoned conclusion was that the plurality doctrine undercut the identity of a substance. Whereas many of his day argued that *forma corporeitatis* is the “first act” that makes prime matter to be a specific organized material entity that could then be receptive of further “perfecting” – or clearly defining – forms, Aquinas viewed this as a concept fraught with philosophical confusion. Contesting the coherence of the plurality doctrine, he asserts in the *Summa*:

If we suppose, however, that the soul is united to the body *as its form*, it is quite impossible for several essentially different souls to be in one body. This can be made clear by three different reasons.

In the first place, an animal would not be absolutely one, in which there were several souls. For nothing is absolutely one except by one form, by which a thing has existence: because a thing has from the same source both existence and unity; and therefore things which are denominated by various forms are not absolutely one; as, for instance, "a white man." If, therefore, man were 'living' by one form, the vegetative soul, and 'animal' by another form, the sensitive soul, and "man" by another form, the intellectual soul, it would follow that man is not absolutely one. Thus Aristotle argues, *Metaph. viii* (Did. vii, 6), against Plato, that if the idea of

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<sup>31</sup> In his early *Commentary of the Sentences* (2, 18, I, 2) he accepts the standard theory of *forma corporeitatis* as the first substantial form in a corporeal entity that then includes other forms. However, in *Summa Theologica* 1 a. 47, reply 1 his rejection of this idea is indubitable. “The natural agent acts *by the form* which makes it what it is, and *which is only one in one thing; and therefore its effect is one only.*”

an animal is distinct from the idea of a biped, then a biped animal is not absolutely one. For this reason, against those who hold that there are several souls in the body, he asks (De Anima i, 5), "what contains them?"— that is, what makes them one? It cannot be said that they are united by the one body; because rather does the soul contain the body and make it one, than the reverse. (*Summa I a, Q 76, a 3, reply*)

The crux of Thomas's argument here involves how a substance can be understood to be identical to all that it is *qua* substance. For us to conceive of a poly-formal specification to be involved in the make-up of entities would require us to deny, Aquinas thought, the absolute oneness of identity in each of those entities. So, he continues in his argument for singularity of the formal principle.

If we have one form by which a thing is an animal, and another form by which it is a man, it follows either that one of these two things could not be predicated of the other, except accidentally, supposing these two forms not to be ordered to one another – or that one would be predicated of the other according to the second manner of essential predication, if one soul be presupposed to the other. But both of these consequences are clearly false: because "animal" is predicated of man essentially and not accidentally; and man is not part of the definition of an animal, but the other way about. Therefore of necessity by the same form a thing is animal and man. . . . (*Summa I a, Q 76, a 3, reply*)

With regard to his own earlier acceptance of the idea of *forma corporeitatis* as the "first act" that caused the existence of a corporeal substance, Aquinas came to reject this because he viewed this kind of plurality doctrine as necessarily implying that essential predicates would have to be considered as subsequent accidental forms. This, he thought, was logically incoherent. So, he rejected the doctrine of plurality, with its ideas about a *forma corporeitatis* as the instantiator of the corporeal essence, which would then receive or accrue subsequent forms as *hoc aliquid in actu* (a specific already existing thing). For Aquinas, only the first form – the most basic organizing principle – could be considered to be the substantial form. He held this on the basis of his views about the essence of

things. The essence of an entity is given to it, he argued, at the same moment that its substantiality (the character of being (*esse*) a substance) is made actual.<sup>32</sup> Aquinas was convinced that without this idea of a unitary substantial form that is the single organizing principle of a corporeal substance, one could not maintain the strict identity of things *qua* their inherent natures and specific identity. Such a strict way of construing the function of substantial form does not, however, mean that many features cannot be true of an entity.

Consider what he says in *De Ente*:

In the genus of substance we give the name ‘body’ to that which has a nature such that three dimensions can be counted in it; but these three determined dimensions themselves are a body in the genus of quantity. It does happen that something having one perfection may also possess a further perfection, as is evident in man, who has a sensitive nature and, besides this, an intellectual nature. So, too, over and above the perfection of have in a form such that three dimensions can be designated in it, another perfection can be added, such as life, or something of the kind. (*De Ente* 2 [6])

This statement, taken by itself, would fit, it would seem, with a pluralistic metaphysics of forms in individuals. However, Aquinas qualifies what he has in mind when he says a few lines later:

The soul [*anima* – that which makes alive in a certain way] *is not* a form different from that which gives to the thing three determined dimensions. That is why, when we said that a body is that which has such a form as allows the determination of three dimensions in it, we understood this to mean any *form* whatsoever: animality, stones, or any other form. In this way the form of animal is *implicitly* contained in the form of body, inasmuch as body is its genus. And such also is the relation of animal to man. (*De Ente* 2 [7])

The background of this discussion is the view that there are a hierarchy of forms in which the “higher” forms assume the aspects of those that fall under them and give to those forms a particular kind of expression. For example, humans considered as those

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<sup>32</sup> *Quodlibet*, II 5, 5.

beings who are what one might call physical rationality or rational bodies are made what they are by the union of the single form humanity with *materia designate/ signata*.

Humanity as a species form has as its specific difference rationality, in Aquinas's view. This specific difference, however, is a difference that entails a number of other realities, since humans are essentially an animal part of the corporeal world. So, humanity – both definitionally and existentially – assumes the following formal features: 1) life, which Aquinas sees as a fundamental, rather than an emergent phenomenon; 2) a capacity, therefore, for sensory engagement with the world; 3) growth and mobility; but the overarching reality that is involved in all of these features is 4) rationality. On this basis Aquinas describes the singularity of form that makes humans to be human. On different level of analysis, the same kind of discriminations can be made of other non-human animals; they merely lack rationality. The same analysis can even apply to botanical life; and to a much lesser extent to non-living physical things. The crux of the issue and its implications in Aquinas's metaphysics is that a single organizing principle accounts for all the essential attributes that one might discover to be a part of the nature of a primary substance. This principle is its substantial form. As was observed earlier in this chapter, by analyzing the whole of the world and its particulars in terms of hylomorphism, with its attendant polar corollaries act/potency, form/matter, species/individual, et al., Aquinas came to conclude that hylomorphism implies a sense of composition in non-necessary beings that is the most fundamental constitutive distinction of all in those non-necessary beings.

### Esse and “participating” *essentiae*

The distinction posited in the title of his work *De Ente et Essentia* is a necessary differentiation, Thomas argues, between what a thing is and that it, in fact, has existence. This concept is developed even further in the *Summa*. In a passage dealing with the “simplicity” of God, he argues as follows regarding the dependent nature of essences.

First, whatever a thing has besides its essence must be caused either by the constituent principles of that essence (like a property that necessarily accompanies the species— as the faculty of laughing is proper to a man— and is caused by the constituent principles of the species), or by some exterior agent— as heat is caused in water by fire. Therefore, if the existence of a thing differs from its essence, this existence must be caused either by some exterior agent or by its essential principles. Now it is impossible for a thing's existence to be caused by its essential constituent principles, for nothing can be the sufficient cause of its own existence, if its existence is caused. Therefore that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. . . .

Secondly, existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality.

Thirdly, because, just as that which has fire, but is not itself fire, is on fire by participation; so that which has existence but is not existence, is a being by participation. (*Summa* I, a, 3, 4, reply)

In Aquinas’s view, a thing simply is its *essentia*. However, no essence can be said to be its own *esse*, i.e. the existence that it has.

The essence of a thing is what it is as itself, hence the absurdity of considering the essence to be something other than the thing itself. “Because we use the term ‘a being’ absolutely and primarily of substances, and secondarily and with qualification of accidents, it follows that essence is in substances truly and properly. . . .” (*De Ente* 1 [5]) To conceive the essence of a natural substance or ordinary particular to be something besides its own identity as a substance, Aquinas contends, would be to think of the

essence-substance relationship in terms analogous to the relationship between substance and accident in Aristotelian metaphysics. But the fact that a thing actually has existence (or its “act” of existing) is different from the essence that it is. Such a medieval way of stating the relationship between the activity of existing and the factual essence that the thing *is qua* its identity might strike some as odd. So, we must look at what Aquinas means when he says that a being is not its own act of being.

Aristotle’s contribution to Aquinas’s thought is well established, but in the matter of the relationship between essence and existence Aquinas moved well beyond Aristotle’s views. Gilson has noted that for Aristotle the demonstration of the truth of an essential definition was the same as demonstrating its being, its reality or existence as an essence. The Stagirite analyzes this relationship as follows in the *Prior Analytics*:

The being (existence) of anything as fact is a matter for demonstration, and this is the actual procedure of the sciences, for the geometer assumes the meaning of the word triangle, but that it is possessed of some attributes he proves. What is it then that we shall prove in defining essential nature? Triangle? In that case a man will know by definition what a thing’s nature is without knowing it exists. But that is impossible.<sup>33</sup>

Because Aristotle conceived of the universe as necessary and eternal, he drew no distinctions between essence and existence as metaphysical principles. Since the demonstration of fact about an entity or state of affairs was, by Aristotle’s lights, the result of knowing the cause(s), all statements about the truth of an essence had to be statements about its actual being. His epistemological commitments about how we know things (rejecting Platonic idealism) shaped his ontology, and his ontology gave rise to his logic. Joseph Owens comments about Aristotle’s intertwining of logic and metaphysics:

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<sup>33</sup> Gilson, 138. Cf. *Prior Analytics*, II, c. 7, 92 B 14 – 17.

“To ask whether the moon is eclipsed or not, is . . . precisely the same as asking whether A (i.e., the eclipse) has a defining condition (*logos*), and if this condition actually exists, we assert that A also actually exists.”<sup>34</sup> So, in Aristotle’s account of the relationship between essence and existence, the relationship is one of identity: a thing exists as what it is, because it is.

Whereas Aristotle was not (apparently) concerned with the act of being (existing) that a thing evinces, in the sense that this “act” contingently applies to the essential concept of the thing, Aquinas saw it as the most fundamental of all relationships. For the Greek logician, a contingent relationship would be a *per accidens* relationship. He was “dealing with the universal and necessary connections between the elements of definition and demonstration.”<sup>35</sup> In Aristotle’s view, the radical distinction between Being and non-Being did not allow Aquinas’s later question to arise. But for Aquinas, the issues that attended the Aristotelian doctrine of potency and act implied the necessity to examine the distinction between *esse* (Being) and *essentia* (Essence). An essence, he argued, entails, the possibility of its existence, but it does entail the fact of its existence. In *De Ente* he follows Avicenna’s insights.

Whatever does not belong to the notion of an essence or quiddity comes from without and enters into composition with the essence, for no essence is intelligible without its parts [the form and matter that make it exist as real]. Now, every essence or quiddity can be understood without anything being known of its existing. I can know what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it exists in reality. From this it is clear that the act of existing is other than essence or quiddity, unless, perhaps, there is a being whose quiddity is the very act of existing. And there can be only one such being, the First Being.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Owens, 291

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *De Ente*

What this does not mean, for Aquinas, however, is that existence is added to an essence, such that the fact of a thing's reality is in some way accidental to the thing that it is. For when Aquinas argues that a thing's essence is identical with it, and that the only things that really exist in themselves are primary beings or substances, this implies that existence and essence in a thing are not separable when one is considering the thing itself. In other words, a being is a being only because it has being (*esse*). His metaphysics require that *esse* be understood as the highest intrinsic principle of the being (*esse*) of a primary being (*ens*). To understand this aspect of Aquinas we need to consider his view of how a thing can come to exist in the first place.

In the *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas famously argues for the existence of God.<sup>37</sup> The "Third Way" is his expression of the distinction between essence and existence in terms of a demonstration of the existence of a First Cause, or Being, that is the source of all other beings.

We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence— which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient

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<sup>37</sup> Brian Davies has noted that the "existence argument" is granted special emphasis in Aquinas' philosophy as a demonstration of God's reality. "It appears again and again in his writings, and it is often presupposed in contexts where it is not given explicitly. It is fleshed out in *De potential 7* and *Summa contra Gentiles*, 1. 22, and 2. 52. But it is particularly concisely stated in *Summa Theologiae*, I a. 65. 1. Davies 31.



causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God. (*Summa* I a, 2, 3, reply)

The import of Aquinas's argument is that some Being, by which he means some activity of existing, that is not dependent upon anything else must be that upon which all other entities depend, not for their instantiation alone, but for their very reality.

If things that differ agree in some point, there must be some cause for that agreement, since things diverse in nature cannot be united of themselves. Hence whenever in different things some one thing common to all is found, it must be that these different things receive that one thing from some one cause, as different bodies that are hot receive their heat from fire. But being is found to be common to all things, however otherwise different. There must, therefore, be one principle of being from which all things in whatever way existing have their being, whether they are invisible and spiritual, or visible and corporeal. (*Summa* I a, 65, 1, reply)

In other words, there is some active condition or substance, understood in the widest possible terms, upon which all else depends.<sup>38</sup> What this implies, however, is that each being exists only if it participates in Being as the most proper principle of its essence as a being. On the basis of this reasoning – plus the additional conclusion that

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<sup>38</sup> It falls outside the scope of this dissertation to deal with the various objections that have been proffered as refutations of this argument for the existence of God. It should be noted, however, that Aquinas is not here arguing for a sequential chain of causes back to a cause that is the very first cause in the chain. Such a notion would not let him posit a truly First and necessary cause. Rather, he is arguing here that the existence of any particular and obviously contingent being is dependent for its existence upon a prior condition. Also, any contingent chain of events or beings can exist only if some prior condition is the ground upon which the capacity for existence evidenced by that chain of contingent events or beings depends. Hence, some foundational something must be posited as the metaphysically prior condition or state in which other things exist via participation. Hence, when he argues above that “we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity,” he is establishing that something has to be thought of as the foundational point of reference. This is not unlike, it seems to me, Spinoza's argument that the one Substance exists in itself and all other things exist in this Substance as temporal, even if logically necessary in their temporality, modes. Of course, Spinoza's method of demonstration is “geometrical”, i.e., a priori. Aquinas' proceeds a posteriori from the beings encountered in the world and the world as it is given to us in experience. The conclusion that Aquinas draws above that a necessary prior condition all men call God is his endeavor to demonstrate that Christian belief in God is not irrational. We can demonstrate the philosophical appropriateness of introducing God-language into metaphysical discussion, Aquinas would argue, even if we cannot establish a knock-down proof of the Christian God. Spinoza would have agreed.

God must be defined as self-subsisting<sup>39</sup> (not existing in anything else) – Aquinas puts forth the following conclusion about the relationship between God and all beings:

It must be said that every being in any way existing is from God. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire. Now it has been shown above (3, 4) when treating of the divine simplicity that God is the essentially self-subsisting Being; and also it was shown (11, 3,4) that subsisting being must be one; as, if whiteness were self-subsisting, it would be one, since whiteness is multiplied by its recipients. Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly. (*Summa I a, Q 44, a 1, reply*)

This means, among other things, for Aquinas, that only God can create; and the notion of creation is a profoundly unique idea.

To create can be the action of God alone. For the more universal effects must be reduced to the more universal and prior causes. *Now among all effects the most universal is being itself: and hence it must be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, and that is God.* Hence also it is said (*De Causis prop., iii*) that "neither intelligence nor the soul gives us being, except inasmuch as it works by divine operation." *Now to produce being absolutely, not as this or that being, belongs to creation.* Hence it is manifest that creation is the proper act of God alone. (*Summa I a, 44, 5, reply*)

If one adds to this notion Aquinas's earlier insistence that all that has being does so by participation in some principle that is the act of Being simply, then we can see that in Aquinas view the act of creation is not a reference point in the past – i.e. the starting point at the beginning of a chain of events. Rather, the idea of creation entails that all creatures (primary beings, forms and matter, prime and designated, as the principles of

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<sup>39</sup> *Summa Theologica I a, 3, 1.* "The first being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality. For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to the actuality; nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced into actuality only by some being in actuality. Now it has been already proved that God is the First Being. It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality."

being, all specific essences, the laws of nature, mathematical principles, spiritual beings, etc) exist in some way as a ‘participating’ expression of God’s own act of Being.

Because God is “simple” and not composite, Aquinas would contend that God’s act of Being just is identical to God’s essence. Brian Davies has noted about Aquinas’s thought on this point that “This means that all things depend upon God for their continued existence. In saying that God is the Creator of something, Aquinas is not just saying that God just got it going at some time past. He means that God sustains being. . . . the conservation of things is, for Aquinas, closely related to their first coming into being. Both depend upon God’s activity.”<sup>40</sup>

What this does not mean, for Aquinas, is that the things so created and participating in God’s act of Being are God properly considered. Rather, things exist in a way that is distinguishable from God’s own essence as Being itself. They exist, however, only because God allows them to partake of God’s own existence, without being divine themselves by association.

God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident, but as an agent is present to that upon which it works. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately and touch it by its power; hence it is proved in Phys. vii that the thing moved and the mover must be joined together. Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing, as was shown above (7, 1). Hence it must be that God is in all things, and innermost. (*Summa I a, 8, 1, reply*)

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<sup>40</sup> Davies, 35.

It should be reiterated here that for Aquinas God is simple not composite in any way. This means that God's acts as agent are ultimately not separate ontologically from God's being in the way that our acts are separate from our essence. Thus, while the things themselves have, in themselves, their own identity strictly speaking (their own essence) they do not have in themselves their own individual act of existing. That can only be had via God's presence in them. And this state of dependence would obtain, in Aquinas's view, even if the created world were conceived of as eternal.<sup>41</sup> In turn, this view of God's relationship to creatures is one that notes the distinction (although in a different way) which Spinoza would later observe between that which exists only in or through another and that which exists in itself.<sup>42</sup>

### **Summary**

The doctrine of hylomorphism in Aquinas entails that individual entities have existence only via participation in the Being of God. Aquinas defines God as Infinite, Perfect Act that has no potency. However, in recognizing this kind of substantial dependence for existence, Aquinas argues that the individual entities that participate in God's Act of Being cannot be confused with the ultimate identity of God, because as Being Itself God's "essence" is not communicable to any single entity that is composite

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<sup>41</sup> Aquinas is willing to entertain the notion that "temporal origin" of the universe is not demonstrable. However, temporal origin and metaphysical dependence are distinct concepts in his mind. Cf. *Summa Theologica*, I a, 46, 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ethics* I, defs. 3 & 5. "By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed. By mode I mean the affections of substance; that is, that which is in something else and which is conceived through something else." It is interesting that Aquinas's view about God's necessity and the dependence of all other things for their existence upon the Being of God – not just God's first instantiation of stuff in creation – has some similarity to Spinoza's views. This is not to say that their metaphysics are the same, but to note another potential point of comparison between Aquinas as a Medieval Christian Scholastic and the Modern Rationalist.

in any way. So, participation in God's existence grants reality to essences (particulars, both substantial and accidental), but these particulars are always understood to be something less than God, even when the realm of particulars is taken as a whole. In Aquinas's view, even a chain of contingent composites – even an infinite one taken as a whole -- would not be self-explanatory, or self-causing

Making things essentially what they are, the dynamic interplay of form and matter creates individual essences, as form gives a proper orientation to the particular matter that is organized as an ordinary particular (an *essentia*). So, things that exist via participation in God's act of Being, in Aquinas's metaphysical schema, do so as irreducibly physical entities. But the principle that grants to them a particular physical existence cannot be conflated with the material that they are, because the material *qua* material does not and cannot be the source of its own organization. This implies that form is distinct conceptually from designated matter, even if form cannot "exist" apart from the matter it so designates. The import of this is that form as a principle of existence is some force that "acts" not merely upon matter (that would be too Platonic) but acts in concert with matter to constitute, and by participation in God's act of Being to cause, a particular essence to be what it is. Matter, by the same lights, must be thought of as a second principle of existence that is passively there as a cooperating stuff that the organizing principle, form, establishes as a definable and specific *ens*.

Only one form, in each ordinary particular, can be conceived of as the foundational reason that that a thing exists the way that it does. This is the substantial form. If a thing is a singular essence, then all other "forms" that express themselves in the individual must be thought of as either accidental or incidental to the organizing

presence of the substantial form. As examples, consider the color of Socrates hair and the shape of his body. His hair color can change, but he remains the same. So, the form of brown can give way to the form of white, as the organizing principles of his hair color change. However, it is still the hair color of Socrates. Thus, the forms that his hair can receive *qua* his hair are dependent upon the substantial form of his Socrateity, i.e. his actual existence as the singular essence Socrates. The shape of Socrates body might change, as well. This could be conceived of as the reception of accidents. These accidental forms do not change the essence of Socrates, even though they are expression of his actual existence at a particular moment. They are, therefore, incidental in the dictionary sense that they are minor or casual or subordinate in significance or nature or occurring as a chance concomitant or consequence. These incidental accidents are dependent upon Socrates-ness.

However, the *shape* of Socrates' body is a different and more complex subject, metaphysically speaking, in Aquinas's hylomorphism. It would seem that what Aquinas refers to as the proper operation of a primary being is intricately tied to the way that it is organized as a body. And further, the designated material that makes it up is crucial to the proper operation being fulfilled. In any case, while the identity of an entity is not simply a nominal matter, but rather the entity is what it is because the body that it is can be said to function in a certain way. This specific operation happens because the form that organizes and designates the matter that has been formed into the body in question causes the physical organism (the body) to be capable of performing certain operations. Strictly speaking, these functions and operations are not those of either the body or the form per se. Rather, they are the acts of the particular primary being that is the composite

“product” of the interplay of the basic forces – matter and form. Maintaining the particular proper operation particular to it (and its kind), an animated primary being’s identity as an individual is maintained diachronically in spite of the fact that changes in the material make-up take place (perhaps many times) over the course of its life.

In this way, Aquinas utilizes Aristotle’s hylomorphic theory to develop his own theory in important ways that distance him from his Greek predecessor. The distinction he draws between essence and existence proper finally is a still more radical example of how he drives the act/potency distinction to do work it did not do for Aristotle. This distinction may be such an important one that it provides an example of a philosophy that anticipates some of Spinoza’s arguments about the “oneness of Substance.” Aquinas’s oneness of Being, in which all things must exist and which must be expressed in all things has, of course, significant differences from Spinoza’s ontology. However, it is worth suspending judgment about this matter until we have opportunity to consider Spinoza’s doctrine in a later chapter.

Now, however, we must turn our attention to an area where many commentators insist that Aquinas parts company with Aristotle in a fundamental way; a way that some think is incoherent. This is the conception that Aquinas’s develops that sees the human soul *qua* form as not only a substantial form of the body, but that claims that we must think of the human soul as itself a *subsistent* feature of the world.<sup>43</sup> As we shall examine in the next chapter, the distinctions that Aquinas draws between form and matter and essence come together in his focus, regarding the relationship between mind and body, on

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<sup>43</sup> The issue of subsistence will prove to be vital to a proper interpretation of Aquinas in the next chapter.

the concept person – “an individual entity of a rational nature.” This is the crucial point in understanding Aquinas’s real doctrine of mind-body identity. As we shall see, he would perhaps have understood what Spinoza meant when he said that “mind and body are one and the same thing; conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of extension.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Ethics*, III, 2, sch.



## Chapter 4

### **Mind-Body Identity in Aquinas: On Being Composite and Being One**

In this chapter we turn our attention toward the issue that directly concerns the thesis of this dissertation. We will look at Aquinas's doctrine of the unity of a human being's existence and indicate how his hylomorphism is a kind of "identity theory" regarding the relationship between mind and body. Hylomorphism allows him to think of the mind and body as dual aspects of a single entity, and therefore, identical as that existent thing, but described in distinct ways. This crucial analysis will lay an important foundation for our consideration in chapter five of Spinoza's own metaphysics. There we shall endeavor to show how his doctrine of mind body can be helpfully interpreted as a post-Cartesian expression of a Thomistic perspective. This claim does not entail any dependence of Spinoza upon Thomism rather it simply marks a striking similarity. While the language in which Aquinas and Spinoza wrote was the same, Latin, the philosophical terminology that they utilize is different, reflecting the contexts in which they lived and thought. Differences notwithstanding, it will be argued in the next chapter that Aquinas's way of seeing the issues involved, provides us with a helpful interpretive schema for understanding Spinoza's own cryptic statements describing the mind and body as "one and the same thing, considered under two distinct modes." This will allow us to address the much-discussed issues surrounding various interpretations of Spinoza's theory of mind-body identity.

It is hoped that we might be able to find a better way of understanding Spinoza's own doctrine in the light of Aquinas's and, therefore, advance somewhat in our

understanding of the great modern rationalist's concepts. But, before we begin to suggest how looking backward in time could help us understand Spinoza, let us look to Aquinas's own metaphysical position.

### **Interpretive difficulties in Aquinas's theory**

Aquinas's metaphysical theory on the nature of man is a challenge for his interpreters. Parts of his doctrine are particularly difficult. He claims, for example, that the soul is both a substantial form and subsistent in its own right, that is, that the soul is both a principle that grants certain form and function to the human body and also itself thing-like and having its own subsistence, which he argues means that the soul is able to survive the death of the body it has formed and enabled to function. Aquinas's articulation of this doctrine presents many contemporary readers with the challenge to understand what he could possibly mean – and not just by Aristotelian lights – in making this claim. And, as if this difficulty of understanding his idea of subsistence were not enough, he also presents other challenges.

A second obstacle to understanding Aquinas is the way that he speaks about the essence of a human being as soul and body in union. In particular, he describes the metaphysical status of human beings in two different ways which seem mutually exclusive, rather than complementary. Gyula Klima sets out in a very concise fashion what is at stake in the tensions that Aquinas's doctrine of soul-body unity presents to his interpreters.<sup>1</sup> Regarding the Angelic Doctor's descriptions of human beings, Klima notes

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<sup>1</sup> The following analysis is indebted to Klima for pointing out the semantic difficulties in Aquinas's theory, especially Klima's essay "Man = Body + Soul: Aquinas's Arithmetic of Human Nature," *Philosophical Studies in Religion, Metaphysics, and Ethics: Essays in Honour of Heikki*

that Aquinas says both that a particular human being *is* a specific kind of body – a rational, sensing, and living corporeal entity – and that a human being is a composite being that *consists of* a soul united to a body. These two descriptions will not co-exist easily, at least at first glance, Klima observes, because to *be* something (a body) is not the same thing as *consisting of* something as a part of one’s being. Indeed, by this second definition the whole human being cannot simply be *this* body, because a part, no matter how integral it is to the whole, cannot be the same as the whole. But, this confusion is only part of the challenge an Aquinas interpreter faces.

Furthermore, when contemporary readers of Aquinas consider his doctrine of the soul that posits the rational soul as is the one and only substantial form of the human body, it is difficult to understand, in contemporary terms, what this might mean.

Aquinas’s argument in the *Summa* insists that there is only one soul and one substantial form of human existence – the rational *anima*. So he concludes in I a, Q 76, a 4, ad 1: “And so it is said that the soul is the actuation of a body and so on, meaning that due to the soul *it is a body* and is organic and has power to live.”<sup>2</sup> This was in answer to an objection that contended, against the single-form theory of Aquinas, that the life when considered as an activity of a living body should be judged to be something over and above the body that is alive (a kind of supervenience). Hence, a third question arises for Aquinas’s hylomorphism as to how the same form could be both the essential cause of the animality of a human being (the life) as well as the formative principle that gives spatiality to the organization of the human body. In much contemporary metaphysical

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*Kirjavainen*, ed. Timo Koistinen and Tommi Lehtonen, (Helsinki: Luther Agricola-Society, 1997), 179 – 197.

<sup>2</sup> My emphasis.

thought, the doctrine of supervenience is the preferred way of envisioning the relationship between the presence of life and the chemical and atomic structure of the bodies of living things. Hence, the doctrine of supervenience would describe the organization of the material body as sufficiently complex to allow life to supervene or emerge epiphenomenally. This means (to translate it out of medieval terms) that contemporary scientific paradigms consider the material make-up of a living being to be one thing and the presence of life which makes the living being alive another thing. Even in Aquinas's own day, the pluralists, who contended that there were distinct souls that accounted for the organization of the body and the presence of sensory life, had their own version of supervenience. But even more critical for the purposes of this dissertation is the further Thomistic assertion that a human being's humanness is the result of the very same form that makes him be an animal in the first place. For the typical supervenience theories in science and philosophy in contemporary thought, this way of construing the issue is challenging to understand.

Here a fourth hurdle is encountered. While he asserts the unity and singularity of form in a human being's existence, because a human being has a single essence, Aquinas's articulation of this doctrine is misleading, at least apart from a careful analysis of what he is actually saying. Aquinas seems to hold that the essence of a human being and the soul of a human being are not actually the same thing. Again, Klima gives a good description of the challenge that a modern commentary on Aquinas must deal with, one that it seems might run afoul of the metaphysical essentialism that hylomorphism entails.

Aquinas also argues that a man's humanity or quiddity is what he calls the 'form of the whole' [*forma totius*], as opposed to the "form of the part" [*forma partis*], which he identifies as the soul, and the form of the whole differs from the form of the part because the form of the whole contains both matter and form. So the form of the whole, the quiddity of man, contains the soul as its part, so it obviously cannot be the same as the soul. But if it is not the same as the soul, and yet it is a form of the human being, and it is clearly not an accidental form, then it seems that we have at least two substantial forms here, one of which is a part of the other, and which, besides the form of the part, also contains matter!<sup>3</sup>

Klima's observations, outlined above, only suggest a part of the difficulty faced by anyone who wants to take Thomistic metaphysics seriously. Other of Aquinas's formulations, which at times seem to conflate the soul (*anima*) and the intellect (*intellectus*) or mind (*mens*), introduce a different kind of confusion into the mix. Making things even murkier, Aquinas argues that we can say that intellect and *anima* are both principles by which a living human being has biological "life." His discussion in the Reply of question 76, article 1, of the *Summa*, regarding the nature of *anima* as the *life-giving* and the *intellectual* principle in human beings, brings out the importance of carefully reading what he says there:

The intellect, as the source of intellectual activity, is the form of the human body. . . And the reason for this is that what a thing actually does depends on what it actually has to give; a thing acts precisely by virtue of its actancy. Now it is obvious that the soul [*anima*] is the prime endowment by virtue of which a body *has life* [*vivo*]. Life [*vita*] manifests its presence through different activities at different levels, but the soul is the ultimate principle by which we conduct *every one of life's activities*; the soul is the ultimate motive factor behind nutrition, sensation and movement from place to place, and the same holds true of the act of understanding. So that this prime factor in intellectual activity, whether we call it mind [*intellectus*] or intellectual soul [*anima intellectiva*], is the formative principle of the body [*forma corporis*]. . .

Should anyone wish to maintain that the intellectual soul is not the form of the body, he would have to find some way of making the act of understanding an act

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<sup>3</sup> Klima, 181.

of this particular person. For each is conscious that it is he himself that understands. . . So we must either say that Socrates understands through his whole self, as Plato held, saying that man is an intellectual soul, or else we must say that the understanding is a *part* of Socrates. Now the first of these is untenable. . . on the grounds that one and the same man perceives himself both to understand and to have sensations. Yet sensation involves the body, so that the body must be said to be part of man. It remains, therefore, that the intellect whereby Socrates understands is a part of Socrates, in such wise that the intellect is in some way united to the body of Socrates.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, Aquinas certainly seems to be saying that intellect (*intellectus*) -- which he acknowledges is a *mental activity* -- is the actual *form* of the human body. This way of speaking seems to imply that mental activity is something more than an activity. While it would be clear how mental activity could be a feature of a human being, it is far from clear exactly how an act in which the human being engages could also be described as the *form* that enables the same human being to perform the activity of knowing. At the very least it is unclear how Aquinas could employ this kind of description, if he is indeed serious about being an Aristotelian, rather than a strict Augustinian Platonist. Even if one allows for what we saw in chapter three, that a form is logically and in some sense ontologically distinct from the body it informs (which gives the form actual existence rather than metaphysical *subsistence*), we can still ask how it could be that the intellect could be thought of as a subsisting and substantial form. How could an activity of knowing ever be conceived of as a substantial form (much less a subsisting one), unless one embraces a Platonic view of mental activity?

Our dilemma grows more confounding, because in this very same passage he contends that “the understanding is a *part*” of the human knower’s existence. This way

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<sup>4</sup> My emphasis.

of putting the matter would seem to imply the same thing that Klima described in terms of the soul generally, namely, that the intellect is (comparable to) a *forma partis*. Aquinas insists that the fullness of the act of knowing in sensation and intellect involves, in some way, the body, which is informed presumably by the very “intellect” which is an activity of the knower *qua* bodily. Hence we have a description of the intellect as simultaneously both a result of the *forma totius* -- or soul-body union -- and at the same time the “formative principle” of the very same union.

One can survey ever so briefly the varying commentaries and interpretations on Aquinas to see the conflict that this kind of locution creates. Aquinas’s interpreters have provided us with quite disparate readings of the metaphysical implications that his doctrine has for understanding the nature of human beings. On the one hand there are those who focus on Aquinas’s contention that intellect is the *activity* of an embodied knower. Peter Geach is an excellent example of this reading of Aquinas. He argues that if we take the whole of Aquinas’s treatment of human beings into consideration (which the passage we have been considering only outlines) we must see Aquinas’s view of human beings in very physicalist terms. Aquinas, according to Geach, views a human being as “an animal, an animal is a *body*; so [a human being] is a body, not a body plus something else.”<sup>5</sup> Contrary to such a reading, Anton Pegis interprets Aquinas’s doctrine as a refutation of Aristotle’s description of a human being is a physical substance-- a body formed by the soul as its enabling principle. Aquinas instead prefers, Pegis argues,

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<sup>5</sup> G.E.M. Anscombe and Peter Geach, *Three Philosophers: Aristotle, Aquinas, Frege* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 98.

to describe a human being as an “incarnated intellect.”<sup>6</sup> Obviously, Pegis is focused on the terms of Aquinas’s doctrine that highlight the “intellect” itself as a form.

At least one scholar has posited an even more radical interpretation of Aquinas’s ostensibly bifurcated rhetoric about the nature of human beings. Linda Jenks suggests a reading of Aquinas that goes beyond either Geach’s or Pegis’s appraisals, but hers is one that makes Aquinas even more difficult for contemporary readers to consider seriously. In her view, as a consequence of his account of the uniqueness of the human soul *qua* form, “Aquinas assigns man a correspondingly unique ontological status which is intermediate between spiritual and corporeal creation.”<sup>7</sup> It is not the focus of this dissertation to critique Geach or Pegis or Jenks in the various readings they give of Aquinas. Yet, in what follows in the rest of this chapter it will become obvious that choosing between Geach’s “physicalist” Aquinas, Pegis’s “intellectualist” Aquinas or Jenk’s “intermediate” Aquinas is unnecessary, when one sees the import of his hylomorphism and the doctrine of mind-body “identity” that follows from it.

Because of interpretive issues such as those discussed in the preceding paragraphs, some conclude that Aquinas’s metaphysical scheme regarding human beings is woefully confused. So, getting clear about Aquinas’s doctrine and its implications is crucial if we are to make sense of Aquinas’s doctrine as a possible ally in interpreting Spinoza’s own difficult doctrine. Hence, in this chapter we must wrestle with what

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<sup>6</sup> Anton Pegis, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man. Augustinian Lectures 1962* (Philadelphia: Villanova University Press, 1963). I am indebted to Linda P. Jenks in *Aquinas On the Soul: Substantial Form and Subsistent Entity*, 1985 dissertation, University of California, Irvine for pointing me to Pegis’s reading of Aquinas, as well as Geach’s.

<sup>7</sup> Linda P. Jenks in *Aquinas On the Soul: Substantial Form and Subsistent Entity*, (Ph. D. diss. University of California, Irvine, 1985), 29.



exactly Aquinas's metaphysics regarding human beings actually entails. The question to be addressed is whether or not we can make sense of his theory of mind-body. To do so we must demonstrate that Aquinas can be accurately designated as one who holds a type of dual-aspect identity theory. And of course, this analysis is not important just in order to understand him adequately, but also to set the stage for the next chapter of this project, in which we will suggest how Spinoza's own doctrine of mind and body as "one and the same thing" can be understood in light of Aquinas's metaphysical doctrine of human nature. To those ends we will specifically consider five crucial metaphysical claims that Aquinas defends. We will first consider them following, in order.

- (1) A human being is unitary in essence, yet composite.
- (2) The soul is rightly called "intellect" or "mind."
- (3) The composite of soul and body is rightly called a "person," which is a foundational metaphysical concept.
- (4) A human being has an essential unity.
- (5) The human soul can survive the bodily death of a human person.

The first four of these will be treated in this chapter. The fifth will be discussed in the last chapter where we take up at the same time Spinoza's doctrine on the same issue:

As we analyze Aquinas's attempts to be an Aristotelian as a Christian philosopher, we shall be in a much better position to understand both why he believes -- and how he arrives at that belief -- that every human being who exists in the world does so as a fundamentally psycho-physical singularity. Also, we shall see why, in his view, neither of the aspects of this being can be subsumed by the other as we attempt to describe them; neither can be reduced into terms that describe the states of the other, i.e.

mind cannot be described in physical terms simply. Again, and as Spinoza would say later of the essence of human existence and as Aquinas could possibly concur (even if he would reject much of the former's ontological commitments): the mind and the body are *one and the same thing*, conceived of in distinct modes. It is precisely this kind of unity, I contend, Aquinas is seeking to articulate in his "Treatise on Man" in *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>8</sup>

### **Human "being" – soul and body composite**

In question 76 of the *Summa*, Aquinas takes up directly the question of human beings as *comprised* of the union of soul and body. There he is forthright in his contention that there is only one soul (essence-giving principle) that is associated with the animated human body, namely, the "intellectual soul." Aquinas's main focus in this passage is to establish that the *activity* of rational living is the form of a human being's life. Since that activity is the definition of a human being, a human being *is* a rational animal. This definition provides the foundation upon which Aquinas built his argument against the pluralists of his day. The medieval pluralists argued that there must be more than one form that accounts for human existence, in order to account for the various "powers" that human beings evidence, namely, growth, locomotion, sensation, and reason. Aquinas contended that on Aristotelian terms there could really only be a single form that would be the principle at work in the material existence of a human being,

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<sup>8</sup> Timothy Suttor describes Aquinas's treatise on man as one of the three "highly technical" treatises that shaped the theoretical orientation of western culture. The other two are Aristotle's *Categories* and Boethius's theological works. "How original was it," Suttor asks. "One is struck by how little he repeated his predecessors, and how radically he reorganized the material they had left. . ." *Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970), xv – xvi.

making that human being to be what he is essentially and not accidentally. Any other way of reasoning about the essential nature of a human being, he argued, would force us to conceive that the definitional elements in question – rationality and animality – only exist accidentally in the essence of a human being. That would, he believed, mean that there the essential definition of a human being, as both rational and animal – or mental and biological irreducibly -- would have to be sacrificed; but these dual aspects are, he argued, both indubitable and irreducible as essential features of human existence.

In the *Summa* Q 75, a 1, reply, we can glimpse Thomas’s logic on this matter. He is arguing for the unitary nature of a human being, and asserts:

The nature of a specific type includes whatever its strict definition includes, and in things of the physical world [*rebus naturalibus*] this means not only form, but form and matter. Thus materiality is part of the specific type in physical natures; not this determinate matter here, which individuates a thing, but materiality in general. For as it belong to the very conception of ‘this man’ that he have this soul and this flesh and bone, so it belongs to the very conception of ‘man’ that he have soul, flesh and bone.

But we could [take the statement “the soul is the man”] to mean that “this soul” is “this man”. And this indeed could be maintained, if we postulated that the activity of the sense-soul belonged to it apart from the body. For all the activities attributed to a man would then be attributable to the soul. For that *is* a thing which does what the thing does, and so that is man which does what man does. But it has been shown [in article 3 of this same question] that sensation is not an activity of the soul alone. Sensing is an activity of the whole man, even though it is not peculiar to man [since all animals have sensation]. And hence it is plain that man is no mere soul, but a compound of soul and body. It was because Plato held that sensation belonged to the soul as such that he could speak of man as a soul using a body.<sup>9</sup>

Once he has argued for this conception as the definition – “compound of soul and body” – of being human, he is then able to begin to present his argument that

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<sup>9</sup> In this passage Aquinas is addressing the critical issue that was much discussed in his day regarding the relationship between specific entities and universals.

demonstrates how the soul, therefore, only a part of a human being, rather than, ala some Platonistic positions, that it is most essentially the man. The soul is “part” of Socrates only in the sense that Socrates *is not* his soul, for “man is no mere soul, but a compound of soul and body.” To be a human being is to be a compound entity, but it is nonetheless to be a singular thing, yet the singularity cannot be attributed to the soul. As belonging to *rebus naturalibus* a human being (Socrates) is essentially physical as a particularly informed and specifically defined entity. The soul of Socrates is what makes the living “body” of Socrates to be a human body, rather than some other type. Socrates *is* the union of the two principles, because the soul is the part of Socrates’ actual essential *existence qua* Socrates the rational animal that makes him a human being, insofar as, not generically but in a very defined way, it causes the matter of his body to take on life. Socrates’ being alive, rather than inanimate (as his corpse would be after his death), is his being alive specifically as a human being. One cannot, in Aquinas’s view, legitimately differentiate the two (his being alive and his being human), except through abstraction from actual existence. On Aristotelian principles, therefore, Aquinas asserts that the soul is not Socrates (or any man), but is part of the compound entity. This sets him against the kind of neo-Platonic view that would claim that the “*soul* is the man.”<sup>10</sup> But, as it might be better to put the point, the point is simply that the soul is a component of the very essence, without being the essence, of the existent compound entity in question. This

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<sup>10</sup> The parallel between neo-Platonic, Augustinian and Cartesian thought is obvious regarding the question of identity. When the *soul* is conceived of primarily in terms of consciousness (and therefore almost strictly equivalent to the mind) the idea that one’s identity is anchored, either primarily, at least, or exclusively, in the *soul* is the logical conclusion. However, neither Aquinas nor Spinoza would so conceive of the soul.

means that the soul is not the existent man *per se* but is the feature without which his existence as a man cannot be.

Aquinas's arguments in question 76 about the soul's union with the body are rooted in Aristotle's contention that each and every entity has only *one substantial form* that makes it what it is. There can be other accidental forms that are associated with a thing, but as accidents they cannot be part of the definition of the thing. Hence, as accidents they cannot be considered to be even a *part* of a thing's essence. Rather, as accidents their essence is part of the substance. On the basis of this understanding of the nature of accidents of substances, Aquinas argues vigorously that the intellectual or rational soul must be the only form of the human body, since being rational or engaging in acts of intellect is not something that human beings do in addition to *being* human; that would be an accidental relationship to their essence. Being rational is the form of the actual concrete essence of a human being. If there were, he reasons, some other form that made them human *qua* physical that was different from their being human *qua* rational, then rationality would be accidental to their humanity. Or the same conclusion would be reached, if rationality were fundamental to human existence, but being embodied were only a contingent feature. His reasoning is laid out in the *Summa* Q 76, a 4, reply. The form of his argument is, as follows.

- 1) A thing exists only as a particular concrete expression of a specific kind of existent essence, not generically.
- 2) A concrete existent is what it is because of the substantial form that makes it be what it is.
- 3) A living entity is the result of an *anima* that gives it life.
- 4) The life of the entity is not distinct, in reality, from its essence.

5) Therefore, there can only be one substantial form/soul in any living entity.

By Aquinas's lights, one can think about the question of what makes a human being a human being as follows. If the essence of a human being, by (1), is to be an animal that has the specific difference *qua* animal of being intellectual/rational,<sup>11</sup> then by (2 and 3) there is a human *anima* of each human being which is the form that makes the being under consideration to be human. It follows, thus, that by (4) the soul that is productive of rational thought and understanding must be the sole animating principle in a human being. In his view, it makes no sense to say that, even in a non-temporal, purely metaphysical sense, humans exist first as physical bodies of a particular type, then as animals in a generic sense, and only in the last level of analysis as human. Aquinas does not deny the continuity between human beings and other organisms *qua* animals, but he cannot conceive of how one could define the humanity of the human animal in any terms other than by an essential definition. In other words, human beings do not have any generic existence *qua* animal.

To conceive otherwise would run afoul of the Aristotelian in Aquinas, because, as for Aristotle, what is primary in existence are the individual members of species, not the species. A genus such as "animal" is a secondary substance, at best, that exists only because there are organisms that can be called "animals. Hence, for Aquinas, the animality of a human being is a part of the definition of human being, namely rational *animal*, but neither rationality nor animality can be thought of as ontologically prior to

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<sup>11</sup> The terms intellectual or rational when used by Aquinas as adjective qualifiers of the term *anima* have a synonymous use. Hence, I shall use them interchangeably. What he means in either case is the organizational form or essence of human existence that gives to an individual the quality of being a rational animal.

the actual creature (the primary substance) that expresses in the world both animality and rationality. Any other way of thinking would be, in Aquinas's view, an abstraction from actual existence. The only animality that human beings have is always specifically *rational* animality. Thomas's main concern in this analytical position is that we not attempt to posit any existential or ontological real distinction between the rationality of a human being and his animality. Following his peripatetic mentor, he concluded that if one conceived of the distinction between the two as a distinction between ontologically different substances, a human being's rationality would be something over and above his actual, physical existence in the world. He was convinced that, philosophically, we could neither divorce the rational from the material in human beings.

It cannot be the case, Aquinas contends, that a human being's rational existence is something other than his life as a living physical entity. If rationality and animality are both essential to the definition of a human being, there could only be, in Aquinas' view, one sole animating principle of the human creature. To allow for more than one animating principle (to posit, with the pluralists, a sense-soul that accounts for the animality and then another soul to account for the rationality) would erode the essential oneness of a human being's essential existence. On this basis, Aquinas asserts in the strongest terms that there can only be what he calls the single "intellectual soul" making a human both alive and rational in nature simultaneously.

Among other implications, Aquinas's resolute conviction that there can be only one *anima* that makes a human being alive *qua* rational animal forces the conclusion that rationality is never something over and above the other features of human life. Rather, in some way *intellect* is involved in the power of growth and the power of sense that

operates in a human being's life. Hence, the "lower" (in the medieval sense) aspects of biological life – sensory perception and motive life and growth – have a very specific and utterly unique manifestation in human life. So, Aquinas says in Q 76, a 4, reply: "We must affirm that the rational soul alone informs man so as to give him existence, no other form does so. And just as it contains within its capacities all that the sense-soul and the nutritive soul contain, so it contains all the more elementary forms and of itself effects what they effect in other cases." The act of living rationally gives a distinct "flavoring" or expression to the other features of the animated (animal) existence of a human being. This way of thinking about the place of rationality in human existence leads Aquinas to reject the plurality doctrine and the quasi-supervenience it entails.

The irreducible unity of the definition of humanness with which Aquinas works in this section of the *Summa* is further revealed when one considers Aquinas's dissertation about how the "intellectual soul" must be understood as only a "part" of some other entity. In Q 76, a 4, *ad 1*, he explains what he means by this: "[The soul] is the *activating part* of an organic physical body that has the power to live."<sup>12</sup> In asserting this, Aquinas is saying that something other than the physical elements and principles that make up the material body must be posited to account for the fact that the "physical body" actually has "the power to live." Matter is not, by Aquinas's lights, self-organizing, much less capable of being the sole explanation (cause) of the existence of life in a particular entity.<sup>13</sup> But the matter that is organized to be alive, in the case of a human

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<sup>12</sup> My emphasis

<sup>13</sup> In so arguing, Aquinas is not suggesting the need for some radically occult explanation, such as immediate reference to God's power. His view is perfectly consistent with the doctrine ofhylomorphism which we traced in chapter two of this dissertation, in which the organizational principle that provides the



being, is alive in a very particular way. The life that is being lived is a rational life; or one could call it living rationality. This intimate connection between rationality and life produces the Thomistic hylomorphism according to which the intellectual soul is the *part* of a human being that operates as the single formal cause of a human being's humanness. For Aquinas, there cannot be a plurality of essential causes for the humanness, say, of Socrates; otherwise Socrates would be many things and not essentially one with himself.

However, if Socrates bears the form of humanness that all other human beings share, then Thomas must provide an account for Socrates' individuality. Socrates cannot exist apart from the form of humanness that gives him life *qua* Socrates, but he is not *identical* with the human *anima* that makes him human; what makes Socrates to be "Socrates" in the metaphysical scheme we are considering. Socrates and Plato, according to Aquinas's metaphysics, are only distinguished from one another by the fact that the humanness of the one is present in *this* arrangement of matter and the humanness of the other in *that* arrangement of matter. Hence, the "body" of each individual particular (Plato and Socrates) is distinct and, therefore, Plato is distinct from Socrates. There is no other way, in Aquinas's view, to understand the distinctness, since the essence of humanity is to be composed of matter and form. They share the form of being human, hence, in respect to their humanness they do not differ from one another.<sup>14</sup> But what could Aquinas mean by saying that the arrangement of matter makes them individuals?

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necessary information to cause matter to be arranged in an appropriate way so as to make life possible is asserted as a necessary description and an inescapable conclusion.

<sup>14</sup> This way of discussing the matter would seem to be entirely consonant with contemporary science of DNA. The encoded information that humans share is not the thing that makes them distinct from one another, even if issues of height and pigmentation and other features that are expressed in the physical make up of a particular human being are also in the DNA information. For, there is no real distinction

On the basis of Aristotle's metaphysical principles, Aquinas argues that Socrates is made to be an individual, and therefore "Socrates," by the rational human-making soul specifically but only insofar as it informs some particular material stuff in the composite entity "Socrates." This doctrine is simply an application of his general theory of matter as the principle of individuation within species. The spatial dimensions of Socrates' body are what individuate Socrates from all other human beings, as well as from all other entities. In part three of the *Summa*, Aquinas describes the way that dimensions work in the individuation of an entity. In III, Q 77, a. 2, while discussing the Eucharist, Aquinas argues that "dimensional quantity in itself has a certain individuation; we can imagine many lines of the same kind, but all different because of their position; and this position is part of the very idea of this quantity. For it is of the very definition of a dimension to be a quantity having position."<sup>15</sup> What is interesting here is the role that "position" plays in Aquinas's account of individuality. As Andrew Payne notes, "Rightly understood [Aquinas's account of] the nature of dimensional quantity includes position, so that whatever has dimensional quantity will also be made of parts having position in relation to each other and will therefore occupy a determinate place."<sup>16</sup>

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between the humanness of human beings simply on the level of DNA, since the DNA has a shared "formal" essence and is, as I have argued, analogous to information. The distinction is, rather, only real when actual spatial differentiation occurs. An interesting question to pursue, but which is beyond the present focus of this project, would be whether or not a Thomistic metaphysics or the metaphysics of Duns Scotus, with his doctrine of the *haecceitas* more closely approximates the modern science of DNA and the way that the information encoded gives expression to each specific person's humanness.

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent discussion of Aquinas's theory of individuation see, Andrew Payne, "Garcia and Aquinas on the Principle of Individuation," *The Thomist* 68 (2004): 545 – 575. A substantive criticism of Aquinas's doctrine is found in Jorge Gracia, *Individuality: An Essay on the Foundations of Metaphysics*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 155 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Payne, 568.

One could add as well, I think, that Aquinas's view of individuation includes the further notion of being an individual by having particular dimensions that particularize that individual's "place" *in relation to* all other entities in relation to which that individual exists. This is inherent in the idea of place, especially in light of the argument presented in the previous quotation, according to which all the lines are individuated from one another because "of their position." Hence, the individuality of Socrates, say, is only ultimately comprehensible regarding the place and position he fills in relation to *other* individuals who are also similarly individuated. So, Socrates is made to be "Socrates" both because matter has received form and because in so receiving form the matter takes on, (out of its own nature, not that of the form) the "dimensive quantity" of Socrates in relation to all other material entities.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, individuals are what exist primarily, but they exist in their ontological primacy as entities that share in a specific kind of *act* of being. In the *Summa*, 1-2, Q 17, a. 4 he concludes that: "Many individuals that are one in genus or species are many absolutely speaking [when considered as ordinary particulars], and one with respect to something, for to be one in genus or species is to be *one with respect to reason*."<sup>18</sup> This means that Socrates and Plato can be considered to be "one" kind of thing (human), in a conceptual sense, but not ontologically.<sup>19</sup> Just as every *thing* that exists only exists as a specific *kind* of thing, the only way that specific *kinds* exist is in the particular *thing(s)*

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<sup>17</sup> See chapter three for the discussion of Aquinas's ideas about signate matter, 93 ff.

<sup>18</sup> My emphasis

<sup>19</sup> But as was argued in chapter three that does not mean the existence of the concept is not real. The existence of the concept is the product of the abstract reasoning powers of a human knower who is capable of recognizing similarities between ordinary particulars. Such similarities are not nothing, even if they have no concrete existence except in the ordinary particulars that share the manifested similarities

that exist concretely in the world. In other words, ordinary particulars that are similar to one another share a common nature. However, Aquinas refuses to think of that nature as existentially prior to those ordinary particulars, despite the fact that, the individual character of each of the similar particulars only exist in the form of the specific essence to which each of them gives expression.

In the section of the *Summa* just mentioned, Aquinas is attempting to articulate how things can be conceived of as “being many in some respects and being one in another.” He utilizes the example of human compositeness in the argument. “. . . in the genus of natural things [things that exist in the material world], some whole is composed of matter and form, as man from body and soul, *who is one natural being*, although he has a multitude of parts.”<sup>20</sup> What Aquinas is arguing for in this Question of the *Summa* is fully consistent with the rest of his metaphysical system. He is pointing out that we can analyze or describe ordinary particular items of our experience from various points of view, but that this need not deny the ultimate oneness of an entity under consideration. We can discuss human beings as composite entities comprised of body and soul, and that would be, analytically speaking, correct. However, for Aquinas that mode of analysis does not determine the ontological status of a human being as a rational animal. There is, for him, some absolute standard “according to which the mereological constitution of the whole is not dependent on us, namely the ontological status of the parts so distinguished and of the whole thus marked off.”<sup>21</sup> “

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<sup>20</sup> My emphasis

<sup>21</sup> Klima, 182.

Soul” and “body” are terms for the ontological principles of rational animal existence, according to Aquinas. In their composite unity they instantiate an entity called a human being. As principles, they are not substances, but are, respectively, active and passive attributes of being. Soul is the active factor, in that it grants specific kind of existence to the physical entity that lives because of the union of soul and the matter that becomes the *informed* body. The body is the passive dynamic in human existence because it is only capable of being formed, but it grants particularity and individuality in its passive capability of being formed. Reference to both of these principle is necessarily involved in descriptions of the act of *being* human. Soul, therefore, is not an immaterial, much less mental, “thing” that exists in its own way and in a unique realm. When Aquinas says, as quoted above, that the soul is *in* the body, he means that it is “in” it in such a way as to be truly one with the body, namely, insofar as it is the very *being* (existence) of the body that is a human being and perceived as the source of the specific material organization of that same being. And yet, the soul can be regarded rightly in metaphysical analysis in abstraction from the material conditions of the being so organized.

### **The essential unity of a human being**

The intricacy of Aquinas’s theory that the soul and body are one *qua* human person in *act* (in the Aristotelian sense), is made more obvious when one considers the reciprocal relationship that exists between the human body and the soul. In his metaphysical appraisal, not only does the soul establish a body as a particular kind of essence in act, but as well, only a particular kind of matter can be adequate for expressing the form of the human *anima*. Because of the kind of intelligence that a human being

exhibits, the human soul must activate matter to become a very particular kind of body. Hence, not just any matter will do as the receiver of the information by the human *anima* gives form (literally) and function to the human body. He describes the reciprocity in I a, Q 76, a 5, reply.

Since form does not exist for the sake of matter but rather matter for the sake of form, the form explains the character of the matter, not the other way around. Now the intellective soul [as he has argued in I, Q 55, a 2] is the *lowest grade of intelligence* in the hierarchy of nature, in that it does not have the angelic being's inborn knowledge of the truth but *has to gather it* from quantified things *through sensation*. . . . the intellective soul needs the power of sensation as well as the power of understanding. But there can be no sensation except through a body. Therefore, the intellective soul has to have a body *which is a suitable organ of sense*.

Now all the other senses build on touch. And the organ of touch needs to embrace contraries within its range, hot and cold, moist and dry and so on, the things touch comprehends. . . . And the more it occupies a sort of middle position between such contraries, the more *touch-perceptive* the organ will be. So that the body to which an intellective soul is *joined* has to be a compound body occupying a sort of middle position as regards objects of touch. For this reason man is the most touch-perceptive of the animals and intelligent men the most touch-perceptive of men. For instance, sensitivity and insight go together.

Whether or not Aquinas's assessment of the relationship between one's physical sensitivity and one's intellectual prowess is acceptable is open to question, but it is clear, from this passage, that Aquinas is deeply indebted to Aristotle's claims in the *De anima*. Aristotle's argument in that work regarding the dependence of mental acts upon the physiological conditions of the body has greatly shaped Aquinas's philosophical anthropology. In fact, in his commentary on the *De Anima* the Angelic Doctor is willing to acknowledge that human emotions can be described, at least in part, by decidedly physical categories. For instance, he thinks that Aristotle's contention that anger is "inflammation of blood around the heart," should not be neglected as a part of the

analysis of what anger itself *is*. Of course, Aquinas thought that this would not fully describe the nature of anger and that much of what Aristotle theorized about this matter is (understandably) undeveloped. Aquinas would presumably not be dismayed by the discoveries of contemporary brain science, namely, the detection and demonstration of associations between psychological/mental states and physical events in the brain. More important for this dissertation, however, it might indeed be the case that he would have at the very least understood, if not have been able to affirm at least in part, Spinoza's argument in Book Three of *Ethics* that there is a fundamental physical "part" of the very being of human emotions.

In addressing the pluralist claims of his day, namely that there must be some other principle that organizes the physical structure of the body besides the rational soul, Aquinas says that the soul does not merely actuate the body (as Plato might have insisted), but as the principle of animate existence of the living human being, it is "included *in* that which the soul is said to actuate, just as we say that heat actuates something hot and light something luminous – not as if it would be luminous apart from the light, but that the light makes it luminous" (Q 76, a 4, ad 1).<sup>22</sup> This illustration entails, what has been stated earlier, that the "intellective soul" is the principle by which a particular human being lives the organic life of a rational animal. As was discussed above, the particular kind of body that a human being has is a necessary part of his existence as a rational animal. As Thomas puts it, "so it is said that the soul is the actuation of a body and so one, meaning that due to the soul it is a body and is organic

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<sup>22</sup> My emphasis.

and has power to live. But the first actuation [being a body] has a relation of potentiality to the second [being organically alive], which we call activity;’ there is no such potentiality apart from or excluding the soul.”<sup>23</sup>

The essential unity that Aquinas attributes to a human being is made clearer elsewhere in this same Question in the *Summa*. In article 3 Aquinas addresses the question of whether there are other souls, not simply other forms (principles of biological organization) besides the “intellectual soul.” Aquinas lays out the objection that he wishes to address in the fourth objection.

Aristotle says that genus stems from matter, while the differentiating features stems from form. But rationality, the differentiating feature constituting humanity, comes from the intellective soul, while man is said to be an animal because he has a body animated by a sense-soul. Thus the intellectual soul is related to the body animated by the sense-soul as form to matter. So the intellectual soul is not the same as the sensitive soul in man, but presupposes it as the matter it energizes.<sup>24</sup>

In answering in the negative on this issue, Aquinas sought to overturn a theory of his day which claimed that a human being was comprised of a plurality of *souls* (organizing life-forces), which made intellect a state supervening upon lower organic states. He answers those who objected to the idea that the “intellectual soul” was the only source of life in human beings in a way that is crucial for understanding his general position on the issue of the absolute oneness of body and soul in the singular entity called a human being. He begins by noting that we can and do make logical distinctions

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<sup>23</sup> Klima, 184.

<sup>24</sup> The assertion that this is a medieval version of supervenience theory is based on the implication in this argument that the “intellectual” soul needs the “sense-soul” in the same way that form, generally conceived, needs matter. Hence, the conclusion that the intellectual soul “presupposes” the sense-soul strikes me as a kind of supervenience doctrine, which contends that the mind supervenes upon an physical-organic state of affairs that are necessary for, even if not productive of the mental supervenience.



between certain concepts such as sensory life and intellectual activity in human beings. In his rebuttal, he maintains, however, that the distinctions are logical, not ontological -- that human reason actually “can grasp *a single existing thing* [*unum et idem* – one and the same] in a variety of ways.”

His rejection of these distinctions as real divisions of being is based on his conception of the intellectual soul; he conceived of the reality of souls in the world as entailing a concept of a hierarchy of life. In Aquinas’s understanding of this issue, every more complex level of biological life is actuated by an *anima* that gives these entities not only the more complex form of its own level but contains, as well, the kind of existence that the less complex life forms exhibit. Hence, no other “soul” is needed to account for the why of human existence, because a single organizational force (*anima*) gives life, function, a drive to flourish, rational understanding and anything else essential to being a human being.<sup>25</sup>

Because the intellective soul contains within its capacities all that the sense-soul does and more, therefore *analysis can look at* the sense powers as matter in need of form. And as this characteristic (soul with sense powers) is common to man and to other animals, *the mind forms the concept* of a genus embracing both.

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<sup>25</sup> This particular way of arguing for the substantial unity of entities and insisting that the human soul was hierarchically capable of subsuming within itself all the powers of the lower vegetative and sensory soul of plants and animals was thought to be a dangerous innovation by many of his day and afterward. Copleston in *Aquinas* comments about this doctrine’s controversial reception. “It was combated at a debate in Paris, before the bishop, about 1270, Dominicans and Franciscans, especially the Franciscan Peckham, accusing St. Thomas of maintaining an opinion which was contrary to the teaching of the saints, particularly Augustine and Anselm. . . . the chief ground of complaint being that the Thomist doctrine was unable to explain how the dead body of Christ was the same as the living body, since according to St. Thomas there is only one substantial form in the human substance and this more, the soul, is withdrawn at death, other forms being educed out of the potentiality of matter. . . .on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1277 [Thomism was condemned] at Oxford, inspired by Robert Kilwardby, O.P., Archbishop of Canterbury, in which figured among other propositions the unicity of substantial form and the passivity of matter. . . . Kilwardby’s condemnation was repeated by his successor, the Franciscan Peckham, on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1284, though by that time Thomism had been officially approved in the Dominican Order.” Copleston, 153 – 155. Cf. Suttor, 255.

This means, in Aquinas's view, that those who, on the basis of mere ordinary observation of behavior, posit a plurality of souls really do not fully comprehend the way that a single human *anima* provides for complexity of organization in a being who is essentially one, and only one, in the most basic sense. It is not the case that one needs to posit a different organizational principle, he argues, to account for various human capacities. The single rational soul grants the very capacity for sensory life upon which it is itself dependent in order to be able to reason discursively in the first place. In the relevant observation of behavior, our minds merely identify distinct operations, rather than disparate forms of life, in human experience and action. As he puts it in the same passage: "Those features of the intellective soul which are beyond the power of *sense* are seen by the mind as shaping and completing and *thus constituting* that which makes man different."<sup>26</sup> By contrast, doctrines involving a pluralistic hierarchy of supervenient souls go hand in hand with the suggestion that each of them, including the highest, is something over and above the material nature of human existence. Aquinas could not see how this would fit the point of the essential definition, "rational animal. The doctrine he proposed was simpler and more consistent, he thought, only needing to posit a single informing *anima* to explain the organizational complexity of a human being. This in turn leads to a reconciliation of the claims that the soul is "in" the living human being and that it is at the same time "one and the same" as that being.

Aquinas observes, as a part of his proofs, that the departure of life at the death of a person was both the end of rationality in that bodily entity and the beginning of the

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<sup>26</sup> My emphasis

disintegration of the body *qua* spatial entity. In Aquinas's mind, just as the initial unity of soul and body means that rationality is part (in potency, at least) of the nature of the new entity so in-formed, so in even the most rudimentary forms in the course of the process of human development, rationality is still part of the definition. That is why the departure of the intellectual soul results in the cessation of life.

Substantial form enables a thing simply to have existence, so that when it is there we say the thing is there, and when it is not there we say the thing has disintegrated. . . . If it were the case that *as well as the intellective soul* some other substantial form already existed in the soul's subject material, so that it came into something already existing, it would follow that the soul did not give precisely existence, and was consequently not a substantial form. Its embodiment would not generate existence nor its departure bring on disintegration simply speaking, but merely as regards some particular aspect. This is clearly untrue. We must affirm that the intellective soul informs man so as to give him existence; no other form does.

There is only one organizational principle that accounts the complexity of the organization of the human body into a human being. This is the singular human *anima* that Aquinas calls the rational soul. By this measure, Aquinas can argue, as he does, that the mental activity that a human being engages in because of the in-forming principles of the rational *anima*, however, is not the product of the soul alone. The matter which is informed by the soul provides, in Thomas's judgment, the individuation of a human particular essence. The humanness of the essence is that which the rational soul brings to the material stuff that becomes the human body. The matter so organized is what, and only what, the body of a human being is, in his view. But the soul does not account for the particularization of the essence; that is the function of the matter that is informed. Since, Thomas's hylomorphism focuses on primary substances as the fundamental existents of reality, rather than essences or natures, he must conclude that without the

body that is produced in the union of soul and matter the organizational information that the soul provides to the material stuff goes unexpressed and, therefore is not truly existent. Soul, in other words, requires body in order to exist strictly speaking. The human being that is the singular composite and primary substance is his bodily life; and that bodily life is produced in the union of soul and matter. Both individual existence and of human nature, generically named, is communicated to the matter of the body by the formation principles that the rational soul brings.

**The knowing subject: The soul as “Intellect” or “Mind”**

Beyond what we have already discovered, we must ask what Aquinas’s argument means when he, in certain passages Aquinas utilizes the nouns “mind’ and “intellect” to name the soul of a human being. Such a designation might suggest, in light of his claim that the *soul* is subsistent and incorruptible, that he is -- all protestations aside -- really a kind of substance dualist. At least it could be argued that if he holds to a doctrine of incorruptibility of the soul and he uses ‘mind’ to name the soul, it makes no sense to interpret him as holding that mind and body are *one and the same thing*, for that would seem to suggest that ‘mind’ is a kind of thing in itself (a Cartesian and un-Spinozistic sounding concept.) Hence, we need to ask what alternative meaning there could be when Aquinas says we can characterize *anima* as “intellect” or “mind.” Without this alternative reading, we may find that Aquinas not only is unhelpful for understanding Spinoza but actually gainsays his metaphysical commitments as an Aristotelian. If he uses these terms to refer to the soul insofar as they might be interpreted as saying they point us to an actual thing as their shared referent, that would be remarkably un-Aristotelian.; and yet Aquinas thought of himself as unpacking Aristotle’s doctrines for the Christian Church in

a manner that was consonant with Christian orthodoxy and faithful to Aristotle's intentions.<sup>27</sup> But even if it is not the case that Aquinas holds to a quasi-substance dualism, if it could be shown even that Aquinas conceived of mind as some power or feature that is, not distinct from the matter of the body but set off from the body, the suggestion that Thomistic hylomorphism is a helpful interpretive category for understanding Spinoza would be weakened beyond all hope of rehabilitation.

In order to analyze how Aquinas develops his argument that the soul can also be called the mind, we will benefit by considering a recent 'Cartesian' reading of Aquinas's doctrine, one that makes a strong case for considering Aquinas's 'mind' as, in itself, a categorical entity, that of Anthony Kenny.<sup>28</sup> By considering such an interpretation of Aquinas, and showing how it fails, the argument of this dissertation – that he conceives of mind and body as one and the same *thing* – will be strengthened. According to Kenny, Aquinas would agree with the discoverer of the *cogito* in the judgment that human beings 'have' minds. This might be, on some level, defensible, but not as Kenny unpacks it. The Thomistic mind, by Kenny's definition, is a single power in itself that is a "knower" constituted by the two capacities of (1) intellect and (2) the desire for the good *that corresponds to* the nature of the mind, i.e., will.<sup>29</sup> Kenny attributes this position to Aquinas, because he interprets Aquinas as defining the mind as "the capacity for acquiring linguistic and symbolic abilities" that exists along with *will* as an additional

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<sup>27</sup> Of course, Aquinas might be wrong about this. Suttor points out, for example, that in the Treatise on Man Aquinas's "argument for Aristotle's [harmony with Christian] orthodoxy is tenuous, and he can be understood [in the sense Aquinas interprets him] only if we can overcome several grave difficulties of *De generatione animalium*, 736b 273." *Summa Theologiae*, 163 n.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, (London: Routledge, 1993). Hereafter, Kenny.

<sup>29</sup> Kenny, 18. "The will, *too*, is part of the mind, as the Aristotelian tradition maintained, but that is because the intellect and will are two aspects of a *single indivisible capacity*."

power.<sup>30</sup> The import of all this for Kenny is that he believes that “mind” in Aquinas’s view is a power that is metaphysically distinct from the biological considerations that science deals with in its analysis of human life. While he quite rightly, in his interpretation, describes the mind as a power of the soul – but as a ‘power’ is not identical with the soul – he realizes that in Aquinas’s metaphysics the soul possesses sensitive powers that are not part of the ‘mind’ as Kenny conceives of Aquinas’s ‘mind,’ Kenny’s way of describing Aquinas’s doctrine is fraught with inadequacies as an interpretation of a Thomistic philosophy of mind.<sup>31</sup>

Kenny’s interpretation lands us in a methodological dualism that, as O’Callaghan says, “separates the philosophical study of mind from the scientific study of everything else, including the animal life of the human body.”<sup>32</sup> This dualism is apparent when he describes an “Aquinas in whose philosophy there is some power called “mind” that exists in as some “irreducible core amenable *only* to philosophy.”<sup>33</sup> This Aquinas would, in the methodological dualism Kenny offers, seem to run afoul of the medieval Aristotelian’s own insistence that the one *anima* that organizes the biological life of a human being also establishes in the human being the vegetative and sensory elements of life. While Kenny recognizes and accepts this aspect of Aquinas, he nonetheless undercuts it by making

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 17

<sup>31</sup> Kenny’s treatment of Thomas’s doctrine sounds, as O’Callaghan also notices, very much like his own notion of the nature of mind. In *The Metaphysics of Mind*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), he argues that human beings alone have minds but they share features of life with other animals. In Kenny’s view, Thomistic *anima* is fundamentally possessed of two powers, what he calls “psyche” and “mind.” He offers this distinction: We may wish to have a word to refer to the *cluster of sensory capacities* in the way in which ‘mind’ in my usage refers to the cluster of capacities whose major members are the intellect and will. The most appropriate word seems to be ‘psyche’. If we adopt this usage we can say that whereas only human have minds, humans and other animals have psyches.”

<sup>32</sup> John P. O’Callaghan, “Aquinas Rejection of Mind”, *The Thomist* 66, (January, 2002), 21.

<sup>33</sup> Kenny, 5.

Aquinas sound similar to the very pluralists that he stood against. As noted by O’Callaghan in an essay critical of Kenny: “Kenny preserves that plurality in a weaker sense, by his emphasis upon a strong distinction within the soul between the set of powers of vegetative and sensitive life on the one hand, and mind as a thoroughly different power of the soul on the other.”<sup>34</sup>

If Kenny’s account is lacking, how will we progress toward understanding what Aquinas, in fact, does mean where calls the soul “mind or intellect?” We may begin with the foundational focus Aquinas provides in his “treatise on man” in the *Summa*. The discussion of the mind he provides later is built first upon his discussion of the nature of the soul and then secondly upon his view of human beings as composite beings who each have in themselves an essential unity in the integration of soul and body. In *Question 75*, a 2 of the *Prima Pars*, where he presents his argument about the soul’s nature, he argues that the form of the human body (the soul) is what he refers to as the “principle of the *act* of understanding” and this act is incorporeal and subsistent.<sup>35</sup> He continues on to say that “the principle of understanding, which is *called* mind or intellect, has its own activity in which body takes no intrinsic part.” It seems odd that Aquinas would name the soul “mind or intellect” when it is clear from his other discussions of the nature of the soul that the human *anima* has powers that are not describable as intellectual or mental in any reasonable sense (growth and motion). Intellect or mind is really but one of the powers of the rational soul. Aquinas, however, is thinking of mind as the “principle power” of

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<sup>34</sup>O’Callaghan, 19. O’Callaghan’s article is an excellent analysis of not only Aquinas’s mature doctrine of the soul and mind-body relations, but also an insightful exposition of how his later theory articulated in the *Summa* relates to and grew out of his earlier work in his commentary on *De Anima*, through the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

<sup>35</sup>My emphasis

the soul: “the intellectual soul *sometimes* gets named from the intellect *as its principle power*” (Ia, Q 79, a 1, *ad* 1). As the “principle power” of the soul, intellect (*intellectus*) is still only “a power of the soul and not the very essence of the soul” (Reply). So, the soul is *called* mind or intellect in an equivocal sense as a way to name the most specific feature that it brings to human life, i.e. the specific difference of being a *rational* animal.

If *intellectus* is not “the very essence of the soul” in Aquinas’s doctrine, then he is effectively distancing himself from Augustine’s authority, who considered the process of thought and understanding as the ontological nature of the soul.<sup>36</sup> In Augustine’s theory, the mind is distinct from the body and the soul is essentially the mind. Sensation is not part of the mind, for this great Christian theologian, because the mind is essentially one thing that has three acts it performs: memory, intellect, and will.<sup>37</sup> The result is of course a dualism in Augustine, reflected in his description of the “inner” and “outer” man.<sup>38</sup> The former acts to understand eternal truth and the latter focuses on the sensory data the body experiences; and the result of this kind of thinking means, for Augustine, that the mind is an immaterial thing with its own special unity of operation. Aquinas, while needing to distance himself from Augustine’s brand dualism, had to square himself with Augustine’s authority as a theologian. Aquinas cites the Father of the Church in the

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<sup>36</sup> Augustine’s most important, influential, and sophisticated statements on the mind come in *De Trinitate*, in which he uses the example of the human mind to endeavor to establish the possibility of plurality in the Godhead. He posits the mind as a foundational existent but then suggests that the self-knowledge that the mind can have and the love that the mind can feel for the knowledge it has of itself are three substantive distinctions that do not imply ontological division. “Love and knowledge are not in the mind as in a subject, but they too are substantial, just as the mind itself is; and even if they are posited relatively to each other, still each of them is its own substance. . . . the mind therefore and its love and knowledge are three somethings, and these three are one thing, and when they are complete they are equal.” *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 273f.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 298 ff.

<sup>38</sup> While Augustine is careful to insist that the body is an intricate part of the human person, he nonetheless, with his doctrine of the inner and outer man posits a dualism.



first point of Question 79 where he is interpreting Augustine. Aquinas there says that we *call* the human soul the mind or the intellect in the same sense in which we speak of the souls of lower animals as *sense-souls*. “And likewise the intellectual soul sometimes *gets named* from the intellect as its principle power, in the way, as the *De Anima* remarks, that *the intellect is a substance*. And in this way Augustine says that mind is spirit or essence.”

The import of the above exposition is that in the *Summa* we find Aquinas saying that the terms “mind” and “intellect” are *only* a kind of short-hand for describing the soul with respect to that which is the highest expression of a life that is truly human. These two terms signify the highest activity of the human being’s embodied life that results from the organizing form that is the principle of a human being’s existence *qua* rational animal. The act of intellection takes place in the life of a rational animal, because the acts of the intellect (thought and awareness and reason) are the highest expressions of life that the soul *qua* organizing principle produces in the “composite” being in question. “Mind” names the highest *act* of the human being. These terms – “mind or intellect,” then, refer to the soul in respect to its highest power. Thus for sake of convenience and to make sure his rhetoric is reconcilable with the authority of Saint Augustine, the Dominican theologian says we can *call* the soul the mind, while at the same time not allowing that the soul *is* the mind.

In this sense, for Aquinas, it is not the term “mind” or “intellect” but “soul”, understood as referring to the informing or organizing principle of bodily existence, that actually has a referent. While the soul can be called the mind in the sense outlined above, the mind is strictly speaking a power of the soul, not a thing itself with certain powers.

However, we must understand this idea of the mind as a power of the soul rightly, if we are going to understand Aquinas. Rationality is the act that is called ‘mind’ by Aquinas; it is a capacity inherent to a human being made possible by the rational soul. Hence, we can say in a qualified sense that the mind is a ‘power’ of the soul, in the sense that the instantiation of the act of being minded is the highest capability that the soul grants to the organized matter it informs. O’Callaghan’s exegetical observations in this respect are on the mark:

The intellective part of the soul consists [for Aquinas] in the powers closely associated with intellect or mind. No suggestion is made [by Aquinas] that they form a potential whole that is itself a power. . . . Now ‘intellective part’ is nothing more than a phrase for the classification of powers associated with the intellect. Most importantly, ‘mind’ is uniformly associated with ‘intellect’ alone [with no intimation of will as a part of the ‘mind’].<sup>39</sup>

At the heart of Aquinas’s concerns is not the Cartesian problem of how to define the mind in itself or discuss the ontological status of consciousness, but how to understand human existence as one whole entity that is essentially the act of rationality *qua* animal.<sup>40</sup> He presents us with a philosophical anthropology rather than a philosophy of mind. Hence, Aquinas does not offer a doctrine that would make all mental acts the acts of a Cartesian mind, or even an Augustinian one (with its inner and outer man). Rather, he thinks of mental acts as the acts of a being that is as essentially material as it is mental, because they are ultimately the acts of a rational *animal*. As shall be argued below, this allows Aquinas to avoid the attendant problems of causation and origination

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<sup>39</sup> O’Callaghan, 38.

<sup>40</sup> Recall Linda Jenks’ work cited above, note 7. While I disagree with her interpretation of Aquinas as holding that human beings are a kind of ontological intermediary between the material and the spiritual, she is correct to note that the rationality of the human is a partaking of rationality that is, in itself, immaterial. Hence, the best way to describe Aquinas’s of human rationality is to say it is rationality *qua* animal.

that attended and attend various dualisms. With respect to the question of the connection of mental acts with human bodies, he sees mental acts as the actions or experiences of a biological creature, in whom soul *and* body are involved in process involved in the achievement of understanding. (The same can also be said about the nature of physical motion.) Knowing is the act of a human being *qua* bodily, at least in the sense that it is not something that takes place in addition to the actual bodily life of the human being. But since knowing and understanding constitute the highest level of that complex biological life which is made possible in a human being through the organizational principle of the human *anima*, one is to that extent – but no further --justified in calling the soul “mind” or “intellect.”

This failure of “mind” to be a genuinely “referring term” in the sense in question is underscored by Aquinas’s insistence that the human “intellective soul” is the kind of intellect (the lowest in the hierarchy of intellect in reality) that can perform its operations only in relation to a body.<sup>41</sup> In the *Summa* (I a, Q 77, art. 3) Aquinas makes the case that the “powers” of the soul are distinguished from one another by their acts, and these acts in turn are distinguished according to their objects. “Object” is to be understood in the medieval sense rather than in terms of our contemporary metaphysical currency. It can refer to a thing that is the objective or purpose of a passive power of the soul, for example music would be an “object” of hearing. In terms of the acting powers of the soul, the

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<sup>41</sup> In his doctrine of the immortality of the soul Aquinas argues that certain powers of the soul are kept operable after death, namely, intellect and will. But these incorruptibly operating powers would not have become operable in the first place prior to the body’s relationship with the soul. We shall look at the logic of Aquinas’s view of the incorruptibility of the soul at the end of this chapter, but for now we can observe that this way of stating the issue underscores the fact that Aquinas thinks of soul and body in union as enabling actual existence and real “expression” to an entity that is neither body nor mind strictly speaking and yet, in some sense, is in fact both.

“object” of an active power of the soul would be the aspect of reality that is the goal or the end for which that active power exists. An example would be truth as the “object” of the rational soul; or health the “object” of medicine.<sup>42</sup>

What then is the object of the mind, if the mind is understood to be the act of understanding that is manifest in a human being *qua* rational animal? Aquinas’s epistemology can take us some way toward understanding how to answer this question. First, as was indicated in the previous section, he conceives of the human intellect as requiring the body to perform its acts of understanding. This does not mean that the body causes the mind to attain or receive knowledge. Instead, he argues, the issue that needs to be analyzed is simply how a rational animal is both animal and rational, because the activity of knowing is one that involves the whole being of a human person. To analyze this process, Aquinas offers a theory of how sensory perception provides the mind with the material that it is to understand. For Aquinas, the proper object of the human mind (at least in this life) is the nature of the material world. Based on his Aristotelian commitments, he insists that the mind is not endowed with innate ideas, that “the first thing which is known by us in the state of our present life is the nature of the material thing, which is the object of the intellect . . .” (*Summa I a*, Q 88, a 3).

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to interpret or analyze Aquinas’s epistemology in great detail goes without saying, we can observe how he understands the term “mind” by noting the general way he describes the process by which human beings come to attain knowledge of any kind. We discussed above how Aquinas viewed the

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<sup>42</sup> O’Callaghan observes, “Aquinas uses color as the object of vision for an example of a passive power, and physical maturity as the object of an active power like growth, O’ Callaghan, 40.

necessity for a certain kind of body to be the effect of the human soul's organizational power in the material stuff of the human animal. In the *Summa* he maintains consistently what he says in his answer to the third objection posed in question fifty of the *prima secundae partis* of the *Summa*: "a man is made apt of understanding by the good disposition of the interior powers [of the organism], in the production of which the good dispositions of the body has a part to play." It is through the organs of sense, which are bodily, that the sensible forms of things first present themselves to the human being. Hence, in the first analysis the body is involved in the reception of these forms into the power for understanding of a person. In fact, the organizational principle of the intellectual soul establishes certain organs of sensory perception in order to serve the purpose of knowing:

The powers [of sensation, which are rooted in the soul] do not exist *for the sake of* the organs [of sensory perception], rather the organs exist *for the sake of* the powers. Hence it is not that different organs give rise to different powers but that nature establishes diversity to go with the diversity of the powers. Likewise different senses naturally use different media, depending on what the powers need in order to act. As for knowing the *natures* of sense qualities, that belongs to the intelligence [*intellectus*].

[A natural change] occurs when the form of the source of change is *received* into the subject of change in a physical way, as *heat is absorbed* by something being heated. [A "spiritual" or nonphysical change occurs] when the form of the source of change is received in the subject of change supraphysically, the way that the form of a colour is in the eye, which does not become the colour it sees.

[When] the *intention* [of the sensible form that is sensed] comes to be within the sense organ. . . [in sense other than sight] there is a physical change as well, either on the object's part only, or on the part of the organ also. . . Natural change of place on the part of the object occurs in the case of sound, the object of hearing, for sound is caused by impact and movement in the atmosphere. . . Touch and taste involve physical change in the organ itself; the hand touching something hot *gets hot*, and the tongue dampens through the moisture of what it tastes. The

organ of smell or hearing, on the other hand, is physically affected only *per accidens*.<sup>43</sup>

This establishes quite clearly that all of our knowledge results from our initial experience of sensory awareness, which is an act of the human being as a whole person, but it implies much more. Sensory knowledge is not, in Aquinas's doctrine (contra the Cartesian theory) a solely mental power strictly speaking. Neither is it an act of the "outer man," as Augustine argued. Rather, sensory awareness, which is the foundation of all knowledge in Aquinas's epistemology, is the achievement of the entire human entity – body as well as mind. For Thomas, sensory knowledge -- when considered in mental terms -- involves not just an awareness of actual changes to the physical body and the perception of external objects, but a real engagement of the mind with those changes as the sensory organs are, as one could say, acted upon by the nature or the form of another entity. The acting entity in this context is described by Aquinas as acting out of its own nature (that is what a sensible form would be, according to the passage quoted above.) There is a change that occurs in the sensory organ of the body (for example, the eye). The intention of the entity is communicated to the eye as the form of the object, say the redness of an apple, is "received into" the organ of sight.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>44</sup> Such a way of speaking, it is worth noting, would be entirely consistent with the argument that the apple's redness is not strictly *in* the apple *qua* the redness that one sees. That would not in the least attenuate recognition of the fact that something from the apple's own existence is communicated to the sensory awareness. It would simply mean that the organs of sense are geared in such a way that the objects acting on them can act on them in certain ways. Just because the redness of the apple could not act upon the eye of, say, a honeybee in the same way does not negate the claim that the apple is acting out of its own essence upon the eye of a human being in such a way that redness is "received" as a result. The same thing could be said of the hardness of the apple, or its sweetness, or its crunchiness in relation to the appropriate bodily parts.

What is happening is sensory experience, according to Aquinas, is that some entity is acting upon the body out of its essential powers, and the mind is aware of this.

He defends this view in I a, 84 a 1, Reply, of the *Summa*.

Even in sensible things we observe that the same form can be in different sensible objects in different ways; for instance, whiteness can be more intense in one thing than another, and whiteness can be associated with sweetness in one thing but not in another. Furthermore, the same is true of the form of a sensible object: *it exists in a different way in the thing outside than it does in sense knowledge*, which receives sensible forms without their matter – for instance, the colour of gold without the gold itself. Similarly, the intellect receives material and changeable species of material things in an immaterial and unchanging way, in accord with its nature; for things are received in a subject according to the nature of the subject.

Aquinas's doctrine of form *qua* in an object versus form *qua* in sensory experience requires us to think about objects of sensory awareness in terms of the functions and/or powers that form gives to them as primary substances. Each thing acts in certain ways and is individuated in relation to other things specifically because it is materially organized in certain ways by the form that makes it what it is. It acts or is acted upon – in accordance with its essence. Hence, when the sensory apparatus of a human being is acted upon out of the essence of the acting entity, something about the acting entity is conveyed to the sensory organs of a particular part of the body that is receiving the action. Copleston describes Aquinas's view in this in a similar way.

Our organs of sense are affected by external objects, and we receive sense-impressions. The eye, for example, sees colours or colour-patches; but it would not do so unless it were affected by its object acting on it through a medium. It receives an impression, therefore, *and undergoes a physical alteration*. The process of sensation cannot, however, be reduced to *mere physical change*. . . Sensation is a *psycho-physical process* in which a sensible "form" is received.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Copleston, 179. My emphasis.

While Aquinas does accept the idea that the human soul has the “power of sensation,” his hylomorphism requires that he argue that this “power of sensation” is a principle of the very same soul that *qua* rational soul informs the human body even before it is actually exercised in the process of sensation. Only with the body so informed can *human* sensory experience take place, for human sensory experience *qua* rational is distinct from that of other sense-capable entities. The “intellect” requires objects of sensory experience in order to engage in its own proper work of understanding. Only through these sensory-obtained “objects” can the rational capacity of the human being begin to operate to acquire knowledge of reality or being. In other words, if all knowledge begins with sensory experience via the body’s engagement with the material world, then knowledge, while much more than a physical phenomenon, is not a feature of a Cartesian “thinking substance,” but is the activity of a being that is irreducibly a rational biological organism.<sup>46</sup> Because he conceives the relationship between mind and body that results from the integrated union of soul and the matter of the body in these terms, Thomas declares in the *Summa* I a, Q 98, a 1, that it is clear that it is good for the rational soul to be united with a body. And again in *Quaestio disputata de anima*, 2, ad 14, he pronounces a conclusion that is fully consistent with his doctrine as it is described in the *Summa*: “Origen thought, like Plato, that the human soul is a complete substance, and that the body is united to it accidentally. But since this is false, as has been show

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<sup>46</sup> See *Summa* Ia, 77, a 8, for Aquinas’s discussion of how the soul, when “separated from the body,” loses some of its capacity for knowledge. Again, it is outside the scope of this dissertation to deal with Aquinas’s doctrine of the soul exhaustively. But consider what he says in the reply of this article: “Certain powers, namely, understanding and will, are related to the soul taken on its own as their subject of inhesion, and powers of this kind have to remain in the soul after the death of the body. *But some powers have the body-soul compound for subject*; this is the case with all the powers of sensation and nutrition. Now when the subject goes the accident cannot stay. Hence when the compound corrupts such powers do not remain in actual existence. They survive in the soul in a virtual state only, as in their source or root.”



above, it is not to the detriment of the soul that it is united to a body, but for the perfection of its nature.”<sup>47</sup>

The first *object* of the mind is the essence of each material ordinary particulars through their forms *qua* sensible. To say that these material things are known through their forms *qua* sensible is another way of saying that These particulars act according to what they *are in relation to* the human body’s organs of sense. As he contends in the extended passage quoted above, the sensible forms cause some change in the various sense-organs of the body. However, the changes are, what he calls, “supraphysical.” What he seems to mean by this is that the physical nature of the sensory organs remain exactly what they are physically speaking, but they entertain some affect that the sensible form brings to them. Perhaps we could say that the sensory capacity of the human being which relates to the retinal tissue of the eye, when it receives the sensible characteristics of rock that are part of the rock’s essence, is acted upon by the sensible form that communicates the characteristics of the rock, which allow us to have an adequate awareness of its nature. The sensory capacity of the human being undergoes a change as the sensible form (visually speaking in this example) acts upon the retinal tissue of the eye in that both the retina and the sensory capacity now contain within them the something of the essence of the rock that can be conveyed visually. This is a change in the sense that the retina, prior to the reception of that sensible form, was not acted upon by the essence of the rock, nor was the sensory capacity that is inherently tied to the changes that take place in the retina when light is refracted on it through the other media

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<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Copleston, *Aquinas*, 163.

of the eyeball acted upon by the changes the retina underwent. However, the presence of the sensory image of the rock now entails that a change has occurred. But that change has not changed either the matter of the retina or the metaphysical essence of the sensory capacity that relates to the sense of sight. They are still, the one physically and the one non-physically, exactly what they were in themselves

Since all knowledge begins with a human being's engagement with the material world *through* the supraphysical changes that sensible forms provide, and these changes occur in the sensory organs, then the actions of material objects upon our senses are the first "object" of the mind.<sup>48</sup> Something like this is what Aquinas means by his insistence that the material world is the first object of the mind. But, our knowledge is not of the sensory objects or our ideas that we formulate from these sensible forms. Rather, these are *the means* by which we perceive the first *object* of the mind (the material world).<sup>49</sup>

So we could say that the mind of a person is that person's awareness of the material

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<sup>48</sup> We cannot in the confines of the present study adequately analyze Aquinas's epistemology, which posits a "possible intellect" and an "active intellect" in human life. Yet we can at least point out that in his complex theory the "possible intellect" is a power of the soul to receive the information that comes through the sensory organs. One possible way to interpret this is to say that for Aquinas the sensory data are communicated to the sense organs via the changes that the essence of a thing produces in the state or condition of the sensory organ. In turn, the receptive intellect, which is part of the power of the intellectual soul, which is the form of the body that has the sensory organs, is aware of the changes. But, *qua* intellect, the changes in the sensory organs do not "cause" the knowledge. Rather, the receptive intellect is a process involving immediate awareness of the information provided. This information is what the active intellect works with to abstract universal knowledge of essences, natures, accidents, substances, and, ultimately, being itself. But neither can this active or agent intellect be construed as a cognitive power all its own. Rather it is a part of the human being complexly organized so that rationality can attend biology; and it is the power to abstract, from the "objects" already otherwise known, a fuller and deeper kind of knowledge. Indeed, for Aquinas, the actions of the senses and the receptive intellect are ordered to serve the activity of the agent intellect through the informing presence of human *anima* in matter. For an excellent discussion of these concepts see Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also see Copleston, *Aquinas*, 178 – 184. For a critique of Aquinas's complicated and "naïve" theory of knowledge and intellect see Anthony Kenny, "Aquinas: Intentionality," *Philosophy Through its Past*, ed Ted Honderich, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 78-95.

<sup>49</sup> For an excellent discussion of Aquinas's understanding of the way that the soul interacts with sensible forms see Sheldon Cohen, "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Immaterial Reception of Sensible Forms," *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 2 (Apr., 1982).

world that is made accessible to the person's understanding through the sensory capacity that the intellectual soul grants to the human body, so as to enable intellectual awareness of the material world (the world of extension) as the body's senses interact as physical organs with that world.<sup>50</sup>

Aquinas even contends that the rational soul's awareness of itself is the product of its prior engagement with the objects of sensory experience and the intellectual activity that is prompted by that engagement. Since the mind is not an entity that exists Aquinas could not conceive of how the mind could know itself *qua* mind. Aquinas contends that we become aware of our own existence, not via Cartesian introspection (which he would have pointed out must assume the presence of ideas that are not identical with the act of thinking about them), but through the activity of perceiving things in the material world. All of the mind's awareness is awareness of something that is its object. His doctrine is a kind of medieval version of intentionality in which thought is always thought about . . . X. But, in his view, thought about X always entails some kind of awareness of the subject of such an act. So, while there is first of all an object of the mind's awareness, the very act of being aware of something creates the possibility to encountering oneself as the subject of the knowledge of the act of knowing. Aquinas puts it as follows in *De Veritate*, 10, 8:

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<sup>50</sup> The possible parallel between this way of putting the process of knowledge and Spinoza's own articulation will be discussed in the next chapter. But consider, by way of anticipation, Spinoza's statement in *The Ethics* II, p 16, proof & corollary 1: "All the modes wherein a body is affected follow from the nature of the body affected together with the nature of the affecting body. Therefore the idea of the modes will necessarily involve the nature of both bodies. So the idea of any mode wherein the human body is affected by an external body involves the nature of the human body and the external body. Hence, it follows that the human mind perceives the nature of very many bodies along with the nature of its own body.

The soul is known [by the human person] by its acts. For a man perceives that he has a soul and lives and exists by the fact that *he perceives that he senses and understands and performs other vital operations of this kind. . .* No one perceives he understands *except through the fact that he understands something*, for to understand something *is prior to understanding that one understands*. And so the soul comes to the actual realization of its existence through the fact that it understands or perceives.<sup>51</sup>

The mind is really, for Aquinas, a term that captures the whole human being's capacity for knowing things and abstracting understanding from his engagement with the world. Those objects can be material entities engaged through the sensory experience or truths about the world that are realized through acts of reasoning; it can even be the embodied-self experienced as subject of the thoughts and experiences. However, what is clear is that the mind is an aspect of a human being that requires an object that is non-mental in order to be instantiated. The thing that "knows," therefore, is not the mind, or even the soul, because the rational soul's capacity for knowing is instantiated by the engagement with sensory experience via the body's sense organs being acted upon and the body acting. "It has been shown that sensation is not an activity of the soul alone. Sensing is the activity of *the whole man*, even though it is not peculiar to man" (*Summa I a, Q 75, a 4, reply*).

It must be emphasized, however, that knowledge is not being thought of here as "caused", by the passive receptivity of the bodily organs, much less by any action that the bodily organs might exert on the "mind." The *Summa* in I a, Q 76, a 1, reply, is where Aquinas asserts his Aristotelian credentials and commitments on this issue:

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<sup>51</sup> Here Aquinas is using the term "soul" in a very ambiguous way, one time for something that a human being "has" and then again for the knowing human being itself. In any case, what he is saying is that self-consciousness is dependent upon the knowledge of objects that are, in some sense, intentional. This distances his view of self-consciousness from both Augustine and Descartes, for who self-awareness is the most fundamental type of knowledge.

The activity of a moving agent is attributed to the thing it moves in one case only, when it uses it as an instrument, as when a carpenter imparts his motions to his saw. There if understanding were to be attributed to Socrates on the ground that it was the activity of some agent acting on him, it would follow that he was said to understand because being used for understanding. This is incompatible with the Philosopher's contention that understanding takes place without physical instrumentality.

The mind performs its act of understanding, as a result of the soul's informing power in the human being, with no dependence upon the physical functions of the body. But, that negative way of stating Thomas's doctrine does not get a far down the ontological path as he wants to take us. One must also say that the mind's understanding is the act of a human being who, while being essentially physical, is capable of rational insight that is, in itself, the expression of a human power that, while indeed present in the physical body, is not a purely physical power of the body insofar as it is part of what makes it the sort of body that it is in the first place. The intellect engages the objects of sense – as we described above -- but neither the act of engaging the objects nor the act of understanding what is engaged is caused by anything bodily in Aquinas's theory of mind and its knowledge.

In fact, this contention is the foundation of Aquinas's doctrine of the immateriality of the intellectual soul, as well as its incorruptibility, which shall be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter. Aquinas conceives of the state of affairs in the following way in *Contra Gentiles*, 2, 49: "If the intellect were corporeal, its activity would not reach beyond the order of bodies. So it would understand only bodies. But this is patently false. For we understand many things (such as universals and mathematics and the natures of species) which are not bodies. Therefore, the intellect is not corporeal." The logic of Aquinas's argument is built upon a supposition common in

his day (and even in the early modern period) that only like things can interact. He thought that there is, one could say, a kind of explanatory barrier that exists between thought and the body that is the location of a thought, because there is a real difference between the material and the immaterial. Hence, as we said above, the act of knowing is one which is not simply part of a physical body's activity, but is a power of the soul that enables the physical body of a human being to be the kind of body that is capable of knowing. This concept of the mind's relation to the body via the soul's informing power, plus the argument that the intellect or mind can actually know things that are far beyond the scope of material reality or sensible form (differential calculus, geometry, universals, God, and, again, the natures of species), leads Aquinas to the conclusion the true nature of the soul must be other than corporeal. However, the intellect's awareness of sensible form does not violate the principle that only like can know like and thereby refute or confuse Aquinas's claim that the soul is immaterial. It does not do so because the sensible form of an ordinary particular entity is not a feature of the essence of that entity *qua* material. Rather, the sensible form (one might say) "projects" the characteristics of the entity into the perceptual field of a human knower. The sensible form then, is not the essence of a thing acting upon the sensory apparatus of animals in such a way so as to be engaged by them and known *qua* object of sensation. But, the sensible form does express the characteristics of that entity's essence in such a way so as to act upon the senses and the sense organs. We could say, in this regard, that Aquinas would allow that the sensory organs are really acted upon as physical entities when the sound waves produced by a piano strike the eardrum and activate the physical process involved in hearing. But, the essence of the musical sound is heard and comprehended, not in the way that the sensory

organs receive the sensible form, but as music in its essence as it is given expression through the piano and the sound waves it produces. The process has a decidedly physical component. However, the event of comprehending that one has heard is not, itself, reducible to the physical. Hearing is physical, but *knowing* what has been heard is not.

The soul is called “mind” only because the act of understanding is a power of the soul. Understanding itself is an act of the human being in Thomas’s doctrine, i.e. it is something that is exercised by a human being *qua* rational animal. Hence, Aquinas’s pronouncement that it is not the soul that knows, but the man that knows.<sup>52</sup> A human being is an agent, acting in the world to know it, and that act is made possible only by the organizing information that the soul brings to the matter of the human animal. In the human agent-knower, the body, then, via its sensory organs (which are the result of the power of the soul to so order matter) is receptive of the various sensible forms of things that are appropriate for each organ as a particular type of sensory organ attuned to a specific object. Engagement with the changes that these sensible forms work on the body’s organs of sensation provides the intellect with items of experience upon which the active intellect works – with no causative determination from the body at all. Such

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<sup>52</sup> Aquinas’s discussion of the soul in *Quaestio disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis* which he wrote in 1269, probably after the “Treatise on Man” in the *Summa* was written, further illustrates his conviction that the soul is *not* a set of powers, but contains “powers” that can activate a body to be human and capable of knowing as a person. In article eleven he demonstrates this negative conclusion. None of the soul’s powers are its essence, hence intellect could not be the soul’s essence. “The soul’s abilities are called essential characteristics *not because they constitute its essence* but because *they derive from [its essence]*” -- my emphasis. Furthermore, he rejects the idea that the ability to understand is the soul’s essence, which would entail that the soul is mental activity. “[The human soul], being essentially body’s form, gives body existence (being the form of its substance) and that sort of existence we call life (being the sort of form we call soul) and that sort of [human] life we call understanding or intellectual (being the sort of soul we call intellectual. For “understanding” sometimes names an activity (and then its source is an ability or disposition), and sometimes names our very existence as creatures of an understanding nature (and then its source is the very essence of our intellectual soul). From *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans., Timothy McDermott, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 121-129.

knowledge is not caused by the body; it could not be, Aquinas maintained, because knowledge is not material. But I have tried to show how its lack of materiality is very different from the sort of lack of materiality involved in a Cartesian view of knowledge.<sup>53</sup>

He did not conceive of the act of knowing as a supervenient addition to a world filled other wise with naked bare particulars, because the form of knowing is part of reality itself. Just as life is a principle of the world that we cannot really account for, but can only acknowledge as inherently present in the world, so thought for Aquinas, was a feature of reality that could not be reduced to material causes that would explain it. At the same time, on the other hand, Aquinas would presumably not be shocked at findings in current brain research that show various links between cognitive and biological processes. Since cognition is a universal principle at work in a world that (as was discussed in Chapter Three) participates in the Being of God, every individual act of understanding must be, by the light of a Thomistic metaphysics, a subsisting reality. And this it can be, as we have seen, only by virtue of its embodiment in the natural processes of living organisms.

In light of the foregoing, it is arguable that Aquinas's Latin "*intellectus*," which some translators simply render "intellect," is better translated, in the context of the

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<sup>53</sup> It seems reasonable to suppose that the reason that Aquinas thought that human *anima* could be described as "mind" or "intellect," and even be referred to as a "subsistent entity," is related to his broader views about the universe as a whole. He does not conceive of reality in Cartesian terms where an otherwise extended substance is coincided with individual "thinking things." Rather, his willingness to call the soul, "mind" is the result of his belief that act of knowing (quite apart from any particular knower) is part of the very make-up of the universe. Quite apart from the question of individual knowers, Aquinas saw the *form* of knowing, to be a subsisting reality that is a fundamental feature of the universe. Knowledge is not something, for him, in addition to the material world. No! the material world, since it is intelligible, is itself part of the same world *qua* rational knowledge. Thought is thought about the world and it is the world that is thought. Hence, rationality is precisely a possibility that is a part of the essence of rational *animals*.



Angelic Doctor's thought, by means of the gerund "understanding." This is the practice of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa* that is being utilized in this dissertation. It is better translated in that way, I would argue, insofar as intellect or mind, for Aquinas, is simply the act of knowing a human being exercises. It is a power of the soul in the sense that the soul provides the possibility of this act for a rational animal, but intellect or mind itself is not a power; and the soul does not do the understanding – that is the act of a human being. In the *Summa*, "mind" is simply a synonym for "intellect": "the human soul, which is called intellect [*intellectus*] or mind [*mens*]" (I a, Q 75, a 2, Reply). Since this act of knowing is what Aquinas means by intellect or mind; and since this activity is the result of the incredible organizational complexity of a human being; and since this organizational complexity is the result of the "informing" nature of the soul, Aquinas says that the soul can be called (equivocally) the "mind." Hence, insofar as "mind" is a equivocal term for the soul, Aquinas would say that the soul can be said to be involved in the immaterial act of knowing. However, for him the act properly speaking is the result of a rational animal performing an act that is not itself bodily. All this comes about because the human *anima* informs a material being in such a way that rational life can be present in the biological entity.

### **Persons are metaphysically foundational**

Aquinas, however, is not satisfied to stop the discussion of the act of knowing and understanding by describing them, even equivocally and conventionally, as the act of the soul. His contention is that we must focus attention, rather, on "the person" as the one who is acting in the attainment of the knowledge. (This can also be said for any and all *physical* acts.) This latter concept captures the full-blown focus of Aquinas's

metaphysical scheme, for “person” provides him with a category that allows him to discuss the act of knowing as the act of a particular mode of intellectual being (since in his view angels and even God are higher intellectual beings). But his concept of human beings as “persons” allows him to conceive of this act of knowing as something that is essentially, in the case of human persons, an act that can be understood as the act of a thing that is both body and mind.<sup>54</sup>

Aquinas defines ‘person,’ following the authority of Boethius, as “an individual substance of a rational nature” (*Summa* 3a, Q 2, a 2 reply.)<sup>55</sup> Such a being is also called a *supposit* by Aquinas, which means an entity that is capable of expressing a particular essence, as well as being the substantial subject of other acts of being. A person, therefore, is a kind of primary substance, in the Latin Aristotelian sense that translates Aristotle’s own term *prote ousia* (primary being). Thomas’s most critical discussion of the concept of a person takes place in the part of the *Summa* that deals with his defense and philosophical demonstration of the logic of the doctrine of the Incarnation. There he

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<sup>54</sup> It is, I think, the concept person is that which Aquinas seizes upon to attempt to refute Averroism among his Latin counterparts. By linking the term “person” to the definition “a substance of a rational nature,” following the authority of Boethius on the matter, he utilized an important Christian theological concept to refute the doctrine – mentioned in Q 76, a 2, 1, as well as in the reply to this same article. Although he does not utilize the term in article 2, for he is arguing a different metaphysical response to Averroism there, it could not have been far from his mind. By ultimately linking the act of knowing with a human person, which he defines as mind and body in integrated material-rational life, Aquinas would have formed a base upon which Averroes’ monopsychism would have been made problematic for a Christian audience. The concept of person developed in Christian theology in the West to address the doctrine of the Trinity without denying the oneness of God. *Persona* was taken up for the Greek term *hupostasis*. In Christian theology the idea of the “Persons” of the Trinity entailed the notion that each person is distinct without being separate. This concept could have allowed Aquinas a foundation upon which to discuss, against Averroism, the distinctness of each act of knowing (because it is the act of a person), given that the Christian dogma contends that human beings are made to be persons in the image of God. That would have provided Aquinas with a strong position to insist that Averroism was doctrinally untenable for Christian believers, even as he endeavors in Q 76, a 2, to refute the doctrine via the logic of his philosophical theology.

<sup>55</sup> For Aquinas, person is, in a qualified and derivative sense an allowable synonym for “human being,” since he believed that human beings were made in the image of the Trinity.

distinguishes between essence and person; and it is not essences that exist but persons, for only individual substances exist in the most precise sense<sup>56</sup> Human individuals – persons – are supposita that exist through the formal cause of human nature (the union of matter with human-making form). Yet each person is more than his human nature. All persons have additional and incommunicably unique existences and characteristics that cause them to be distinguished from all other particulars that are formed by that same formal essence. Recall the above discussion of the individuating role of matter. Hence, Aquinas claims that “in things composed of matter and form the nature is not predicated of the supposit; we do not say for example that this man is his humanity” (3a, Q2, a 3, Reply).

“Person,” therefore, is a different metaphysical concept than essence or nature; in fact “person” is a primary concept for Aquinas because a person is a primary being in the Aristotelian sense. As “an individual substance of rational nature,” a person is essentially rational, but the bodily existence of a human being is essential, as well, for the true *human* personhood of that human being.<sup>57</sup> He asserts this strongly in *Summa* I a, Q 75, a 2, reply, where he argues that the soul’s substantiality is a highly qualified sense of substance. He describes the soul as “some kind of incorporeal and subsistent *principle*. In other words, as he puts it in ad 2 of this question, the soul is itself something that is real, but it is not strictly speaking “this *particular* thing, for the concept of a particular

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<sup>56</sup> In an Aristotelian philosophy, essences (or natures) only exist (as we saw in chapters two and three) in concrete beings that express those essences.

<sup>57</sup> Again, when utilized in reference to human beings, “person” must entail the idea of a body, since the definition of a human being is “rational animal.” Animality is, therefore, part of personhood and being human, itself, becomes a basic concept in philosophy of mind. Cf. chapter two, p 67, where Williams is quoted: “A strength of hylomorphism, particularly in its more materialistic version, is that it does point to human being as a basic concept in the philosophy of mind, and, consequently, in ethics.”

thing can have two applications. One is what we might call a “weak” reference, i.e. that any real feature of the world can be called a particular thing. (We might refer to the DNA “code” that makes my bodily and mental existence possible a particular thing -- or an ordinary particular, if we utilize a contemporary locution -- without positing it as an actually existing thing or primary substance in the Aristotelian sense or ordinary particular in the contemporary sense.) The soul, Aquinas argues, can be called a particular thing, in this “weak” sense.<sup>58</sup> On this basis, Aquinas argues in Q 75, a 4, ad 4, “Not every particular substance [understood in the weak sense] is a hypostasis or person, but rather, that which has the full nature of the species. Thus, a hand or foot cannot be called a hypostasis or person. Nor, likewise, can the soul, as it is *a part* of human nature.” The concept “person” captures for Aquinas the substantial existence of a human being as a primary substance. It is a metaphysical concept that expresses the full nature of the entity produced in the hylomorphic integration of soul and body.

Since the intellectual soul is the form of the human body it is subsistent as a real particular thing (in the weak sense described above). The form-giving reality of the soul does not need something else to grant it reality *qua* form-giving. But it is also a substantial form, meaning that its own essence is to give essence or form to a primary substance. The essence of the soul as a particular thing (in the weak sense) is to make possible the existence of a different particular thing (in the strong sense). From these two

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<sup>58</sup> Suttor’s comments on this passage help in grasping what Aquinas is doing by providing an ambiguous usage of the idea of the soul. “Thomas is concerned with a far-reaching rectification of names. Because ‘soul’ is a noun, we tend to think of it as a thing. We can hold a man’s hand, and say by metonymy, ‘This particular thing has an existence of its own,’ e.g.. meaning the man has, not the hand. Now the same is true of the soul: properly speaking it is man who comes into existence, and has an existence of his own.” 12 note c.

aspects of the nature of the soul, it follows that the primary substance that is created in the union of the soul with the matter of the body is a substance (and therefore a particular thing in the “strong” sense), but the soul alone is not. Only in the existential integration of intellectual soul in the matter of a body does one find a hypostasis.<sup>59</sup> This is what Aquinas means by his more epigrammatic assertion: a soul is not a person.<sup>60</sup>

The metaphysical importance of Thomas’s notion of a “person” is emphasized when one considers his ideas about the incorruptibility of the soul and what that doctrine entails for him. Substances are what really exist fundamentally as the subjects of all other categories of being. The subsisting soul, while a reality on its own is not, as we have shown, for Aquinas, a substance. Yet, he argues that it is capable of surviving the death of the body. The soul is not a rational *substance*, but a substantial principle of rational life. This is what it means for the soul to be the form of the body. Hence, the soul is by its very nature meant for union with and existence *in* the material body that it

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<sup>59</sup> This is unquestionably a complicated theory, but perhaps no more truly complicated than the current scientific understanding of DNA information. In the current science of DNA, we have two notions that are quite distinct philosophically speaking, which could not be reduced one to the other except by a rather bald assertion of materialism or idealism. On the one hand there is the material stuff (the proteins, amino acids, chemical interaction and molecular structure) that carry the genetic information. But that which is carried is not itself thereby to be regarded as material. Rather, it is, as was argued in chapter two, something (at least arguably) quite other than the matter by which the information is communicated and instantiated in its incipient form. This information *in* the matter in question is the source of a particular living thing’s life *qua* the particular kind of thing that it is. Hence, as we understand by the light of contemporary micro-biology and organic chemistry, the feature of the universe that grants life to a human creature (its DNA in the sperm-egg union) is the same principle that makes the person to be *rational* animal. The same information encoded in the DNA that makes me have brown eyes and produces my heartbeat and orders every cell of my body to be productive and reproductive of life, in order to sustain my existence and enable me to pursue certain “ends” toward which I am naturally ordered [oriented] as a human being, is also the information that enables my rational awareness of the world and my own life. Thus these potentialities inherent in the DNA code are not potentialities for various sorts of activity on the part of DNA itself. Rather, they are potentialities for the human beings of which that DNA is a component. And yet, the information is, itself, something (in the weak sense.)

<sup>60</sup> An intriguing insight about Thomas’s formulation of the idea of person and the import of maintaining the integrated union of soul and body is offered by Suttor. “Thomas was seeking to replace [the common, more neo-Platonic claim that the soul used a body] with something more in accord with the doctrine of the Incarnation.” Suttor, vol. 11, 19 n.

informs. The soul's separation from that body, while allowed by Aquinas's philosophical conception of the soul as immaterial and demanded by his theological commitments, is nonetheless, in that state of separation, continuing in existence in a state that Aquinas viewed as *praeter naturam* (beyond what is natural). It is unnatural in the sense that the soul *qua* informing and organizing principle is meant to be in the matter that it informs. In the union for which it is meant, the soul *qua* informing and organizing principle *causes* (in union with matter) a person to exist. This means, then, that the rational soul separated from the body is not strictly a human person, because the term "person" signifies the whole complete primary substance that expresses human nature by its very existence. That nature so expressed, however, is by definition a primary being or substance that is the result of the organizational influence of rational soul in a particular matter.

It could be objected, that if it is the person who knows, because soul and body are one entity, namely a human person, then perhaps the distinction that Aquinas is attempting to draw between soul and body is a merely nominal one. In other words, Aquinas's radical emphasis upon the unity doctrine might be regarded as supporting the conclusion that, in the words of Klima, "the concepts of soul and body provide us merely with different aspects *for considering* the same, essentially *materially* entity."<sup>61</sup> But as our preceding discussion should have made clear, such a view would be built on a misapprehension of what Aquinas conceives to be the state of affairs. Klima has commented on Aquinas's thought about the real distinction that must be posited: "But since these [the human body and the life of the body] are obviously distinct perfections,

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<sup>61</sup> Klima, 195. Emphasis added.

whose distinction is given regardless of the intellect's considerations, the parts of the whole accounting for these perfections, each of its own sort, have to be parts that are really distinct, again, regardless of the intellect's consideration."<sup>62</sup> The real distinction that exists is a kind of explanatory barrier, since the form cannot account for the body's materiality *per se* even if it does account for the kind of organization that the material body has received, just as the body cannot explain the information that is integrated into its very existence and has no concrete existence apart from the informed body. And again, as it seems to me Klima has demonstrated regarding Aquinas's theory:

What this means, then, is that in line with St. Thomas's general conception of the analogy of being [discussed in chapter three of this dissertation], the whole and its essential parts, while they are denominated beings on account of the same substantial act of existence, are not denominated beings in the same sense. For the whole substance [the person] is denominated a being in the primary, unqualified sense of being, in the sense in which only a complete, self-subsistent entity can be called a being, existing on its own. The essential parts of this being, namely, its matter and substantial form, however, can be called beings only in some derivative sense of the term. And this is because for a form to exist is nothing but for the thing to exist, or to have existence, *in respect to the form*, which makes it clear that the sense in which existence is attributed to the form is obtained by adding some qualification to the sense in which existence is attributed to the substance which is said to exist in the primary, unqualified sense. Obviously, similar considerations apply to the body, in the exclusive sense of the term, insofar as it is the other essential part of a living being.<sup>63</sup>

His view of person as a metaphysical foundation is helpful in understanding how Aquinas views the issue of mind and body 'interaction. In his discussion of the will in I a, Q 82, a 4, Reply, Aquinas points us toward how he conceived of bodily movement in relationship to mental powers. In this passage he closely associates will with understanding; it is certainly not treated as an immaterial entity that has a realm of its

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid 198

own from which it acts upon other things. Aquinas discusses the activity of the will in terms of the functioning of a whole *system*. As a rational animal, a human being is oriented towards certain particularly human ends. The pursuit of those ends, in Aquinas's account, is engaged in rationally, which entails awareness of one's needs and deliberation about how best to meet those needs. Deliberation and choice, in this scenario, are not acts that are mental, however, in the Cartesian or Augustinian senses of being solely immaterial acts absolutely speaking. Aquinas argues the point like this:

One thing can set another in motion in two ways. First as an aim, and this is the way its fulfillment moves an agent cause and also the way that the *understanding* moves the will. For a good understood is will's object and moves it by being *something to aim for*. But secondly, one thing can change another by its activity, as in chemical or physical change. And it is after this fashion that the will moves the understanding and all the other powers of the soul. . . .

The explanation is that *in a system* of active powers the one that concerns the perfection of *the whole* moves those that have more particularized objectives. This is just as clear in physical nature as it is in political society. . . Now the object of the will is *goodness and fulfillment* in general. . . So the will *actively moves* all the soul's powers to their acts, except for vegetative powers, which are not subject to our decisions.

This concept of the will is consistent with Aquinas's hylomorphism and its implication that neither one of the "aspects" of human existence (body or mind) can be conceived of as having a causal relationship to the other. This conclusion follows from Aquinas's assertion that it is the person who acts and wills and knows, not the mind that directs the body nor the body that effects the workings of the mind. Thus, Aquinas describes the relationship between mind and body in terms of the type of description that one finds in various dual aspect theories of mind and body in human life. He contends that our reason can grasp *a single existing entity* in a variety of ways" (Q 76, a 3, *ad 4*). The italicized phrase "single existing entity" can be translated "one and the same thing"



(*unum et idem*). This would imply that such terms as “will,” therefore, do not name some entity, or even some ultimately isolatable power (as Kenny tries to find), in a Thomist metaphysics. Hence, the problem of the interaction of the immaterial and the material would seem to be attenuated, at least. Mind or will do not refer to any immaterial force or thing that would be analogous in relationship to the body (as a metaphysical cause of the body’s actions) to the captain of a ship or motor of a vehicle. Rather, both are simply terms that name the human person’s capacity to make informed, reason-guided choices regarding how best to achieve human flourishing. Bodily acts, then, are not caused by the will, in Aquinas’s view. They are the actions of a person who is acting volitionally (i.e., in a goal-directed way) in the pursuit of a thing or state of affairs that is perceived to be a good. For example, when I reach for a piece of apple, rather than a donut, as a snack, it is not my will (or for that matter my mind) that lifts my arm.

Thus, Aquinas is not inconsistent to allow us to call the soul “mind,” nor to allow there to be a real distinction of the aspects (mind and body) of the human person. First, since the mind, as we have seen, is not a “thing” that acts, then the soul, not the mind, is the source of the relevant activity, but by naming the highest potential that the human soul brings to the human person, he can use the convention mind to refer to the soul. Secondly, since the soul grants the power of mental activity to the person, and since the soul is not the body – but is the principle of the body – we are correct to call the distinction between mind and body a real one. So, thirdly, Aquinas could hold that the mind *qua* immaterial entity, strictly speaking, does not cause the body to move, but the motion of the body cannot be accounted for unless one acknowledges that the person who moves and acts bodily does so in a goal-oriented way; and that goal oriented way is

rational and purposive in intent. Finally, the motion of the body is not mental, but it is distinct from the mind that is part of the person's acts.<sup>64</sup>

The preceding discussion shows that Aquinas's hylomorphism sets the question of mind-body interaction on a different footing. His commitment to the unity of human life in the soul-produced person is the distinct contribution he makes to the philosophy of mind. Conundrums would seem to be mitigated, at least over how the so-called immaterial mind, with its ostensibly, non-law governed acts, could interact or act upon with the material body that is *qua* physical subject to physical forces and laws. To advert, in our discussion of human acts, to the intellectual or even the volitional feature of human experience does not provide us with an additional causal explanation for, say, a man swimming that must be appended to the otherwise merely physical description. Bodily acts, then, are *not* best described or conceived of as *caused* by the acts of the mind, such as belief and will. That way of putting the matter posits an ontological distinction between the two aspects of the unitary human life that, in Aquinas's view, is wrong. Rather, both the acts of the mind and the acts of the body are endeavors that reveal to us that to be human is to be a physical being that makes informed, reason-guided choices regarding how best to achieve human flourishing. All the acts of a human being's life (both the volitional and the non-volitional) are, ultimately, acts associated

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<sup>64</sup> Here we come to way of conceiving the relationship between mind and body that points to a solution to the Cartesian problem of mind/soul and body interaction, one which does not make the mistakes of eliminative or reductionistic theories of mind and body. Since the power and action of knowing, deciding, willing, and bodily actions or movements can only belong properly to a being that is real in the primary sense, the problem of interaction simply does not present itself. Rather, the mind is the result of an activity [Remember that you earlier said that it was an activity itself. Of course, you also said it is a power. It seems that this a third way of talking about it.] that is taking place in or by the entirety of a human person. Hence, mind is not *something* that can be described as acting or causing to act, except in qualified analogous way (much the way that soul can be called "mind" analogously.)

with a person, who ultimately lives in a goal-directed way, pursuing things or state of affairs perceived to be a good. However, if we take seriously Aquinas's definition of human's – i.e., rational animals – and realize that for him to be human is to be a person (of a particular sort) then we can say (in a qualified sense) that even acts of the autonomic nervous system, which have no conscious quality to them for the person -- or the cellular processes that sustain life – can be regarded as acts of a person. They are animal acts of the rational animal. Hence, they qualify as the acts of a person, although not an act that is *specifically* human. As life sustaining acts, they too would be part of the intellectual soul's gift of orientation toward a particular end – the living of the life of a rational animal.

If we speak of beliefs, intentions, desires, choices, and reason we are not, in the hylomorphic theory of Aquinas, introducing mental concepts that have no relationship to the material world. For Aquinas, our life is that of a material agent, capable of awareness and understanding *qua* a material agent, who lives in the law-governed and ordered material world. To speak of them is to provide an adequate portrayal of human acts. But, as human acts they have involved in them physical factors, as well. We choose, as we do, because we are oriented, toward the good, Aquinas argues: "The will is a rational appetite. Now every appetite is only of something good. . . . Since, therefore, everything, inasmuch as it is being and substance, is a good, it must needs be that every *inclination* is to something good."

That which is perceived as “the good” we choose. This perception is, of course, linked to our experience in the material world.<sup>65</sup> Hence, the man (described above) who is swimming may be swimming to escape a sinking ship, or to save a child, or to impress a young woman with his athletic prowess, or to improve his health. Each choice is informed by the physical state of affairs that is perceived to be relevant. The fulfillment sought is not divorced from the material set of conditions. But since the rational awareness (it could be deliberative, but need not be) that leads to an action is not caused by the material set of conditions (even when we are directly acted on by an essence), then in Aquinas’s doctrine of human action *qua* rationally animal acts our choices are free acts of a rational mind. The problem that belief, judgment, intention, choice, etc face is not one of being deterministically caused by the physical. Rather, the challenge that the person who believes, judges, . . . etc must confront in order to make right and good choices, as Aquinas contends in his reply in Ia, involves Q 19, a 3, having adequate knowledge of the good and so ordering his acts and thoughts.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “For since every agent or thing moved, acts or is moved for an end, as stated above (1, 2); those are perfectly moved by an intrinsic principle, whose intrinsic principle is one not only of movement but of movement for an end. Now in order for a thing to be done for an end, some knowledge of the end is necessary. Therefore, whatever so acts or is moved by an intrinsic principle, that it has some knowledge of the end, has within itself the principle of its act, so that it not only acts, but acts for an end. On the other hand, if a thing has no knowledge of the end, even though it have an intrinsic principle of action or movement, nevertheless the principle of acting or being moved for an end is not in that thing, but in something else, by which the principle of its action towards an end is not in that thing, but in something else, by which the principle of its action towards an end is imprinted on it. Wherefore such like things are not said to move themselves, but to be moved by others. But those things which have knowledge of the end are said to move themselves because there is in them a principle by which they not only act but also act for an end.’

<sup>66</sup> “. . . the goodness of the will depends properly on the object. Now the will’s object is proposed to it by reason. Because the good understood is the proportionate object of the will; while sensitive or imaginary good is proportionate not to the will but to the sensitive appetite: since the will can tend to the universal good, which reason apprehends; whereas the sensitive appetite tends only to the particular good, apprehended by the sensitive power. Therefore the goodness of the will depends on reason, in the same way

## **Aquinas's hylomorphism and contemporary mind-body theories**

Aquinas's arguments regarding his doctrine of hylomorphic unity allows him to embrace a theory of mind-body "identity." And to describe this identity we can talk of dual-aspects of a more basic underlying entity that is the relevant source of the "identity" of the mind and body. He developed his own nuanced theory of hylomorphism from an Aristotelian starting point, but the permutations he introduces to Aristotelianism place him in a distinct philosophical category.<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, his locutions sometimes make him confusing to read. However, as we have shown, by positing form and matter as fundamental "causes" of the existence of all primary substances, including human beings, Aquinas looks beyond the problems that are associated, even in his own day, with the problematic status of mind and body interaction. Instead, he focused attention on the existence of primary substances (i.e., the specific ordinary particular entities of everyday encounter) as the true ontologically concrete expressions of being. His doctrine of the relationship between mind and body is a consequence of this starting point, since in his view mind and body are distinct "parts" of human existence. But these 'parts' are not primary substances that have existence. When considering the relationship between mind and body metaphysically, Aquinas's paradigm looks to the human being as

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as it depends on the object.' Also, see his discussion in the entirety of this Question, especially articles 3 – 6 for a fuller picture of his view of the relationship between reason and the will.

<sup>67</sup> Suttor claims that Aquinas's treatise on man "probably did more than any earlier document, and perhaps more than any later document, to confirm Christians in the realization that ensoulment (active) and embodiment (passive) are the same process looked at from different angles." It is my conviction that this estimation is essentially correct regarding Aquinas, who utilizes concrete nouns to name the various angles of vision upon the process being described. "Yet, the usage," as Suttor also acknowledges, "leaves its mark on his text, in sentences which do not do sufficiently delicate justice to the reciprocal and co-relative intelligibility of the nouns 'soul' and 'body', which are better thought of as gerunds. . . He recognized that concrete terms better expressed than abstract terms the conditions of actual being." xv – xvi.

a unitary whole as the primary substance that is ontologically foundational. As is the case with all primary substances in Aquinas's hylomorphic metaphysics, the human being must be considered to be the subject *in* which all other features or aspects of that substance exist.<sup>68</sup> Seeing the relationship between mind and body from this starting vantage, Aquinas offers to philosophy of mind a metaphysical scheme in which 'mind' and 'body' are understood to be distinct linguistic terms that describe or express the two very real modes of human existence. But human beings do not exist in these modes; rather these modes express the complexity of human life as an organic unity.

Aquinas's insistence that mind and body are both equally modes that give expression to the essential nature of unitary human existence means that he is not reductionistic in the way of many modern identity theories. These theories attempt to make mental statements reducible to or translatable into statements about physical states (or at least into statements about various sorts of relations involving states of human beings, where those relations are neutral as to the existence of anything ultimately "mental" in character). However, in Thomas's judgment (as was discussed in chapter three) the very concept of "being physical" itself requires some explanation. For him, in a world such as ours that has in it both physical states and mental states, "being physical" would be no clearer – in itself – than is "being mental," so a reductive materialism that dismisses the mental as a real irreducible feature of our world, preferring to claim that the mental is in the final analysis really and only physical, would be woefully inadequate. In

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<sup>68</sup> Recall from chapter three that for Aquinas Being is in some sense an even more fundamental ontological category than substance. This makes his view of substance somewhat different from Descartes's. And it means that Aquinas's use of the term "substance," while carrying some of the metaphysical freight that Spinoza would want it to carry, is not necessarily the same concept as his. Being, then, is perhaps much more like Spinoza's *Natura Naturans* than *Natura Naturata*.

his estimation, the hylomorphism that he develops out of Aristotle as a beginning source, allows us to begin to understand that both the mental and the physical are required to account for one another; neither can be ontologically prior, because *anima* informing matter is productive of both.<sup>69</sup> Because his hylomorphism allows him to explain the nature of the physical bodies that exist *qua* informed entities, as well as explain how the mind must be understood to be distinct from the physical, he would understand the epistemological objections to reductive physicalism posed by Barbara Montero:

Indeed, since most think that the mind *must* be physical, the project they are engaged in is not so much arguing that the mind is physical, but, rather, trying to show how the mind could be physical (given that it is). And so, whether the account of mentality that physicalists propound is expressed in terms of reduction, realization, identity, supervenience, explanation or even elimination, the goal is to provide a plausible theory of mentality (or, as the case may be, a theory that accounts for what we mistakenly took to be mentality) that is compatible with the view that the world is fundamentally physical. For example, if one thinks that it is incumbent on physicalists to *explain* mentality then the explanation, it is thought, must make reference exclusively to physical phenomena; if one thinks supervenience suffices for physicalism, then the supervenience base must be entirely physical; and so forth. But what does it mean to be physical? It seems that those who take the central concern of the mind-body problem to be the relationship between mental properties and physical properties—and if Kim is right, this is just about everyone—should have at least a rough idea of what it means to be physical, not necessarily a strict definition, but at least a notion of the physical that excludes some, if not actual, then at least possible, phenomena from being physical. For if we cannot even conceive of something being nonphysical, it is difficult to grasp what physicalists could be arguing for—to say nothing of what that they could be arguing against.<sup>70</sup>

Rejecting reductive materialistic explanations for the mind and body relationship, Aquinas is just as adamantly anti-dualistic, except in a *highly* qualified theological sense. He acknowledges that the soul is distinct from the body and can survive the death of the

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<sup>69</sup> See chapter three of this dissertation.

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Montero, "Post-Physicalism," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* Vol. 8, No. 2 (2001): 62 – 63.

body, but this does not entail dualism of the Cartesian or Augustinian variety. In Aquinas's ontology, while being a "thinking thing" or a mind is part of the definition of a human being (rational animal), his very definition requires us to acknowledge that being human involves a form of intellect that is essentially biological. The allowance Aquinas makes for the survival of the soul after physical death is built on the combination of two intellectual commitments. The first is his rejection of any reductionist account of the world in which we live – a world which contains minds that are engaged in acts of knowing that are quite ontologically different from any physical states with which they are associated. The second is his theological belief that the soul is naturally immortal. But because it is the person who exerts the powers made possible by the soul and not the soul itself, then powers such as sensation and memory are not exercisable in such a state. So, he contends the soul's natural orientation for union with the body will, sometime following physical death, be reunited with the matter of the body in the resurrection.<sup>71</sup> But during this period the soul is active in knowing: "As soon as it ceases to turn to the body it turns to higher beings. It does not follow on this account that the knowledge is not natural, for God is the author of the infowing of light [knowledge] not only of grace, but also of nature" (*Summa*, I a, 89, 1 ad 3).

Nor would Aquinas be a proponent of various non-reductionist theories of physicalism such as supervenience or emergentism. The first of these, supervenience, is

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<sup>71</sup> This theological proposition is, of course, incredible to many philosophers. However, while its intelligibility will not be defended or critiqued in this chapter, it is worth noting that the belief in the resurrection of the body in Aquinas's theology is a further proof that calling him a dualist is wide of the mark. To be human is, for him, to be a corporeal being endowed with the image of God and living a rationally biological life, even eschatologically. We shall explore Aquinas's doctrine of the incorruptibility of the soul (as opposed to the idea that it is immortal (as Spinoza puts it) in the final chapter of this work along side Spinoza's own claim that the mind is immortal.



an attempt to allow for mental state, without necessarily accepting the ontological reality of mind as something that engages in the mental activity that those states would involve. Supervenience does not want to insist on, in the strictest sense, the dependence of mind upon the body. It does not argue, for instance, that mental states are simply physical states described differently. And yet, there is, for the philosophers who hold to supervenience, a primacy of the physical. As Kim notes:

According to some philosophers, mind-body supervenience gives us the right kind of physicalism: It respects the primacy of the physical by giving a clear sense to the idea that the physical determines the mental. Without the instantiations of appropriate physical properties, no mental property can be instantiated, and hat particular mental properties are instantiated depends wholly on what physical properties happen to be instantiated. And yet. . . mental properties remain distinct from their physical base properties.<sup>72</sup>

However, many philosophers who embrace supervenience as an account of mind and body in human beings do regard it as “affirming a relation of *dependence* or *determination* between the mental and the physical; that is, what mental properties a given thing has depends on, or is determined by, what physical properties it has.”<sup>73</sup> In the case of supervenience as a description of the relationship between mind and body, this theory does not suffice, in Aquinas’s judgment, because as he saw it the acts of understanding and reasoning cannot be intelligibly described as causally dependent upon any underlying physical substrate. For Aquinas, even though the mental acts of a human being cannot be done without the so-called physical substrate (the body, he would say), they are acts that are so radically distinct from the matter which underlies the human activity of understanding and reasoning . Even if one posits (as supervenience doctrines

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<sup>72</sup> Kim, 149

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 11

do) thought as a thing over-and-above a brain-state, but nonetheless contend that the brain-state is necessarily causal of the mental act, he fails, in Thomas's judgment, to see that understanding is something quite distinct from any set of physical conditions. The very nature of rational insight necessitates, he argued, that thought be conceived as non-dependent *qua* rational *insight* upon physical states of affairs.<sup>74</sup>

It would also be incorrect to place Aquinas in the so-called emergentist fold. This species of non-reductive physicalism is committed to the reality of laws of emergence at work in the world such as the following: "When appropriate [material] 'basal conditions' are present, emergent properties must of necessity emerge."<sup>75</sup> Emergentism attempts to protect the integrity of mind as an existent reality in its own right. The properties themselves, although still "physical," would be a special sort of physical state, not reducible in terms of the sorts of states out of which they emerge. However, against this theory of mind-body relations, Aquinas would argue, I think, that such a commitment to laws of emergence entails a granting of metaphysical priority to the "physical" as ontologically foundational without accounting for the physical

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<sup>74</sup> Aquinas would find common cause with the perspective of William Hasker regarding the non-materiality and, therefore, independence of rational acts. "Now let us suppose that all human thinking is physically determined in the following sense: (1) Every thought or belief accepted by a person is a result of that person's brain being in a corresponding state. (2) We assume, provisionally, that the physical indeterminacy which exists at the quantum level makes no perceptible difference in the overall functioning of the brain. So that the brain functions, in effect, as a [materially or physically] deterministic system. It follows that (3) every brain state, and therefore every thought and belief of the person, is fully determined by the physical functioning of the brain in accordance with the deterministic laws of physics. Is it not evident, on this supposition, that rational thinking is an impossibility? It cannot be true, on this assumption, that anyone's thinking is guided by rational insight; rather, it is guided entirely by the physical laws which govern the brain's functioning, which proceed with no regard to whether the thought processes they generate correspond to principles of sound reasoning. . . . [To hold this, one] must admit that our belief that we are capable of rational thinking is an illusion [which would, of course, undercut the claim that such a theory, itself, is true in any sense that we define the concept of being true." *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 48 – 49.

<sup>75</sup> I am indebted to Kim for this definition of emergentism. See, Kim, 228.

organization of the very 'basal conditions' it posits in the first place. He would argue, in good Aristotelian fashion, that the physical basal conditions cannot account for themselves, since the organizational information (form) that enables the existence of such basal conditions is distinct from the physical states that are organized in such a way so as to make possible the existence of those states as basal conditions for mind to supervene. Here, as with every other point of comparison between Aquinas's doctrine and contemporary theories, his hylomorphic understanding of the soul is critical. Something makes the biological entity capable of rationality through a particular mode of physical organization capable of life and awareness; and that same something is the source of the mind as an aspect of human existence that is radically distinct from the body, but not an essence in its own right.

Aquinas's hylomorphism positions his theory of mind-body in relation to other philosophical discussions as an important alternative way of expressing the nature of the question in our quest to envision the mind-body relationship; yet, his perspective, it will be noticed, has at first blush much in common with so-called dual aspect theory. But there is a difference, even in this positive comparison. Dual aspect theory is for the most part content to describe the paired phenomena of mind and body without pursuing an account of the reason why any entities might in fact be doubly-aspected in this way. We have demonstrated, that if we acknowledge Aquinas's doctrine to be a kind of dual-aspect theory, the employment the term "dual-aspect" need not cause us to think of mind (being rational) and body (being animal) as distinct aspects of a human being's life, in the sense that they have nothing to do with each other. Were that false interpretation allowed, we would be placed, as we endeavor to interpret Aquinas, in the difficulty that faces the

parallelism interpretation of Spinoza's doctrine, namely, that we now have a functional dualism in the place of an ontological one.

As we have shown, in Aquinas's judgment, a human being *qua* mind and body is a primary substance whose essence can be defined as but the unitary *process* of living as rationally the life of a biological entity. For analytic purposes Aquinas considers mind and body as something like two modes that express existentially the single act of being of an entity that is irreducible in its rational animality. However, that kind of analysis is, in his view, abstracted from the actual living of a person. Mindedness, while distinct from the matter that is minded, is not *ultimately* able to be thought of as separable from that minded matter, because the mindedness itself is the mindedness of a living physical entity – i.e., a person.<sup>76</sup> Hence, Aquinas provides at least the beginning intuitions of an account of *how* a human being can be described as a singular entity, yet can be regarded simultaneously as mental and physical in his existence. He offers us in medieval and Aristotelian terminology a theory of the relationship between the organic complexity of the human body -- whose complexity is dependent upon the in-formational powers of the soul -- that accounts for the presence of the mental in biological beings as an aspect of their living embodiedness. Aquinas grants to us in his hylomorphism a philosophical analysis of the nature of the mind that provides what Jonas claimed for Spinoza's

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<sup>76</sup> This is captured in Aquinas's definition of a person, when considering a human being. A person is, in his metaphysics, an individual substance of a rational nature. Such a definition can apply to the "persons" of the Trinity. But a human being is called by Aquinas both person and rational animal. Hence, a good Thomistic definition of human person would be something like, an individual primary substance of a rational nature whose rationality is rooted in its biology and whose biology does not exist separately from its rationality. We shall address in the final chapter how the last part of this way of envisioning the human person is reconcilable with Aquinas' claim that the act of reason is not dependent upon the body and is, thereby, separable from the body at death. Suffice it to say at this point that I am, at present, addressing Aquinas's doctrine of the identity of the "thing" that is a rational animal, not the distinction that must be posited between the principles (form and matter) that in unity instantiate a particular rational animal.

metaphysics, i.e. “a speculative means is offered for relating the degree of organization of the body to the degree of awareness belonging to it.”<sup>77</sup> The Angelic Doctor, therefore, provides us with a reason to think a dual-aspect theory is true, not just as a description of the state of affairs, but as the metaphysical situation of a human being’s existence. He gives, in his doctrine of *anima* and its relationship to both mind and body, a way to recover the unitary nature of human existence that both dualistic metaphysics and those that grant ontological priority to the physical fail to do. What Jonas says of Spinoza can also be said of Thomas: He gave to philosophy a way to describe the “intrinsic belonging-together of mind and matter, which gave causal preference neither to matter, as materialism would have it, nor to mind, as [dualistic] idealism would have it, but instead rested their interrelation on the *common ground* of which they were both aspects.”<sup>78</sup>

In his metaphysics, the mindedness of a living body is not simply to be the mindedness of something that is, *in one of its aspects*, a living body; or the mindedness of something that *also has* a bodily aspect. Rather, it is the case, for him, that the singular act of existence that is a human being expresses itself in two aspects, but these aspects, while distinguishable in their own powers, are always involved not only alongside one another, but in one another. The physical act of human existence is essentially manifested in the act of living rationally. Likewise, the mental activity that is the specific difference in the definition of a human being is the activity of a physical entity that is a living body.<sup>79</sup> So Aquinas refuses to think of the mind (and the acts of understanding

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<sup>77</sup> Jonas, 271.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 272.

<sup>79</sup> The import of this kind of unity of existence, without diminishing the distinction that actually exists, will be explored more fully in the next chapter where we take up our consideration of Spinoza.

that we associated with it) simply as an immaterial aspect of a being that is also physical, but precisely as the non-physical activity of a being that is physical. But the being itself is in the final analysis not reducible to either. Mental acts and physical acts are both the acts of a subject and agent -- a person.

In any case, if one is to be able to acknowledge any validity to Aquinas's metaphysical theory, he must be able to accept the idea that intelligibility and intellect is a fundamental principle of the way the universe is. Spinoza would have been able to agree with that, as his doctrine of Thought and Extension as Attributes of *Deus sive Natura* indicates. So now we will turn our attention to reading Spinoza's cryptic and complicated claims about *conatus* and about "mind and body as one and the same thing" in the light of the Thomistic framework that has been developed in the last two chapters, and then eventually return to questions concerning the "subsistent" and even "immortal" status of the human soul.

## Chapter 5

### Reading Spinoza Afresh: Thomistic Hylomorphism and Spinoza's *Conatus*

Spinoza's doctrine of mind and body has spilt an ocean of ink;<sup>1</sup> so much so that we cannot undertake an exhaustive survey of the various interpretations offered in the secondary literature. In much of the commentary, however a common difficulty confronts his interpreters, i.e. the meaning of his statement in II, P 7, sch.:

Thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. *So, too*, a mode of Extension and the idea of that mode are *one and the same thing*, expressed in two ways. . . And so, whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of Extension or under the attribute of Thought or under any other attribute, we find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes – that is, the same things following one another.<sup>2</sup>

In this argument he builds on the conclusions of Book I of *Ethics* that there is only one Substance, namely God or Nature; and the “God” is “the thinking Substance” and “the extended Substance.”<sup>3</sup> While Spinoza's argument in the scholium involves his conception of a single substance of which Thought and Extension are attributes, it is not necessary for the purposes of the questions this dissertation is considering that we critically evaluate the logic Spinoza employs to reach this. We can bracket the way that

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<sup>1</sup> A brief survey of some of the literature on this subject includes: Timothy L. S. Sprigge, “Spinoza: His Identity Theory,” *Philosophy Through its Past*, ed. Ted Honderich, (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 164 – 167. Albert G. A. Balz, *Idea and Essence in the philosophy of Hobbes and Spinoza*, AMS Press, Inc., 1967. (First published in New York, 1918.) E. M. Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, (London: Routledge U Kegan Paul, 1930), 16 – 23. Henry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 33 – 70. Add to these R. J. Delahunty, Jonathan Bennett, and Michael Della Rocca, who are cited below.

<sup>2</sup> My emphasis. [

<sup>3</sup> We could, perhaps, just as readily put this in gerund-like terms, that Thought is Substance “thinking” and Extension is Substance “being” extension.

Spinoza arrives at his monistic conclusions, simply acknowledge that he does, and proceed with an analysis of how exactly Spinoza conceives of the “one-and-the-sameness” of the mind and the body. Of more immediate relevance, for this dissertation, is Spinoza’s use of this conclusion that he posits in this scholium. It is the foundation upon which Spinoza later seems to be clearly asserting (III, P 2, sch) mind-body identity. He says, “mind and body are *one and the same thing*, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension.” Interpreting Spinoza’s contention that mind and body are one and the same thing is made further difficult, however, by what many have called his explanatory or causal barrier between thought and extension, as indeed between modes of any distinct Attributes. In Book III, Proposition 2, Spinoza claims that “the body cannot determine the mind to thinking, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest, or to anything else.” Such a proposition would appear to contradict or at least make confounding the claim he makes (which we have already alluded to) in the scholium of this same proposition. If mind and body are in fact *the same thing* how, one can ask, can these two sorts of Modes not be causally related in some way? Hence, what he means by mind and body being “one and the same thing” and how this idea relates to the prior statements of II, P 7 is a subject of no little controversy.

As we exposit and analyze Spinoza’s metaphysical commitments about mind and body, the interpretation that follows will show how Spinoza’s concept of mind and body oneness is comprehensible in the light of his concept of *conatus*, which is, I contend, a much more foundational concept in his metaphysics than has previously been appreciated. In the course of demonstrating the importance this concept has for Spinoza, the similarities between *conatus* in his metaphysics and the hylomorphic understanding



of *form* in Aquinas's philosophy will be highlighted. What will be demonstrated, by this approach, is *why* Spinoza's doctrine is cast in the form it is, namely, mind and body as one and the same thing. His doctrine is an important and particularized form of the "identity theory" of mind and body (as is Aquinas's) that is best captured by seeing mind and body as two differing *aspects* of a single entity that is neither mind nor body *simpliciter*. What follows will not attempt to tame Spinoza's monism or radicalize Aquinas, rather it will show that the distinctive terms that express Spinoza's ontological commitments regarding the oneness of human existence actually do much of the same work in his metaphysics of mind and body that Aquinas's Christian-Aristotelian categories do in his philosophy.

### **Spinoza and "Identity Theory"**

As we consider Spinoza's cryptic statements about the identity between mind and body, we should be aware of some issues that bemuse commentators regarding Spinoza's doctrine on this issue. There are essentially only two basic approaches that Spinoza affords us. The first is to deny that there can, in Spinozistic terms, be an identity relation between mind and body. The other option is to take Spinoza seriously, and then try to explain how the identity in question can be understood. R. J. Delahunty is an example of one who claims quite forcefully that Spinoza's metaphysical statements are self-contradictory on this issue. Two of the more engaging recent treatments of Spinoza that take the identity approach seriously are those of Jonathan Bennett and Michael Della Rocca.

Bennett sees Spinoza's theory as asserting an actual identity, but in a highly qualified sense that does not entail the numerical identity of *mind and body*. He argues

that Spinoza's concept of the identity of minds and bodies rests rather on the idea that, for any given mind, there is a numerical identity between the "fundamental mode" in which that mind in some sense *consists* and the fundamental mode in which some particular body consists; and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> By contrast Della Rocca, who is critical of Bennett's reading of Spinoza, argues that Spinoza's metaphysical doctrine and his accompanying epistemology require that a full-blown, strictly applied view of the numerical identity of mind and body be attributed to Spinoza. This identity, Della Rocca emphasizes, is rooted in Spinoza's so-called "parallelism." The distinction between these two approaches will be seen below, but it is closely tied to how one interprets three issues: (1) the relationship that the Attributes have to Substance; (2) whether there can be, in Spinoza's thought some type of Modes that are not Modes of the Attributes; and (3) the place that parallelism has in Spinoza's doctrine.

First, a world about parallelism will serve us well as a backdrop to the issues that will concern us in this chapter. Both Bennett and Della Rocca, in different ways, see the notion of a psycho-physical parallelism as playing an important role in Spinoza's thought. Typically, however, a discussion of psycho-physical parallelism is brought into a discussion of Spinoza as an alternative to any sort of reading in terms of identity, reading Spinoza rather as following Leibniz's theory of the way that the physical and the psychic worlds are related. On this view, given that there can be no interaction between mind and body, because they are dissimilar in essence, it is simply held that there must rather be no more than a kind of isomorphism or mapping between the physical world

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<sup>4</sup> Bennett's view is thus indeed a kind of numerical identity view, even though he does not himself put it in those terms, and chooses to present it as in opposition to "numerical identity" approaches to Spinoza. This issue will become clearer as we proceed..

and the mental (or perhaps, more specifically, between the physical world and the way that world is represented in the mental). Parallelism generally fails, I contend, as an explanation of Spinoza's own doctrine, because it allows us to assume that he was willing to ensconce himself safely in the harbor of such unexplained mapping of activity. Psychophysical parallelism eschews interactionism on the grounds that events so totally dissimilar as those of mind and body could not possibly affect one another. However, parallelists simply accept the fact that every mental event is correlated with a physical event in such a way that when one occurs, so too does the other. This does not seem, in my estimation, to be consistent with Spinoza's treatment of the nature of the way that mind as a location of thought and emotions relates to the body as the location of activity and changes which are, in some sense, the objects of the mind. Parallelism, if it wants to be an adequate explication of Spinoza's doctrine, ought to try to provide us with an explanation of how the parallelism could work.<sup>5</sup>

Parallelism fails, in part, because it misses the importance of an aspect of Spinoza's thought that, I contend, is the *central* issue in Spinoza's own theory, namely his describing all things as being *alive* [II, P 13, sch]. While pan-psychism is the label that this aspect of Spinoza's doctrine often receives, pan-psychism is not going to enter in any substantive way into my treatment of Spinoza's doctrine. However, it should be noted that Spinoza's actual argument in the second part of *Ethics* is not just saying that all things are "minded." Rather, his position seems to be that the universe is imbued with

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<sup>5</sup> Parallelism is, in my view, an example of the fundamental Cartesian divide that functions in philosophy of mind. This prevailing attitude was mentioned in chapter one.

life through and through.<sup>6</sup> I take this to mean, for him, that “life” is a fundamental aspect of the way Reality is, not a supervening property. This way of looking at the matter opens up the possibility that for Spinoza the identity of mind and body is actually rooted in the identity of a “living” entity as one with itself. Mind and body, then, are dual-aspects of such a single thing. Where parallelism rejects dual-aspect theory on the grounds that no “third” entity, whatever that might be, could be responsible for such vastly different effects as those of mind and body, Spinoza’s doctrine attempts to describe just this kind of situation. My own eventual proposal will be a form of the dual-aspect approach. However, the interpretation I offer will attempt to ground the duality of aspects in an underlying unity in a way that can explain the unity of mind and body as resulting from what Spinoza calls *conatus*.

### **Delahunty, Della Rocca, and Bennett on Spinoza**

I will begin by considering the arguments of Delahunty, Bennett, and Della Rocca, as a way of putting the issues that must be kept before us in clear relief. Let us begin with Delahunty. He offers a criticism of Spinoza’s own formulation of his doctrine of mind-body identity in *Ethics*; and his assault is a serious one.<sup>7</sup> Delahunty focuses his

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<sup>6</sup> Lewis Feuer has commented about this aspect of Spinoza’s thought. “Panpsychism . . . was born as a mystical, social revolutionary doctrine in the seventeenth century, but it was remarkably reinforced by the science of the time. The last half of the seventeenth century was the age of microscopy . . . Spinoza was indeed one of the Dutch microscopists, reveling in the magnifications which revealed the variety of minute living things, and fitting his observations into his philosophy. As Colerus narrates” ‘He observed also, with a Microscope, the different parts of the smallest Insects, from which he drew such Consequenses as seem’d to him to agree best with his Discoveries.’ . . . And Spinoza in explicating his grounds for believing that ‘each part of Nature accords with the whole of it’ made full and explicit use of the new physiology and microscopy of blood and its constituents.” *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 236f.

<sup>7</sup> R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

criticism on Spinoza's insistence that there is a causal barrier between thought and extension.

Whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of Extension or under the attribute of Thought or under any other attribute, we find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes – that is, the same things following one another. . . . God is the cause – e. g. – of the idea of a circle only in so far as he is a thinking thing, and of a circle only in so far as he is an extended thing. . . . as long as things are considered as modes of thought, we must explicate the order of the whole of Nature, of the connection of causes, through the attribute of Thought alone; and in so far as things are considered as modes of Extension, again the order of the whole of Nature must be explicated through the attribute of Extension [II, P7s].<sup>8</sup>

In a later section, Spinoza unpacks this metaphysical claim. Building on this scholium in III, P2, he flatly asserts the barrier to interaction mentioned above: “The body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to motion or rest, or to anything else (if there is anything else).” The proof offered for this proposition is the ontological distinction between the Modes of the Attributes that Spinoza believes is implied in the distinction he posits between the Attributes of Substance.

All modes of thinking have God for their cause *in so far* as he is a thinking thing, and not in so far as he is explicated by any other attribute. So that which determines the mind to think is a mode of Thinking, and not of Extension; that is it is not a body. . . . Now the motion-and-rest of a body must arise from another body . . . and without exception whatever arises in a body must have arisen from God *in so far* as he is considered as affected by a mode of Extension. . . .

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<sup>8</sup> This passage has been seen by those who have insisted on calling Spinoza's doctrine “parallelism” as a main pillar of that interpretation. The problems inherent with parallelism were discussed in chapter one, namely that it presents us with a kind of functional dualism in Spinoza that does not do justice to Spinoza's further treatment in the *Ethics* of the relationship between mental states such as will and bodily states. The functional dualism implied by the parallelist reading of Spinoza might as well be ontological. This will be discussed below.

Because of this insistence by Spinoza, Delahunty rejects the coherence of Spinoza's own claims that mind and body are actually one and the same thing. The reasoning he employs in his refutation is in the following form:

1. If mode of thought (T) 1 is identical with mode of extension (E) A and
2. If EA causes another mode of extension EB, then
3. T1 has caused EB.

This result would be contrary to the obvious ban stated in III, P2; so Delahunty concludes that Spinoza, although he does say that mind and body are the same, *should not have said* this. He contends, therefore, that Spinoza himself is confused in his conclusions, because his claims about mind and body sameness transgress against his own ban on causal interaction between the Attributes of Substance. This would seem to be quite a strong objection against the notion of numerical identity between the Modes.

A response to Delahunty's critique of Spinoza's mind-body identity statements is found in Della Rocca's work. He contends that Delahunty's arguments fail because he does not see that Spinoza's system, far from being incoherent, actually requires us to posit identity between mind and body in the strongest and the strictest sense. Della Rocca refutes Delahunty's objection, noting that Delahunty's criticism of the mind-body identity reading of Spinoza "turns on the view that causal contexts are referentially transparent."<sup>9</sup> Della Rocca instead insists that one can read Spinoza as holding that causal and explanatory contexts are referentially opaque.<sup>10</sup> Following Quine on this

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Della Rocca, 121 f.

<sup>10</sup> This observation is significant. However, my concerns are different from his, although the reading I will offer is consistent with Della Rocca's claim that not all causal contexts need be referentially

matter, he says that “a context is referentially *opaque* if the truth value of the sentence resulting from completing the context does depend on which particular term is used to refer to that object.”<sup>11</sup> With this general principle in hand, he points to Spinoza’s own stated sensitivity to the description-relative *opacity* of truth statements. Della Rocca rightly reminds us of Spinoza insistence that any statements about God’s causality will be true only if we describe God with specific consideration of the Attribute of Substance under which we are describing that causality. Spinoza considers God to be the *immanent* cause of each finite mode (1p18). A finite mode would be a *transitive* cause of another finite mode. Now, Spinoza says quite clearly that whether it is true to say that God is the immanent cause of a finite mode depends on how God is considered. Thus: “The modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute.”<sup>12</sup>

Undaunted by Delahunty and others who have insisted that the “barrier” between the various attributes makes a “numerical identity” view impossible, Della Rocca argues “that it is in part *because* of the explanatory barrier (and *not* in spite of it) that Spinoza holds the numerical identity view.”<sup>13</sup> For Della Rocca, the opacity of causal contexts is the key to understanding Spinoza’s dual insistence: (1) Modes of completely distinct Attributes can have no causal relationship, as well as the claim (2) that Modes of different Attributes can be in fact *numerically* identical. “Spinoza thinks that the truth-value of

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transparent in a Spinozistic system. What Della Rocca does not provide is a *metaphysical* explanation for why referential opacity might be a part of Spinoza’s view about certain causal contexts.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 122

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 122 – 123.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 118.

certain immanent causal claims is sensitive to the way in which the immanent cause is described.”<sup>14</sup> Della Rocca believes that his own reading avoids violating “the conceptual [and causal] separation between the attributes,”<sup>15</sup> without denying the proper ontological relationship that the Attributes have to Substance. The secret to this is two fold for Della Rocca: the opacity of causal relations and Spinoza’s parallelism. The doctrine of parallelism provides Della Rocca the foundation for understanding Spinoza’s acceptance of mind-body identity in the first place. Commenting on Spinoza’s statement in II, P 7, which says “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” Della Rocca takes this to mean not only that there is a one-to-one correspondence between ideas and extended things, but that, for Spinoza, “the fact that the order and connection within the two series is the same entails that certain neutral properties are shared by parallel modes.”<sup>16</sup> But parallelism alone cannot *account for* the identity statements that it allows for.

On Della Rocca’s reading, Spinoza had a view of identity in which the identity between two modes requires only that have all their *extensional* properties in common. By “extensional property” Della Rocca means a property that is *neutral* regarding whether or not the property in question is one of extension or thought (or one of the other Attributes). The reason that only extensional properties are relevant for the question of how Spinoza argues for mind-body identity regards what is involved whenever we recognize non-identity. In Della Rocca’s view any statement of the kind “a is not b,” can only be true if there is “some difference between a and b that explains their non-

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 123.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>16</sup> Della Rocca, 133.



identity.”<sup>17</sup> He thinks that Spinoza insisted that any facts about non-identity could only be true if they could be explained by property difference between the items under consideration. This way of describing Spinoza’s reasoning he bases on proposition 4 of Book I, which he interprets to be telling us clearly “that there must be a way to distinguish two distinct things.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, since Spinoza regards the properties of being extended and being thinking as intensional, these properties can be left to the side for the purposes of the argument here, and so can all the particular properties that presuppose on or the other of these general properties. Any conclusion about the identity of a mode of thought and a mode of extension will have to be reached on the basis of a relatively impoverished class of properties.<sup>19</sup>

Since intensional properties (those that are Attribute-relative) are irrelevant, in Della Rocca’s opinion, for deciding the issue of identity between mind and body,<sup>20</sup> he contends that there must be a class of extensional properties that is small but nonetheless important for Spinoza’s logic. These properties are properties that Spinoza assumes in the *Ethics*; and they are comprised of properties that Spinoza utilizes in the course of his various proofs and explanations. For instance, the property of having X number of effects would be a neutral property in that more than one Mode could share the property of having X number of effects. Also, there would be the property of being temporal or

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Shirley’s translation of this proposition reads: “Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by the difference of the attributes of the substances or by the difference of the affections of the substances.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>20</sup> Della Rocca claims that Spinoza held to a version of what Della Rocca calls “Leibniz’s Law.” “a = b iff a and b have all their properties in common. As Leibniz himself and other have recognized, however, this principle does not hold in complete generality. There are certain kind of properties that are such that the fact that a has a property of that kind, and b does not, does not by itself undermine the claim that a = b. The properties included within the scope of the above principle are, of course, intensional properties. Since intensional properties are not covered by Leibniz’s Law, we can formulate a version of Leibniz’s Law that is exceptionless” a = b iff a and b have all their extensional properties in common” [130 – 131].

having duration [is this really a word?] existence. A final extensional property that Della Rocca thinks is important is the property of being a complex individual. These neutral ways of describing Modes does not commit one to a point of view regarding the type of Attribute in terms of which one is describing them, since such descriptions can apply across Attributes. Hence, on this level a similar description could be given of Modes of different Attributes that would allow for these different Modes to share *extensional* properties. For Della Rocca, Spinoza's identity theory, as we have said, is based on the centrality of parallelism in Spinoza's thought. This parallelism is, however, a parallelism that entails the presence of neutral properties and not Attribute-relative properties. He argues that if there is a neutral property F that is a neutral property of a certain Mode of extension (E1) that contributes to the order and connection of the extended series, then (by parallelism) there must be a parallel mode of thought (T1) that also has property F. "If there were no parallel mode of thought that had feature F, or if the fact that feature F is present at that point were not explained by a certain feature of another mode of thought, then," Della Rocca asserts, "the order and connection of the mental series would be different in a certain respect from the order and connection of the physical series."<sup>21</sup> That would violate the parallelism that Della Rocca thinks is the foundational premise of Spinoza's ontology and epistemology. Since there must always be an intra-attribute modal explanation (as is described in the previous quote) for all causes; and since parallelism always holds in Spinoza's metaphysics, Della Rocca reasons to the existence of shared extensional, that is, Attribute-neutral properties.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 135.

However, Della Rocca wants us to understand that things need only share certain critical neutral properties in order for identity-statements to hold with regard to what modes are parallel to each other. Such a qualification about the necessity of sharing extensional properties means that relevant to parallelism, it follows that a Mode of extension and a Mode of thought will share *certain* extensional properties that are Attribute neutral. By focusing on *certain* extensional properties only then Della Rocca believes that the proper distinction between Modes *qua* thought or extendeness can be maintained, without denying identity between mind and body. Since only a certain set is critical for identity to be asserted, then we can on the basis of other *extensional* properties allow for distinction. This reasoning allows Spinoza, to rightly claim that “mind = body, without treating distinction between the two as *merely* nominal.”<sup>22</sup>

Della Rocca’s view of parallelism in Spinoza attempts to posit identity of mind and body in the strictest possible form, but to do so without denying some kind of duality in Spinoza’s doctrine. For Della Rocca, “the *duality* in Spinoza’s parallelism is not one between distinct things but between distinct descriptions or ways of conceiving things;” it is a semantical parallelism.<sup>23</sup> This idea of semantical parallelism is, in part, rooted in the “relativity” of explanatory contexts. Thus, parallelism is strict with regard to identity, but is relative with regard to ways of considering the things that are identical. An object has, for example, the property of being physical only *relative to* a certain manner of conceiving or describing it. This conception of description-relativity of mental and physical properties in general is additional to the *mind*-relativity of content in particular

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 19.

[Spinoza's insistence that things are "known" differently in different minds]. . . Thus, the general notion responsible for much of what is most intriguing and important about Spinoza's theory of [mental/ideational representation] is also the notion that provides the key to understanding his position on mind-body identity. This is the notion of *relativity*. That different kinds of relativity should be so significant in Spinoza is not a surprising fact about a philosopher whose favorite locution is, perhaps, "insofar as" ("*quatenus*"). Since . . . mode identity results from parallelism, we can see how this identity stems from Spinoza's theory or representation and, ultimately, from his explanatory barrier between thought and extension.<sup>24</sup>

The view of the mind in relation to the body that Della Rocca offers us would seem to be one in which the mind is a complex set of organized "ideas" that not only precisely parallels the body, but is at the same time *one* essentially with the latter. But how could this be? On Della Rocca's reading, when Spinoza says that, "the object constituting the essence of the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, *and nothing else*,"<sup>25</sup> [II, P 11] we must understand Spinoza to mean by "object," if we follow Della Rocca, to mean something like the following: the mind is a *representation* of the things that are going on in the body that *qua* representation parallels the body exactly and essentially.<sup>26</sup> Della Rocca seems to suggest that as a *representation*, the mind can be the same as the body for Spinoza, because of Spinoza's

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>25</sup> Della Rocca's translation.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 18 – 19. "Spinoza's use of the traditional term *objective* {when describing the how things follow in God formally from God's infinite nature from his idea in the same order and connection} indicates that he is speaking of a representation relation between the items in the causal chain of things and the parallel items in the causal chain if ideas."

contention that an idea of X (at least unconfused ones) always involve the idea of X's *essence*. This is the same thing as saying, in Spinoza's terms, that the idea is not a Humean representative impression one has which is radically distinct *qua* idea from that which it represents. Rather, "idea", as Della Rocca puts it, represents an objective essence and not a mere impression of something. And since the *essence* of the body is, in some sense, what the body is, and since the mind's *essence* is simply to be the ideas of that essence, then the mind and the body are one and the same. But the *presence* of the *essence* in the mind is not caused by the body; rather the mind is always active in its knowing. Parallelism allows then for there to be an essential oneness of mind and body as these two Modes share certain extensional properties without being the cause or explanation of each other.

According to this way of stating the order of things, the mind is numerically identical with the body in the sense that the mind is just the essence of the body relative to the way that the essence is considered under that Attribute of thought, rather than the Attribute of extension wherein the essence is "located" *qua* extended Mode. This idea of the parallelism of essence is then applied by Della Rocca to the identity of mind and body, in conjunction with the thought that all causal contexts (and therefore explanatory barriers) are opaque, in order to defend his claim that the mind is the body, because it is constituted in its essence by the essence of the body; hence it is identical with the body.<sup>27</sup>

Contra Della Rocca's subtle reading of Spinoza, there is another and better way to interpret the meaning of parallelism in a Spinozistic system. It can also deal with

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<sup>27</sup> This seems to be the import of Della Rocca chapter entitled, "The Essence Requirement on Representation," 84 – 106.

Delahunty's objections, but is more straightforward in its reading of Spinoza. It requires taking a closer look at II, P 7, sch, which Della Rocca cites, which is according to Spinoza (in III, P 2, sch) what we are to consider so that the denial of causality between mind and body might be "more clearly understood." But here, I contend, Spinoza is introducing only an *explanatory* limit rather than a *causal* barrier between modes of thought and extension. I am not denying that Spinoza might very well hold to a causal barrier; in fact he does. However, the specific focus in this passage is on explanations, not causality. He focuses our attention on the impossibility of *explicating* a mental state of affairs by reference to a physical event or state. Concomitantly, he instructs us that neither can a physical state be *explicated* in terms of concepts that apply to the mental. He is essentially arguing that we cannot translate (or reduce) *explications* of states of affairs involving modes of a given Attribute in terms of language referring to a different attribute.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, what Spinoza's proposition 2 of Book III is arguably meant to do is not to deny mind-body interaction, but simply establish that we have no proper way of explaining such interaction. Spinoza indeed denies causal interaction *in a sense* – which amounts *simply* to denying the intelligibility of such interaction – but does not thereby need to deny interaction in some other, more ontological, sense. In fact, it could be that

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<sup>28</sup> This should, I think, be a hint to those who would like to make Spinoza into a reductionist (of sorts) that they should take pause. See as examples of those who want to reduce mind to body: Odegard, Douglas. "The Body Identical with the Human Mind: A Problem in Spinoza's Philosophy." From *The Monist: An International Quarterly Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry*, Vol. 55, 1971, 579-601. Odegard contends that Spinoza's theory, i.e. that the human mind is identical to the body, can only be true if it is a human body. Wallace Matson, "Spinoza's Theory of Mind." From *The Monist: An International Quarterly Journal of General Philosophical Inquiry*, Vol. 55, 1971, 568-578. Matson's Spinoza actually has no theory of mind, because the mind is explained functionally not causally. Donald Davidson endorses this kind of interpretation of Spinoza in "Spinoza's Causal Theory of the Affects," *Desire and Affect: Spinoza as Psychologist*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (New York: Little Room Press, 2000), pp. 95-112.

the notion of *conatus* which I shall try to unpack below gives Spinoza precisely a kind of oneness of action on the part of an organism that can eschew the difficulties he has with interactionism. In any case, bringing in axioms 2 and 4 in Book I, we see that conceptual and explanatory descriptions are closely related in his mind. I take it that Spinoza means something like the following in these two statements.<sup>29</sup>

Axiom 2: If one thing cannot be conceived through another then the thing must be explained through itself.

Axiom 4: Knowing causation requires us to know the relationship an effect has to a cause.

If the interaction cannot be “explained” then, for Spinoza, the interaction *qua* perceived is nil. Absent an explanation, the very concept of causal interaction is void. Hence, there is no causation attributable between mind and body. Della Rocca explicitly argues, however, that a distinction such as the one I am drawing fails to interpret Spinoza correctly. Hence, we are parting ways. He contends that “. . . such a separation of causal relations and explanatory relations is a possible position and, indeed, a popular one in contemporary philosophy. But, although it may be tempting to read Spinoza along these contemporary lines, there is no evidence for doing so. *This interpretation must attribute to Spinoza the view that a claim of the form ‘mode of thought I causes mode of extension B’ can be true, even if the corresponding explanatory claim is false. However . . . for Spinoza, the truth of a causal claim depends on its explanatory value.*”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The following is my translation of the Latin put in more colloquial terms.

<sup>30</sup> Della Rocca, 124.

I think that there is strong support for this way of understanding parallelism as close to Spinoza's actual position. In the latter part of the scholium to III, P 2, he focuses on this very issue of explanatory agnosticism:

. . . (1) the order and the linking of things is one, whether Nature be (2) conceived under this or that attribute, and consequently (3) the order of the active and passive states of our body is *simultaneous in Nature* with the active and passive states of the mind. Yet, although the matter admits of no shadow of doubt, I can scarcely believe, without the confirmation of experience, that men can be induced to examine this view without prejudice, so strongly are they convinced that at the mere bidding of the mind the body can now be set in motion . . . (4) Again, *no one knows* in what way and by what means mind can move body, or how many degrees of motion it can impart to body and with what speed it can cause it to move. Hence it follows that when men say that this or that action of the body arises from the mind which has command over the body, *they do not know* what they are saying, and are merely admitting, under a plausible cover of words, that they are ignorant of the true cause of that action and are not concerned to discover it.<sup>31</sup>

I have numbered the steps of Spinoza's argument so that we might be able to set down the flow of his logic very clearly. Following the inserted numbering, we can see what Spinoza is claiming:

- (1) There is only one order of "things"
- (2) This order can be conceived under either Attribute
- (3) So, there is simultaneity of occurrences in Nature in the states of the extended mode EA and the states of the mode of thought T1.
- (4) And, attributing mental causation upon body or physical causation of mind is epistemically indefensible (and therefore nothing of substance).

What we are allowed to say (according to III, P 7), then, can be cast as follows:

- (1) If EA causes EB (by the law of Mode of Attribute causation)
- (2) Then T1 attended EA's causation of EB and caused T2

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<sup>31</sup> My Emphasis.



(3) And the nature of T1's relation to EB is opaque.

(4) Hence, there is no causal interaction, because [on my reading – “in the sense that”] there is no explanation of it.

At this point it might be useful to note the ambiguity of a key concept in Spinoza's discussion of the oneness of mind and body, namely, that of a *res* (thing). The role that this concept plays (ambiguously) in Spinoza's thought will allow us later in this chapter to articulate a perspective on mind-body identity that is distinct from Della Rocca's emphasis on representation, relativity and shared neutral properties. While *res* is a general term, it seems to function in a technical (or at least quasi-technical way) at times. Spinoza's locutions that say mind and body are one and the same *thing* are examples.<sup>32</sup> Now, Spinoza claims that Substance and the affections of Substance are all that really exist – and he equates affections of Substance with Modes [I, def. 5]. But arguably, he may be taken as at least committed to the view that there are *things* that are not precisely Modes of extension or Modes of thought, and not substances either. Rather, they are something that can be alternatively considered *as* modes of extension or modes of thought in the light of the two distinct Attributes of Substance thereby in question.

Another way of describing the nature of “things” in relation to the Modes of the Attributes would be to say that they are necessarily *expressed* by (or in or as) the various Modes of the Attributes of Substance. As such, each “thing” will be expressed in different ways relative to the Attribute in question. (To that extent I agree with Della Rocca.) If this way of stating the matter is correct, then it might be argued that, *qua* these

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<sup>32</sup> See above in chapter three, pages 83 & 84, note 6 for a discussion of the way that *res* actually functions in Latin. There Theodor Haecker, is quoted where he calls *res* one of the *Hertzworter*-- heart-words --for the Latin tongue, in which is concentrated something of the genius of the language.

“things,” Spinoza is indeed arguing that a mode of extension and the idea of that mode – the body and mind – are to be identified as the same as, not each other as such, but rather identified as the same as the “thing” of which each of them exists only as as an aspect. This is a different focus upon identity than that offered by Della Rocca. In his interpretation, there is presumably a set of properties (F 1.....10) that are Attribute neutral that are shared by a Mode of thought and a Mode of extension. However, the question becomes how these things are, in fact, shared. Here, I think, the ambiguity of the term *res* comes into play. The parallel sharing of properties can only make sense if we can contend that these properties are *in* a particular something. If so, one could then grant that bodies and minds do not, as such, causally relate to or even “explain” one another; but nevertheless, qua whatever “things” are involved in regarding “things” as either bodies or minds in the first place, bodies and minds do indeed after all causally relate to one another. (The advantage of this approach will be filled out below, as we consider how Spinoza viewed the integrity of complex organisms.)

The way of reading Spinoza that I am suggesting at this point has at least some affinity with that of Jonathan Bennett, whose view is not only distinctive in the way that he posits the identity between mind and body, but it is possibly the most sophisticated in the literature. Bennett offers what he calls the “mode identity” thesis as a way to account for Spinoza’s insistence that “mind and body are one and the same thing.” Just as I have suggested, Bennett argues that the identity of mind and body is not rooted in the sharing of properties, as Della Rocca has contended. Nor is it rooted in parallelism (he thinks that mode identity explains parallelism). Rather, there is some “something” that is present in Spinoza’s identity equation, but is neither a Mode of thought or of extension

strictly speaking. In order to offer his interpretation, however, Bennett has to argue that a distinction must hold in Spinoza's metaphysics between what he calls Attribute-involving Modes and trans-Attribute Modes.

On this reading, it is the Modes that are the most properly basic features of Substance. They are the way that Substance exists most fundamentally in concrete reality. Such Modes, Bennett argues, are not essentially either Modes of thought or extension or of any other of the Attributes. Instead, the truly properly basic Modes are, in some sense, entities that are neither, because "they lie deep enough to be combined with both attributes." Bennett asserts that this way of construing the matter is critical if we are to enable Spinoza's claims to be coherent; it is the price one has to pay to allow Spinoza to mean that mind and body can be the same thing. It must be "read into" Spinoza's metaphysic, Bennett contends, because for Spinoza extension and thought, while not merely nominal distinctions about God or Nature, are not "really fundamental properties, although they must be perceived as such by any intellect."<sup>33</sup> In Bennett's view, the Attributes of thought and extension would seem to be best understood as qualitative *ways* that things exist; but as *ways* they are not basic properties that make a Spinozistic Mode a mode.

When Spinoza says that "whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of Extension or under the attribute of Thought, . . . we find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes – that is, the same things following one another" [II P

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 147. Cf. Shmuely, 61 – 72, 71. See 7 – 9 of this dissertation, where Shmuely's interpretation is presented: Shmuely has argued that one can discern an influence of Aquinas (indirectly) on Spinoza's concept of Attributes. He argues that Spinoza's treatment of the Attributes of Substance was a reinvigoration of the medieval debate about the nature of universals, especially as to whether any predication could be made of God.

7, sch], he knows that something has to be able to account for this psycho-physical “parallelism.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, embracing parallelism as he interprets it, Bennett considers the Modes of thought to be best described, in their relationship to the Modes of extension in terms that take mentality to be a psychological state of existence. (This distances him from interpretations such as Balz and Curley who conceive of the parallel “identity” between mind and body in a way that negates the psychological nature of ideas.<sup>35</sup>) But one can ask Bennett, nonetheless, *how* his brand of psycho-physical parallelism is to be accounted for, since it is not clear how, in Spinoza’s system, a Mode can be something that has its Attributes stripped off.

Bennett proposes a seemingly radical a solution to this problem involving what he calls a *differentia*.

[Spinoza’s] thesis is rather that if P1 is systematically linked with M1, then P1 is extension-and-F for some differentia F such that M1 is thought-and-F. What it takes for an extended world to contain my body is exactly what it takes for a thinking world to contain my mind. . . . Spinoza usually takes it that a mode ‘involves the concept of’ an attribute (2p6d), so that entailments run upwards from mode to attribute; but in our present context I must suppose him to be thinking of modes – or ‘things’, as he calls them – as having their attributes

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 127 – 156. The concept of parallelism, as has already been suggested, is itself ultimately an interpretation of Spinoza that could have difficulties as an expression of Spinoza’s thought. It all depends upon how one conceives the parallelism. It could be seen as implying the same order, but on parallel planes of existence that would seem to entail a kind of dualism that is more than conceptual, but actually a dualism of activity. That conclusion would not be amenable to Spinoza’s thought. For example, where he says, “. . . we find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes—that is, *the same things* following from one another” [II, P 7, sch]. Bennett is right in his version of parallelism, however, to dismiss Curley’s “logical” interpretation of Spinoza’s “parallelism” as simply meaning that an idea is reducible to truths about each particular event, since “ideas can scarcely be regarded as individual psychical entities.” [Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 118. The question is not whether or not ideas can be so regarded, but what it means to be *an idea of* a Mode of Extension in the first place, in Spinoza’s ontology.

<sup>35</sup> Both Balz and Curley seem to view the “ideas” of the body as propositions that mirror the way that reality itself is. Hence, our ideational life is the same as our physical life, because the propositions are true propositions about real states of affairs.

peeled off, i.e., as consisting in the F which must be *added* to extension to get my body or to thought to get my mind.<sup>36</sup>

By allowing for the existence of such *differentiae* in Spinoza's thought, Bennett claims that we can make sense of Spinoza's claim and allow him actually to mean that "physical state P1 = mental state M1." However, the identity of these states necessarily involves *the* differentia as the unstated member of the identity equation: "if P1 is systematically linked with M1, then P1 is extension-and-F for some differentia F such that M1 is thought-and-F." Bennett describes the general implication of this way of reading Spinoza as meaning that what it takes for the world to contain a certain body is exactly what it takes for a thinking world to contain the mind of that body

For Bennett, the cryptic nature of Modes, in Spinoza's system, can be best understood in the way that he (Bennett) describes the nature of extended modes.<sup>37</sup> Bennett describes Spinoza's understanding of the nature of a mode of extension as functioning descriptively (qualifying or quantifying) as "adjectival" or "adverbial" with respect to space (extension).<sup>38</sup> This is a rather odd sounding way to put it, but what Bennett means is fairly straightforward, once one begins to think about extension (space) in terms of contemporary physics' notion of "quarks."

Contemporary particle physics depicts fundamental particles . . . not as little lumps of matter, but rather as spheres of influence; and their unsplitability is not remotely like the end point on a line running through water drops, marshmallows, billiard balls, diamonds and . . . fundamental particles, quarks. This may make quarks unsplitable in a manner which satisfies the strongest demand that Spinoza

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>37</sup> "As for Spinoza's thesis that all particulars – minds as well as bodies—are modes: I have to suppose that he started with a sound doctrine about the modal nature of extended particulars and then stretched it over mental ones as well on the strength of a *general* thesis that the extended world is mirrored in detail by the mental world," Bennett, 94.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 95.

could reasonably make [that they have true particularity in substance]. But it deprives them of substantial status in a different way, by making them adjectival upon space: the existence of a quark in a given region, according to this way of looking at things, is the region's having certain *qualities*. . . . [it] is a *version* of Spinoza's own position. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Bennett labels this a "field metaphysic" and utilizes it to interpret the meaning of Mode *qua* modifications of substance (i.e. ways that Substance is "qualified" and "quantified").

A complete Spinozist account of the world would have to provide replacements not only for quantifications over regions but also for mentions of individual regions. . . . we can replace [the substantial language] 'Region R is F' by 'Space is F there' while pointing to R, or by 'Space is F here' while occupying R. . . .<sup>40</sup>

By Bennett's account, Spinoza's view involves regarding extended Modes as ultimately resting on properties whose instantiation by space amounts to the existence of what we ordinarily refer to as distinct "regions" of space. The Modes that Bennett offers us, then, are real states or properties of Substance. But ultimately, Spinoza's one Substance would have to be regarded as somehow the "totality" of all of the various ultimate "fields" that there are - that of space simply serving as the model for how we are supposed to think of the latter in general. Building upon this general thesis about the nature of Modes, then, Bennett develops his view about Spinoza's theory regarding the identity of mind and body.<sup>41</sup> He argues that, for Spinoza's metaphysic: "If my mind is a mode and my body is a mode, and my mind is my body, it follows that my mind is the same mode as my

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>41</sup> About this presentation Bennett interestingly says about Spinoza's theory: "It is a metaphysical speculation which I suppose is not true, and it is not even philosophically useful as an object lesson. But I care whether I am right in attributing it to Spinoza, since it displays his basic metaphysic as more coherent and better thought out than any previous commentator has found it to be."

body. . . . [Spinoza's] thesis about the identity of physical and mental particulars is really about the identity of *properties*.”<sup>4243</sup>

Applying this general description to Modes of all the Attributes, we can say that for Bennett, for every Mode of any Attribute there must be a “fundamental mode” that is itself not as such a Mode of any Attribute, and that is strictly speaking the identical Mode involved in any ascription of “identity” across the Attributes. As we might put it, this fundamental mode is in a certain way “in” the two distinct Modes thereby (but not strictly) identified with one another; indeed the latter modes might even be said to “consist” (each in its own way) in that fundamental mode, but without being strictly identical with it. And this fundamental mode would not be anything like we take to be ordinary particulars like minds or bodies, i.e., like Modes of thought or extension. For the relation of those fundamental modes to Substance, again, is simply that of a property to something “propertied” by it. Thus, the fundamental mode that is “in” some mode of thought (and in which that mode of thought in some sense “consists,” although it is not absolutely the same as the mode of thought) is numerically identical with the fundamental mode “in” some mode of extension, and vice versa. This way of understanding Spinoza means, for Bennett, that we can take Spinoza seriously, when he

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>43</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to argue this point of Bennett's views critically, I want to point out that, if there is some plausibility in it, then, as has already been suggested earlier in this work, one might be able to read Spinoza's view of Substance in relation to its Modes as having interesting parallels with Aquinas's view of God as *pure Act of Being*. Just as God's own being, for Aquinas, is the only real source of being, in which *qua* the only source of being all other things participate, so Spinoza's substance (especially if one takes into account *Natura naturans*) is the source in which all other things exist *qua* modes.

insists that Substance and Modes are what really exist. Further, we can also account for how Modes can be understood as real *qua* particulars.<sup>44</sup>

Bennett is focused on keeping the conceptual distinction between Attributes (that I suggested above is the focus of the relevant scholium) intact. What Spinoza cannot be saying, Bennett concludes, is that “physical P1 = mental M1.”<sup>45</sup> To say that would violate the conceptual distinction between the Attributes, argues Bennett; and he thinks his view of the fundamental modes as being the source of the identity relation between the mind and the body keeps this inviolate. The fundamental modes, because they are certain properties of Substance that are in a certain sense “in” the Modes of thought and extension, may, in turn, themselves be regarded as true “Modes” (and indeed must be, given Spinoza’s view that all that exists are Substance and its Modes). We are simply viewing them as ways in which the one Substance is “propertied.” For this reason, but also in order to distinguish his approach from the more familiar versions of the “identity” thesis, he calls his view the “mode identity” thesis. One need not transgress the conceptual barrier, Bennett concludes, because the explanation of identity in terms of *differentia* means that identity is rooted in the *differentia* and not the Attributes, since it is the *differentia* that combines with all the Attributes. Hence, no defiance of the barrier between Attributes can be charged.

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Bennett, 94, where he quotes appreciatively Edwin Curley’s observations: “Spinoza’s modes are, *prima facie*, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes’ modes are related to substance, for they are particular things, not qualities. And it is difficult to know what it would mean to say that the particular things inhere in substance. When qualities are said to inhere in substance, this may be viewed as a way of saying that they are predicated of it. What would it mean to say that one thing is predicated of another is a mystery that needs solving.” Bennett goes on to claim that his reading has “solved the mystery.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Also see Bennett’s article “Eight Questions About Spinoza,” *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind Vol. 2*, Y Yovel, (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 18. This is a volume of the “Spinoza by 2000: The Jerusalem Conferences.



Unlike the view of identity of the Modes as it is more ordinarily put forth – and which requires some form of “relativization” of identity for its formulation – Bennett’s is not, strictly speaking, a view according to which Modes of thought and extension are identified with one another. Again, the identity relation concerns only certain (“fundamental”) “modes” that are in a special way “in” modes of thought and extension, and in which the latter might at best be said in a certain sense to “consist.” But one might ask what these fundamental modes or *differentiae* might be in Spinoza’s system? This question is especially important, since *differentiae* are described as something that “consists in the F which must be *added* to extension to get my body or to thought to get my mind.”<sup>46</sup> Again, the *identity* that Bennett has in mind is strictly speaking an identity relation involving the “fundamental modes” *in* (ordinary) particulars.

Two questions must be asked of Bennett’s interpretation. First, what could it possibly mean for Spinoza to think of “modes or things” as having their attributes “peeled off,” but able to be *added* to the Attributes. Does he mean this merely conceptually or as a metaphysical given? This idea of a thinking Mode as being T + F is a problematic way of constructing the relationship that a Mode has to itself. While the idea that I suggested earlier, that in Spinoza’s thought there are some “things” that can be “expressed” in two Modes, is itself consistent with Spinoza’s own statements, Bennett’s claim that there are things (*differentiae*) that get “added” to Attributes is confusing. For instance, my body is

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 142. Bennett does admit that his reading has to “credit Spinoza with having this change of tune: it is the price for letting him mean that a certain mental mode is a certain physical mode, rather than dismissing those texts as lapses or rescuing them through ‘relative identity’ manoeuvre.” I think the Bennett is essentially on to the right track, but he does not account for what such a *differentia* might be in Spinoza’s system. In fact, he thinks that it cannot be found and must be implied in Spinoza’s logic. Later, as we consider the role of *conatus* in Spinoza’s thought, we may find a helpful inter-textual way of making sense of Bennett’s notion of *differentia*.

E + F and my mind is T + F, but then what am I? Am I ET + F? Or am I (E+F)+(T+F)? Or am I F in the most basic sense? Thus while Della Rocca argues that Bennett's theory does not give him mind-body identity,<sup>47</sup> there would seem to be an even more pressing existential problem; Bennett's view does not account for how I (and so, for that matter, how anything) could actually be one with myself (or itself). As I shall presently suggest, however, perhaps there is a different way to utilize the idea of "things" that are not as such the Modes of extension or thought, but rather "expressed as" Modes of the latter sort.

A second problem for Bennett is this. , Does it not follow from Bennett's suggestion that these stripped-down fundamental modes, at the very least, have an ontological priority over the Attributes that are supposed to make them conceivable and intelligible in the first place? How do these *differentiae* then avoid not being *nothing* within the confines of Spinoza's system? Perhaps something like this is what Spinoza means, but it is an open question whether or not such a reading of the concept of Mode is actually reconcilable to Spinoza's system.<sup>48</sup> In Spinoza's account, the Modes *prima facie* must have properties that reflect the primacy that he grants (in some sense) to Attributes of Substance. For the Attributes of Substance are the essence of Substance. Since the Modes are modifications of Substance, how do the *differentiae* "somehow" relate to substance as "properties" of it without the Attributes being involved in *that* relation at all?. Bennett seems, in his interpretation, to turn Spinoza's ontological ladder upside down from the rather hierarchical view that Spinoza suggests, i.e. that Substance

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<sup>47</sup> Della Rocca, 158 - 160

<sup>48</sup> Della Rocca, who will be considered below, thinks Bennett's *kind* of reading is "Spinozistically unacceptable. For Spinoza, all modes are modes of attributes." Della Rocca, 121.

is foundational, manifesting or manifested in (according to how one reads Spinoza's view of the Attributes) infinite Attributes that themselves are expressed by or in infinite and finite attribute-expressing Modes. Reversing this conceptual scheme, Bennett argues:

Now, according to my 'mode identity' interpretation, there is a good sense in which the most basic properties of the one substance are not the attributes but the modes, since they lie deep enough to combine with both attributes. Of course extension is more basic than squareness; but to be square is to be extended and F, for an F which does entail extension because it is also combinable with thought. Given that there are such Fs, Spinoza rightly won't say that an attribute is an essence = most fundamental property, but only that it must be conceived or perceived as basic, since to get deeper we would have to think of finite modes in abstraction from either attribute, which is impossible.<sup>49</sup>

I think that Bennett's basic insight here is on target, namely that there is another *something* that must be at work to account for the identity in question. But his description of his "*differentia*" as being *added* to extension or thought is an unfortunate formulation. In fact, although I have spoken of his fundamental modes F as if they are simply "in" the ordinary Modes in question, when we are concerned with the relevant identities, isn't it really the case on Bennett's view (though he denies it) – or at least so one might argue – that the ordinary Modes *are* F? Namely, isn't the Mode of thought in question simply F "as differentiating" Thought and the mode of extension in question that same F "as differentiating" Extension? Now of course Bennett can *insist* that F "as differentiating" Thought and F "as differentiating" Extension are not identical in any way; they simply both *contain* something that is identical. But is it so clear? After all, given the model taken from the "field metaphysic," isn't the *particular* in question simply some way that the "substance-field" is propertied? And that is F. The (distinct) Modes of

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<sup>49</sup> Bennett, 146 In this portion of his argument Bennett contends that the definition of an Attribute that Spinoza offers in I def 4 "that there is something in the nature of an illusion or error or lack of intellectual depth or thoroughness in taking an attribute to be a basic property."

thought and extension in question are then simply *that F*: in one case *qua* differentiating Thought and in the other case *qua* differentiating Extension. So it turns out, after all, that Bennett should have to resort to relativization of identity, in order to maintain his position that the identity relation in Spinoza doesn't hold between ordinary modes, but only on the level of the Fs.] That is some Mode of thought is identical with some Mode of extension, *qua* the "fundamental" Mode that the "two" of them are – that is, with the identity statement so relativized – but is not identical with it *qua* ordinary Mode.

Furthermore, why would one not be allowed to conclude from Bennett's description that we would, in some sense, have an F whose existence is dualistically distinct from itself. If this F combines with the Attribute of extension and the Attribute of thought, and if Spinoza imposes a causal barrier between the Modes of the Attributes, how would the same F be able to be the cause of all its own acts, since it would have acts that are *qua* thought not its acts of its own in terms of its existence *qua* extension plus F. This F would have to have two different existences, in some sense, as it exists as E1 (extension and F) rather than T1 (thought and F).<sup>50</sup> Any attempt to describe the acts of F would, it seems to me, be liable to the charge that the act of a Mode of Thought (if F combined with Thought makes F a mode of a particular Attribute) would explain the acts of a Mode of Extension (if F added to Extension makes it a mode of a different

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 141. Bennett contends (146) that for Spinoza the most basic properties of the one Substance, "since they lie deep enough to combine with both attributes." But Bennett's view requires that there be something even more fundamental than the ordinary Modes, i.e. the *differentia*, because these are capable of combining with the Attributes to make the Modes of those Attributes possible. But what could such a thing be? He denies in the passage on 146 that "essence" could mean anything more than the "fundamental property of a thing." I cannot mean, he contends, "something deeper and more general. What Bennett means by deeper is not clear, but it seems that he is wanting to deny that Spinoza has any place for Universals in his system.

Attribute). Perhaps the impulse behind Bennett's idea of *differentiae* might be salvageable if we can find a better way of putting the issue.

In the case of both Bennett and Della Rocca, their accounts of Spinoza could benefit from taking a different look at what the significance might be of Spinoza's argument that the existence of the mind is integrally one with the body, and vice versa, because of the *conatus* that grants in some simultaneous sense both organizational complexity and mental capacity.<sup>51</sup> The key hint to this better way of interpreting Spinoza is found where he asserts: "From the above we understand not only that the human is united to the Body but also what is to be understood by the union of Mind and Body. But nobody can understand this union adequately or distinctly unless he first gains adequate knowledge of the nature of our body" [II, P 13, sch.]. What we shall proceed to demonstrate in the rest of this chapter is that Spinoza's concern in *Ethics* is to offer a view of the nature of a human life as that of a complex individual; what Jonas calls "an organic individual . . . viewed as a fact of wholeness."<sup>52</sup> This reading can pick up where Bennett leaves us with his concept of the *differentia* and Della Rocca with his concept of Modes as also bearers

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<sup>51</sup> Della Rocca does, in an earlier section of his work [33 – 38], develop an argument for the importance of *conatus* in understanding the nature of individuality. "Spinoza's discussion of the *conatus*, or striving, of all things fits nicely with and indeed corroborates this reading of Spinoza's account of physical individuals. According to this doctrine, each thing – complex physical individuals, complex mental individuals, and also not-complex things, if there are any – by its very nature strives or tends to persist in existence" [35]. The troublesome portion of this assessment of Spinoza's doctrine, from my vantage, is that Della Rocca interprets *conatus* to imply that "complex physical *individuals*" (CPI) and "complex mental *individuals*" (CMI) are both types of "things" that strive to persist. Such a reading, while it fits well with Della Rocca's insistence that parallelism is the key to understanding Spinoza's identity doctrine, suggests that the striving of the mind (CMI) and the striving of the body (CPI) are two different acts of striving. Della Rocca attempts to put the issue of the constitution of individuality in "attribute-neutral terms" as a way to avoid this implication. However, as he develops this idea he argues that the CPI is constituted by a feature that is relevant to it (the tendency to preserve their proportion of motion and rest), but that the CMI has its own relevant feature that constitutes it (the feature of affirming the existence of the body). It would be a good thing if we could establish how these two strivings are not two, but one.

<sup>52</sup> Jonas, 269.

of *extensional* properties but also provide a much more dynamic understanding of Spinoza's view of life as irreducibly minded and bodied. The benefit of the following exposition and interpretation will be the realization that the concepts of *anima*, *conatus*, and *essentia* work together in Spinoza's metaphysics as he analyzes the nature of the existence of ordinary concrete particulars, to provide us with a helpful concept—the living conatic essence that a thing is. It will be demonstrated that this concept could very well represent the door that must be opened if we are to understand Spinoza's doctrine correctly. Aquinas's hylomorphism, it will be argued, is a key to that door. To get to this, however, we should address one glaring difficulty that is faced by anyone who would want to compare Aquinas's and Spinoza's ontological commitments. That hurdle is Spinoza's monism.

### **Spinoza's "Substance" compared to Aquinas's "Being"**

No concept is more central to Spinoza's philosophy or more axiomatic in Spinoza studies than his complementary claims that there is only one Substance and all else that 'exists' either is an Attribute or a Mode of Substance.<sup>53</sup> The demonstration of this is the main theme of the first book of the *Ethics*. Any attempt, therefore, to understand what Spinoza means by the claim that mind and body are "one and the same thing" will have to consider the way that this oneness is related to the oneness of Substance.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> I do not intend to take a position on whether or not the Attributes are really existent in Spinoza's ontology.

<sup>54</sup> By this assertion I do not mean to suggest that I hold embrace the "relative identity" thesis, which contends that the oneness of mind and body as Modes of the Attributes of Substance are one because Substance itself is one. There is a different, and better, way to account for Spinoza's identity doctrine, as shall be shown.

If one were to argue (as does Descartes) that the obvious distinction between various attributes implies that they are ontologically distinguished, Spinoza's reply would surely be that this does not follow. The distinction of Attributes, whereby this one Substance is expressed, poses no difficulty for monism as Spinoza develops it, because of his conception of Substance as infinitely real. From that, he argues, that Substance must have an infinite number of attributes and an infinite number of Modes within each Attribute that give expression to the existence of Substance. The radical 'difference' of these attributes does not pose a problem, because an attribute represents in our understanding a certain quality of existence that implies its own unique state of affairs.<sup>55</sup> Attributes in Spinoza's view are (by implication from I, P 2) something that substances "have." As Attributes, Thought and Extension are not, self-explanatory strictly speaking. They can only be "explained" as qualitative ways that Substance exists. With this focus on Substance as the ontological ground of Attributes, Spinoza argues, then, that *qua* qualitative ways of existing, even though they seem totally disparate from each other explanatorily, are not (by principles 6-8 above) expressions of different substances. Rather, they are Attributes of the same Substance, but since they are distinct as Attributes they can be conceived through any other Attribute.

On the basis of this logic Spinoza insists: "Consequently nothing can be clearer than this . . . that an absolutely infinite entity must necessarily be defined as an entity

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<sup>55</sup> Again, the perspective that I am developing does not rely upon taking a side in the debate about whether or not the Attributes are real or nominal. However, I agree with the perspective of Shmueli developed in chapter one of this dissertation that something similar to Aquinas' concept of "the analogy of being" allowed Spinoza to develop a view of the Attributes that was neither a nominalistic view, nor was his a strictly realist view. "The basic view, then, of Spinoza [on the Attributes] is the Thomistic view of the attributes (universals) as extra-mental realities without being distinctly existent on their own, not the [nominalist/subjectivist] view of Maimonides" [7-8].

consisting of infinite attributes, each of which express a definite essence, eternal and infinite. . . in Nature there exists only one substance, absolutely infinite” [I, P 10, sch]. And this Substance must, by definitions 3 and 6 in Book I, be conceived of as nothing other than God. This conclusion is argued in propositions 11 – 13; and leads Spinoza to the conclusion that no other substance, other than God, can be conceived, “since God is an absolutely infinite being of whom no attribute expressing the essence of substance can be denied and since he necessarily exists” [I, P 14, pr].

Spinoza’s particular way of conceptualizing the relationship of Attributes and Substance, plus his willingness to embrace the traditional term “God” as a part of his argument, leads him to the proposition (15) in Book I that “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.” Spinoza is quite aware, in the course of his “geometrical” argument that we do not experience Substance in our ordinary experience. Rather, we encounter ordinary particulars. This is the assumed background of the demonstrations of the *Ethics*. His point is to describe the necessity of recognizing that the ordinary particulars and every feature which we encounter of Nature is not self-explanatory. Axioms 1 and 2 of Book I express this fact for Spinoza. Because he takes our experience of the particularized “many” as the foundation of our daily experience, Spinoza asserts in his very first proposition that “Substance is by nature prior to its affections.”<sup>56</sup> An “affection” of Substance is, in Spinoza’s metaphysics, a way that Substance exists in concrete expression that our minds can conceive. “Affections” of

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<sup>56</sup> This way of seeing the issue is not in discontinuity with the Thomistic insistence that what we know in the first instance is “primary substances.” It is from these that we reason our way by abstraction to recognize species and universal concepts; and from these to realize the distinction between essence and existence until finally we demonstrate the necessity of God as Pure Act of Existing in which all things must exist via participation.



Substance, then, are best understood as the “form ‘taken on’ by something, a state of that thing, and therefore logically posterior to that of which it is an affection.”<sup>57</sup> This is a broad concept for Spinoza by which he describes the ontological dependence that everything that exists (both infinite features of Substance as well as finite features – concrete and universal) has upon Substance. Because there can be no existence conceivable apart from Substance (nor can it be actual), everything that has actual existence (materially or immaterially) is a Mode of God *qua* Substance. From the conclusion that all that exists is in God and that God is expressed in an infinity of ways, follows for Spinoza that the ways (Modes) by which God expresses its necessary existence and essence are themselves “in the divine nature and can be conceived only through the divine nature” [I, P 15, pr]. Consequently, we cannot conceive of anything existing in reality “except substance and modes [of substance].”<sup>58</sup>

This implies, of course, for Spinoza that material entities are *qua* material “part” of God, because material reality, just as much as immaterial reality must be part of God *qua* Substance.<sup>59</sup> In the scholium of proposition 15, as Spinoza endeavors to defend the

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<sup>57</sup> Shirley, 24.

<sup>58</sup> Spinoza would include in this not just finite modes, but the infinite modes, as well. However, for the purposes of the present discussion, we will focus on the relationship of finite modes to the one eternal and infinite Substance. We can bracket the questions that attend the interpretation of Spinoza regarding the nature of infinite Modes. Cf. Bennett for a good discussion of various aspects of the infinite modes” [107f, 111-113, 118f]. Also see, Walter Horn, “Causality of Substance: Spinozistic Proof of the Physical Plenum,” (Chapter 4) of *Substance and Mode: A Spinozistic Study*, (Ph. D. diss. Brown University, 1978) UMI Dissertation Services, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> Spinoza’s argument, by which he defends this conclusion, is found in propositions 12 and 13 of Book I. He argues in P 12 that even the *divisions (or parts)* of Substance must *qua* divisions exist *in* something. As parts of Substance the divisions cannot be conceived of as each themselves substances, nor can they be thought of apart from Substance nor can they have some other ontological status other than existing in Substance. Hence the fact that Substance could be conceived as having parts does not imply that division as such cannot be part of the infinite Substance. Also, by P 13, the infinity of Substance means that we cannot conceive of anything as ultimately distinguishable from Substance. Even divisions exist in the infinity of Substance, hence the divisions into parts that we conceive of as being the case in the

implication that God is Substance *qua* extended, he presents an argument against the objectors to God's materiality who declare that the divisibility of matter rules it out as an Attribute of God. To demonstrate the appropriateness of his own conclusions, he utilizes the distinction between matter as existent in itself and the modifications which are the concrete instantiations of matter.<sup>60</sup> He says, ". . . matter is everywhere the same, and there are no distinct parts in it except in so far as we conceive matter as modified in various ways. Then its parts are distinct, not really but only modally."<sup>61</sup> Such a distinction was not unique to Spinoza when he made it. It is a distinction that was posited by Descartes. Prior to Descartes, the medieval philosophers had embraced it. As a translator and commentator, Shirley argues that it is the Cartesian background that is relevant.

. . . it is probably the Cartesian version of the distinction that is relevant. . . . [According to Descartes's dualism], a modal distinction [as opposed to a substance-distinction] is a distinction either between a mode and the substance of which it is a mode or between the various modes of substance. . . . Spinoza uses this philosophical terminology to express the difference between matter as divided up into individual corporeal parts and matter as pure homogeneous extension."<sup>62</sup>

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various Attributes does not imply that Substance, insofar as it is substance," is divisible. All exists in the infinity of Substance.

<sup>60</sup> Bennett's interpretation of how Spinoza could make the distinction that he does argues that Spinoza's view has much in common with contemporary quantum field theory. Bennett, 91 -97.

<sup>61</sup> Horn's observations are on the mark, I think, expressing Spinoza's general position on the actual existence of the distinction between modes. Spinoza embraces the partitioned nature of physical modes from one another, because [his] faith in the real distinction of the attributes led him to the opinion that the cause of the real existence of a physical object must contain some other physical object. A finite mode cannot be self-caused. . . . And though the cause of a physical object may include an infinite mode of extension – a physical law – it cannot be composed entirely of such modes, for whatever follows from an infinite mode alone must itself be infinite" (112). The import of the finite modes, then, is obvious in Spinoza's metaphysics. They become a part of his explanation for change and contingency and a part of his proof for the necessity of the existence of God *qua* Substance. E.g. the modes are not self-caused, but as temporal they cannot be immediately the result of Substance.

<sup>62</sup> Shirley, 42, note 2.

What strikes me, however, is not the “Cartesian” comparison (which one might expect), but that such a “modal” distinction as Spinoza draws is very much like the distinction that Aquinas makes in his own metaphysical analysis of the nature of primary entities that exist materially and the prime matter upon which they depend for their existence *qua* material entities. (Of course, Aquinas calls them “primary substances” but let us set aside, for the moment, this important difference in terminology from Spinoza to see if we cannot draw an instructive comparison.) Spinoza insists that there are Modes of Substance *qua* extended that do not contain in themselves the source of their own being, as well as maintaining that “extended substance” is itself to be distinguished from the Modes that express the reality and nature of extended substance. It must be remembered that while the Attribute of Extension is an attribute of Substance, Extension does not precisely “exist,” since what exists are Substance and its modifications.<sup>63</sup> Spinoza, by regarding the nature of extended things as Modes of the Attribute of extension that enables their existence *qua* extended modes, offers a metaphysical theory of dependence and existence that has analogy to the Aristotelian/Thomistic ideas about prime matter.<sup>64</sup>

While Aquinas does not think of prime matter as an eternal principle, much less an attribute of God’s essence, when thinking strictly in terms of material existence, he is insistent that it is primary entities *qua* “designated matter” that actually exist materially.<sup>65</sup> Some might suggest in reply to this claim that Spinoza’s identification of extension as an

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Shmueli, see chapter one in this dissertation, for an argument that Spinoza’s understanding of the ontological nature of the Attributes is neither strictly nominalist or realist.

<sup>64</sup> As was discussed in chapter three, Aquinas views prime matter as real, but not a truly existent thing, because it is pure potentiality. While Spinoza does not describe extension in these precise terms, it would seem that his insistence that the Modes of Substance are what exist along with Substance itself could imply that the Attribute of extension is not precisely an existent thing, but nonetheless real *qua* an Attribute.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Chapter 3, 90f.

Attribute of God would undercut the comparison with Aquinas; and no doubt that would be troubling for the metaphysics of the latter. However, taking Aquinas's claim that prime matter is a principle *in* which material entities exist *qua* material and then reading this understanding of prime matter in terms of his even deeper claim that nothing that exists can exist apart from participation in the Being of God, possible parallels between the ontological commitments of Spinoza and the most influential of the Christian Aristotelian medieval thinkers begin to suggest themselves. Regarding the participation of the principle of materiality in the Being of God, the logic of Aquinas' deliberation can be found in Q 44, a 1 & a 2 of the *Summa's prima pars*:<sup>66</sup>

- (1) No entity or principle of existence (including matter and material things) has its existence in itself, but exist only by participation in God's own act of Being.<sup>67</sup>
- (2) Prime matter is a principle of existence.
- (3) Therefore, Prime matter can only exist by participation in God's Being.<sup>68</sup>

The differences between Spinoza's account of Substance and Aquinas's idea about God's Being as the ontological foundation of all existent things are obvious, but perhaps the ways that these concepts do similar work in the philosophical systems under consideration is not. It is worth noting, therefore, the functional and (to a limited extent) ontological similarities that one can find. Consider first, in this regard, Spinoza's

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<sup>66</sup> For the discussion of Aquinas's views on participation in the Being of God see 105f above.

<sup>67</sup> "Therefore *all beings* apart from God are not their own being, but are beings *by participation*. Therefore it must be that all things which are *diversified by the diverse participation* of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly."

<sup>68</sup> "Therefore whatever is the cause of things considered as beings, must be the cause of things, not only according as they are "such" by accidental forms, nor according as they are "these" by substantial forms, *but also according to all that belongs to their being* at all in any way. And thus it is necessary to say that also *primary matter is created* by the universal cause of things. . . . But here we are speaking of things according to their emanation from the universal principle of being; *from which emanation matter itself is not excluded*, although it is excluded from the former mode of being made."

argument that Substance (God or Nature) is infinite and compare this concept to Aquinas's contentions that God is Pure Act. In the course of his demonstration, Spinoza asserts in I, P 8 that "every substance is necessarily infinite." At this point in his argument, Spinoza has not yet proposed that there can only be one Substance, so the content of this proposition and its proofs and scholia are important for that conclusion. In scholium 1, he contends, "Since in fact to be finite is in part a negation and to be infinite is the unqualified affirmation of the existence of some nature, it follows from Proposition 7 alone that every substance must be infinite." The thrust of P 7 is the necessary existence of Substance, because it cannot – by definition – be the product of some prior set of conditions. So, "its essence necessarily involves existence." What Spinoza seems to be contending for is that there can be no non-being conceivable in itself. Hence, Substance must be infinity per se. This way of stating the issue resonates, I suggest, harmoniously (so far) with Aquinas's belief that God is Pure Act with no potentiality. Recall the argument of chapter two where it was shown that the basis for Aristotle's distinction between act and potency is rooted in the concept of negation (not being something else).<sup>69</sup> Taking this Aristotelian starting point, Aquinas argues that God cannot be conceived of as having any kind of potentiality. Hence, there is no non-being in God.<sup>70</sup> On the basis of the claim that God is the Act of Being itself, Aquinas argues for the infinity of God.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. above 55f.

<sup>70</sup> Aquinas argues the point as follows: "God is existence itself, of itself subsistent (3, 4). Consequently, He must contain within Himself the whole perfection of being. For it is clear that if some hot thing has not the whole perfection of heat, this is because heat is not participated in its full perfection; but if this heat were self-subsisting, nothing of the virtue of heat would be wanting to it. Since therefore God is subsisting being itself, nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him. Now all created

If it should be argued that Aquinas's claim that there cannot be an infinite magnitude undercuts the argument being presented -- that Spinoza and Aquinas have possible points of continuity on the question of the ontological primacy of God in all things -- the reply must be two-fold. First, it has already been acknowledged that there are significant differences that separate Spinoza and Aquinas on the metaphysical issue of God's identity in relation to the Universe. Aquinas's Christian views and Spinoza's theology are not, ultimately compatible; that is uncontroversial. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the real source of their disagreement would be (on the question of God's relationship to the world) the following: (1) denial of God's volition by Spinoza, (2) the positing of necessity in Spinoza's God, and (3) Spinoza's failure to see the distinction between existence and essence as implying the necessity of God's transcendence. Replying to the objection, we must, as a second stage of our response, analyze exactly what Aquinas's rejection of the idea of an infinite magnitude actually entails. Aquinas's argument against this concept is an argument about the conceivability of such an entity. In I a, Q 7, a 3 of the *Summa*, Aquinas argues that we cannot simultaneously think of an infinite magnitude and a *particular* physical thing. His argument is that whether or not we "consider" the infinite magnitude as "a natural body" or as "a mathematical body" we

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perfections are included in the perfection of being; for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion. It follows therefore that the perfection of no one thing is wanting to God. This line of argument, too, is implied by Dionysius (Div. Nom. v), when he says that, "God exists not in any single mode, but embraces all being within Himself, absolutely, without limitation, uniformly;" and afterwards he adds that, "He is the very existence to subsisting things" [*Summa*, Ia, Q 4, a 2, reply].

<sup>71</sup> *Summa* I a, Q 7, a 1, reply. ". . . form is not made perfect by matter, but rather is contracted by matter; and hence the *infinite*, regarded on the part of the form not determined by matter, has the *nature of something perfect*. Now being is the most formal of all things, as appears from what is shown above (4, 1, Objection 3). Since therefore the divine being is not a being received in anything, but He is His own subsistent being as was shown above (3, 4), it is clear that *God Himself is infinite and perfect*.

run into the same logical problem. What Aquinas is arguing is that the concept of an infinite magnitude, considered as a particular thing, is a self-refuting concept.

- (1) To be a body is to be bounded by something.
- (2) To be infinite as a body is to be unbounded.
- (3) Hence, the idea of an infinite body (magnitude) is absurd.

When comparing this syllogistic form of Aquinas's reasoning with Spinoza's assertion that extension must logically be conceived as a part of God, other interesting similarities emerge. Spinoza argues that because God is truly infinite there can be no state of existence that is not involved in the essence of God as an Attribute of God. However, we must consider an important interpretive point in order to understand adequately the import of this claim. For Spinoza, the infinity of God *qua* the Attribute of Extension does not allow us to conceive of God as a particular thing *qua* extended, To posit God as infinite in "magnitude" (to incorporate Aquinas's term) does not allow us to conceive of God as an extended "thing," strictly speaking, because the only *particular* things that exist are Modes. Such a conclusion about Spinoza's view would seem consistent with his claim [I, P 15, sch] where he refutes those who deny that Extension cannot be an Attribute of God on the basis of the divisibility of the material:

The student who looks carefully into these arguments [against Spinoza] will find that I have already replied to them, since they are all founded on the same supposition that material substance is composed of parts, and this I have already shown to be absurd (P 12 and Cor. P 13). . . . [Any] alleged absurdities . . . from which they seek to prove that extended substance is finite do not at all follow from the supposition that quantity is infinite, but that infinite quantity is measurable and is made up of finite parts. . . .

If therefore we consider quantity as it is presented in the imagination – and that is what we more frequently and readily do – we find it to be finite, divisible, and made up of parts. But if we consider it intellectually and conceive it in so far as it

is substance – and this is very difficult – then it will be found to be infinite, one and indivisible. . . . This will be quite clear to those who can distinguish between the imagination and the intellect, especially if this point also is stressed, that matter is everywhere the same, and there are no distinct parts in it except in so far as we conceive matter as modified in various ways.

Spinoza would agree, I suggest, that God *qua* extended Substance is not a “thing” in itself, because being extended is an attribute of the infinite God who is *qua* the matter of extended Substance “everywhere the same.” When Spinoza argues that being extended infinitely is an Attribute of God, he is not identifying God *qua* material as some “thing,” e.g. the whole of the universe.<sup>72</sup> Instead, he is identifying God or Nature as the source (out of God’s own essential nature as the *immanent* cause) of there being extended reality at all. But, God is not *qua* extended Substance identifiable as any particular thing no matter how grandiose the identification. We can add this conclusion to Aquinas’s willingness to say that Prime Matter *qua* the material principle of existence participates in the Being of God. Hence, there is, quite possibly, not quite the distance between Aquinas and Spinoza on this matter as might be suggested by a mere passing consideration. We can compare them in the following way. I enumerate each of the comparisons to highlight the ways we can note an affinity between them.

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<sup>72</sup> The reading I am suggesting is consistent with the self-described “radical” suggestion of Curley in *Behind the Geometrical Method*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 149, note 52. “The assumption that Spinoza’s God may be identified with the whole of Nature is so common in the Spinoza literature that few commentators feel any need to justify it.” In fact, Curley argues convincingly that Spinoza rejects “that kind of pantheism” in Letter 43. Curley notes that, engaging the arguments of Velthuysen, Spinoza contends that “his having said that all things emanate necessarily from the nature of God does not commit him to holding that the universe is God.” By Curley’s account, “the general disposition to identify Spinoza’s God with the whole of Nature comes mainly from . . . a misreading of the Preface to *E IV*.” Cf. Bennett, 118, where he opines that “Spinoza’s terminology [regarding extended reality] is dangerous.” He says, that Spinoza’s descriptions offered in Letter 64 in defense of his metaphysics cannot imply that “the make of the whole universe” suggests that this locution suggests that it names “the totality of particular facts about the extended world.”



- (1) Spinoza – Modes of extension are not distinct, strictly speaking, from extension.
- (1') Aquinas – Material entities (primary substances) are not distinct, strictly speaking, from prime matter.
  
- (2) Spinoza – Extension, as an Attribute of Substance, does not explain itself apart from Substance.
- (2') Aquinas – Prime Matter as “potential” cannot account for its own existence.
  
- (3) Spinoza – Extension must be an Attribute of Substance.
- (3') Aquinas – Prime Matter must express the Being of God (in some way).

With the above issues addressed we can look at a second analogous conception in their respective metaphysical schemes. We can observe that Spinoza's Substance and Aquinas's Being both grant existence to the things that exist *in* them because those things *qua* particular entities participate in the ontological reality of the first cause. Although any number of Spinoza commentators have asserted that Spinoza's theory of causation rules out the idea of a “final cause” because he does not grant purposiveness to things, it is difficult to argue that he would not share something of Thomas's claim that there is a “first cause” that grants existence to all else by way of its very being. Spinoza's insistence that God is the cause *immanens* and not the cause *transiens* does not separate him entirely from Aquinas. Of course, his pantheistic rejection of the concept of God as transcendent would be heretical, for Aquinas. However, Spinoza's description of God as an immanent cause is not completely alien to Thomas's own notions about the Creation's ontological dependence upon God. In chapter three of this dissertation, it was argued that Aquinas believed that

. . . the existence of any particular and obviously contingent being is dependent for its existence upon a prior condition. Also, any contingent chain of events or beings can exist only if some prior state provides the capacity of the existence of that chain of contingent events or beings. Hence, some foundational *something*

must be posited as the prior condition or state in which other things exist via participation.<sup>73</sup>

To this we can adduce further support for the present case being made for a complementary comparison between Spinoza and Thomas. In, of all places, his commentary, *Exposition of the Gospel of Saint John*, we find Aquinas commenting on what it means for God to be his own pure act of being and the relation of contingent beings to this pure act:

Since, then, all the things that are participate in existence (*esse*), and are beings by participation, there must needs be, at the summit of all things, something that is existence itself by His own essence (*aliquid. . . quod sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam*), so the His essence is His existence (*id est quod sua essential sity suum esse*), and this is God, Who is the most sufficient, the most worthy and the most perfect cause of the whole being, from whom all that which is participates in being.<sup>74</sup>

Spinoza's concept of God as immanent cause is admittedly different from Aquinas's notion of participation in a crucially important way, metaphysically and theologically speaking. The immanent causal agency of Spinoza's God is not in reality distinct from its effect(s), whereas Aquinas's idea of participation entails the distinct ontological identity of God apart from the things that exist via participation. Spinoza's cryptic use of the distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* does not

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. above 110, note 66

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Etienne Gilson, *The Elements of Christian Philosophy*, (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1963), 328 n 12. Gilson interprets the significance of Aquinas's theory of participation as follows: "A new field of metaphysical prospection is here offering itself to our inquiry. Before being anything else [e.g. members of species], the objects of sense experience are so many existents. Their only possible common cause, qua existents, is therefore Existence. But what is Existence? Thomas says it is that which, being absolutely immovable and most perfect, is also absolutely simple; in short, a being that is to itself its own being." 112

assuage the tension between their metaphysical systems.<sup>75</sup> Spinoza's concept of nature as naturing (*naturans*), does imply enough of a distinction within the nature of Substance itself that we could reconsider the judgment of one such as Bennett who claims that this locution is "quite without significance in the *Ethic*" His is not the final word.<sup>76</sup> One need not attempt to read into Spinoza's doctrine any traditional understanding of transcendence and volition in order to assert that the naturing power of Nature is something other than the natured effects of Nature. In fact, it would seem to be precisely such a distinction that Spinoza is insisting upon in his arguments about the dependence of Modes upon Substance. The ontological dependence runs only one way. It is not the case, for instance, that Substance is dependent upon the Modes. So, while Spinoza would give to us a thoroughly naturalistic, transcendence-void metaphysic, it does not necessitate that we interpret him as holding the that distinction between *Naturans* and *Naturata* is of no consequence.<sup>77</sup> There is a clear distinction logically, for Spinoza

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<sup>75</sup> Spinoza asserts that there is a difference between *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*. While we cannot undertake a critical examination of this distinction, it can be noted that Spinoza the distinction is one between (*Naturans*) the Attributes of God that "express eternal and infinite essence" and (*Naturata*) "all that follows from the necessity of God's nature. . . modes of God's attributes in so far as they are considered as things which are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God" [I, P 29 sch]. See, Wolfson's claim that Spinoza inherited this distinction from Aquinas, even as he modified it from its former use. Wolfson, I, 16. See Bennett for an argument that this distinction is "quite without significance in the *Ethics*, 119. Also, see Curley's claim that "given Spinoza's identification of God with *natura naturans*, and his identification of God's power with his essence, we have here a thoroughly naturalistic explanation of Spinoza's claim that God's essence, i.e. the totality of his attributes, is eternal and immutable. The eternity and immutability of God's essence is the eternity and immutability of the fundamental laws of nature," *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Bennett, 119.

<sup>77</sup> Also, Spinoza's later insistence that the object of intellectual investigation is the "love" of God, would seem to suggest that he wants his readers to make a distinction between the naturing aspects of nature and the natured aspects. Consider, for example, that in Spinoza's view the idea of loving some thing when applied to our experience of the Modes of Substance is inadequate. The implication of his arguments in Books III and IV would seem to be that the way of beatitude is to know that love is but a feeling we attach to favorable states of the body. It is those favorable states experienced as favorable. The love of God which he discusses in *Ethics* V, P 32 – 35 is quite different from the inadequacy of this feeling love. Even if this love is, as would seem to be the case for Spinoza, the result of an epistemological shift (the

between what provides or accounts for the possibility of naturing and those things (or the totality of things) that are natured (i.e. given essence and existence). Hence, we can see that the concept of contingents having their existence *qua* existent contingents by being *in* something that is itself the necessary prior condition of itself and, therefore, of contingent beings is that dominates the discussion of Substance for Spinoza as much as it dominated the discussion for Aquinas. The differences cannot be glossed over, but the reality that in both views God gives existence to all other things out of the divine existence should not be ignored either. Whatever the oneness of mind and body *is*, for each of them it is in some way an expression of the being of God.

### **Hylomorphic existence and conatic essence**

The notion of expressing the essence or being of God, for a commentator such as Wolfson, was enough to account for the one-and-the-sameness of mind and body in Spinoza's metaphysics.<sup>78</sup> In Wolfson's view, the identity of mind and body is a relative identity that is rooted in the fact that the Attributes of extension and the Attribute thought are not really distinct in God; hence the oneness of mind and body is relative to the

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third kind of knowledge) one need not deny that even this opens-up for those who embrace this beatitude a new *object* of love. Although it might be argued that such a realization is only an embrace of the way things really are naturalistically, even this naturalistic interpretation would not mitigate the distinction between *naturata* and *naturans* in toto. An appropriate distinction remains, because what we come to love is the eternal necessity *qua* eternal necessity that makes the Universe possible; and this *eternal necessity* is quite distinct in itself from the necessary, infinite flow of Modes that exist because of the one Substance. *Naturans* is the infinite logical source of what exists; *Naturata* is what exists as a *result* of that infinite necessity.

<sup>78</sup> Wolfson, 33f. “[Spinoza] finds an analogy between the interrelation of extension and thought in God and the interrelation of body and mind in man. But there are fundamental differences between them, and the first fundamental difference which he discusses is that between the relation of extension and thought to God and the relation of body and mind to man. God is a substance in whom extension and thought are attributes. Logically then, God is the underlying subject of these attributes, without himself being composed of them. But man is not a substance, and logically he is not the underlying subject of body and mind; rather he is composed of them.”

reality that there is only one undifferentiated Substance – God.<sup>79</sup> This, it seems to me, would suggest that not only is it true for the Attributes of Substance, in a Wolfsonian reading of Spinoza, that the distinction between them has no reality.<sup>80</sup> Concomitantly, the Modes of Substance would also be but phenomenal manifestations with no reality *qua* Modes and hence no real distinction as Modes. But this would also mean that the that Spinoza grants them would be negated. And such a conclusion would run against Spinoza’s assertion that “what exists are Substance *and* Modes.”<sup>81</sup> It would seem that if the Modes really exist *qua* distinct modifications of the one Substance, then something has to account for their distinction, as well as their identity. But Wolfson’s relative interpretation of Spinoza can say little to solve the problem of mind-body identity except to *assert* that the mind is the body in some way that reflects the nature of the one Substance’s unity with itself.

Something more is needed to account for the oneness of mind and body precisely because there is a real distinction of some kind; and many of Spinoza’s interpreters have

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<sup>79</sup> Wolfson’s reading of Spinoza makes him a modern Neo-Platonist with regard to the non-differentiability of the One. However, Spinoza is clear in his insistence that our knowledge of the Attributes and their Modes gives us true (adequate) knowledge of God. For a strong case against Wolfson’s understanding of the Attributes in Spinoza’s philosophy see Martial Geroult, *Spinoza*, Vol. 1, (Paris:Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 430: “[The understanding] produces only true ideas that adequately reflect what is the case. If, therefore, it perceives an infinity of attributes in the substance, then they are really there.” Also, see Francis S. Haserot, “Spinoza’s Definition of Attribute,” *Philosophical Review* Vol. 62, No. 4 (Oct., 1953): 499-513.

<sup>80</sup> Wolfson, 154 – 157. Also, see 257f: “The independence of each attribute which Spinoza insists upon is *merely* to emphasize his denial of the interdependence of matter and form in mediaeval philosophy; it is not an independence which implies the reality of the attributes in their relation to substance or a reality in the difference between themselves, with the result that the unity of substance can no longer be logically maintained. The relation of the attributes to each other is of the same order as their relation to substance. Just as the difference between attribute and substance only a conception for the human mind, so the difference between the attributes themselves is only a form of conception in the human mind. . .”

<sup>81</sup> My emphasis. Wolfson’s argument, if the unreality of the Modes is the implication of his view, that a human being is composed of mind and body would beg the question: What is a human being, then, if the human being is composed of Modes that are not themselves real things. A Wolfsonian Spinozistic world would be truly occult.

offered to add the more. What many of the commentators, however, have missed is the integrating insights provided for the whole of Spinoza's metaphysics by the concept *conatus*. Admittedly, he does not introduce the term specifically until Book III, but it is arguable that this concept is what makes the establishment of the identity of mind and body metaphysically possible in Spinoza's analysis. In III, 7 Spinoza suggests that this kind of reading of his metaphysical system is on target. This proposition clearly identifies what Spinoza means by the term: "The *conatus* with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself." What is instructive here is not simply that he defines the term as being the property "with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being." That was a common place notion in Spinoza's day.<sup>82</sup> I suggest that the more intriguing and helpful statement in this proposition is Spinoza's statement that the *conatus* is "*nothing* but the actual essence of the thing itself" [my emphasis]. This is, in one sense, at least a startling identification, since Spinoza identifies the essence of a thing in terms a property or principle upon which the thing dependence for its existence: ". . . there pertains to the essence of a thing that which, when granted, the thing is necessarily posited, and by the annulling of which the thing is necessarily annulled; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and, vice versa, that which cannot be or be conceived without the thing." Unless by *conatus* Spinoza means something more than merely a process of preserving (or tending to preserve) certain proportions or arrangements, this kind of identification of essence and *conatus* is confounding. I suggest that there is an important ambiguity in

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<sup>82</sup> Wolfson, 195 – 199. "At the time of Spinoza the principle of self-preservation became a commonplace of popular wisdom. . ."

Spinoza's use of this concept which, once it is recognized, helps us to interpret his doctrine of mind-body identity, even as it allows us to see some very intriguing parallels with Aquinas's hylomorphism.

Bennett seems to interpret the doctrine as being confounded. He finds Spinoza's arguments for the striving of things to persevere "disgracefully bad." He sees Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine merely as a subsequent account of a process of self-preservation in which all entities are engaged to a greater or lesser degree. And while it is certainly true that Spinoza only introduces the concept after he has offered his metaphysical arguments for the oneness of Substance and the nature of the mind, the doctrine that things are ordered in such a way so as to be "actively" engaged -- *qua* specifically instantiated Modes -- in the preservation of their own existence is a doctrine that is fundamental to the very conception of modal existence for Spinoza. Unable to see this, Bennett tends to follow Stuart Hampshire's reading and view this doctrine primarily as a psychological basis for ethics, rather than a metaphysically basic hypothesis.<sup>83</sup>

One could ask, however, what it would mean for the idea of *conatus* to be a metaphysically basic notion. Thus, we must proceed attentively. First let us consider some semantic issues regarding Spinoza's statements about the nature of *conatus*.

Proposition 7 in the Latin text of the *Ethics* reads: *Conatus quo unaquaeque res in suo esse perseverare conatur nihil est praeter ipsius rei actualem essentiam*. Here Spinoza is

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<sup>83</sup> Bennett, 240 – 251. Bennett acknowledges that "the criteria for individuality, for the large class of individuals, do involve the concept of self-preservation; claims of the form 'x is an individual' can sometimes be rejected as failing certain self-preservation tests." However, he fails to see that even this way of interpreting the idea of self-preservation does not account metaphysically for the fact of the existence of the self-preservation impulse. Much less is it able to account for why the mind's self-preservation would be "one and the same thing" as the self-preservation of the body. Cf. Hampshire, 122 – 143.

utilizing *conatus* as though it points to a referent of some kind. But this does not mean that he conceives of it as being thing-like. However, he does identify *conatus* by the phrase *nihil est praeter ipsius rei actualem*. Shirley translates this phrase “is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself” and R. H. M Elwes renders it “is nothing else but the actual essence of the thing in question.” These translations express very well the identity between *conatus* and the *rei actualem* (the actual thing or the thing active). This *conatus*, identified with the actual thing (or perhaps we might be able to say the thing’s actuality), is also further identified with some specificity in Spinoza’s Latin as the feature of a thing “with which each thing endeavors to persist. . .” (Shirley) or “wherewith everything endeavours to persist” (Elwes). The structure of the sentence in Latin would allow that *conatus* is being identified as a feature or perhaps a power that is also identical with the “actual essence” of a thing. It is described as *quo unaquaeque res in suo esse perseverare conatur*. The pronoun *quo* has as its antecedent the subject *conatus*; and the composite word *unaquaeque* refers to something other than *the conatus*. Hence, the grammar of the sentence suggest that we designate the *conatus* as a something “by which” (*quo*) “each single one [endeavoring thing]” (*unaquaeque*) endeavors to persist. So whatever Spinoza more fully means by the notion of *conatus* he at least conceives of it as some feature or aspect or quality of a thing that *enables* its to endeavor “to persist in its own being” and not simply a description of the act of striving to endeavor. That being the case, we are able to suggest that *conatus*, in Spinoza’s usage here, has some ambiguity; and can be thought of not only as “striving” but as “something” that in some sense is prior to the concrete striving (*conatus*) of the entity and as the essence of the thing determines it to strive in a particular way.



Another important semantic consideration in Spinoza's *Ethics* involves how he understands the relationship of essences to existent things. Spinoza provides a definition that explains what he means when he utilizes the term "essence": "There pertains to the essence of a thing that which, when granted the thing is necessarily posited, and by the annulling of which the thing is necessarily annulled; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and, vice versa, that which cannot be or be conceived without the thing" [II, def 2]. It is *prima facie* apparent by this definition that the essence of a thing is in some way to be distinguished from the thing itself. When essence is "granted" the thing is necessarily posited, but absent "essence" the thing either is inconceivable or cannot exist. But Spinoza also goes on to say that the essence of the thing "cannot be nor be conceived without the thing." An essence, therefore, is not an existent entity in itself, strictly speaking, (that would make it a Mode), because it can only exist or be conceived by us as "accompanying" the existence of the thing that gives actual existence to the essence. The distinction between essence and existence is further drawn out by Spinoza in Axiom 1 of this same section of the *Ethics*. He predicates of human beings in this axiom that the "essence of man does not involve necessary existence [which reserved for God's essence]."

Spinoza assumes some type of ontological difference between essence and existence, considered as aspects (not Attributes) of the one Substance, God, throughout the *Ethics*. All that he says, intimates, or assumes throughout is consistent with his statement in the second scholium of proposition 10. In this proposition Spinoza is building his case that substantiality cannot be a part of man's essence (since he has already demonstrated that God is the immanent or indwelling cause of all things). He

seeks to establish that God -- if truly understood -- will be conceived as the substance of the existence of human beings, both *qua* species and particular. But he wants to protect against the illicit implication being drawn that God's essence *qua* God pertains to the essence of the individuals.<sup>84</sup> Having argued in Book I that human existence cannot be conceived of in terms that would allow a human being to be called a substance, he posits the distinction between essence and existence that is a real distinction in human beings, as well as in all particular things.<sup>85</sup>

All must surely admit that nothing can be or be conceived without God. For all are agreed that God is the sole cause of all things, both of their *essence* and their *existence*; that is, God is the cause of things not only in respect of their coming into being (*secundum fieri*) [this would be existence], as they say, but also in respect of their being [their essential nature]. But at the same time many assert that that without which a thing can neither be nor be conceived pertains to the essence of the thing, and so they believe that either the nature of God pertains to the essence of created things [which need not follow] or that created things can either be or be conceived without God [which is impossible]; or else, more probably, they hold no consistent opinion. . .<sup>86</sup>

The distinction between the essence and the existence of a thing, that Spinoza accepts as a given suggests, at the very least, that he thought of essences as logically prior to existent ordinary particulars. The essence is what makes the ordinary particular to be what it is. However, the essence does not establish *that* it is. Something more is needed; and that something more, for Spinoza, is not only the necessary infinite modifiability of

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<sup>84</sup> Wolfson comments on Spinoza's brand of pantheism "While indeed he considers man as well as all other beings as modes of the attributes of thought and extension of God, he does not consider them as being in the literal sense of the same essence as God."

<sup>85</sup> Spinoza's insistence in II, P 10, sch 2, "individual things can neither be nor be conceived without God, and yet God does not pertain to their essence," implies two things: first, a human being (nor a Cartesian human mind) is not a substance. But secondly, it suggests that there is a *real distinction* to be made between God *qua* God's essence and identity as Substance and the Modes which exist only because the one Substance is infinitely modified, according to the necessity of its very essence. Perhaps this distinction is another way of expressing the difference between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*.

<sup>86</sup> My emphasis.

God/Substance. Some eternal necessity of the nature of God (*naturans*) causes a process of coming to be -- and coming to be in highly particularized and real ways -- to be at work in *Natura naturata*. Spinoza can say that existent things are dependent upon their *essences* in order to exist *qua* their specific selves and that those very *essences* cannot and do not *exist*, either conceptually or in actuality, apart from the particular existent things that are posited by the essence given or granted to it.

With these semantic clarifications in place, we may move to a consideration of a systematic concept that we can rightly infer from Spinoza's own analysis. It has already been noted that Spinoza defines the *conatus* as the actual essence of a particular thing. If that identification is in place, then a thing's *conatus* must, as is the case with the thing's essence, be thought of as something more than its existence 'actively' engaged in pursuing self-preservation. Rather, *qua* essence a thing's *conatus* is what makes the actual existence of the thing possible existentially and conceptually.<sup>87</sup> The *conatus* is the feature or principle of a thing's existence that makes it what it is. Also, this very same principle, one could argue, is what grants to an entity its power of self-preservation, because it has been ordered in such a way through the 'presence' of this *conatus* as the particular-existence giving principle.

We will return to this process of unpacking and analyzing *conatus* as a causative essence shortly, but at this point let us consider a particular interpretive implication that arises from this reading of the importance of *conatus*. Proposition 7 in Book 2 has been treated as a foundational passage for the doctrine of psycho-physical parallelism as a way

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<sup>87</sup> The existence of things as a result of essence being "granted" to them is what makes any particular essence conceivable. And the existence of things that are not self-explanatory, but require essences to explain them, is what makes the notion of essences as distinct from existence possible.

to understand Spinoza's metaphysics. While neither essence nor *conatus* is the subject in II, P 7, it is not far afield to suggest that the parallel between existence and conceivability is what Spinoza is really after in the scholium of the proposition. In other words, this passage is epistemological in focus, not existential or metaphysical. When he contends that "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things," he is not asserting some metaphysical principle – the so-called psycho-physical parallelism. To interpret him this way, at this point, is to move too quickly to psychologize the meaning of Spinoza's doctrine on this subject. While he might, indeed, think of the "mind" as merely a collection of ideas that in some way is a parallel to the world of which they are ideas, his concern here is not to posit a mental-physical mapping pattern. Rather, he is insisting in this passage that in the activity (*act*) of existing the nature (*act*) of being intelligible is also given. While it is not clear exactly how proposition 7 – which is a proposition about the parallelism of ideas and things -- follows strictly from axiom 4 of Book I,<sup>88</sup> what is clear in Spinoza's utilization of this axiom in the proof of the proposition is that he is thinking here epistemologically rather than metaphysically.

Furthermore, the corollary of this proposition clearly supports this non-metaphysical reading of Spinoza's meaning: "whatever follows formally from the infinite nature of God all this follows from the idea of God with the same order and the same connection, as an object of thought in God." Here he makes a distinction between that which follows "formally" from the nature of God and the notion that there is "an

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<sup>88</sup> I, Axiom 4: "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause."

object” of thought in God. This further suggests that Spinoza is speaking about the certainty of our epistemic engagement with *naturata*. This is even more obvious from his later statement in this same scholium: “a circle *existing in Nature* and *the idea* of the existing circle – which is also in God – are one and the same thing. . . . we find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes – that is the same things following one another.” Clearly, Spinoza is thinking of the intelligibility of *Natura naturata* that exists as all of the particular Modes of God.<sup>89</sup> When he argues that ideas and actually existing things are the same in order, etc, he is describing formal or essential existence (of every, and each, thing) as present *and knowable* in the very act of that thing’s existing. What we are able to know is the way things really are; a thing can be known for what the thing actually *is* and even God or Nature can be truly known.

In order to indicate how this knowability relates to *conatus* we shall have to consider further an important point of Spinoza’s epistemology, namely what I shall call the “being-about” nature of all ideas. It is the very nature of an idea to be about something; in other words they are intentional. And that suggests, in Spinoza’s view, that we must posit some reality beyond the idea itself about which the idea is an idea. Recall that Spinoza argues that our mind’s have as their true *object* our bodies *as* they are affected (acted upon) by other things (this from II, P 13). He thinks that this claim stands on the merits of the previous proposition (12). There Spinoza contends for the ‘being-

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<sup>89</sup> To this point a reading such as Curley’s is appropriate regarding the sameness of ideas and extended things. However, his epistemological reading need not be strictly applicable across the board regarding Spinoza’s doctrine. The doctrine of *conatus* can account for what is epistemic and what is metaphysical in Spinoza’s treatment of ideas and objects or minds and bodies, if it is understood rightly.

about' nature of all ideas. When he expostulates in the proof of P 12 he is arguing the intentional nature of ideas.

Whatever happens in the *object* of any idea, knowledge thereof is necessarily in God [II, P 9, Cor] in so far as he is considered as affected by the idea of that object; that is [II, P 11] in so far as he constitutes the mind of something. So whatever happens *in the object* of the idea constitutes the human mind, knowledge thereof is necessarily in God in so far as he constitutes the nature of the human mind. . . .<sup>90</sup>

That he is positing the intentional nature of ideas is clearly seen by Spinoza's use of the term "object" in proofs 9, 12, and 13 as he adduces proofs to establish his claim that "nothing can happen in [a human] body without its being perceived by the mind [of that body]." In each of these proofs the focus of his argument is that there is something beyond the idea itself, about which the idea is an idea.<sup>91</sup>

In Axiom 1 of P 13, Spinoza states an explicit conclusion regarding the "being-about" nature of ideas that helps us tie what has been explicated above with his doctrine of *conatus* as essence, or what we might call conatic essence. "All the ways in which a body is affected by another body follow from the nature of the affected body together with the nature of the body affecting it, so that one and the same body may move in various ways in accordance with the various natures of the bodies causing its motion; and

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<sup>90</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>91</sup> Spinoza in II P 10, sch, Spinoza is, I think, critiquing the empiricism of the early modern variety which would tend to deny the "being-about" nature of ideas. Of course, he puts his argument in terms of the divine nature, but he thinks he has already established that thought and extension are one in the One Substance and in each and every aspect of reality. Hence he criticizes those who are confused in that "the things that are called objects of sense they have taken as prior to everything. Hence it has come about that in considering natural phenomena, they have completely disregarded the divine nature. And when thereafter they turned to the contemplation of the divine nature, they could find no place in their thinking for those fiction on which they had built their natural science, since these fictions were of no avail in attaining knowledge of the divine nature. So little wonder they have contradicted themselves on all sides." Spinoza metaphysic demands that all ideas have an intentional quality that points beyond themselves and even beyond the objects about which they are ideas, when one considers the objects of our ideas in the light of the whole of reality in which we experience them and know them as objects of our ideas.

on the other, different bodies may be caused to move in different ways by one and the same body.” Part of the implication of this axiom is that extended things affect the human body out of their own natures and that they do so in relation to the specific nature of the human body. By the general use of the term *natura* in this axiom and in other places, Spinoza is simply referencing the “essence” of the distinct things. Hence, he utilizes this axiom in the proof of proposition 16 where he argues that our ideas about extended modes involves *qua* ideas the nature or essence of the body that is “external” to our own bodies. Of course, he insists that the ideas we have will be ideas that are specific to the ways that a human body can be acted upon by another extended entity (out of its essence). But, that claim does not imply that our knowledge would be lacking about the way reality is “in itself,” because there is, for Spinoza, no reality that does not involved each and every other aspect of reality. Thus, our knowledge of things as acting upon us is known through our own natures, but that knowledge is real and true knowledge, because the things are acting upon our nature out of their natures. What must be secured, he thought, was that we understand the oneness of Substance rightly.<sup>92</sup>

We can return to the consideration of *conatus*, then, and conclude that in Spinoza’s philosophical view, the *conatus* of a thing is what makes it knowable to us, since the *conatus* is the essence of a thing. So, parallelism is, indeed, a good epistemological doctrine, but it fails as a metaphysical account of the relationship between mind and body. As we look further at his metaphysical analysis, we can begin to see that the very thing that makes something *knowable* to us – its *conatus* acting upon

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<sup>92</sup> Also, recall that Spinoza believes something similar to Aquinas’s convictions about the human body. Spinoza thought of the human body as the most capable of acting and being acted upon.

us – is the principle that also instantiates the entity from the very beginning of its existence. We see this developed in Spinoza’s treatment of the nature of bodies in II P 13. As was noted in chapter one of this dissertation, it is instructive that Spinoza develops this analysis as a part of his discussion of the nature of the human mind. Especially in his consideration of the nature of “composite bodies,” i.e., those that are made up of many different components, Spinoza has to have conceived of some principle that would so organize them. Even as Modes of Extension, they are not *qua* Extension particular Modes. While not being substantial in existence, the individuality of the Modes can only be individual because each of them has an essence of its own. Given that it has been demonstrated that essence and *conatus* are synonymous in Spinoza’s thinking, the latter concept, although not introduced until much later, is at work here. Here he argues that complex entities or bodies remain identical to themselves so long as the appropriate relation of motion and rest is preserved as a feature of the existence of this complexly organized Mode.<sup>93</sup>

When a number of bodies of the same or different magnitude form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed *so as to* preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together to form one body or individual thing, which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies [II, P 13, lemma 2, def.].

The idea here is focused on *preservation* of an unvarying relation of co-movement. However, one can ask how this preservation of co-movement might be accounted for in a Spinozistic metaphysics. Della Rocca, following Matson and Bennett

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<sup>93</sup> Agreeing with Shirley’s rendering of this definition, Della Rocca’s believes that the translation of *ut* in this passage is most properly rendered “so as to,” suggesting a tendency, rather than a state.



suggests that the technical denomination “proportion of motion and rest” can be most adequately understood as “placeholder” for a concept that Spinoza “had not worked out, perhaps because it might involve a detailed anatomical and physiological theory of organisms which he knew was not yet available.”<sup>94</sup>

This seems to me to be essentially correct, so far as it goes. But, once we recall Spinoza’s doctrine that all things have an inherent striving -- its conatic essence – that is part of their existence then a new insight can be gained into *how* Spinoza might have envisioned the nature of this (to use Della Rocca’s description) “frustratingly sketchy” characterization of the inherent oneness of a complex being’s existence. Spinoza would have to have known that, by his metaphysics, some principle would have to be posited to account for modal identity of a complex body over time. His particular monism requires that something other than the infinite, eternal, essence of account for this modal identity. He is clear and consistent throughout his depiction of how all things exist in the one Substance. Substance per se does not cause each individual Mode to exist. Rather, each Mode is the effect of some previous modal state of affairs.<sup>95</sup> We should assume that he might have had such a necessary principle in mind – each thing’s conatic essence.<sup>96</sup>

If Spinoza really means his definition of essence to be taken seriously, then the claim that “there pertains to the essence of a thing that which, *when granted*, the thing is

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<sup>94</sup> Della Rocca, 33.

<sup>95</sup> Jonas’ observations mentioned in chapter one support this reading: “The continuity of determinateness (of a things identity) throughout such interactions (a continuity, therefore, not excluding change) bespeaks the self-affirming ‘conatus’ by which a mode tends to persevere in existence, and which is identical with its essence. Thus it is the *form* of determinateness, and the *conatus* evidenced by the survival of that Form in a causal history, i.e., in *relation* to co-existing things, that defines an individual.”

<sup>96</sup> For another reading of the import of the doctrine of *conatus* and its connection with Spinoza’s views of identity and diachronous identity see Della Rocca, “Spinoza’s Metaphysical Psychology,” *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett ([New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 192 – 266.

necessarily posited,” must be read all the way back to the very beginning of the instantiation of that thing’s existence. There is, in other words, an *ordering* arrangement that is granted to the complex body that is something other *qua* ordering arrangement than the bodies (or one might say matter) that is so ordered. This ordering arrangement is the way a complex organized body is determined to be. In fact, in the seventh definition of Book II, Spinoza precisely defines *res singulares* (individual/ particular things) as having *determinate* existence. And by determinate he means us to understand that each particular entity that exists has a particular *way* that it is to be.<sup>97</sup> ”All things,” Spinoza says in the proof of proposition 29 in the first book, “are determined from the necessity of the divine nature not only to exist but also *to exist and to act in a definite way*. Spinoza utilizes this argument in I, P 29 as a proof that there is no contingency in the universe, but the further implication of his argument is that all things do have a kind of necessary teleological *ordering*.<sup>98</sup>

This ordering is the essence of a thing that instantiates its concrete existence. And that essence is, as we have shown above, the things *conatus* that accounts for and is the activity of its striving to be what it is, maintain itself in its existence, and to flourish as itself. So, when a thing exists and acts in the “definite” way that the divine nature has determined it to exist and to act, one could translate this to mean (without doing violence to Spinoza’s ontology) that the thing is acting in the “defined” way. To be defined is to

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<sup>97</sup> Again, the metaphysical importance of *res singulares* is a critical issue. It seems clear that a thing (*res*) is, in some way, distinct from an ordinary mode of extension or thought.

<sup>98</sup> To incorporate the concept of teleology into Spinoza’s metaphysics is not to attempt an illicit interpretation which would claim that he really did have a doctrine of final causation. Rather, the teleological ordering is much more like Aristotle’s concept of *immanent entelechy* a sought after end (preservation and flourishing) out of the essential nature of a thing. The end that a thing seeks, in Spinoza’s system, is simply to be what it is and persevere in being what it is in relation to all other things and modes.

have a particular form of existence. The idea of things having a “definition,” or even a form, fits nicely with Spinoza’s own epistemological views (mentioned above) regarding the way that the concept of essence functions to be the source of that which makes things intelligible. However, the idea of having a definition/form need not involve the very un-Spinozistic concept of God as a conscious actor or ‘definer.’ Recognizing the crucial role that conatic essence plays in Spinoza’s metaphysics, we can affirm -- against interpretations such as Bennett’s -- that teleology is actuality *not* foreign to Spinoza’s metaphysical frame of mind.<sup>99</sup> In Spinoza’s view, a thing’s concrete existence is defined for it by the conatic essence that grants it particularized existence; and in this granting of specific existence an orientation toward certain ends within the world is part of the thing’s existence. This conatic essence also makes the existent entity to be a particular kind of entity in relationship to all others that act upon it out of their various essences.

Perhaps the parallels between Aquinas’s hylomorphism and Spinoza’s ideas of conatic essence are apparent, but let us sketch these briefly. First, the role of *conatus* as the essence of a thing which grants it a particular kind of existence and an orientation to strive for preservation functions in the same way that the concept “form” does in Aquinas’s metaphysics. Secondly, the idea that this essence must be something other than the bodies or matter that are given a defined existence by this essence echoes Aquinas’s contention that form is itself distinguishable from the matter in which it is

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<sup>99</sup> Bennett, 215 f. For a reading of Spinoza that agrees that teleology need not be seen as absent in Spinoza see Don Garrett, “Teleology in Spinoza and Early Modern Rationalism,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. Rocco Gennaro and Charles Huenemann, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310 – 336. Garrett argues as his main points the following: (1) that Spinoza affirms that many teleological explanations are adequate; (2) that in two important ways, Leibniz’s view of teleology is most likely less in line with Aristotle than Descartes’; and (3) most significant for this dissertation that among Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, Spinoza holds the view of teleology most in concert with that of Aristotle.

expressed. Spinoza's intention would seem to necessitate that this difference is a real distinction, even if one were to argue that *conatus* must be conceived of as, in some sense, a part of the infinite mode of motion and rest.<sup>100</sup> The principle of motion and rest would be, at least arguably, a feature of extension that is not, itself, material, but would not be conceivable apart from the Attribute of extension. That would make it an infinite Mode of extension, without, itself being extended. But even more to the point, Spinoza does not say simply that motion and rest account for the diachronous and enduring identity of any particular body. Rather, it is the preservation of the *proportion* of motion and rest that is necessary for identity to be maintained. Therefore, the case can be made for interpreting *conatus* as the organizing principle that is not material, but is the source of the information that establishes the *proportion* of motion and rest that keeps an entity in existence essentially. Continuing this same focus on the relationship of *conatus* to material existence, a third comparison is in order. For both Spinoza and Aquinas, there is an insistence that the form/*conatus* of an entity cannot be conceived of as actually *existing* apart from the entity to which that form/*conatus* grants a particular kind of existence. In other words, for neither Aquinas nor Spinoza can a formal essence be thought of as being, strictly speaking, a particular thing prior to the coming-to-be of the entity that exists through the influence of that essence. Finally, it is the form/*conatus* that causes the entity to act in the world toward certain ends and by certain powers. The exertion of the entity toward its own ends is the essence of the entity at work in the world. Human experience of a particular entity acting out of its essence is the foundation

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<sup>100</sup> Shirley, 286 – 287. In Letter 64, in response to G. H. Schuller, a physician with philosophical interests who was the only person present when Spinoza died, Spinoza describes “motion and rest” as examples of an infinite Mode [of extension]. Spinoza never does develop this concept very clearly.

of our acquaintance of the things that are acting. In other words, we know things for what they are, because their forms or conatic essences present themselves to us as intelligible in the activity of the entities upon our bodies.

### **Mind and body unity = identity**

The analysis of *conatus* that has been presented to this point brings us to the crucial issue of mind and body identity in Spinoza's metaphysics. Della Rocca has noted the import that this concept plays in Spinoza's understanding of individuality: According to this doctrine, each thing – complex physical individuals, complex mental individuals, and also non-complex things, if there are any – by its very nature strives or tends to persist in existence.”<sup>101</sup> He does not, however, see the instantiating role that *conatus* plays in Spinoza's thought in relationship to the individuality of the particular complex entity. What I mean is he does not take sufficient note that the specific existence of the thing as a particular kind of entity is granted to it by the presence of a conatic essence that makes it to be what it is. Because he does not see this aspect of Spinoza's doctrine of *conatus*, Della Rocca, like many others, views Spinoza's mind-body identity doctrine in terms of parallelism. Noting that Spinoza describes the *mind* in terms that highlights its particular *conatus* – “the most important element of our mind is the conatus to affirm the existence of our body”<sup>102</sup> – Della Rocca suggests that this entails that “the property of affirming the existence of the body is a feature of the mental collection that the mental

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<sup>101</sup> Della Rocca, 35 f.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 37. He translates Spinoza's Latin phrase (in III, P 10, pr), *primum & praecipuum nostrae mentis conatus est. . . Corporis nostril existentiam affirmare*, “the first and principle [tendency] of the striving of our mind is. . . to affirm the existence of our body.”

collection tends to preserve, just as the proportion of motion and rest is a feature of the physical collection that the physical collection tends to preserve.<sup>103</sup>

As we demonstrated above “parallelism”, if it functions at all in Spinoza’s philosophy works predominantly as an epistemological concept, not a metaphysical scheme. Della Rocca’s parallelist account of the relationship between the *conatus* of the body and the *conatus* of the mind leaves unanswered a very crucial question: Why should there be such a mapping? I do not see how it can be coherently argued that the mind and body are one on the basis of parallelism. Even Della Rocca ultimately concludes, after much analysis of the way Spinoza presents mind-body identity, that the explanatory barrier erected by Spinoza between thought and extension denies the great Rationalist his claim of mind-body identity. Hence, Della Rocca places Spinoza in “the illustrious company of those who have failed to solve the mind-body problem.”<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the reason the Della Rocca’s account of Spinoza produces failure is that parallelism itself is a wrong metaphysical starting point that must treat not just ideas and the objects of those ideas as parallel, but must also treat the conatic essence that enables a particular body to persist as something distinct from that which would enable the mind that is associated with that body to persist. Della Rocca’s work on Spinoza is creative and insightful. It is among the best of the recent works on his thought. However, once one has embraced the parallelism reading of Spinoza, the hopes of arguing for numeric identity, in Spinoza’s system, seem to me hopelessly flawed.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 151.

Bennett's analysis is, perhaps, closer to the real issue in Spinoza's mind-body theory, and has captured the important distinction between the ordinary modes of thought and extension versus the fundamental modes that are capable of combining with both Attributes. However, my reading is distinguished from his in the following ways. There is, indeed, something more fundamental than "ordinary" modes (bodies and minds) that is involved in the identity relation in question. However, Bennett's way of formulating the issue, as I described it above, is in terms of a *differentia* that is added to the Attributes. This idea of something being added to the attributes leaves us with the difficult question of what such a property or principle might be. Also, Bennett cannot account for how his notion "*differentia*" could fit into Spinoza's metaphysics. But, his basic intuition is correct, I believe, that the ascription of identity must be regarded as being related to some more fundamental "thing" other than mind or body.

The reading I am offering allows the advantage that comes from positing mind-body identity in some more fundamental entity, but it can account for the existence of this, more basic, *res* in Spinoza's own terms. The "ordinary" Modes, we can say, consist in or express the nature of this more fundamental "mode." Of course, the idea of "consisting in" does not really fit Bennett's way of putting the issue. But, given the role that the idea of essence and conatus play together in Spinoza's thought, this is a better Spinozistic way of putting it. Not only do I gain the advantages of Bennett's approach to identity as being in something more fundamental, but I am able to relocate the discussion to a more "dynamic" level, with respect to which we might regard Bennett's so-called "fundamental modes" precisely as things that exist as a result of the organizing and animating "form" or essence of an organism. The "ordinary" modes of body and mind

being, on my interpretation, not the result of some *differentia* added to the Attributes, but rather the necessary ways that the fundamental entity must express its existence because thought and extension are both irreducible aspects of Reality. Hence, mind and body are one and the same being *qua* essential *res* that is expressed in two modes of the Attributes (ways of being). The expression of the *conatus* that is striving must occur (at least to our minds) through the Attributes of thought and extension. This way of reading Spinoza, therefore, perceives how the double aspect theory fits Spinoza and it points to an interesting affinity with Aquinas.

If Spinoza was attending to a more fundamental and dynamic metaphysical question--one which harkens back to Aquinas's hylomorphism--it is worth considering whether or not Spinoza's metaphysics even has a mind-body problem (in the Cartesian form) that Della Rocca says he cannot solve. Instead of concerning himself with the mind-body relationship, his analysis seeks to point to the simultaneity involved in mental-physical acts; and the concept of *conatus* helps us see *how* a living entity can be minded as a material creature in the first place. Spinoza is interested in the question of mind and body as a feature of living human beings. The *conatus* that makes a human being alive *qua* human being is a singular *conatus*, not a mapped pair that parallel one another. But this single conatic essence is productive of both physical results and mental activity. Such a co-inhering relationship is fundamental to his view of *natura naturata*, where all things are animate, albeit in different degrees. The little phrase, "albeit in different degrees," cannot be over emphasized. What Spinoza's metaphysics wants to recover is the reality of life as a part of the world of matter itself; a view which was obscured by the dominant interest, I contend, in physics and mathematics that emerged



during the late Renaissance and early modern period. (Descartes, because of his exceptional prowess in many fields, is the quintessential representative.)

Spinoza, like Aquinas before him (and Aristotle in the ancient world) was attempting to posit that *life* is itself an essential feature of the world should figure into our metaphysical account of things, if an adequate account of reality is to be given that does not embrace a too-quickly appropriated materialist reductionism. In regard to human beings, therefore, mindedness or thought (or rationality to utilize the medieval term) is considered to be the essential existence that human life takes. At least one scholar has seen this central feature of Spinoza's thought. Jonas has rightly observed that, in contrast to Spinoza, the dominant philosophical/scientific point of view in the early modern period was to see the material world in mechanistic terms. He argues that Spinoza's doctrine of the "organism" as defined (or given determinate existence) by a conatic essence salvaged what was lost in philosophical Cartesianism, i.e. the reality of *life* in the world.

Because he sees Spinoza's metaphysics as being interested in what makes the living existence of particular entities possible, Jonas says of Spinoza's argument's about the origins of the mind: "From proposition XI [of Book II] onward, Spinoza deals with the soul-body problem, and in *that* context makes certain statements concerning the type of body that corresponds to a soul or mind, and the type of identity that pertains to it."<sup>105</sup> While Jonas is clear that Spinoza's treatise is entitled *Ethics* because it is concerned to provide an metaphysical underpinning for morality and the human quest for meaning, he

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<sup>105</sup> Jonas, 267.

is correct in his acknowledgement that Spinoza's way of analyzing the existence of entities "enabled him to account for features of organic existence far beyond what Cartesian dualism and mechanism could accommodate."<sup>106</sup> This is most true about Spinoza's approach to the question of the relationship between mind and body.

As Aquinas before him, Spinoza envisioned the issue of mind and body as a different issue from the Cartesian problem of how a mind could be related to a body from which it is absolutely different substantially. His doctrine of the oneness of Substance and his identification of the Attributes of thought and extension as really different (as expressions of the one Substance) but not distinct ontologically are the evidence that he wanted to affirm that thought and extension, as well as mind and body, are irreplaceable and irreducible descriptions of our experience in the world and of ourselves.<sup>107</sup> In Spinoza's system the mind is an irreducible feature of an entity that also has "being physical" as another irreducible feature. Parallelism grants this, of course, but now we have an explanation of how this "mapping" might occur. It is an essentially hylomorphic view of things.

Consider how Spinoza's doctrine of conatic essence works to enable us to take a different approach to the mind-body "problem." The solution to the mind-body relationship cannot be solved, in Spinoza's system, by referring to the nature of Substance, because the *essence* of Substance *qua* Substance is (with regard to our present

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 263.

<sup>107</sup> More work could be done to show how Spinoza's thought was in direct confrontation with the empiricism of his day. For an excellent analysis of recent scholarship on the relationship and contrast between Hume and Spinoza see Vance Maxwell, "The Dialectic of Enlightenment: A Critique of Recent Hume-Spinoza Scholarship, *Animus: A Philosophical Journal for Our Time*, <http://www.swgc.mun.ca/animus/2002vol7/maxwell7.htm>. Cf. Hegel's lectures on Locke for a comparison of Locke and Spinoza. These lectures can be found at <http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/Hegel%20-%20Hist%20Phil/locke.htm>.

question) to exist infinitely expressing infinite Attributes, especially thought and extension. While the Modes of Substance are really existent, just as Substance is, Substance is not individual strictly speaking (except in that the Divine Mind knows itself and that there is the “face of the whole Universe). But individual things (*res singulares*) are, obviously, individual. But individuals cannot exist as bare particulars, since the essence of the Substance upon which *res singulares* depend for existence and in which they must exist and by which they are explained (ultimately) is to exist (in our experience of Substance) as the Modes thought and extension. So, the individuals in their *conatus*-organized existence only exist as mind and body, but they are, ultimately, neither one nor the other, but irreducibly both.

The hinge of his argument is II, P 13, where he discusses at length the nature of the body, is to make it more readily apparent to us how the human mind is united to the body. That union is not the union of different Modes whose union is necessarily parallel because of the nature of Substance. Rather, the union is due to the conatic essence that makes a body *qua* complex living organism capable of having a mind like the human mind. Not every entity is so organized; and the subtlety of the human body makes it more apt to be acted upon and to act so as to be minded in a unique and penultimate manner. On the basis of this kind of analysis of the conatic complexity of the human being is Spinoza able to say:

. . . the mind and the body are *one and the same thing*, conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension. Hence it comes about that the order or linking of things is one, whether Nature be conceived under this or that attribute, and consequently *the order of the active and passive states of our*

*body is simultaneous in Nature with the order of active and passive states of the mind.*<sup>108</sup>

In his comments in the scholium, Spinoza says that that the scholium of II, P 7 is the foundation for the claims of this proposition – the mind and body do not have any causal determination over one another. He then says in his additional comments on this proposition that we can understand this lack of causal relation “more clearly from that scholium. Here he interprets II, P 7, sch to mean that “mind and body are one and the same thing. . .” It is interesting that in that scholium his actual argument does not mention mind or body. Rather, he there speaks of a Mode of extension and the idea of that Mode as one and the same thing, expressed in two ways (modus). I have argued above that this statement is the basis for Spinoza’s epistemological parallelism and not for his metaphysical view of the relationship between mind and body. But it is clear that in the context of III, P 2, sch that he applies this language about “Modes,” which I have argued is an epistemological construct, to the metaphysical issue of the mind and the body. Spinoza’s willingness to translate his rhetoric about modes of extension and the ideas of those modes into body-mind language does not do damage to my interpretation. Neither my claim that the focus of II, P 7 is epistemology nor my emphasis on *conatus* as the source of mind-body identity in Spinoza’s metaphysics is undercut.

Spinoza, on my interpretation, utilizes the statements in II, P 1 and III, P 2 in way that implies a similarity but not synonymity. He can do this, because he does not need to think of “mind” (specifically) as a referring term strictly speaking. On my reading of Spinoza, the mind could be in its essence the bounded set of all ideas that have come to

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<sup>108</sup> My emphasis

exist *qua* the experiences and understanding and insights of a particular organic individual. These “ideas” as a bounded set would be the result, not of the body *per se*, but would instead be understood as the thought engaged in (actively) by the organic individual’s living existence as a minded body that is acting and being acted upon.<sup>109</sup> Neither does his metaphysical description take “body” to be a referring term in the most precise ontological sense. The body exists, in a Spinozistic view, as an *aspect* of the “one and the same thing” that Spinoza insists is “expressed” in two ways (the Latin term is *modis* which is a form of the word *modus*). This expressed “thing” is the organism that has a body and it not the body is the actual existent thing. Because the organism *qua* the organized and defined *res* is the locus of the relevant essence, the body is, like the mind, simply a Mode whereby the existence of the organism in the one Substance is “expressed.”<sup>110</sup>

This brings us to another important point, regarding the *conatus* that is the organization-granting, existence-enabling power of a thing’s being. Just as the *conatus* organizes the body to be “apt” for the mind, the same *conatus* has the power to make the human “mind” that is, the idea of the body “apt” for that body. But we might ask why the *conatus* is not itself conceived of as the thing that is doubly aspected. If this is the case, then *conatus* is no more analogous to form or rational soul than it is to the body. The reply is that the concept of *conatus* has some ambiguity in Spinoza’s metaphysics. The *conatus*, when we are thinking *of the total entity* that is organized and expressed in

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<sup>109</sup> Spinoza is insistent that the mind is always active in its essence.

<sup>110</sup> See chapter one for a discussion of the meaning of “expressed” in Spinoza’s thought, 21 f. . . “*Expressa* can be taken to refer not primarily to the act of our describing or expressing something we observe (nominalism), but rather it might be seen as a function of the essence of the thing itself which is given existential “expression” (objectivism) in distinct modes of existence.”

the two ordinary modes of body and mind, must be considered relative to the way we are considering the organism's life. If we are thinking of the thing that exists and is striving to maintain that existence *qua* simultaneously minded and extended, then there is a sense in which *conatus* names a single and unified yet doubly-aspected striving. But *conatus* has a more metaphysically fundamental meaning, which is also its most "essential" meaning. This necessitates that we qualify what we mean by it being doubly-aspected. In this meaning, the *conatus* of which we have just spoken and that strives to be itself is dependent upon a more basic *conatus*. The striving entity exists only because it has an informing and organizing essence in which sense it exists. This essence (which I have argued is identified with the *conatus* in the metaphysically fundamental sense I am now suggesting) is not a particular thing, but is an informing principle. What I mean is that, in this sense, *conatus* is considered to be the "formal cause" of the entity that strives in two aspects of its existence, but does so as a single existent essence. If the *conatus* is identifiable with the essence that "can be granted" or "annulled" [2def2], then we can say that Spinoza was, at least, assuming that the organizational essence or form (*conatus*) that enables the complexity of the body to have a greater perfection and to be apt to have associated with it an "idea of that body" is the very same organizing form that grants to the organism a mind that is appropriate to the "more perfect" body with which it exists as one thing. In this sense, then, the *conatus* considered as the "form" of the living organism is not doubly-aspected, but productive of the duality that is expressed.

On this reading of Spinoza's metaphysics, *conatus* is very much like the rational soul *qua* form, as Aquinas uses the concept. In Aquinas's view the rational soul is not a form that merely gives a particular organization to the body. It also instantiates the

existence of a particular kind of mind that will be apt for the body that is so organized. The body does not produce the mind, but the mind of a human is the only intelligence that is meant for union with a body, unlike the Divine Mind or “angelic” minds. The rational soul in Aquinas’s view is the essence of a human being *qua* human body and mind, because rationality and biology (animality) are essential to the definition of a human being. So, the essence of man is not the form or the soul, but both “aspects” that are ultimately involved in a person’s existence as a living entity. Considering Spinoza in this light, we can say that the Modes – mind and body, made mutually apt each for the other. This, at least, suggests a strong congruity with Aquinas’s basic conception of the component metaphysical principles that are involved in the existence of a compound being like a human being. Spinoza’s Modes then can be seen as analogous to the “acts of being” employed in Aquinas’s description of his particular hylomorphic view of mind and body. As “acts” of being, the body and mind are, for Aquinas, objectively real and not merely subjective descriptions. The same is true for Spinoza. But where Aquinas’s speaks of “acts” (which would imply too much intention), Spinoza chooses to talk about Modes that express the necessary being of the one infinite Substance.

“Body” and “mind” name Spinozistic (and Thomistic) properties of existence which the human being *must* exist *as*. These are the modal expressions of the Attributes of Substance – extension and thought. And only the Modes of these Attributes present Substance to the human understanding. Hence, the interpretation of mind-body identity being offered here does not ignore Spinoza’s insistence that what exists are Substance and Modes. The Modes of extension and thought are not reduced to mere nominal descriptions that get applied to the organism. They are, rather, the only ways that the

organism's life can be expressed, because being extended and being minded are both fundamental features of Reality. And the same *conatus* that makes the body capable of being "minded" in a more perfect way also instantiates the very mind that is "apt" to have as its "object" the greater perfection that is the human body. Therefore, the emphatic focus that Aquinas's hylomorphism places on human beings as essentially *knowing* bodies (rational animals)--whose knowing cannot be reduced to any mere material, but whose biological description and whose physical existence is necessary essentially--Spinoza recaptures in his post-Cartesian language.

### **Mind and body interaction**

However, the interpretation being offered must address the issue of Spinoza's rejection of mind and body interaction. Margaret Gullan-Whur has commented on the historical context in which Spinoza expressed, what she calls his "cryptic" view of mind and body. She informs us further that the doctrine which is utilized by contemporary Spinoza scholarship, "parallelism," had evolved in the context of the theological controversies that surrounded Descartes philosophy. And she rightly notes that the doctrine of "occasionalism" was closely related to the idea of parallelism at that time, at least by the leading theological defender of Descartes, Geulincx.<sup>111</sup> But, Spinoza, as Gullan-Whur acknowledges, was no occasionalist. But neither was he a materialist, although his statements in the *Short Treatise*, which Gullan-Whur points us to, had appeared to make the mind "logically and causally dependent on the body. *The essence of the soul consists only in the being of an idea . . . arising from the essence of an object*

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<sup>111</sup> Margaret Gullan-Whur, *Within Reason: A Life of Spinoza*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000), 178.



*which in fact exists in Nature.*"<sup>112</sup> But he removes the possibility reading him as a materialist in *Ethics* when he posits the explanatory barrier between the mind and the body. We are left in Spinoza studies, Gullan-Whur concludes, with the realization that an unresolved tension exists in his "doctrine of mind between identity and anatomy."

Here and there in *Ethics* Spinoza seems to suggest that mind and body are just two ways of seeing one thing. *The thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways.* But this explanation will not do, since Spinoza would also insist in *Ethics* that extension and thought express two diverse and incompatible causal powers. The causal force within modes of extension was motion and rest, he claimed, whereas modes of thought, *ideas*, were empowered only by implication and inference. *The power of the mind is intelligence itself.* Neither power, he stated, could operate on modes of the other attribute. *The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion.* How, then, could mind and body be identical?<sup>113</sup>

Gullan-Whur's observations identify the core of the problem that any interpretation must face. To get at addressing it we start by asking what Spinoza intends by his description of the body as "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body" [II, P 13]. If Spinoza thinks that the "idea" that is the mind is *not* caused by the body's affections, and if he also thinks that bodily movements cannot be caused by the mind, then what does Spinoza mean, then, when he calls body the object of the mind. If a materialist explanation of "mind" is ruled out by the explanatory-causal barrier of *Ethics*, then "object" must mean something other than the intension it is granted in much of current metaphysical discussion. Even though he states that "a definite mode of extension actually existing, and nothing else" is "object" of the mind, the term "object" cannot simply mean "thing that exists" or "value of a bound variable." Were that the

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 179

<sup>113</sup> Ibid

case, then we would have a mode of thought being explained by a mode of extension, for *qua* object (as a bound physical variable) the body would be, in some way, the “content” that is the mind. Hence, we owe it to ourselves to see if there is not some better way to interpret Spinoza’s meaning.

Spinoza utilizes “object” (*obiectum*) ambiguously, just as he does *conatus*. He speaks, for instance, in Definition 4 of the second part of *Ethics* about an “adequate idea” in itself without consideration of the idea’s “relation to its object.” Here, “object” seems to imply a kind of thing-like status, which would sit well with a representationalist interpretation of Spinoza’s epistemology.<sup>114</sup> In the corollary of proposition 9 Spinoza also uses “object” in a way that seems to suggest that it is referring to some kind of “value of a bound variable”: “Whatsoever happens in the individual *object* of any idea, knowledge of it is in God only in so far as he has the *idea of that object*.”<sup>115</sup> Later in his consideration of “the nature and origin of the mind” Spinoza uses *obiectum* in a way that seems to move away from the concept of a bound-variable. In II, P 12 Spinoza says that the happenings “*in* the object of the idea constituting the human mind is bound to be perceived by the human mind . . . . That is to say, if the *object* of the idea constituting the human mind is a body, nothing can happen in that body without its being perceived by the mind.” In this instance, *obiectum* appears to be something other than the bound variable of which the idea is a representation or upon which the idea is dependent for its

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<sup>114</sup> In the explication of this definition Spinoza utilizes the term *ideatum* as an apparent synonym for *obiectum* in the definition. This synonymous linking suggests that Spinoza in the definition is thinking of object as that upon which an idea depends. In Platonic philosophy in its Latin form, *ideatum* had the implication of “eternal prototype.”

<sup>115</sup> Even here we see what is arguably an ambiguity. God can have knowledge of that object, but the individual object is also described as something that things happen *in*.

existence as an idea. Instead, the body considered as the *obiectum* of the *ideae* is described as something that events or states of affairs can occur *in*. Such a way of utilizing the term object is misleading, if Spinoza is simply utilizing the concept in a way that is consistent with contemporary metaphysical usage.

It seems obvious to me that Spinoza's concept of the body as the "object" of the idea that constitutes the essence of the human mind is not best conceived of in representationalist terms. Rather, the description of the body as the object of the idea of the mind, when one thinks in terms of conatic essence as the organization giving principle of human life, can be understood clearly as Spinoza's way of saying that the body (its affections or happenings) is the *focus* of the mind's activity. This does not mean, however, that the body's events cause the ideas to exist. The body as the "object" of the idea that constitutes the mind could be thought of as that which engages a particular power of an organism. That power, however, is not caused, *per se*, by that "object." Even Spinoza's argument that "if there were another object of the mind apart from the body, since nothing exists from which some effect does not follow, there would necessarily have to be in our mind the idea of some effect of it," can be understood in the terms I am suggesting. To have the body as its object is for the mind to be oriented toward a particular mode of extension as the focus of the mind's activity. This concept does not imply causation of the modal act of thought that is at work in the activity of the mind, because Spinoza will not allow us to defy the causal barrier between thought and extension. Just as Aquinas could say that the proper *object* of the human intellect is the understanding of material nature (and not think that material nature caused the

understanding), so Spinoza seems to conceive of the body as the proper *object* of the mind.

This way of stating Spinoza's position is quite consistent with his claim that the idea(s) that constitute the essence of the mind are the "affections of the body." The body acts and is acted upon in the context of the world of extension and this interaction, as we saw above, involves the conatic essences of things acting out of their essences upon the body. The interaction of extended things that act out of the powers that their essences grant them means that in the world of extension a real engagement of essences is involved. The body so affected in its essence by this interaction of essences is the *object* of the mind. As things act out of their essences upon the body, they produce affections in the body. These acts of "essences" produce affections or modifications of the body that; and the ideas of these acts are the thought of or consciously experienced nature of the essences. This constitutes the essence of the mind. And as a mode of thought the mind is just the organism's being aware because its *conatus* makes this possible in the organism by its essence giving presence.<sup>116</sup>

Such a state of affairs would be the result of the conatic essence that subtly and complexly organizes the body (P 13) to be the most apt to act and be acted upon and a mind to be apt to perceive and understand the acts. Spinoza can, then, assume in his argument that the mind exercises its powers only in relation to the body, but the body does not cause the thoughts of the mind. The activities of the organism are "one and the same"

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<sup>116</sup> But whereas the Thomistic conception of the relationship between a power and its proper object was often described in terms of the power as passive until its object affected it, Spinoza's view would have been that the mind is active in relation to the body's affections.

activity because the *conatus* establishes the activity in the organism that is expressed in both ordinary modes of existence. The *life* of the organism, therefore, explains how thought and extension can be “one and the same thing.” Of course, if the organism is the relevant focus of the identity, then (as Bennett wished to show) we could have identity without denying the explanatory (or even causal) boundary that Spinoza erects.

In a similar way, the non-causal role of mind in relation to the motion of the body can be secured by this same focus on conatic essence. It is axiomatic in Spinoza studies that he wanted to deny the will or desire or conscious deliberation as features of human existence that could account for the actions of the body. He was, as many have pointed out, unimpressed with Descartes concept of mental-physical interaction, not just the “pineal gland” explanation, but the general hypothesis. (Leibniz’s doctrine of harmonization between the mental and physical left him just as unenthused.) But by emphasizing the role of *conatus* in Spinoza’s thought we can account for his doctrine of oneness and his doctrine of non-causal relations between mind and body. The body *qua* mode of extension produces its own movement *qua* physical action through the operation of the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology. In the proof of III, P 2 he asserts this in seventeenth century terms: “Now the motion-and-rest of a body must arise from another body, which again has been determined to motion or rest by another body, and without exception whatever arises in a body must have arisen from God in so far as he is considered as affected by a mode of Extension. . .” Utilizing the example of “sleepwalkers” as an illustration of bodily actions that are not volitional, or truly conscious in the ordinary sense, to portray the body’s purely physical powers, Spinoza argues vigorously in terms of real experience that the mind cannot be thought of as a

single power that superintends the motion and rest of the body. However, the true intent of Spinoza's arguments against the mind as the mover or captain of the body is seen in the scholium of III, P 2 when he concludes:

Now surely all these considerations [regarding how the acts we consider to be free acts of the mind moving the body to action] go to show clearly that mental decision on the one hand, and the appetite and physical state of the body on the other hand, are simultaneous in nature; or rather, they are one and the same thing which, when considered under the attribute of Thought and explicated through Thought, we call decision, and when considered under the attribute of Extension and deduced from the laws of motion-and-rest, we call a physical state.

Spinoza's argument is against a kind of Cartesian and late scholastic view of the mind's relationship to the body in which the mind is something that attends the body or perhaps (to risk anachronism) supervenes upon it.<sup>117</sup> His concerns, however, are fully

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<sup>117</sup> While not addressing mind body interaction directly, Justin Skirry argues convincingly, in his essay on Descartes' metaphysical views on the relationship between mind and body, that Descartes essentially followed a Scotistic scholastic line of thinking. "Although Descartes argues that bodies, in the general sense, are constituted by extension, he also maintains that species of bodies are determined by the configuration and motion of their parts. This doctrine of "configuration and motion of parts" serves the same purpose as the doctrine of substantial forms with regards to entirely physical things. But the main difference between the two is that Descartes' doctrine does not employ final causes. Recall that substantial forms organize matter for the purpose of being a species of thing. "If Descartes did hold a fundamentally scholastic theory of mind-body union, then is it more Thomistic or Scotistic? Since intellect and will are the only faculties of the mind, it does not have the faculty for organizing matter for being a human body. So, if Descartes' theory is scholastic, it must be most in line with some version of the Scotistic theory. . . .

"The purpose of a human body endowed with only the form of corporeity is union with the soul. Hence, the organization of matter into a human body is an effect that is explained by the final cause or purpose of being disposed for union. But, on Descartes' account, the explanatory order would be reversed: a human body's disposition for union is an effect resulting from the configuration and motion of parts. So, even though Descartes does not have recourse to substantial forms, he still has recourse to the configuration of matter and to the dispositions to which it gives rise, including "all the dispositions required to preserve that union" (AT IV 166: CSMK 243). Hence, on this account, Descartes gets what he needs, namely, Descartes gets a body properly configured for potential union with the mind, but without recourse to the scholastic notion of substantial forms with their final causal component.

"Another feature of this basically Scotistic position is that the soul and the body were considered incomplete substances themselves, while their union results in one, complete substance. Surely Descartes maintains that mind and body are two substances but in what sense, if any, can they be considered incomplete? Descartes answers this question in the *Fourth Replies*. He argues that a substance may be complete insofar as it is a substance but incomplete insofar as it is referred to some other substance together with which it forms yet some third substance. This can be applied to mind and body as follows: the mind

addressable, and his doctrine made less cryptic, by reference to conatic essence that grants a particular kind of life to human beings, i.e. being minded in the highest and most apt sense, because they are “bodied” in the most complex and “apt” sense. So, Spinoza’s contention that “mental decision” is simultaneous in its existence *qua* mode of thought with “the appetite” *qua* mode of extension is understandable as on my interpretation as mental and physical actions of a single organism, determined and formed by its conatic essence to be capable of physical states that involve simultaneously mental awareness and the capacity for further reflection and understanding of those very physical states. Hence, the mind *qua* a power does not cause the body to move toward food that is desired, nor does the *physical* desire for food explain the nature of conscious awareness of food or the mind’s “decision.”<sup>118</sup> Rather, Spinoza can say that these acts are “one and the same thing” that can be explicated adequately and thoroughly from the perspective of either Attribute of Substance. The one-and-the-same-thing that can be so explicated can be explicated *in this way*, because the ways that the entity being explicated exists is precisely in the Modes of mind and body. But those Modes are both the thing being explicated in distinct *real* categories of thought and existence. Spinoza’s perspective,

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insofar as it is a thinking thing is a complete substance, while the body insofar as it is an extended thing is a complete substance, but each taken individually is only an incomplete human being.” James Fieser, “Descartes: The Mind Body Distinction,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/descmind.htm>. Hosted by the University of Tennessee at Martin,

<sup>118</sup> As a critique of Cartesianism, Jonas has observed that Spinoza’s doctrine addressed a central failing of the mechanistic view of the extended world. “. . . the main fault, even the absurdity, of the [Cartesian doctrine of mechanism and its attendant dualism] lay in denying organic reality its principal and most obvious characteristic, namely, that it exhibits in each individual instance *a striving* of its own for existence and fulfillment, or the fact of life’s willing itself. In other words, the banishment of the old concept of appetite from the conceptual scheme of the new physics, joined to the rationalistic spiritualism of the new theory of consciousness, deprived the *realm of life* its status in the scheme of things.” Jonas, 259 – 261.

here, is not far from Aquinas's argument that it is not the mind that knows or the body that lifts, but the *person* who does both.

Spinoza was intent on avoiding not just a Cartesian metaphysical dualism, but even a methodological dualism that could treat the difference between mind and body as a difference of existence. That kind of methodological dualism quickly becomes (or at least can) quasi-metaphysical; and then problems such as interaction and causal relations begin to plague the philosophical quest. Of course, materialism or idealism solve the dilemma by simply discounting some significant philosophical distinctions, thereby failing to capture human life empirically. By emphasizing the conatic oneness of the organism that exists essentially (and necessarily) as Modes that are really distinct *qua* "ways" that Reality itself is, Spinoza thinks he has corrected the problems of early modern philosophy that had to opt for some choice between Cartesian-scholastic dualism, or Hobbesian materialism on the one hand and Leibniz's idealism on the other.

What Spinoza wanted to do regarding the phenomena of human existence is in large measure compatible with (and therefore made more comprehensible by) Aquinas's hylomorphism. He refused to think of the mind as some entity or power that tacks an additional level or reality onto the biological/physical life that humans share with all other creatures. Rather, he offers, as the Books three and four of *Ethics* clearly reflect, a view of human existence as a unity, one which is always just as ideational as it is material. His concept of conatic essence was the key that allowed him to state in post-Cartesian terms the insights about the irreducible doubly-aspected unity of human living that Aquinas's theory offered in a much earlier time. The idea of conatus, as I have interpreted it, while not developed explicitly in Spinoza's doctrine, is certainly present in



his system; and it gives us a reason to think that the so-called dual-aspect theory is not only a good description of Spinoza's own views, but arguably true, as well.

## Chapter 6

### Hylomorphism and Immortality

The preceding presentation has suggested ways that Spinoza can be interpreted as holding a doctrine regarding mind and body that has significant parallels to Aquinas's hylomorphism. They both posited Thought as an ontologically basic attribute of Reality, even if in different schematic constructs. However, their conviction that Thought should be so understood is important for understanding two further propositions in their thought: (1) the idea that a human being has a "composite" existence and (2) the immortality of the mind/soul. Looking at these two questions in this chapter, we will be able to provide an explanation of how their respective doctrines of immortality relate to their more basic metaphysical scheme. This is important, since the concept of the soul's/mind's immortality in both philosophers' doctrines has been criticized by commentators.<sup>1</sup>

In this concluding chapter, therefore, I want to suggest how we should frame the logic that undergirds the claim that they make for the activity of thought as not dependent upon anything that is material or extended. Exploring their logic in this regard, I will show why it is arguably true that Spinoza's concept of *conatus* implies a view of human nature that is comparable to Aquinas's idea that humans are, as are all things,

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<sup>1</sup> In Spinoza's case see H. H Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), 290 ff. Cf. Feuer, 224 and Bennett, 357f. Both Joachim and Feuer claim that Spinoza's affirmation of personal immortality cannot be reconciled with the focus of Spinoza's metaphysics. Bennett attempts to provide a reading of Spinoza that allows Spinoza's own system to embrace this claim, but in Bennett's view Spinoza's doctrine is not just false but a "seemingly unmotivated disaster" (357). Regarding Aquinas's view Anthony Kenny's treatment of his doctrine seems to capture the essence of many of the main arguments against him. Considering Aquinas's conception of the immateriality of the intellectual soul, Kenny wonders how Aquinas could possibly have thought that the soul, being a form, could exist without matter. Kenny thinks that this would only be possible for his non-philosophical, religious beliefs. Hence, in his view, Aquinas shows "a disconcerting disdain for distinctions between abstract and concrete" (138).

“composite” beings. I offer this for two reasons: (1) because I have not quite yet argued for this designation explicitly; and (2) some might think Spinoza’s monism could not allow this. Following that demonstration, I then will indicate how their particular doctrines of immortality, while quite different from one another, actually do emerge from their various philosophical systems, and are not embarrassing additions or dangling propositions that do not fit with their basic metaphysical schemes. We can show how the doctrine of *conatus* shapes Spinoza’s doctrine of the immortality of the mind; and we can do the same, as well, for Aquinas regarding the way that his doctrine of *form* works in his doctrine of incorruptibility.

Once this last piece of the interpretive puzzle is in place, the final section of this concluding chapter will point in a sketchy and preliminary way to some important insights that can be gleaned from the kind of hylomorphic understanding of human existence that is offered here with regard to Spinoza and Aquinas. I will suggest some ways that their insights can be helpful in shaping the focus of contemporary debates about mind and body relations. While this last section will be, as I have already indicated, only suggestive, I offer it in the hope that the interpretive work of this dissertation might assist us in discovering a fruitful conceptual starting point for the continuing quest to explore the metaphysical nature of the mind-body relationship.

### **The “composite” individual and *conatus/form***

Aquinas’s definition of human beings as “rational animals” captures the *hylomorphism* that defines how he *and* Spinoza (at least in an analogous way) conceived the dynamic

basic “principles” that make a human being unique.<sup>2</sup> While all things, in Spinoza’s view, express in some way the Attribute of Thought, even Spinoza allows that there is a distinct “way” or expression of that Attribute in human beings. Hence, we can say that for him even as with Aquinas, when we consider ourselves in terms of our capacity for rationality, human persons participate (in Aquinas’s terminology) or express (in Spinoza’s) the fundamental Attribute of Thought. The argument of this dissertation has not been that Spinoza and Aquinas are compatible on every level of their metaphysical doctrine, but that they can be read in a complementary manner, in that Spinoza’s view’s (when applied specifically to the human being – which was ultimately what he was after in *Ethics*) can be seen to have an affinity with Aquinas’s hylomorphism.

As an individual, each human person has what Aquinas calls the “form” of rationality or the “rational soul.” This soul makes the human body to be apt for a “mind,” even as it makes that mind apt for having a particular body as the locus of its activity.<sup>3</sup> It must be understood here that “the form of rationality,” for Aquinas, is not the same thing as the *act* of rationality that a human being exercises when he is having thoughts or experiencing something. The “form” that Aquinas names “rational soul” is, rather, best understood as analogous to the set of *information* that a specific person’s particular (and unique) genes provide. The rational soul, so far as Aquinas is concerned, grants a species appropriate shape and function to each human person. It does this in relation to the

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<sup>2</sup> The term “principle” is a basic Thomist concept. Spinoza speaks of Attributes of Substance, rather than principles because he wanted to press for substance-monism. However, when one reflects on the way that the Attributes work in individual modes and in complex organisms (see chapter five) the analogy between Thomas’ “principles” and Spinoza’s “Attributes” emerges. In both cases, the respective concepts serve to point to what is responsible for (causes in the Aristotelian sense) the existence of ordinary particulars.

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas’s contention was that human minds are the lowest form of intellectual substances, which means that he thought intellect was a part of reality quite apart from the existence of human minds.

material body that is *formed* by the “form,” thereby producing a unique individual. The rational soul does not, therefore, ipso facto give a person a “mind,” but at most gives “aptness” for a mind. The distinction between the “mind” and “body” entails nothing more than that “mind” is an aspect of the existence of an entity that exists as unified on a more fundamental level. This is the meaning of the distinction discussed in chapter four.<sup>4</sup> Spinoza, as I have interpreted him, views *conatus* in an analogous way. Understood as the essence of an individual organism that organizes its specific and unified “striving,” the *conatus* of a complexly *organized* human body is the self-same “form” that establishes a mind as the mental aspect of the organism’s “striving.”

To say that in Spinoza’s view a *conatus* “organizes” the individual’s striving might seem to suggest that the striving, apart from the *conatus*, is something like “matter.” That reading of my interpretation, however, misses the essential point that I argued in the previous chapter. *Conatus* in Spinoza’s metaphysics is a term that he uses explicitly to refer to the *act* of “striving” to remain in active existence. However, it is my contention that one needs to see *conatus* as having an ambiguous meaning in Spinoza. On the one hand it is, as was observed in the previous chapter, the act of “striving” when one thinks in terms of the ordinary modes of thought and extension exerting the drive to maintain their individual existences. However, the ordinary modes, which are in fact distinct aspects of a more fundamental unity, only “strive” to maintain their existences because there is a more fundamental finite and particular entity that exists as the “ground” of which body and mind are but aspects. In terms of this more fundamental

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<sup>4</sup> See 152 – 165 above.

entity, which in reference to human beings we can name “person,” there is an essence that is so intimately related to *conatus* in the first sense that we are justified in referring to it as *conatus* as well. It is in this second sense, then that *conatus* can be conceived of as an organizing form.

While it could be argued that, if the matter-form approach applies to Spinoza at all, we should say that the *conatus* is simply the *individual's* multiplicity of striving that is precisely in some way also a *single* striving, this would not do justice to the question regarding how this individual can in the first place be established in existence so as to be capable of striving as an individual. Spinoza not only needs something like Aquinas's notion of form, but actually relies upon it. This striving individual in Spinoza's thought is granted extended existence and mental existence by the self-same essence. And since, as was demonstrated in chapter five,<sup>5</sup> Spinoza describes the *conatus* as “the actual essence of [any] thing” it is clear that *conatus* does indeed have an ambiguous meaning in Spinoza's metaphysics, signifying both the activity of “striving” on the part of individuals possessed of both a mental and a physical side and an essence that *accounts* for the acts of striving [mental-striving and physical-striving] that present themselves as dual aspects of any such “thing” (*res*) in the first place. For this reason, neither the body nor the mind can be reduced to the other or explained by the other, in Spinoza's view; and a very similar explanation follows for why the reductionist approach does not work for Aquinas. Both mind and body are irreducible and primary aspects of human

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<sup>5</sup> Above 239f.

existence, because a single form or *conatus*, as a kind of metaphysical “entity” is, in some sense, prior to the being that expresses both aspects in an equal and integrated way.

When we see the important role that the idea of *conatus* as form plays in Spinoza’s thought, we not only can appreciate the way that his and Aquinas’s view are compatible, but we can begin to understand why both philosophers view the body as the “object” of particular cognitive acts that are the mind’s activity. As was demonstrated in chapter four,<sup>6</sup> for Aquinas just as for Spinoza, the mind’s knowledge of the world cannot be separated from the body’s interaction with the world of things that act upon the human person *qua* bodily. And so, in this action the “body” is affected by the things that impact it out of their own essences, and hence the “mind” can know those essences as objects of understanding. In other words, the “mind” does not have its own particular realm (Descartes) or level of reality (in the supervenient sense) that is radically distinct from the bodily life. For neither Spinoza nor Aquinas, however, does this physical interaction produce or cause the knowledge in question, because the activity of mind is not caused by anything bodily. One might say that, at least in the case of cognitive acts that are not purely intellectual, Aquinas’s conceives of the body as also the “medium” of those acts in a way that might not so clearly fit Spinoza’s view. However, if one looks closely at their descriptions this objection falls aside. For instance, Spinoza is clear that the aptness for thought and “perception of many things simultaneously” by a mind is in direct proportion to the “aptness of the body [that is the *object* of that mind] to act and be acted upon simultaneously in many ways” [II, P 13, sch].

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<sup>6</sup> Above 163f.

The key questions in regard to this statement are two: First, why would Spinoza argue that the aptness for thought is directly tied to the aptness of the body, unless he accepts something like Aquinas's view that the body is involved in the process of a person knowing, even though it does not explain what the act of knowing (perceiving and conceiving) is itself nor cause the act of intellection to take place? Second, what does Spinoza mean when he describes the body as the "object of the idea constituting the human mind"? As was argued in chapter five<sup>7</sup> the term 'object' in Spinoza's usage ascribes an intentionality to thought, and for him to call the body the "object" of the idea that constitutes the human mind suggests that he utilizes the term "object" in this context in a way that is compatible with Aquinas's usage. This way of using the term implies that the body is that to which the mind is properly oriented as the medium through which engagement with the world occurs and the world that is engaged is the physical world in which things act upon one another (as was stated above) out of their particular essences. Such a way of viewing the matter does not, however, require us to think of the body's interaction as causing the thought *qua* Thought. Rather, we are merely observing that in Spinoza's view there is a single entity that is both bodily (and engaged in interaction with the world of extended things and mental (and engaged in "conceiving" ideas about that world, as well as ideas about the ideas).

On this view of the human person as a fundamental unitary thing, - in some way more fundamental than what we think of as an ordinary human being, possessed of both a mental and a physical "side" – one might say with regard to the relationship between the

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<sup>7</sup> Above 265f.



mind and the body, precisely as such “sides” of a human being, that the body is where the mind is “located” in *natura naturata*. (By contrast, we might then think of *conatus* as “organizing form” as in some way at least more fundamentally a “part” of *natura naturans*.) The activity of thinking, however, is not explainable by reference to the material stuff of the body or the physical laws governing the material world itself. Conversely, the same holds regarding the “explanation” of the body. In the case of both philosophers, to conceive of the body as the “location” of the mind’s acts does not allow us to consider the mind to be the “cause” of any of the body’s movements, when speaking in the strictest sense. Such movements *qua* physical activity require a physical or material explanation in the strict sense of causation. This way of posing the issue is explicit in Spinoza and implicit in Aquinas’s acceptance of the idea that “locomotion” and “growth,” and even the capacity to “sense,” are powers granted to physical organisms by the non-rational parts of the soul. Because of this way of conceiving the powers of the soul, and of seeing the rational soul as subsuming in itself all the non-rational powers, without negating their essence as non-rational powers, Aquinas was able to contend that it is the person who is formed by the rational soul *qua* form that is the source of his own action and movement. The body moves itself in the strictest sense, but the person can act with intent and desire or choice. Hence, for Aquinas, when one reaches out to pick something that he wants or needs, it is not the rational part of the soul acting upon the body to move it. Rather, it is the person *qua* rational animal that is moving with a rational purpose.

As was demonstrated in chapter four, Aquinas does not think of the mind or the “rational part of the soul” as acting at all, in the strictest sense, because the rational soul

is the form of a human being's existence. It is the human being that is physically rational in his existence and rationally physical in his acts. Hence, on one level, the problem of mind-body interaction (at least the Cartesian version) never enters the picture. Similarly, for Spinoza the same follows, because the mind is not strictly speaking a thing (*res*) that could act upon the body, nor vice versa. They are both modal aspects of the more fundamental "one and the same thing" that exists because of the conatus-form which defines it and organizes its life *qua* organism to be both extended in a certain complex way and apt for thought in a way that is complementary to and in direct proportion to the complexity of the organized body.

Hence, the mind is not the "cause" of physical acts, strictly speaking. It could not, in neither Spinoza's nor Aquinas's estimation, be a cause, since "mind" does not name a substantive entity, but only an aspect of the rational-physical being that is a human person. Hence, in the strictest sense, it is not correct, by Spinoza's and Aquinas's lights, to think of "interaction" going on between mind and body. This way of thinking does not fit them, because in their hylomorphic view it is more appropriate to think of the self-same organism as what is both acting *qua* body and knowing *qua* mind. This is the import, I think, of Spinoza's description of mind and body as "one and the same *thing*." In the same way, Aquinas posits the human person as a singular entity that is defined as a "rational animal." So, no real *explanation* of the specific and distinct acts in which each of these aspects (body and mind) of human life engages us is required in order to account for "interaction" between discrete entities or substances or sets of properties, if by such properties one envisions some kind of dualism of existence.

This does not mean that "the mind" is the cause of *nothing* for Aquinas or for Spinoza, but only that the mind is not a substantive entity that itself engages in causation. In the most precise sense, therefore, we would not even want to speak about human beings as having a rational "side" or "part" and a non-mental physical "side" or "part" to their existence. Rather, we must say, to utilize Aquinas's terminology, it is the person who wills or desires or chooses and the same person who moves to achieve the intent or goals that he or she has. This is not the same thing as saying that a mental desire or thought or volition "causes" the movement of the arm that reaches for the light switch in order to enable the person to see. We may not, by this way of construing the question, have an explanation for how our rationality or our thought can be causally efficacious with respect to the physical side. But at least we have disposed of the problematic Cartesian way of construing the question. Instead we can say that the form of rationality -- the human *anima* for Aquinas or the "conatic form" for Spinoza (to coin a phrase that is at most implicitly Spinozistic) -- establishes in its organizational and orienting influence (or at most "causes" in the Aristotelian sense of the formal cause) the existence of an organism (rational animal) that can be rational in its physical existence and physical in its rational acts.

As I have shown in chapter five, Spinoza, as much as Aquinas, must have in view something that is the "source" of the organizational information that enables the particularized existence of a single human individual to be what and who he (or she) is in actual existence. Their contention was that the form (Aquinas) or *conatus* (Spinoza) should be thought of as being this "something" that is ultimately a more fundamental principle of any single entity that is both physical in nature (for Spinoza, "extended") and

a thinking being. Body and mind both express the informing principle that is this *conatus*/form. In both their points of view, each individual entity that moves and acts in the physical world *qua* a physical organism (animal) is identical with itself when we consider it under the aspect of Thought, because that physical entity being described engages in thought, not as a mind, but as a “rational animal” or minded physical organism. Thus both Aquinas and Spinoza were convinced that the mind and the body must be understood as dual-aspects of a single entity whose existence must be accounted for in hylomorphic terms, that is, in terms of a concrete individual life that is “organized” by something more fundamental than whatever “sides” or distinctions are discriminable within its existence *qua* individual.

My contention that Spinoza did indeed have a view of human existence that is congruent with Thomas’s idea of “composite” being in this sense is probably not, even yet, as clear as it should be. Of course, Aquinas’s doctrine of compositeness is quite obvious, for he describes form and matter jointly as the “principles” involved in the existence of a human being (and all other things). For Aquinas, “form” was different from matter in that matter was pure potentiality while form is actuality. His is a clear-cut, but nuanced Aristotelianism.<sup>8</sup> But Spinoza’s understanding was not, I contend, far from this. “Compositeness,” in just the same sense, was arguably his general understanding of the nature of things as well. And here again, and most crucially, I am not merely referring to Spinoza’s insistence that all things have both mind and body as an essential part or side of their existence. The “composite” nature must be pushed back

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of Aquinas’s development of Aristotle’s thought

farther than the Modes that merely “express” substance. That is precisely why, as I have been contending, Spinoza made a distinction between the *essence* of a thing that grants it existence and the actual *existence* of the thing as an individual Mode (no matter how many “sides” there might be to it). As was seen in chapter five, the *conatus* is this essence. But even at that, how close is this really to the sort of doctrine of compositeness that is Aquinas’s? The answer is to be found, I think, by more closely considering his doctrine of *conatus* in the light of the relationship that he says exists between Thought and Extension as Attributes.

To provide this demonstration, we must first look to Spinoza’s account of how individual *physical* identity is instantiated. In II, P 13, he provides an extensive philosophical explanation by way of lemmas, proofs, axioms, and definitions. Throughout, Spinoza returns to a concept that he calls “the *relation* of motion and rest”<sup>9</sup> as inherently involved in the enduring physical identity (EPI) of complex things, i.e. those physical individuals that are made up of many (at least relatively) simple bodies. Every EPI is a Mode of extension and no Mode of extension can “explain” itself by itself, only the extended Substance can explain the existence of the Mode. While the “extended” Substance is the ontological ground for all physical existence, however, when the property of being extended is considered strictly in relation to the Attribute of Extension, we cannot account for the *particularity* of the extended Modes. This is because “being extended” *qua* Attribute is not any particular thing. The Attribute of Extension is a necessary presupposition, of course, to account for extended things *qua*

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<sup>9</sup> My emphasis

extended in exactly the same way that Thought is necessary to account for “ideas,” and thus anything “mental.” But we need to remember Spinoza’s claim that Substance and its Modes are all that exist (I, P 28, pr.). Extension is only real *in* the extended Modes of Substance that express this Attribute of Substance in a concrete way. In Spinoza’s system, therefore, something must explain the nature of the Modes as they exist as *particular* instantiations of extension, besides the mere *fact* of their extendedness.<sup>10</sup>

The “*relation*” of motion and rest necessary for the EPI of a complex individual is not itself an extended thing, even though it involves extended things, for such a relation is something that both requires extended things but also supercedes being extended insofar as it is something that the complex individual *has* or “stands in.” This means that *something* (that Spinoza did not define for us, but I have argued is closely associated with the *conatus*) that could be involved with the Attribute of extension, and therefore in its Modes, but which would not precisely be a part of the physical world *qua* extended (not even in the sense of being a physical law, or the totality of physical laws)<sup>11</sup> would need

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<sup>10</sup> Presumably the explanation of these things would be in the so-called “infinite modes” of Substance. Curley is correct, however, when he says, “In the *Ethics* proper, Spinoza tells us precious little about these modes, and he does not have much more to say in other works. But we do learn in the correspondence . . . that motion and rest is an immediate infinite mode in the attribute of extension, and that the body of the whole universe is a mediate mode, presumably in the attribute of extension” [Curley, 35].

<sup>11</sup> Bennett offers a different interpretation. He argues that Spinoza had to conceive of the Attributes and their Modes as being the “repositories of all causal laws.” This means, in Bennett’s view, that Spinoza’s concept of “motion and rest is not just a system of description and classification but somehow embodies the whole of physics. The laws of physics are supposed to be part of the ‘extension’ package – and the extended world must obey them. . .” [Bennett, 111]. Bennett’s reading suggests of course only that “motion and rest” is an undeveloped concept that is supposed to capture the whole of physics and all its laws of motion and order. Even with that, however, one can still argue that, with those laws in place (and assuming that motion-and-rest does serve as the kind of placeholder that Bennett thinks it does), a *relation* of motion and rest, while involving the laws of physics, would not be precisely one of the “laws” that are involved in motion and rest; unless one is willing to make such a contingent thing as a “relation” a physical law. Cf. Bertrand Russell’s argument that “relations” are something that “subsist” over and above physical reality and are, therefore, real *qua* subsistents (“The Problem of Universals,” *Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 101f.)

to be the source of the *relation* of motion and rest that must be maintained if EPI is to be maintained by a complex individual. Spinoza speaks of the maintenance of this *relation* in Lemmas 4 – 7, but for our purposes we may consider only Lemmas 4, 5, and 6:

(Lemma 4) If from a body, or an individual thing composed of a number of bodies, certain bodies are separated, and at the same time a like number of other bodies of the same nature take their place, the individual thing will retain its nature as before, without any change in its form. [*This Lemma is dealing with the replacement of component parts of an entity, such as the replacement of cells and tissues that a growing and aging body experiences.*]

(Lemma 5) If the parts of an individual thing become greater or smaller, but so proportionately that they all preserve the same mutual relation of motion-and-rest as before, the individual thing will likewise retain its own nature as before without any change in its form. [*This Lemma is defining how an individual thing is the same from its earliest and most immature phases (think small sprout) all the way through its life as fully mature thing (think great oak).*]

(Lemma 6) If certain bodies composing an individual thing are made to change the existing direction of their motion, but in such a way that they can continue their motion and keep the same mutual relation as before, the individual thing will likewise preserve its own nature without any change of form. [*Here the focus seems to be on movement and change of place within the oneness of Substance.*]

In each of these subsidiary propositions, Spinoza asserts that the “form” of the thing is not changed. The use of this term “form” does not necessarily mean that Spinoza was thinking in any kind of hylomorphic sense of compositeness. We do not want to proceed in a rapid and anachronistic fashion; but neither should we rule it out, given that his idea of a “relation” of motion and rest would entail something other than the properties involved in being extended. Spinoza was not simply making a bald assertion about the nature of things when he described the concept of “motion and rest” and the idea that a *relation* of motion and rest had to be maintained for EPI to continue. Everything in his system has a cause or explanation, even if we only know it

inadequately.<sup>12</sup> A thing that strives to maintain the relation of motion and rest, and whose identity is maintained even as the constituent elements (physically, at least) of its existence change, has this very striving as the essential feature of its bodily existence. In other words, the striving is not something that begins after it is formed, for Spinoza. In Lemma 4 – 6 of proposition 13 of Book II, Spinoza seems to use the concept of a thing's nature (which is retained across time) as synonymous to the idea of its *form*. The form of a thing in these Lemmas cannot simply name the shape that is maintained, for in Lemma 5 Spinoza insists that even a change of shape does not change the form of the entity that results from the *relation* of motion and rest being established. The striving to retain its form is, I suggest, the *conatus* that makes itself manifest in (and is in some way therefore more fundamental than the physical and mental strivings of the individual as an individual Mode.<sup>13</sup> The change of bodies (Lemma 4), the change in size of the constituent bodies (Lemma 5), and the change in place or direction (Lemma 6) all involve something other than the bodies that are involved in the process of so changing, growing, or moving. In other words, something other than the physical organism itself must account for EPI. What Spinoza says in the proof of Lemma 6 applies to the nature of EPI with regard to all changes of bodies that constitute a complex individual: “by hypothesis, the individual thing retains all that we, in defining it, asserted as constituting its *form*.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Chapter five for citation of Della Rocca's claim that “motion and rest” is a placeholder for a perspective that Spinoza had not fully worked out.

<sup>13</sup> In Spinoza's case, however, we must be sure to note that the *conatus* qua form would function only to bring about the relationship of the balance or proportion of motion and rest at any point in time the result of the proportion or balance at the preceding point in time, plus the facts about the surrounding bodies, plus the physical laws. This would not, however, deny that an individual entity does not have its own particular *conatus*/form, but only that in a Spinozistic system the way that this functions would have to be in the nature of a Mode of Substance.

<sup>14</sup> My emphasis



It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the form of a thing and the thing that is so formed were distinct *concepts* for Spinoza, even if they are not distinct existentially. (This is also the Thomistic way of discussing the relationship of a *form* and the entity that is formed.) As I demonstrated in chapter five, *conatus* is the “essence” of a thing for Spinoza. He calls the *conatus* in the proof of proposition 7 of Book III “nothing but the given, or actual, essence of the thing.” *Conatus* -- as it was shown in the preceding chapter -- ought to be understood to be the implicit source or perhaps cause of the relevant *relation* of motion-and-rest, in a Spinozistic metaphysics, because the *conatus* is in the act of striving the “essence” of the thing’s being.<sup>15</sup> If we add to this conclusion the arguments of chapter 5, namely that a single *conatus* accounts for the identity of the organism and hence involves both the body that strives and the mind that both accompanies that body and strives in itself, we have good reason to read Spinoza as at least implicitly assuming in his metaphysics something analogous to the Thomistic concept of form.

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Donagan, “Spinoza’s Proof of Immortality,” *Spinoza: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Majorie Grene (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973), 254 – 255. Donagan argues, contra the kind of interpretation I am offering, that Spinoza rejected the distinction of form and matter in its Thomistic form. However, Donagan does not explain why this is so. He asserts it. But his point seems to be (1) that Spinoza held that all essences are individual and (2) that the scholastic notion thought that each individual shared a common essence (humanity) with all others and (3) that as an actual “essence or *conatus*” each individual man is identical with his actual essence. Donagan thinks that this rules out the possibility of affinity between Spinoza and Aquinas’s distinction, discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, between *essentia ut totum* and *essentia ut pars*. However, as was shown earlier for Aquinas Socrates’s essence *qua* Socrates is indeed identical to him. That does not mean, however, that he did not share a common defining property with, say, Plato. Neither, it seems to me, would Spinoza have denied this, although he does not argue for it and in at least on part of the *Ethics* denies the concept of universals. But that denial was an objection not, I think, to a Thomistic notion of universals as real but only objectively real as knowledge. In fact, Spinoza speaks in the introduction of Book IV of “human nature” in such a way that he has some affinity to Aquinas’s conception of universals as real in the intellect: “For since we desire to form the idea of a man which we may look to as a model of human nature, we shall find it helpful to keep these terms [good and bad] in the sense I have indicated. So in what follows I shall mean by ‘good’ that which we certainly know to be the means of our approaching nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. . . . Again, we shall say that men are more perfect or less perfect in so far as they are nearer to or further from this model.” Donagan’s comments are not, then, a defeat of my interpretation.

All that is left, then, is to show how “compositeness” is involved *Spinozistically* in the existence of each thing. It seems reasonable to assume, given that the Attribute of Extension does not explain the particularity of each of its Modes as instances of extendedness, that some kind of “organizational information” is required to instantiate the relevant *relation* of motion-and-rest that maintains the EPI (as well as the enduring mental identity) of an entity. Each living entity exists and continues to exist, according to Spinoza, only on the basis of the relevant *relation*. Perhaps, then, we could say that the organizing and form-giving nature of *conatus*, in the case of human life and identity and a corresponding single body-mind entity, is something akin to the information that is involved in the DNA “code” of each person.<sup>16</sup> But how does this analysis get us any closer to seeing Spinoza as being amenable to a description of human existence as in the relevant sense composite? Seeing *conatus* in terms of information analogous to the DNA code suggests, I contend, that we must conceive of the *conatus*, as the essence, of an organism as something that bridges the Spinozistic gap between Thought and Extension. *Conatus* is for Spinoza something analogous to *form* in Aquinas’s metaphysics. The *conatus* as the organizing principle is also the orienting drive that preserves the physical identity of the organism, as it *equally* preserves the “corresponding” mental identity, and vice versa. Thus, the sense in which *conatus* establishes the orientation and concrete manner of an organism’s existence is precisely like the *form* that Aquinas discusses, namely it brings, as I have already said, a particular form (shape, function, orientation, powers) of life to the organism. Just as the rational soul is “form-giving” to the body (and

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<sup>16</sup> See above 71-75 for the discussion of DNA as “information” that is analogous to “form.”

therefore the *form* of the body) in Aquinas's metaphysics, so Spinoza's "*conatus*" is form-giving. And as the rational soul is the formal cause of both the human body and mind, so Spinoza's *conatus* can equally be deemed "mental" and "physical" (or at least equally "participating" in Thought and Extension). Further, the *conatus* itself involves a unified striving that unifies all of the multiplicity of an individual thing's strivings, which is also the way that the rational soul functions in Aquinas's understanding of the relationship between form and matter in a human being's essence. Just like form, then, *conatus* is comparable to the "information" that the DNA code brings to the arrangement and function of a living being's life.

To continue the comparison with Aquinas's doctrine of compositeness, we can observe that, for Spinoza, the conatic information underlying an organism does not exist in the strictest sense of the word (just as the "rational soul" does not exist in Aquinas's metaphysics, even though it subsists and is real in some sense.) The organizing information that is the *conatus* is not any sort of "thing" within the thing informed by it, but simply the very act of informing itself, whereby there comes to be a particular organism. This informing act results in a body of a certain type that is apt for a mind (understood as the mental awareness of the organism that is bodily *and* mental) of a certain type. Correspondingly, it establishes the possibility of a certain type of mind, apt for a body of a certain type. The point here is that the informing action does not simply produce an organism whose body is simply the "body-side" of a more fundamental something that *already does* have a "mind-side." "Mind" is for Spinoza, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the earlier chapters, less like a Cartesian mind than this way of looking at it would suggest. Rather, "mind" must be for him a term that refers to the

capacity (as it does for Aquinas) for purely intellectual cognizance and judgment. Of course, the term ‘mind’ can also refer, in Spinoza, to the whole of the “ideas” that constitute the “idea”-side of the being in question. But even here, this does not suggest that the mind should be thought of in thing-like terms, even if it is qualified as being only a modal “thing.” The mind entails all kinds of intellectual awareness, for Spinoza, which is why he is insistent that there are three kinds of knowledge, but only two of those are “adequate” as ways of true knowing (or knowing the truth of things.)

Spinoza would not be reserved about Aquinas’s insistence that it is not the mind that knows, but the person; and this person who knows is “one and the same thing” whether considered via the Mode mind or the Mode body. This one and the same thing exists as mind and body in unity of identity, because an organizing principle has given rise both materially and mentally to a being whose physical existence is the home of rationality and whose mental existence is the form of its physical life. So the *conatus*, in the same way as Thomistic “form,” only truly exists in union with the matter that it makes into a particular Mode of extension in union with the particular mind that is instantiated as a different and mental aspect of the organism thereby living as a result of that fact.

Since the idea of form is closely associated in medieval philosophy with the concept of “idea,” some might cry foul at this point, objecting to the fact that this way of conceiving of the relationship between *conatus* and extension violates the explanatory or the causal barrier that Spinoza interposes between the Attributes of Thought and Extension. However, I think this is not the case, because on my reading what is being *explained* is not the extended nature of the organism’s existence *qua* extended but the

organism's existence as a "thing" that has extendedness as one of its aspects. Similarly, the *conatus* does not determine the physical laws that operate to organize (relatively) simple extended Mode(s) into a complex extended entity. Rather, it acts only through those physical laws to establish and maintain a certain particular relation of motion and rest, sufficient for the existence of such an entity. This way of viewing the matter is, if not essentially then very much analogously, similar to Thomas's hylomorphic doctrine that form and matter both explain (or cause) the existence of the thing, even though each of them is a "cause" that is *qua* cause independent of the other.<sup>17</sup> The formal cause does not explain the material cause *qua* "cause", nor vice versa. But *together* they explain (and cause) the existence of the primary being whose existence is being analyzed. And yet too, on the other hand, there remains an important respect in which, , in the strictest sense, it is the formal causes that "gives existence" to things.<sup>18</sup> This is the essence of the doctrine of "compositeness," in which both principles (physical laws and non-physical "information") are involved in the existence of a living human being.

In their focus on form and/or *conatus*, Aquinas and Spinoza are interested, in their distinct ways, in the phenomenon of "life" in the world. They both are interested in describing and analyzing the nature of *living* human beings in the fullness of their

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<sup>17</sup> The Aristotelian distinction between the formal cause and the material cause implies a strong distinction, not a weak one. The distinction is just as strong as the distinction between the formal and the efficient cause. Hence, Spinoza's distinction between causes in which there is Thought and Extension and also the efficient causation of God at work in the infinity of Modes fits into an Aristotelian model, minus final causality in the universal sense. But even Spinoza's definition of God's acts as necessary can pose a certain kind of final causation, just not volitional, which I take it is what Spinoza really wanted to deny about God anyway.

<sup>18</sup> This concept that form grants particular existence Aquinas employed to show that *qua* individuals all men could not be, contra Averroes, possessed of one intellect as the form of all. The rational soul makes existent a knowing person as an individual primary rational being who can participate in the act of knowing that participates in God's own Being.

existence and experience in the world. Neither the scholastic Catholic nor the excommunicated Jewish rationalist thought that life could be treated as a supervenient property that is present in a world that is itself, in the most ultimate sense -- lifeless. For Spinoza the fact that Thought, as much as Extension, was a fundamental Attribute of Reality, meant that Life was everywhere. Although not in the same degree, he could conceive of all things as being “animated” (or alive) [II, P 13, sch].<sup>19</sup> In a parallel way by Aquinas’s lights -- while the concept of all things being *animate* or of pan-psychism was alien to him -- life is a fundamental feature of the universe, because all things participate in God’s Being and “life is properly attributed to God” in the highest sense.<sup>20</sup> The physical (extended) *organism*, therefore – and not simply an abstractly considered physical “side” of that organism.- is conceived of, by both philosophers, as being *alive* essentially and not simply in some supervening sense that can be reduced down to nothing other than the electro-chemical properties of particles of matter. As living beings, human persons are single entities of a composite nature; hence “one and the same thing” whether described in terms of body or “mind”.

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<sup>19</sup> It seems quite clear to me that for Spinoza the notion that all things are animated would have to entail for him more than the mere claim that all things are “minded.” The reasons are two-fold: first, is his insistence that the Attributes of Substance are Extension and Thought and all the Modes that express those Attributes are Modes of one or the other. For him to have a third category, “Life” would suggest that being alive would be another Mode of existence. Hence, being animate entails being minded and extended, because all things are minded and extended and alive. Further, Spinoza was moving away, it seems to me, from the mechanistic view of “life” as merely aspects of extension because life is a biological, and therefore, extended thing (in some sense). He along with Aquinas saw life as a feature of reality that could not be reduced to either the physical functions of biological entities (simply) or made into a level of reality that is “tacked-on” to the otherwise bare and lifeless universe. Life for both is something of an ontological ground of being, not an emergent property.

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas discusses this in *Summa* I a, Q 18 a 3, reply. His basic argument is that life is about self-movement or determination and that God is, by essence, the only truly self determining or moving being. Furthermore, in article 4 of the same question Aquinas argues: “In God intellect, the thing understood, and the act of understanding, are one and the same. Hence *whatever is in God as understood is the very living or life of God*. Now, wherefore, since all things that have been made by God are in Him as things understood, it follows that all things in Him are the divine life itself” (My emphasis).

Their unwavering focus upon the co-inhering unity of mind and body in living human beings, however, did allow for a kind of duality of activity without positing a dualism of existence. Aquinas and Spinoza both argued that the act of *knowing* that there is a physical world with strict laws and properties and knowing that one is a part of that world is an activity that is completely *distinct* from the physical world that is known. Hence, neither in Spinozism nor Thomism can one ever do away with descriptions of either mentality or physicality. But that duality is only a semantic duality in one sense, necessary to account for the phenomenological properties we encounter in our own lives. For both of them there is only one Reality that contains the physical world and the act(s) of understanding that world. In this one and the same world, however, being-extended and being-thought are fundamental properties for which an account must be given. On the level of the individual person, this means that each person is doubly-aspected. But the life that is lived is a single existence in which the person who lives *physically* in extended Reality is also the person who simultaneously *knows* the physical (and mental) Reality in which he is alive and acting. But again, there is no ontological dualism – as there was for Descartes -- in the final analysis, for although mind is not the body that is known and body is not mind that knows, the individual is irreducibly both. Perhaps then, Aquinas and Spinoza could help us begin to see that there may not really be a mind-body “problem” so much as there is a wrong focus on the whole issue of the mind-body relationship.

### **The lingering question of immortality**

There remains for both Spinoza and Aquinas a lingering problem in their metaphysical analyses of the relationship between mind and body. The problem is this:

how to account for their similar insistence on the capacity of the mind or soul to maintain existence even after the death of the body. To this problem we will now turn, not to defend their substantive claims philosophically at this point, but to see how such claims might be made to fit into the context of the rest of their metaphysical schemes. We will begin with Spinoza.

### **Spinoza's view of eternity and immortality**

Curley sets the stage well for our considerations regarding Spinoza's doctrine of the immortality of the mind when he admits, ". . . in spite of many years of study, I still do not feel that I understand this part of the *Ethics* at all adequately. I feel the freedom to confess that, of course, because I also believe that no one else understands it adequately either."<sup>21</sup> The problems that Spinoza's statements raise when he insists that the mind has an eternal part and is, thereby, immortal in some sense have been discussed by many commentators. Many, if not most, of them have decided that his case for this proposition is hopelessly flawed.<sup>22</sup> The purported embarrassing issue is, namely, his insistence that "the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed along with the body, but something of it remains, which is eternal" (V, P 23). Perhaps the particular problems that face a *Spinozistic* claim that the "mind" survives the body's death are obvious, but a very brief mention of them will nonetheless help us see what is required if one is going to make his doctrine internally consistent, if indeed that is possible.

1. The mind and the body are one and the same thing.

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<sup>21</sup> Curley, 84.

<sup>22</sup> In this Bennett is the most forceful recent commentator. Bennett, 537 f. Calling it an "unmotivated disaster," Bennett says that he only deals with the doctrine at all, because "a little can be learned from firmly grasping what is wrong with the core of it."



2. The essence of the mind is to be the idea of a really existing body.
3. The striving of the mind to maintain itself in existence is the same as the body's striving, because the mind and body are "one and the same thing."
4. Spinoza's metaphysics entails that in both infinite and eternal Attributes – thought and extension – the Modes of Substance exist in some kind of simultaneity, so how could he allow for the eternity of the mind but not the body?

Given these four points of Spinozism, is there any way to account for what motivated Spinoza's claim for immortality? Alan Donagan's work represents one attempt to allow Spinoza's doctrine to make sense on his own terms. He argues that the key to understanding why Spinoza thought he could propose this eternity is rooted in two aspects of his thought: (1) the parallel identity of the "order of ideas and the order of things," and (2) that there can be "actual ideas of the formal essences of *non-existent things*"<sup>23</sup> in Spinoza's doctrine of mind. He argues that Spinoza held in the *Ethics* (on the basis of the proof of I, P 11) that not only actual essences are contained in the infinite and eternal Mode of the Attribute of Thought, also essences that are merely "possible." These later essences, because they are not actual – but only possible -- are within the parameters of Thought, even though they are not so as Modes, or at least as finite Modes:

Spinoza saw, if [the above description about possible essences] is true then the very theorem that the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things, entails that what, in the attribute of thought, corresponds to a mere possibility in the attribute of extension, must be *more than a mere possibility* [in the attribute of thought] . . . Such actual ideas of the formal essences of nonexistent individuals, since they cannot be finite modes of thought, must form part of an infinite mode of it, a mode which Spinoza referred to as "*Dei infinita idea*." This infinite mode of thought must contain, *inter alia*, an actual idea of the formal essence of every individual body, existent or nonexistent. . .

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<sup>23</sup> My emphasis.

Once it has been grasped that the identity of the order of ideas and the order of things not only does not forbid that there should be actual ideas of the formal essences of nonexistent things, but on the contrary demands it, Spinoza's proof of immortality is simple. When a living human body is destroyed, the corresponding mind, as nonderivative idea of that body actually existing, perishes with it; for they are the same finite mode in two distinct attributes. However, that mind, as actual essence, had as a part the idea of the formal essence of that body. And the idea of that formal essence belongs to God *sub specie aeternitatis* . . . . Therefore, the part of a man's mind which consists in the idea of the formal essence of his body must be eternal: it must have pre-existed his body, and cannot be destroyed with it. Q.E.D.<sup>24</sup>

Donagan's interpretation represents what Bennett calls an "asymmetrical" explanation for Spinoza's doctrine, which is the kind that Bennett provides and believes is all that is Spinozistically warranted.<sup>25</sup> Bennett argues that Spinoza's suppositions in Book V rule out any possibility of interpreting his doctrine of immortality as an outgrowth of his otherwise symmetrical account of the "parallelism" between the mind and body.<sup>26</sup> I take it that Bennett sees this as a fatal misstep on Spinoza's part. It is not my purpose to analyze Donagan's interpretation or to take up Bennett's characterization of it as the product of an "asymmetrical" procedure. Rather, I present Donagan's description at this point because it provides us a sympathetic reading of Spinoza's doctrine that is helpful as a background for the alternative reading I want to provide. In

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<sup>24</sup> Donagan, 254 – 255.

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, 361. He contends that Spinoza's doctrine is based on the following line of reasoning. "Take a necessary truth about the body, not (a) the corresponding truth about the mind, and then redescribe it as (b) a thought in the mind. The upshot is that you have got a single item which is at once (a) eternal and (b) contained in the mind. Q.e.d."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 158 – 159. "What Spinoza says is asymmetrical: 'the human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the human body, but something of it remains which is eternal.' It has been contended that he has merely underexpressed his position, and would not have minded adding that if the mind is eternal then so is the body; but that is too weak to rescue the symmetrical account. If the appearance of asymmetry is to be explained as a mere result of understatement, then Spinoza must be willing to say: 'The human body is not absolutely destroyed with the human mind, but something of it remains which is eternal', and, indeed, 'The human body is not absolutely destroyed with the human *body*, but. . . etc.'. No one has been willing to cram those sentences into his mouth."

the interpretation I offer, I do not think that the question whether or not Spinoza *needs* a symmetrical or an asymmetrical account to justify his proposition of immortality comes into play in quite the same way that it does in Donagan's (or Bennett's). However, it does seem to me that, in the sense of my interpretation, there is a way to argue for a more symmetrical account of Spinoza's metaphysics of immortality, even though Spinoza's own formulation of it in the final part of the Ethics seems *prima facie* to imply an asymmetrical relationship between body and mind.

Donagan's commentary is built on the presupposition that the idea of the formal essences of things provides the true basis of Spinoza's doctrine. Thus Donagan argues that a mind that is the "idea" of a particular body has? the idea of the formal essence of that body as a *part* of itself that had existed even prior to the actual existence of either that body or that mind. This is because, *qua* the idea of the formal essence of the body in question, and not simply of the body as an actually existing individual, this "idea" belongs to God *sub specie aeternitatis*. In other words, as Donagan argues, the idea of the formal essence of the body is eternal. Therefore, at least the corresponding part of any actually existing person's mind is eternal.

While I think that Donagan is on the right track, in his attempts to show that Spinoza's doctrine of the immortality or eternity of the mind is not incoherent within his system of thought, I would like to explore a different way of approaching the problem. In fact, the doctrine of *conatus* and the singularity of identity that I have contended is the basis of mind-body identity is a better starting point to help us read him as maintaining even *more* consistency in his ontological commitments.

In Spinoza's thought the essence of the body is not that of an independent entity that exists in isolation from all other things. This denial of independent existence is the import of his insistence that a Mode of extension is a modification of Substance. He insists that the extended Substance is not divisible (as was shown in the previous chapter). Hence, any individual extended thing is not truly separate from the rest of extended Reality. This proposition is the foundation upon which he builds his argument in Book IV, where he critiques the strength of human emotions wrongly conceived and the bondage that inadequate ideas can entail for a person.<sup>27</sup> In IV, P 2, for instance, he asserts that each individual person is "passive in so far as we are a part of Nature *which cannot be conceived independently of other parts.*" From this premise, Spinoza proposes in IV, P 4, that "it is impossible for a man not to be a part of Nature [God or Substance] and not to undergo changes other than those which can be understood solely through his own nature and of which he is the adequate cause." However, since every entity actively strives (by its *conatus*) out of its own particular essence (*conatus*), we often, insofar as we are such striving entities, fail to understand the inherent necessity of our own acts in relationship to all other things.

According to Spinoza's thinking, because of our inadequate ideas about our lives in Nature, we wrongly understand our own particularity. As we live out of our particularity and our own *conatus* (drive to maintain our existence), the ways that we experience things that negatively impact us bodily (or mentally) are inadequately understood, because we do not see our lives as part of the infinite and necessary essence

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<sup>27</sup> Note also: it is part of his argument in Book II that we can only have inadequate ideas of particulars.

of God or Nature. This inadequate understanding, in turn, provides a false foundation for our emotional life. As a result, we create categories of good and evil about the nature of things in the world, all the while not realizing that this way of thinking is confused and inadequate. Nothing is good or evil, he says, in itself but is only relatively good or evil as it acts favorably on or in opposition to the interests of other Modes. The entire system of Modes, however, has no room for good and evil in its description. Failing to see the necessity of all things, and not seeing how our individual striving is part of the whole of all things, we live, Spinoza argues, in a kind of self-imposed limit upon our own virtue, beatitude – our very existence.

This line of thought is the focus of propositions 28 through 35 in Book IV. I offer Spinoza's reasoning here in a paraphrased form. Propositions 1 – 5 that I list below are all based on three previously established doctrines from Books I - III: (a) the oneness of Substance and its Attributes and Modes, (b) the identity of mind and body, and (c) the nature of our striving as individual essences/Modes. First, then, knowing God as absolutely infinite being is the highest good of the human mind (P 28). Then Spinoza proceeds:

- (1) Good and evil are evaluations given to things based on whether or not the thing has (a) some common element with us that increases our activity out of our nature or (b) some contradictory element that diminishes or checks our power to act out of our nature. (P 29 – P 31)
- (2) Our capacity to be acted upon and the passive emotions that can attend this capacity is what accounts for our “difference” in nature and causes us to believe we are, in our strivings, contrary to one another. (P 32 – P 34)
- (3) However, reason that sees beyond the passive (and inadequate) emotions can enable us to see that our acts and all others' acts are merely the acts of our natures. Hence we will see that only we seek what all other things seek; and

reason will compel us to embrace this fact of the unity of striving that marks the universe in some fundamental sense, and consciously embrace that all things *together* are seeking the good. (P 35)

- (4) Because we are all part of the eternal and infinite essence of God as individual Modes of God, the highest virtue of those who act according to their own *conatus* is “common to all men and can be possessed equally by all men in so far as they are of the same nature.” (P 36)

Spinoza wants his readers to understand their own lives and the nature of all things as all being Modes of the same Reality. If one takes his line of reasoning about the “commonness” of human endeavor in seeking happiness and fulfillment out of one’s own nature, and then brings into the discussion Spinoza’s claims about the third kind of knowledge (which he had introduced in II, P 40), we can, I think, begin to see how he understood the mind’s immortality, or at least its possession of an eternal part. In Book II (P 40, sch 2) the third kind of knowledge – intuition – “proceeds *from* an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God *to* an adequate knowledge of the essence of things.”<sup>28</sup> Now it is obvious that an adequate knowledge of the “essence of things” would involve understanding them as all being Modes of a single Substance, since “intuition” proceeds *from* the adequate understanding of the Attributes *to* an adequate knowledge of “the essence of things.” Therefore, fully adequate knowledge perceives all things as related to one another via the Substance that is the ground or the source of all things. Furthermore, by proposition 44 of the same book, “it is not in the nature of reason to regard things as contingent, but as necessary.” This understanding of the necessity of all things, then, must be a part of the “third kind of knowledge” and by it each thing that exists is known to be a necessary Mode of God or Substance.

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<sup>28</sup> My emphasis

The “basic principles of reason” allow us, Spinoza argues, to explain and understand things in the light of that which is “common to all things” (which Spinoza thought he had demonstrated in Book I and the first 43 propositions of Book II), i.e. that all things are simply affections of the one Substance. *True* reason will not, therefore, provide any analysis or explication of things that views the *particular* essences of those things in isolation from Nature itself, because they are known to be simply modifications of God’s own being. Anything that is *truly* known, he tells us in the second corollary of proposition 4 in Book II, therefore, cannot be conceived only in temporal terms, but “in the light of eternity. This kind of knowledge is the greatest power of the mind, in Spinoza’s judgment, and *qua* the most adequate and truest knowledge, it is the true fulfillment of the mind’s own particular *conatus*.”

The third kind of knowledge proceeds from the adequate idea of certain of God’s attributes to adequate knowledge of the essence of things [see its definition in Sch. 2 Pr. 40 II], and the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God. Therefore, the highest virtue of the mind, that is [by definition 8 of Book IV] its power or nature, or its highest *conatus*, is to understand things by this third kind of knowledge. (V, P 25, pr).<sup>29</sup>

By this “intuition” a person understands that all things are essentially *one* in God and necessary and inherently linked to one another. As the mind understands the essence of all individual things in this way, there is a crucial state of affairs being represented in this act of intuition: “Whatever the mind understands *under a form of eternity* it does not understand from the fact that it conceives the present actual existence of *the* body [which is the object of the mind], but from the fact that it conceives the *essence* of the body

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<sup>29</sup> My emphasis

under a form of eternity” [V, P 29].<sup>30</sup> In other words, the body which is known is in its very essence a Mode of extension. Therefore, the true essence the body is to be necessarily one part of the infinity of extended Modes that has *qua* particular essence a particular function in the whole chain of extended causes and effects. This is at least part of what it would mean for the body to be “understood” *under a form of eternity*. By “intuition” then, mind can so conceive of the body in this adequate and true way. In fact, according to Spinoza, this way of understanding the body *qua* the “object” of the mind is the very nature of *reason*: “it is the nature of reason to conceive things *under the form of eternity*.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, when it is realized through the “emendation of the intellect” that our truest knowledge of our lives and all of Reality is achieved only when we conceive things under the form of eternity (and one could add infinity), and thereby the unity of all can be perceived, then the mind has achieved not only the greatest state of awareness that is made possible by its very own nature, but it is actually being (in the most ultimate sense) what it truly is. Such knowledge is the highest expression of its particular conatus.

By positing this kind of knowledge as the “highest” form of understanding, Spinoza is pointing toward an epistemology that does not negate the body as the “object” of the mind, but only transcends both the mind and the body when the latter is conceived in terms of its status as object of the former *qua* sensory or imaginative rather than

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> This epistemological claim seems to me to be related to Spinoza’s insistence that there is only one Substance and that Substance is infinite and necessary. Having so defined Substance, then the nature of reason, since he thinks we can have adequate ideas of Substance, would be to understand Substance (and its Modes, etc) as infinite and necessary. Of course, an infinity of time would be eternity, if Spinoza is thinking in Aristotelian terms, rather than Platonic. And “necessity” is also a term that has connotations that could be related to eternity. So, to say that it is the nature of reason to understand things under the form of eternity is just to say that the human mind can recognize the truth about God and all things. See, Donagan for an interpretation of Spinoza’s views of eternity as Aristotelian, 242. Cf. H. H. Joachim for a view that Spinoza’s notions are Platonic, *Ethics of Spinoza*, 298.



“intuitive” awareness. He says of intuition, “The third kind of knowledge depends on the mind as its formal cause in so far as the mind is eternal” (V, P 31). Intriguingly, Spinoza insists in the proof of this proposition that “the mind conceives nothing under a form of eternity except in so far as it conceives the *essence of its body* under a form of eternity, that is, except so far as the mind is eternal.”<sup>32</sup> I take this to mean that Spinoza believes that the truest form of self-knowledge of which an individual is capable is to understand the essential nature of the body (and, correlatively, of the mind) as I described it in the previous paragraph, i.e. to understand it as part of the great whole of Nature. Here we get to the heart of the matter regarding how Spinoza views of the immortality of the mind. His reasoning is “symmetrical.” Spinoza would say that the truest intuition that one can have of oneself is the awareness that one is a particular individual as an existent *thing* (*res*), but as such not independent from the one Substance. This immediate grasp is not just something that the mind is potentially capable of attaining. Rather, it is, in some way, “knowledge” that the mind must already *have* as part of its essence. This follows from Spinoza’s doctrine that there is no such thing as “potential” intellect, but only “active intellect.” We see this when we consider what is going on in the scholium of proposition 31 of Book I. There he “speaks of the intellect in act” not because he grants “there can be any intellect in potentiality.” In fact he is careful to deny this very thing so that he not be interpreted as embracing something like the medieval notion of potential intellect. Instead he is confining himself, in this instance, to this way of expressing the issue, merely because he wants to “avoid any confusion to what we perceive with utmost

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<sup>32</sup> My emphasis

clarity, to wit, the very act of understanding.” Spinoza, in fact, denies the medieval theory that the mind can be activated to knowledge. Rather, for Spinoza ideas are necessarily present in us, either adequately or inadequately. However, the third kind of knowledge of which one attains “understanding” (as he describes it) is a kind of ontological essence that makes the mind what it is. And yet until our intellect is improved by the measures he points us toward in *Ethics*, an individual will be in some sense non-cognizant of this essential nature. Once one has attained the knowledge of the third kind, then the organism, or shall we say person, knows herself under the aspect of eternity, in the sense I have been explicating, she, therefore, knows herself rightly. She can see herself as a part of the whole of things, and yet with her own interests and ends and purposes, which can be harmonized with all other things in the ontological unity of all things as expressions of the one Substance.

The more that one understands his ultimate relatedness to all things in the one Substance, the more he is made capable of truly knowing his own particular existence. In knowing his own existence truly he is, Spinoza contends, becoming conscious of his life for what it really is. This enables the person who knows through “intuition” to take pleasure in all things that are understood through this way of truest knowledge. Spinoza is thinking here, I believe, that as the person comes to realize that his own existence is not substantially distinct from all other things, he can embrace a new (and for Spinoza) more “blessed” sense of his own significance. Here we find the reason that Spinoza never speaks, to use Bennett’s characterization, “of having a *good* eternal part of the mind, but

rather of having a *large* one.”<sup>33</sup> Because he comes to see that he is but a Mode of Substance, the person, in Spinoza’s mind, begins to know himself in far “larger” terms than could ever have been possible so long as he was focused on the mere sensory awareness and passive emotions that accompanied his false beliefs about his place in the world.<sup>34</sup>

This “enlarging” of the mind with respect a mind understood as the mere idea of the body *qua* actually existing, can be considered to be the person’s realization of the meaning or significance of her own body “under the form of eternity.” This means, then, that a “large” mind is actually developed as the conscious part of the mind’s essence *qua* “idea” of the body comes to realize that the very body of which it is an idea is itself intricately united to all things in God or Nature. Hence, the mind’s essence as the “idea of the body” is not merely the “idea of an actually existing thing, and nothing else,” as Spinoza puts it in Book II, in the sense that the mind’s object of reference is only the individual extended Mode *qua* individual. And in proposition 11 of Book II, Spinoza in fact actually says only that the body is the *first thing (primum)* that constitutes the actual being of the human. This means that the actually existing body is, at least in some sense, the most basic object of the idea that constitutes the mind’s essence. In his translation of this passage, Shirley sticks in “basically” to do the job of *primum*. However, this may obscure the deep intention behind Spinoza’s qualification, namely, that true knowledge of

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<sup>33</sup> Bennett, 359.

<sup>34</sup> It is clear that Spinoza thinks that one must achieve this kind of knowledge by realizing its truth. He insists in Book II that the mind exercises no real judgment over ideas, it can only be presented with true ideas and when it sees them rightly will then know them as true and these ideas, then, will become the basis of what we call, although Spinoza does not use the word, “beliefs.”

the individuality of the body as the object of the mind knows this same body in a quite different way: not as an “actual being” but rather, in its very essence, a part of the eternal and necessarily infinite nature of God. And in so knowing, the mind in question is then a part of the eternal mind of God. Thus Spinoza’s doctrine of the eternity of the mind is rooted in his doctrine of the Oneness of Substance and its Modes. This is what the entirety of the *Ethics* labors to demonstrate.

By intuition, then, one becomes aware of this, and this awareness means that the mind’s domain is expanded. The mind discovers its eternal nature insofar as it properly conceives the object toward which it is “basically” oriented. No longer understanding this body as an individual entity who is acted upon by and acts upon an alien “other,” the body is now understood to be *one* with all other extended things. Hence, the mind, because it is “one and the same thing” as the body, namely the living organism that is simultaneously minded and embodied by the *conatus* that grants specificity to the organism, comes to understand the existence of which it is a part as one aspect of the whole of *Natura naturata*. And, of course, Spinoza’s concept that *natura naturata* is a manifestation of *Natura naturans* means that the understanding that is thus in the mind of the organism is able to see that the eternal nature of God is involved in its own being. So, the eternal part of the mind is that which is, from the very beginning of the duration of the organism, oriented toward the essence of the body under the aspect of eternity. This part, by the conscious use of reason by the truly reflective and understanding person, comes to be perceived to be the real nature of the person. Seeing that the life he has been living is *qua* mind essentially united to all other things, in the sense of the body’s eternal

essence being one with all other extended Modes of Substance, the person discovers his truest identity. Hence, beatitude follows.

It is not so much the case, then, that the mind survives the death of the particular body, in Spinoza's way of seeing this issue. Rather, the mind that is immortal is the mind that "in the light of eternity" has realized the person's awareness of his union with all things. Because that union is his essence, he really does not cease to exist, because *qua* extended Mode his existence was always only an "affection" of extended Substance. This realization means the mind is made "large" enough to embrace this identity. This explains the sense in which the mind can be eternal for Spinoza.

But what of personal identity in this doctrine of immortality? Is this a philosophical doctrine that has no real existential import for the interests of individuals? The answer to that, for Spinoza, must lie in how one understands the idea of one's own "history" *qua* the "one and the same thing that is expressed in two ways." Spinoza would argue, I think, that even the contingent history of an individual is part of the eternality of Substance. Here, Donagan argues in a way that corresponds to my own thinking about this matter:

We must remember that Spinoza did not think that our sense of self-identity, even in this life, depends on memory. A man knows his own identity to the extent that the primary constituent of his mind, his idea of his own body, is adequate. And, however inadequate it is, that idea is individual.

We can go further. A man's idea of the essence of his body changes during his life, and in that change there is loss as well as gain. However, God's idea of that essence, inasmuch as God constitutes the essence of that man's mind, is eternal and cannot change; hence it cannot be the idea which that man has of it at any given moment during his life. Can it be anything but the ordered totality of those ideas? If it cannot, it is reasonable to infer that Spinoza conceived the eternal self-knowledge of each man as being complete in a way in which his durational self-knowledge cannot be; for it is an idea of his body's essence through his

whole life. Yet that idea not only need not be a memory-image, it cannot be, because it cannot correspond to physical traces in the brain.

Eternal self-knowledge, while more complete than any durational self-knowledge, can contain no element that is not present in durational self-knowledge. . . That is why Spinoza thought it all-important to attain wisdom in this life. No wisdom and no virtue that a man attains in this life will be taken away from him; but neither will anything that he does not attain be added to him.<sup>35</sup>

The difference between my interpretation and Donagan's is just this. I believe that I can account for the process Spinoza allowed was involved in the immortality of the mind. Donagan's emphasis misses this. What I offer is a view of *conatus* as the organism's form that establishes the individual entity -- and the various Modes in which its existence is expressed -- as ultimately part of the whole of Nature and of God. And my interpretation accounts for how Spinoza's doctrine of eternity of the mind, at least in his own terms, does not necessarily transgress his doctrine that thought and extension always go together, and that a mind must always "accompany" a body in unity. On my interpretation, Spinoza simply believed that if one understands the nature of things, then the mind that understands the true nature of its body is the mental aspect of a human being who has intuited in a true and adequate way his unity with all things. This self-awareness, then, is part of the Mind of God, one could say. And as an individual realization of the nature of things it must always exist. The cessation of the body's duration is, therefore, a change *qua* Mode of extension into a different modification of the extended Substance. The mind that was associated with the body while it strove to maintain itself in existence is the mind that now knows that (and in a sense "all along")

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<sup>35</sup> Donagan, 257.

had this knowledge within itself) the body's existence and its striving were ultimately one with Nature and all other things.

### **Aquinas's views on incorruptibility and resurrection**

Aquinas's views on the question of post-mortem survival have some significant and intractable differences from Spinoza's. For instance, Aquinas speaks of the survival of the soul and not the mind. And Spinoza does not utilize the language of "subsistence" to describe the reality of the rational principle.<sup>36</sup> But the most significant point of divergence is that Aquinas's doctrine of the nature of the soul's survival is not one about eternity or immortality. He focuses, instead, upon the issue of the soul's "incorruptibility" and upon the Christian doctrine of the "resurrection of the body," as the way to understand the nature of the soul's inherent ability to survive the cessation of life in the body.

When Aquinas argues for the proposition that the rational soul survives the death of the body because its essence is incorruptible, he builds his demonstration on the foundational premise that "understanding" is an act that is so unique in the universe that it cannot be accounted for unless the rational soul is incorruptible. As the highest act that the soul brings to the life of the person, understanding must be conceived of as incapable of demise for three interrelated reasons.<sup>37</sup> First and most foundational of all, is the premise that the act of understanding is, by its very nature, absolutely different and,

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<sup>36</sup> However, by Donagan's interpretation, one could argue that the presence of the formal essence of the body as the eternal part of the mind that is present "in" the mind from the very beginning could be a type of "subsistence."

<sup>37</sup> The following analysis is a summary of Aquinas's thought based on his arguments in *Summa Contra Gentiles* mainly, supplemented by his arguments in *Summa Theologiae* I a, Q 75 & Q 89. The form of reference will, therefore, be to refer to the former as *CG* and the later merely by the standard reference that has been utilized in this dissertation, listing section, question, article, etc.

therefore, qualitatively distinct from any physical property (I a, Q 75, a 2 reply). As such, it cannot be accounted for by reference to any physical state of affairs. He says, “the *principle* of understanding . . . has its own activity in which body takes no intrinsic part.” Furthermore, since Aquinas believes that any specific act must be explained by reference to something that can be the agent of that act, he says in reference to the “principle of understanding: “Nothing can act of itself unless it subsists in its own right. For only [that which] actually exists acts, and its manner of acting follows its manner of being.” So, Aquinas argues that understanding is not identifiable with any physical property strictly speaking.

Second in the triad of reasons he gives for his views about the incorruptibility of the rational soul, Aquinas posits a premise that is very much like Spinoza’s view of *conatus* of the mind that seeks permanence. Aquinas argues that “man naturally craves after permanent continuance” (CG II, Q 79). Such a statement is more than a mere psychological assessment on his part. Rather, the argument he offers is founded on his belief that no “natural” condition can go unfulfilled unless something contrary to the natural orientation is introduced as a barrier to its *telos*. Aquinas thinks that being rational or having understanding is a principle of existence that is part of the ontological ground of existence. That is, for Aquinas, the mind of God, because it is one with the Divine essence in which all things participate, grants to the world not only intelligibility but the act of knowing it as intelligible. His claim that human beings are but the lowest type of rational beings in Reality points us to his view that humans actually participate in God’s rationality, although not in a univocal sense, but merely equivocally. Thus, any act



of understanding is, in some sense, to be identified with the foundational principle of God's own essence *qua* Divine Mind that has permanence.

“Understanding” is, in Aquinas’s view, a grasp of the *truth* about Reality. All things have an inner orientation to continue in existence and to flourish in their natures, but the nature of the human intellect is a special case, he contends. “While existence is desired by all, man by his understanding apprehends existence, not in the present moment only, as dumb animals do, but [understands the act of existence of things] absolutely.” Because the act of understanding participates in God’s own Being in an equivocal yet real way, a way that includes the absolute nature of *existence* itself, then a true intellectual grasp of Reality cannot be conceived of as simply being the product of our own ideas or mental constructs. When Aquinas speaks of our knowledge of things, he is very emphatic that the human mind not only knows in a sensory way, but knows “existence” absolutely. On the one hand, what Aquinas means by this is that when we know some thing to be *what* it is, we know first of all *that* it is, in some sense. This is more than a kind of theory of intentionality regarding ideas. It suggests that the first thing that we encounter in our knowing is the concreteness of a thing that exists. Only by way of reflection and abstraction do we come to know, according to Aquinas, what a thing is. On the other hand, by this argument Aquinas means us to think of essences as being radically dependent upon existence.<sup>38</sup> However, the fact of the existence of contingent beings requires, Aquinas argues, some prior principle to explain the fact of their finite,

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<sup>38</sup> The discussion of this distinction is found in chapter three of this dissertation.

specific existence. Every existent thing's existence, therefore, is explained, in Aquinas's view, by the doctrine of participation (which was discussed in chapter three).

When one applies this notion of existence as participation in God's own being to the act of knowing itself, then we are able to see how Aquinas conceives of knowledge as itself a participation in that which has permanence. When we know both *that* a thing exists as well as knowing *what* it is that exists, the very existence of such *knowledge* is only comprehensible as an act that participates in the divine knowledge that God has of things. Hence, the act of knowing is, itself, a part of God's own essence, even if a particular finite act is only equivocally an act that participates in God's action. The existent realities that are known only exist via participation in God's act of Being, and the act of knowing those existent realities also "exists" only as participative acts. On the basis of this idea of our dependence upon and participation in God's act of Being Aquinas asserts that "[Since man can know the truth about things], man attains to permanence on the part of his soul, whereby he apprehends existence absolute and for all time."<sup>39</sup> The capacity to *understand* existence itself entails, in Aquinas's analysis, that the rational soul must share in something of the absoluteness of existence; and that absoluteness of existence is rooted in the very essence of God, in which (as we saw earlier) the soul participates. If the rational soul is in its essence something that partakes of existence in some absolute way, then it cannot, Aquinas reasons, be corruptible and its

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<sup>39</sup> This way of casting his argument assumes what was argued above, i.e. that Thought is a fundamental aspect of Reality or Nature. Of course, an empiricist like Hume could argue that consciousness is indeed a fundamental aspect of Reality, but deny that this entails that *knowing the truth* about the way things really are is an attendant fundamental aspect of reality, as well. However, here we are onto a question of such import that we cannot, in the present context, defend Thomas's (or Spinoza's) epistemological doctrine. However, it could be noted that an empiricist doctrine misses the deep intentionality involved in ideas and that ideas are always *ideas about* something. This, at least, allows for the possibility that our ideas are "in touch" or place us "in touch" with the world in itself.

natural striving (craving) is not to be thwarted. To this extent, then, “permanence” is an intrinsic property of the *anima intellectiva* in a human being’s particular acts of understanding.

Related to this perspective is the third in Aquinas’s triad of reasons for the incorruptibility of the soul. It asserts that the non-existence or cessation in existence of any thing, be it a primary substance or a subsistent principle, can only result from a contrary state of affairs that would exclude the existence of that thing. His position about the cessation of existence being caused by something external is consonant with Spinoza’s Proposition Four in the third Book of the *Ethics*.<sup>40</sup> But Aquinas applies this principle to the soul explicitly. In the *Summa*, Aquinas expresses this proposition as follows: “There can be no contrariety in the intellectual soul, for it receives in the manner of its own being, and there one thing does not push out another. There even our ideas of contraries are not themselves contrary, since one habit of knowledge holds them together in relationship.”<sup>41</sup> Since there is no *contrary* state (nor could there be) that the soul could undergo *qua* principle of understanding, there is no external contrary that could explain how the act of understanding that the rational soul brings to the human being’s existence might cease to exist. Hence, the soul, lacking any contrary state of affairs that could negate its existence, will continue in existence.

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<sup>40</sup> “No thing can be destroyed except by an external cause. Proof: This proposition is self-evident, for the definition of anything affirms, and does not negate, the thing’s essence: that is, it posits, and does not annul, the thing’s essence. So as long as we are attending only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we can find nothing in it which can destroy it.”

<sup>41</sup> *Habitus*, which means for Aquinas something like a condition of activity that is either given or acquired through practice. This condition of acting is an exercise of agency that enables a faculty to orient itself to its proper object in a better manner.(more appropriate way, or a way more adequate to what it truly is).

Unlike other forms, whose essence is *only* to inform matter, and therefore cannot be thought of as having its own *esse* in any sense, the rational soul is possessed of a power or property (understanding and reason) that is distinct from its relationship to the matter that it informs. Unlike other forms that cease to exist when the material object that is formed disintegrates, the highest and most proper power of the rational soul is not in any way dependent upon the material object it forms. Hence, *qua* form, the rational soul must be understood as subsisting apart from the matter it informs, because its specific and proper essence is to be the cause of knowledge in the rational animal – a human person.

That act of being, in which it [the soul] itself subsists, the soul communicates to the physical matter; this matter and the intellectual soul *form a unity* such that the act of being of the compound whole is the soul's act of being. This does not happen in other forms which are non-subsistent. And for the reason the human soul continues in its act of being when the body is destroyed, whereas other souls do not [I a, Q 76, a 1, ad 5].<sup>42</sup>

The human soul informs a material organism that is essentially rational. Hence, Aquinas, as has been stated several times in this dissertation, sees reason or understanding as the form of the rational *animal*. Having the capacity for mind is the definition of human life. This human soul is what Aquinas calls an “actuality,” however. It grants this capacity because of the informing organization it grants to the body, but nothing besides the soul's own act of being (apart from the participation in the Being of God) accounts for the existence of the soul-form *qua* informing principle:

“. . . whatever belongs to a thing *per se* cannot be separated from it. And to form as actuality being belongs *per se*. Matter acquires actual existence precisely as acquiring a form, and its ceasing to be comes from its losing a form. But for a

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<sup>42</sup> My emphasis

form to be separated from itself is impossible. So, too, for a subsisting form to cease to be.” (I a, Q 75, a 6, reply).

But the act of having true knowledge cannot, in Aquinas’s view (or Spinoza’s for that matter), be an act that is, in the final analysis, something that depends upon a physical process. He sees a logic to the world in the very fact that it is intelligible. He thinks of ideas as having an intentionality to them that implies a reference beyond their own existence *qua* ideas. This intelligibility and intentionality is the result, he argues, of the world being a reality that participates ontologically in God’s own act of Being; and since God’s act of Being is one with God’s mind, therefore, true knowledge allows the knower to be in touch with, at least epistemologically, that which is eternal and incorruptible. The capacity to do this could not be, in Aquinas’s mind, a merely physical act, or even an epiphenomenal act that is dependent upon a set of material conditions. In contemporary terms, we can express what there was (and is) about materialistic explanations of the intellect that Aquinas found problematic. He argues that in the act of understanding something we come to understand a feature of the thing known by forming what we might call a “concept.” Such concepts are, for Aquinas, the human intellect’s engagement with universals. There is a process that takes place, Aquinas argues, whereby through a process of reasoning (the active intellect), a person abstracts from the particulars of experience. However, the knowledge that the active intellect attains is always “knower-specific,” that is, the active intellect of each person knows by a unique act of understanding. Aquinas would not allow his readers to think of the active intellect

in each individual person as the same intellect at work, even if each person's intellect does participate in the divine mind.<sup>43</sup>

Since each individual person is essentially an entity that is rational and biological, the knowledge that each person achieves is the product of the engagement of the whole person. However, any ideas that we have about reality, and especially true knowledge, cannot be accounted for or described in physicalist terms. There is something about the act of knowing that is inherently non-physical. Understanding is, he argues, must be conceived of as resulting from an "act of being" that is non-material from the start, in which nothing physical. He describes this in the *Summa*.

"The *principle* of the act of understanding, which is called the soul of man, must of necessity be some kind of incorporeal and subsistent principle. For it is obvious that man's understanding enables him to know the natures of all bodily things. But, what can in this way take in things must have nothing of their nature in its own, for the form that was in it by nature would obstruct the knowledge of anything else . . . if the intellectual *principle* had in it the physical nature of any bodily thing, it would be unable to know all bodies . . . The *principle* of understanding, therefore, which is called mind or intellect, has its own activity in which body takes no intrinsic part.

Read in contemporary terms, we can, I think, extrapolate an interpretation of how Aquinas's argument could engage current discussion about the nature of acts of cognition. He is saying that it is impossible to conceive of how understanding could be attained if we try to attribute it to be the "by-product" of any kind of physical process. Physical processes qualify as "the physical nature of any bodily thing." As such they

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<sup>43</sup> This finely sliced reasoning is what separates Aquinas from Avicenna on the question of whether or not there is one mind that is at work in all people. Aquinas believes that human knowing participates in God's power of knowing, but each person has his own power of knowing, but it is a participated power. Here again, I see a parallel with Spinoza's insistence in Book II that all Modes of Thought are Modes of God *qua* Thinking Substance, but the things that are "in the mind of God" in these Modes of Thought are not there under consideration of God *qua* Substance, but are, rather, in God insofar as these finite Modes of Thought are particular and limited by that particularity.

have a deterministic nature; what he calls “the physical nature of [a] bodily thing.” But he wants to argue that knowledge is really rational *insight*, as he understands it. Hence, if it is thought of as depending upon any physical process, it must be conceived of as an act that operates according to physical laws or properties. Since the dominant view of the workings of the physical universe in modern science are deterministic, then, Thomas would argue, we have lost any reason for thinking of our understanding as being an activity that is engaged in logical analysis and having a claim to truthfulness. Rather, since such acts would be *deterministically* produced by physical laws, they would be nothing more than physical events. They can be granted no status as rational insight or “knowledge,” at least insofar as we traditionally want to refer to knowledge as realizing something that is *true*.<sup>44</sup> On the physicalist view, according to Aquinas, the “judgments” or “thoughts” cannot be regarded as *either true or false*. If all that is involved in what we call knowledge is a physical process (brain function, considered as purely physical interactions) that operates on the basis of strict or even non-strict causal laws, then we must redefine radically what we mean by knowledge. “Thought” is not, on this materialistic view, a process that we could judge or define according to any principles of logic. Therefore, it can be judged neither true *or* false.

If understanding is supposed to be exclusively and reductively a function of the brain’s electro-chemical activity, then it is being supposed that, at least in principle, some of the brain’s electro-chemical activity might be “true.” However, it would not be question-begging to suggest that if such a bald assertion is the case, then some view must

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<sup>44</sup> See above in chapter four, 179, n 73.

be offered as to what it *is* for an electro-chemical process to be true. That view itself must be able to stand up in the face of what we *ordinarily* mean by a *judgment* being true. Without this we find ourselves in an incoherent position. In any case, for Aquinas at least, but as it also seems to me more generally, all our discourse from science to ordinary language operates on the assumption that “being true” - even where the supposed truths in question are supposed to be truths *about* physical processes taking place in brains - is not definable in terms of physical processes taking place in brains. The rational processes of the mind can arguably be regarded as rooted in something other than physical laws and in fact as rooted in part of that (the very form) which structures the brain so as to be amenable to rational processes in the first place.<sup>45</sup> This is, at least, the way I believe that Aquinas would pose the matter in contemporary terms.

This ambiguity of the term ‘soul’ is what informs Aquinas’s contention that while the rational soul does subsist apart from the body *qua* informing principle, it nonetheless cannot be said, as the form of the human body, to *exist* in the most precise sense. Primary beings or substances are what really *exist* most fundamentally. However, as the *information* that gives form to an individual human being/substance, the soul must have

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<sup>45</sup> If one were to suggest that a computer functions on strict laws of physics in a deterministic fashion to arrive at truthfulness, therefore the critique being suggested fails, one could observe that a computer does nothing apart from a “software” program that establishes the principles upon which the computer will function. Hence, we can ask, perhaps, how the programming interfaces with the hardware, but we cannot deny that the program establishes the possibilities of operation for the computer. And the program plus the software is only an extension of the rationality of its designers and those who use them. As Hasker says, “it is no more an independent source of rational thought than a television set is an independent source of news and entertainment” (Hasker, 49). This would strongly suggest that the materialistic model, which is implicitly rejected in Aquinas’s doctrine of the intellectual soul as “something” that performs non-physical operations, still does not account for insight *qua* insight. Something else must account for how we can speak of our thoughts as rational, unless we want to give up altogether the idea that we actually do think. It is this something that Aquinas is describing in his doctrine of the *anima intellective*.



some kind of reality. If the “soul” of an individual is analogous to information upon which the concrete, and not just possible, existence of the individual is dependent (as would seem to be the case, as well, with the relation between the encoded information of DNA and individual existence) then that information is, at least, something. It is not an entity in the strictest sense of the word. But it does have a reality that is not dependent upon the embodied being that is given form and function by this information. So, at the very least, the information that grants form (the soul) is logically prior. By the doctrine of participation Aquinas believed that this informing soul is real even prior to the existence of the rational animal, because to be the essence of something *qua* form is to be closely associated (as it was in Aristotle and Plato) with the concept of an eternally subsisting idea. (Of course, to be eternally subsisting does not entail the Spinozistic notion of necessary existence, for Aquinas.) However, Aquinas, because of his doctrine of God as the Pure Act of Being in which all other things exist by participation, can posit that the rational soul *qua* form has existence not just in the mind of God as an eternally subsistent “idea,” but as an expression of an essence which God knows not only as a possible existent, but as an actuality. This is what Aquinas means when he says that the rational soul “subsists.” *Qua* information that gives specific organization to certain “designated matter,”<sup>46</sup> the form is real and does not depend for its reality upon the particular entity that is so informed and organized.

In this sense, then, Aquinas will say that the rational soul is a subsistent reality, i.e., while it does not exist as a particular “thing,” it is nonetheless real in and of itself *qua*

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. chapter 3

organizing or informing principle. Indeed, the idea of the human soul-form *qua* information implies, by Aquinas's logic, that this form itself *participates* in the inherent intelligibility of the universe. Thomistically speaking, the intelligibility of the *material* universe (i.e. Thought) requires that another complementary principle exist as well -- what we could call the principle of knowing-the-intelligible (i.e. Thinking). Both of these are part of the same Reality that exists apart from and potentially *in* the rational soul when it acts through the body that it informs. However, the rational soul alone brings to the entity that is formed by it a capacity for the act of knowing-the-intelligible. And as we have said, he contends that this act is not in any way a physical act, even if it involves an essentially physical being and that being's physical make up.

. . . we must observe that the nobler a form is, the more it rises above corporeal matter, the less it is merged in matter, and the more it excels matter by its power and its operation; hence we find that the form of a mixed body has another operation not caused by its elemental qualities. And the higher we advance in the nobility of forms, the more we find that the power of the form excels the elementary matter; as the vegetative soul excels the form of the metal, and the sensitive soul excels the vegetative soul. Now the human soul is the highest and noblest of forms. Wherefore it excels corporeal matter in its power by the fact that it has an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever. This power is called the intellect. (I a, Q 76, a 1, reply)

Aquinas's way of expressing the nature of the soul in the above passage brings us to the second sense in which the concept of the rational soul as the form of the human being operates in Aquinas's metaphysics. Strictly speaking, the power called "intellect" that he mentions above is *in* the soul, but is not a power that the soul exercises *qua* form. Rather, intellect, in this sense, is only a principle that the soul *qua* form produces in the entity it informs. In other words, it is not an act of understanding or even a power that the soul could perform "before" its inherence in matter. It is analogous to the part of the

genetic information of DNA that organizes a human body so as to be apt for rational thought. In the *Summa* (I a, Q 79, a 1, ad 1) Aquinas is clear that intellect or the act of understanding is a power of the soul and not its essence. By “power” we must understand Aquinas to mean -- if we are going to make sense of his other statements about soul-body union -- it is a power that the rational soul brings to the person’s existence as a bodily organism. Because it is capable of producing this kind of effect in a human being, the soul is sometimes referred to as the intellect by Aquinas. But this is merely a kind of short-hand designation, utilized because the intellect marks the “highest power” that the rational soul can produce in a human person.

Because the rational soul is the source that enables understanding/rationality -- the capacity for discursive thought -- in a human being, Aquinas argues that the nature of this kind of soul is “incorruptible.” As the source of the act of understanding, this soul will in some sense continue to exist, even when the body ceases to live, because it in some sense subsisted prior to the existence of the body that it formed into a particular human person on this occasion. Just as the material stuff of the body existed prior to being that body, the organizational information that shaped the body is in some way also antecedent.

For Aquinas, these principles not only reflect the way that God has created the world, but they also reflect that the nature of the Creation in question must *participate* in his own Being as Creator.<sup>47</sup> The soul thus makes intellect possible as an aspect of the

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<sup>47</sup> Recall that Aquinas is insistent that in God there is no distinction between essence and existence and that God is utterly simple. So, God’s act of knowing, act of creating, act of willing, act of being knowable are, in some way, all one and the same in God, while being rightly differentiated by our intellects. There is not a conflation going on in Aquinas’s mind here, rather a belief that *qua* unbounded and eternal God is beyond any full comprehension by the human mind, while being, nonetheless, knowable and predicable. This is because of the doctrine of the analogy of Being that Aquinas insists upon.

human person in Aquinas's metaphysical scheme, insofar as it is itself a participation in the active intellect that is a feature of the universe's own existence.<sup>48</sup> Such rationality is the highest power that, *qua* organizing information, the rational soul brings to human beings. In I a, Q 79, reply, Aquinas offers the following:

For what is such by participation, and what is mobile, and what is imperfect always requires the pre-existence of something essentially such, immovable and perfect. Now the human soul is called intellectual by reason of a participation in intellectual power; a sign of which is that it is not wholly intellectual but only in part. Moreover it reaches to the understanding of truth by arguing, with a certain amount of reasoning and movement. Again it has an imperfect understanding; both because it does not understand everything, and because, in those things which it does understand, it passes from potentiality to act. Therefore there must needs be some higher intellect by which the soul is helped to understand.

Wherefore we must say that *in the soul is some power derived from a higher intellect*, whereby it is able to light up the phantasms. And we know this by experience, since we perceive that we abstract universal forms from their particular conditions, which is to make them actually intelligible. Now no action belongs to anything except through some principle formally inherent therein; as we have said above of the passive intellect. Therefore the power which is the principle of this action must be something in the soul. For this reason Aristotle (De Anima iii, 5) compared the active intellect to light, which is something received into the air: while Plato compared the separate intellect impressing the soul to the sun, as Themistius says in his commentary on De Anima iii. But the separate intellect, according to the teaching of our faith, *is God Himself*, Who is the soul's Creator, and only beatitude; as will be shown later on (90, 3; I-II, 3, 7). Wherefore the human soul derives its intellectual light from Him, according to Ps. 4:7, "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.

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<sup>48</sup> In the following quote Aquinas's argument is not only to prove that the intellect participates in God's own being *qua* intellect, but to insist, against the Averroists, that each human soul has in it its own particular and specific act of participation in the active intellect, not a kind of general kind of partaking of it. Hence, he says: "no action belongs to anything except through some principle *formally inherent therein*; as we have said above of the passive intellect (76, 1). Therefore the power which is the principle of this action must be *something in the soul*." One will have to recall, however, Aquinas's insistence that God is his own essence and his own existence in order to understand how Aquinas argues that nothing else can be a part of God's essence. God is Being and the act of being is God's essence philosophically stated, but only one act of Being can be the source of all things who do not have existence as a part of the definition of their essence. This is the basis of Aquinas's views about transcendence.

While it is the case, for Aquinas, that the soul is possessed of a “power” which is the power to enable rationality and understanding in those beings informed by this form, and furthermore the case that the intellectual acts of which the beings are capable are not “caused” by or emergent from bodily states, we must note that neither is the power of the soul self-explanatory or self-instantiating. The rational soul’s existence in the first place is only possible because, as an individuated act of understanding, it participates in God’s own Being. The life of a human being, therefore, *qua* “rational animal,” participates in God’s Being, and in the act of understanding it is a type of analogue of God’s own knowing. (Of course, for Aquinas, “participation” is a concept that can be applied either univocally or analogously.) In the *Summa* I a, Q 18, a 4, ad 1, where he is answering the question of whether all things are “in” God, he says:

In another sense things are said to be in God, as in Him who knows them, in which sense they are in God through their proper ideas, which in God are not distinct from the divine essence. Hence things as they are in God are the divine essence. And since the divine essence is life and not movement, it follows that things existing in God in this manner are not movement, but life.

Each individual act of being that we call “knowledge” or “understanding” exists as an analogue to God’s act of Being. This implies that, for Aquinas, the activity of knowing is to be understood (as it was later by Spinoza) as a principle (or an Attribute, Spinozistically speaking) that is part of Reality *per se*. Hence, the form of knowing, if it informs something so as to make it a true knower, must subsist in itself apart from doing so. This is because moments of individual knowledge exist as such only because they *participate* in the intellectual activity of God’s power of knowing; this is the way that a

human being *qua* knower (but not as a physical entity) participates in God's act of Being.<sup>49</sup>

The incorruptibility of the rational soul is, as Aquinas sees it, ultimately not, strictly speaking, incorruptibility of the rational soul *qua* form, although the “information” that is the *forma intellectiva* brought by that form is *qua* information not corruptible, because it is utterly non-material. (It is no more corruptible than the information  $2 + 2 = 4$ .) Rather, the rational soul's activity in the life of a person who exercises the non-corporeal act of understanding or knowing is what Aquinas wants to demonstrate is capable of “permanence” apart from the body. But what Aquinas *the philosopher* had to account for, within the confines of his own metaphysics, was how the person who is, by definition, a “rational animal” could exercise the power of understanding, if indeed it is conceivable, apart from being embodied. Without such an explanation, then his theological belief that there is “personal” survival past bodily life is philosophically untenable. He puts the arguments against the possibility of such survival in strong terms in objections 1 – 3 in I a, Q 89, a 1:

The first point [against the idea that the rational soul could continue to exercise knowledge after death]:

1. It would seem that the separated soul cannot understand anything at all. For Aristotle says that the *intellectual apprehension is destroyed through the decay of some inward part*. But all the inward parts of man are destroyed in death. Therefore understanding itself is also destroyed.

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<sup>49</sup> It would be an interesting area of inquiry for a theistic philosopher to consider how the concept of God's omniscience relates to the question of individual knowledge. If God exists and is in fact omniscient, then God would have to know not only what I know, but would have to know it, in some sense, as I know it and would have to know it as adequate or inadequate and know every person's perspective and every possible person's perspective, as well as having *sub specie aeternitatis* a knowledge of the whole and more than the whole.

2. In death the senses and the imagination are totally destroyed . . . . Therefore the soul, after death, understands nothing
  
3. Again, if the separated soul understands anything, it must do so by means of species. But it does not understand by means of innate species [in the mind], since it is, from the beginning, like *a writing tablet on which as yet nothing is written* [Aristotle, *De anima* III, 4. 429b29. Nor yet by species it abstracts from things because it has no organs of sense and imagination by means of which species are abstracted from things. Nor, again, by species previously abstracted and retained in the soul, for in this case the soul of a child would understand nothing after death. Nor, finally, by species which come from God, for this would not be the natural knowledge we are talking about, but a gift of grace. Therefore the soul, when separated from the body understands nothing.

Understanding Aquinas's response to such objections requires us to consider a few issues that relate to his view of the human person and the capacity for thought and self-consciousness that is essential to a human being's activity *qua* rational animal. First is his insistence that the state of separation that his metaphysics allows for is *praeter naturam*, i.e. it is outside the nature of the human soul -- one might even call it unnatural. He describes the state of human existence he envisions: "To understand by turning to sense images is as *natural* to the soul as being joined to the body, whereas to be separated from the body is *off-beat* for its nature [*praeter naturam*], and so likewise is understanding without turning to sense images. The soul is joined to the body in order to be and act in accordance with its nature" (I a, Q 89, a 1, reply). This entails that, for Aquinas, the rational soul, when considered as separated from the body, cannot be thought of in the most precise or fullest sense as a human person. Since the essence of a human being involves, as we established in chapter four, both matter and soul, the

survival that Aquinas describes is truly *praeter naturam*.<sup>50</sup> As if this were not a large enough hurdle, however, Aquinas must also, by his own definition, explain how, since it is the person who knows and not the soul, the soul can survive the demise of the bodily aspect of the person precisely as any sort of *knower*.

In order to demonstrate that these difficulties need not be insuperable, Aquinas offers an analogy:

The nature of a light body does not change, whether it is in its proper place (which is natural to it) or whether it is outside its proper place (which is besides its nature). Thus to the soul according to its mode of being when united with the body belongs a mode of understanding which turns to the sense images found in corporeal organs, whereas when separated from the body its mode of understanding, as in other immaterial substances, is to turn to things that are purely intelligible.

Such an analogy, based as it is on the medieval physics of his time, is perhaps not very helpful for us at face value, even if Aquinas and some of his readers at the time found it persuasive. But perhaps we can decipher his meaning. He is trying to describe the true nature of the soul as a cause of the acts of understanding and reasoning that takes place in the human knower. The nature of the rational soul *qua* informing principle is to produce in a human being just this kind of activity. So the soul's nature, when we think of its subsistence as an informing intellectual principle, is to "communicate" to the human person the power to know. I take it that he means by this that the information the soul "communicates" to the matter of the body results in a physical being capable of acts of rationality that are distinct from the physical properties that make him a biological creature. This activity of "informing" is the soul's true nature. Because the soul *qua*

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<sup>50</sup> See above, 166f, especially note 57.



informing principle establishes in the biological being the power to *know*, the being, insofar as we are speaking of the power to know, evinces a participation in the fundamental intelligibility of the universe that is produced by God's own act of knowing. Even though the human intellect is the "lowest of all intellectual substances," as Aquinas puts it, its "power of intelligence comes from the influence of divine light." The person who knows, through the power that the rational soul makes possible out of its essence, therefore, participates (analogously, not univocally) in God's knowing.<sup>51</sup>

The nature of our way of knowing as human beings is that of discursive knowledge that develops from sensory engagement with the world and abstraction from particulars in coming to understand the nature of Reality. The soul, subsequent to the formation of the human person *qua* knowing agent when the soul informs matter, becomes something that is an entity in itself, whereas the soul "prior" to giving actual form to a living entity must be, Aquinas argues, information. A person now in the "union" of soul and informed body is considered to have become something over and above the soul *qua* form that has enabled the existence of a being capable of acts of rational insight. In the human person, the rational soul takes on a new meaning logically and a new existence ontologically. The exercise of the potential for consciousness and rationality was, prior to the union of the soul and the body, only an inherent in the informing nature of the soul, as was therefore only a possibility for an entity informed by the *anima intellectiva*. Now in the union, however, this potential becomes a real property

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<sup>51</sup> Again this distinction that Aquinas makes between participation analogously and univocally has a possible parallel in Spinoza. He insists that *qua* Modes of Thought, the ideas that a Mode has in God, not insofar as God is thought of in his essence, but only insofar as that Mode is a *finite* Mode of Thought, hence partaking of Substance for its existence, but distinct from Substance as an individual and finite and limited instance of Thought.

of the human person. The rational soul *qua* form has communicated its “highest power” (the potential for rationality) to the human person. Because this highest power defines the particular kind of soul that informs a human being, then the term “soul” can begin to function in ordinary language as a quasi synonym for the person who understands and learns. But a person is more than the soul, not less. The equivocality of this usage of the term “soul” is rooted in the fact that it is actually the person, produced when the soul “communicates” its essence to the matter of the body, who is most precisely said to know (as well as to act.) But the soul is the source of this possibility. Hence, in Aquinas’s view, the knowing person is what the soul becomes. Personal experiences and insights into the nature of the world and into the existence of God become part of the soul’s nature, because the soul’s informing potential is now active.

He argues, as was discussed above, that the intellect which the soul makes possible in the human person is, following the concrete existence of a human being that results from the soul-body union, absolutely immaterial in its essence. If that is the case, then (as he puts it in I a Q 89, a 5, reply):

But just as acts of the intellect are *principally and formally* seated in the intellect itself, but materially and in the manner of a disposition in the lower faculties [capacity for sensory awareness], so also must the same be said of habitual dispositions [our acquired understanding and rational processes]. Therefore as to man’s present knowledge, the part that is in the lower faculties will not remain in the separated soul, but what is in the intellect will necessarily remain. For as Aristotle says, a form [the rational soul] can be destroyed in two ways, first, in itself, when it is destroyed by its contrary, e.g., heat by cold; second incidentally, that is, by the destruction of its subject. Now it is obvious that demonstrative knowledge in the human intellect cannot be destroyed by the destruction of its subject, because, as shown before [I a, Q 75, a 6], the intellect is immortal. . . .

Aquinas here expresses what was described in the discussion preceding the above quote. The rational soul gives rise to an entity who, being capable of knowledge,

acquires understanding and insight that once acquired become part of the essence of the person's intellect. Because this soul must be understood to have a subsistence of its own that is logically prior to the person's actual existence, Aquinas contends that the subsequent thoughts, experiences, and insights that become a part of the soul-enabled person continue to exist. This is because, as intellectual acts, they have become part of the essence of an immaterial, and therefore incorruptible, principle that itself participates in the very intelligibility of the universe that is rooted in God's own act of knowing. Thus the particularity of each human being does not cease to exist, he thinks, even though the "separated soul" is not strictly speaking the full person. Cessation of existence is, Aquinas thinks, impossible because even the particularity of perspective that each person *qua* intellect attains and entertains is part of the knowledge that is maintained in the eternal intellect of God. And since the soul *qua* form participated in God's own Being *qua* understanding, and since God's power of Thought is an inherent aspect of the universe, then personal knowledge, and even personal identity, become part of the universe of knowledge. So, the perspectival knowledge, the character that is shaped in the acquisition of that knowledge and holds it, and which has become a part of the soul in concrete existence, cannot be lost, because the perspectival knowledge though acquired in relation to the body never depended upon the body.

As I indicated at the beginning of this section, Aquinas did not so much attempt to argue philosophically for the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Rather, his focus was upon the closely related, but distinct, notion of its incorruptibility. His focus was upon incorruptibility, rather than immortality, due to the role he played as a Christian theologian. As a philosopher he did not argue for immortality, because as a theologian he

embraced and argumentatively supported the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.<sup>52</sup> He thought of this doctrine as not, unlike his argument for the incorruptibility of the soul, open to philosophical demonstration *per se*. (Or as he would put it, it was not open to “natural philosophy.”) It is, rather, an article of faith. So I will not go to great lengths discussing it for our purposes. However, it should be noted that he thought this doctrine was completely consistent with his demonstration of the soul’s incorruptibility and his demonstration that the rational soul is the form of the body.

We can also note that in the supplement to the *Summa’s tertia pars*, he contends that the issue of how personal identity is maintained, if there is a resurrection, implies that a “new” body is going to be part of continuing personal identity. Seizing the authority of Aristotle in III supp. Q 80 a 1, reply, Thomas argues that the soul in relation to the body is not only the formal cause of the body’s existence but is, as well, the efficient cause of its existence.<sup>53</sup> He argues, in good Aristotelian fashion, from the example of a craftsman or artist, and describes the soul as analogous to the “art” by which an artifact or masterpiece is made. Just as everything that appears in the work of art is contained implicitly (but without explicit expression) in the “art” that guides the artist, so it is the case with the soul in relation to the body. Whatever was in the body prior to its death was (and is) contained, in a way, implicitly in the soul. What follows then is that, at the resurrection, the body will not rise again except according to the

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<sup>52</sup> This doctrine is most clearly spelled out in the Bible in I Corinthians chapter fifteen. The doctrine of an intermediate state of the soul “awaiting” resurrection is one that Aquinas inherited from Christian teaching and it is found throughout the New Testament. For a good treatment of these ideas, see John Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>53</sup> Aquinas references Aristotle in *De Anima* ii, 4.

relation it bears to the rational soul, whose existence has been maintained in the Being of God *qua* an immaterial intellectual principle that participates in God's Being *qua* intellect. Since the rational soul, in this state of union with God, has been "perfected," it follows that any person who by faith has been in union with God, must rise again perfected. This is because, as Aquinas puts it, he is *thereby* repaired in order that he may obtain his ultimate perfection.<sup>54</sup>

It is not my intention to defend this position, any more than I have wanted to "defend" Spinoza's or Aquinas's positions on immortality or incorruptibility. Rather, my intention has been to show, in relation to his belief in the resurrection, what I wanted to show in my presentation of both Spinoza's and Aquinas's views of the mind and soul, namely, that this doctrine is, at least, reconcilable with the larger scheme of his metaphysics. And in the final analysis, perhaps a coherence theory of truthfulness is the best we can ask of any system, given the way that competing presuppositions establish for each of us distinct starting points that lead to (sometimes radically) divergent philosophical commitments.

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<sup>54</sup> In the *Summa* III Supp, Q 79, a 2, Aquinas deals with the question of whether or not the self-same man will rise again. His argument there merely insists that it must be the self-same man that rises, but does not provide an argument for how this could be the case. It could well be that my reading of him as holding that all that is true of the person in life becomes part of the rational soul that is incorruptible could have provided him with the "explanation" that he would need. If the experiences and the history of the person are part of the "knowledge" that is maintained in the sum of all knowable things in God's intellect, and the soul continues to be a kind of information, even in the post-mortem condition of separation from the body, then once united with matter again, not only does the "same" body appear, but the same person, because the informing soul is not distinct from the history of the person that it originally informed and will (according to Aquinas) inform again. I do not think that this way of stating the matter will convince those who are not predisposed to believe in the resurrection. Indeed, it probably could not, nor should (if faith is the issue). But, it might, at least, tie up for a Thomist a dangling existential issue regarding personal identity missing in Aquinas's treatment in the *Summa*.

## **Implications for contemporary philosophy of Mind**

The premise of this dissertation has been that Spinoza and Aquinas held theories about the relationship between mind and body that are quite similar in very important ways. That is what I have been endeavoring to unpack in the preceding chapters, even as I have argued less directly that their perspective(s) are coherent and should be taken seriously, not just for comparative studies in the history of philosophy, but as potential dialogue partners in contemporary discussions of this perennially difficult issue. Spinoza and Aquinas should not be considered members, to borrow Della Rocca's description of Spinoza, of "the illustrious company of those who have failed to solve the mind-body problem."<sup>55</sup> I think, instead, that Spinoza, as well as Aquinas, actually avoid the mind-body problem in its typical form, because they push the issue back to an even more fundamental point of philosophical exploration – the very nature of the soul as a form or *conatus*. So, in the closing few pages of this dissertation I want to suggest some helpful ways in which we might perhaps draw upon their metaphysical conclusions to develop a different angle of vision for analyzing the very nature of the "problem."

Hillary Putnam's claim that contemporary philosophy of mind is "methodologically Cartesian" strikes me as essentially on target. I say this because present-day approaches to the knowledge of ourselves as human beings (or so it seems to me) tend to divide the discussants into two distinct epistemological camps. On the one hand, the natural sciences attempt to describe human existence empirically and, therefore, purely in terms of physical laws. On the other hand, philosophy of mind analyzes the

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<sup>55</sup> See above 245.

“mind” nonempirically and philosophically. In such an epistemological perspective we are left with a kind of antinomy that, all attempts to dissuade aside, still views the relationship between the human being as described by science and the “mind” as analyzed philosophically as a problem to be solved. Further exacerbating the contemporary dialogue, I think, is the quite evident tendency to assume that the epistemological approach of science is what is to establish the notion of what is ontologically “natural” in the first place. This, of course, then suggests that any attempt to posit some principle that is not an empirically analyzable property is illicitly importing something “non-natural,” or even worse “super-natural.”

What we are left with, I think, is a methodological dualism that does not envelop the whole of human life empirically, for either we have to see our existence as utterly mysterious or we have to deny what is most immediately obvious to us in our own lived experience, i.e. that we actually do live “minded” single lives that are just as truly “mental,” in some non-material sense, as they are physical. Perhaps we might need to deny, someday, that our day-to-day experiences of having *insight*, being *motivated*, or making a *decision*, or even experiencing *love*, are nothing in themselves. But until we do, we should not! Unless we are willing to exclude these experiences, which seem to be intrinsic properties of some aspect of our actual lives *qua* human, from the category of real things, then we must learn how to analyze them carefully as *real*. But, in taking seriously their existence as aspects of reality, and not simply something that is epiphenomenal, we need to avoid, as well, any theory that fails to account for the phenomenon that is becoming more and more obvious in brain research, namely, that our

mental states are attendant, in some parallel fashion, upon changes in electro-chemical structure and synaptic function.

What must be avoided is the temptation to think that we are only left with one of two disparate conclusions. We need not, in the first instance, think of “mind” as some property that tacks an additional level of reality onto the organic existence we share with animals. The problem that this “tacking-on” way of conceiving the nature mind in relation to body is that having a “mind” or being rational is not something that is over-and-above the biological life that we live. Human life is an organic life. Hence, it includes in its very form the activity of thought and reasoning and understanding. This should also suggest that the proposal is not that we extend some sort of Cartesian dualism to our view of animal life. It may in fact be closer to the truth to recognize some of the truth motivating the various types of reductive physicalism/materialism that have been proposed in recent years. Unlike Cartesian dualism, they insist upon the unity of human life, i.e. that whatever we are in our life as minds and bodies, we must be “one and the same thing.”

However, it is equally crucial, in recognizing some validity in reductionist tendencies, to resist a second temptation, namely, to go too far in precisely that direction. Theories of reductionism, while rightly insisting on the unity of human life, have too uncritically assumed that the methods of empirical “natural” science and the theories that grow out of them must be the only licit methodology for our endeavors to understand the nature of human life *qua* mental. Thereby, reductionism has put itself in an epistemological posture from which it must ignore the overwhelming empirical evidence that each of us has in our own personal experience, namely, that our cognitive activity in



an integral part of our life as consciously aware beings. That is, reductionist tendencies seem to me to divorce cognitive processes from the processes by which we are actually immediately *aware of* the act of reasoning or understanding in which we engage. And for those who accept reductionism who are willing to abandon altogether the explicit sense in which our cognitive activity involves our immediate awareness of that activity, it seems to me that, as was argued above, their materialistic determinism in any case of itself rules out the possibility that cognitive activities embody *truth*, including, therefore, the cognitive activities expressed in their own doctrines.

These approaches lack any principle, so far as I can see, which would provide a unified way of analyzing human experience or thinking about the way that our actual existence is lived. Such unity is the very thing provided by the hylomorphic perspective that I have outlined in Aquinas's and Spinoza's metaphysics. If contemporary philosophy would recover the "natural" principle of *form* as the organizing code that co-inheres in the material "stuff" of the universe, insofar as human life is instantiated in the universe, a new and fruitful way of envisioning mind-body relations could be developed. In the area of biological studies, much is made of the DNA *code* that establishes all basic body functions in organic life, from building proteins out of amino acids to regulating the timing and expression of various processes involved with development and growth. This code determines, at least at the level of biological existence, it seems, every specific of our individual lives, *qua* human, e.g. that we have opposable thumbs, that our jaw muscles are lax, that our cranium capacity is larger to accommodate a large brain, the way that this brain works, and everything else. Every physical structure of our life is in any case in some way dependent upon it. Yet this "code" is basically information; and

*qua* information it is not something physical. It is analogous to a message or instructions “communicated” (as Aquinas might say) to the physical stuff that thereby becomes our body in its organized life as a particular member of a particular species. Logically, however, the “information” of the code could be communicated in any number of ways, as can all information. And yet, this information inheres in every part of our physical existence, without losing its nature of being information, to make us conscious-reasoning beings.

Two things are striking here. First, it is intriguing that this basic premise of modern biology has possible antecedents in the kind of hylomorphism that I have been describing in relation to Aquinas and Spinoza. But, second, it is equally intriguing that contemporary philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists have not explored deeply enough what seems to me to be a very forceful principle at work and an important consideration. What I have in mind is the implications that might accompany the (arguably evident) nature of DNA as “information.” Perhaps what I take to be the significance of DNA may go beyond what contemporary materialists see as its significance. As was argued in chapter two, however, the kind of hylomorphism that this dissertation attempts to explicate as part of Aquinas’s and Spinoza’s metaphysical projects, can allow us to embrace a better understanding of the nature of DNA information. In at least a weak sense, one cannot really appreciate the significance of DNA without becoming a dualist. But the dualism would not be of the Cartesian or Platonic variety (or Augustinian in its Christian theological form). It would be the kind of “dualism” that one finds in Aquinas and Spinoza, where there is only one concrete reality that we engage in knowing and being a part of (Spinoza’s *Natura naturata* and

Aquinas's *being as participation in Being*). By this kind of dualism, one would expect that physicalists would be able to regard DNA as containing and communicating "information," but also regard it in a way that is explicable in physicalist terms. The information is not, strictly speaking, something over and above the material entities, because it exists in them. However, the information is not, itself, physical. But if it is not, strictly speaking, physical then how are we to regard it? It is obvious to my mind, at least, that because it is precisely information, something that is Thought-like must be regarded as a basic principle at work in the universe, and not merely a supervenient property. Aquinas and Spinoza, in their insistence upon the role that *form* or *conatus* plays in establishing the bodily and mental life of a living human person, are old witnesses to the momentousness that this discovery has for the way we think about the mind-body relationship.

In realizing this significance, Aquinas and Spinoza felt compelled to describe Thought as a fundamental feature of Reality, rather than a supervenient property. In this, as well as their notions of form/conatus, we are offered another conceptual lens through which we might view the foundation of mind and body "identity." DNA is arguably a type of information that is analogous in modern terms to the older concept form/*conatus*. Spinoza and Aquinas would argue that the arguably obvious nature of DNA as a conveyor of information requires us to embrace, in our descriptions of the universe, the idea that Thought *qua* Attribute (to put it in Spinoza's terms) or Rationality *qua* participation in God's act of Being (*à la* Aquinas) is a fundamental aspect of such encoded information. This "code" communicates instructions to amino acids and to all other physical parts of the organism that will not exist without that information. Hence,

the existent organism in its concrete reality is arguably unintelligible apart from that information. And again, if the information can be conceived of as in some sense preceding the organism, , then it seems to me that we might have before us at least an interesting philosophical question that could be explored in another dissertation. Perhaps some might be wary of positing Thought as a fundamental Attribute upon which the *encoded* or *informing* nature of DNA is logically dependent for intelligibility, because they fear the posing of such an Attribute would imply a “Thinker” as the source of such Thought; and it could be that this has too much potential theistic baggage. I am not making the case here that Thought, much less a “Thinker,” must be posited. Rather, I am suggesting that by looking at DNA in the light of hylomorphism we might discover a philosophically interesting, and possibly true, way of analyzing the universe and the living organisms that populate it. To what extent the notion of Thought needs to be brought in for that purpose may remain to be discussed. But one should not rule out the idea from start simply because he wants to avoid bringing God into the discussion.<sup>56</sup>

What is most instructive in this basic Thomistic-Spinozistic insight for present-day philosophy of mind is their premise that Thought, along with and perhaps co-inherent with the laws of physics, can be (and perhaps must be) understood as ontologically ultimate. Recovering this concept, we might actually find a better starting point for our contemporary mind-body discussions. And those who find it incoherent would have to show why it is; but I think that they would be begging the question by simply assuming

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<sup>56</sup> However, philosophy ought to be interested in whether or not some concept of “God” is valid. And if other of our logical concepts required that concept, then such is the conclusion that an honest philosophy would have to embrace. It is, however, far beyond the purview of this dissertation to examine that.

what Kim has described as “ontological physicalism.” This “new” way forward, however, shows how to avoid thinking about the nature of mind in the universe and in human experience as tacking another level of reality upon an otherwise lifeless and thoughtless world. Instead, it allows us to see that our own *experience* of ourselves as “one and the same thing,” regardless of which of the dual aspects of our lives by which we might regard ourselves in any given analysis, does not pose the Mind-body problem. Rather, it manifests for us the irreducible complexity of our existence as beings that participate in a universe that is equally dependent upon Thought and Extension as ontological fundamentals.<sup>57</sup>

Colin McGinn, quoted in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, has argued that in philosophy of mind “the question must arise as to whether human minds are *closed* with respect to certain true explanatory theories [about the connection between mind and body].”<sup>58</sup> McGinn’s argument is persuasive in its focus, but it could be asked, I think, whether or not the problem is not what we are considering in the analysis of mind-body relations, but the presuppositions that we bring to the issue. Kim claims that the presupposition of our current approach to the question establishes an undesirable choice. It is assumed, he argues, that if the ontological priority of the physical is not presumed, then one must allow “that there are things in the space-time world other than physical

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<sup>57</sup> While I cannot discuss this here, such a philosophical perspective as that represented in my interpretation of Aquinas could, I think, be embraced by theistic philosophers, especially if they are Christians. To argue that the soul *qua* form is “natural” to the world and that all of the natural world “participates” in the Being of God, need not entail that one give up religious beliefs that are traditionally established in doctrines such as “transcendence” and “immortality.” Rather, it simply would entail that they embrace a richer notion of what the “physical world” and the “natural world” are. God could always be “beyond” our world’s ontology and the “soul” could be nonetheless seen as immortal in the metaphysics offered here. But, the kind of Augustinian/Cartesian dualism that has marked much of Christian reflection might have to go.

<sup>58</sup> McGinn, 544.

things, *like Cartesian souls*, or at least that some things in the world have certain properties that are independent of their physical nature.”<sup>59</sup> However, could it not simply be that the “physical” world itself has infused into it certain non-physical features that entail non-physical properties, e.g. the *information* conveyed by the double helix molecule that makes up the physical structure of DNA? This information is not, as I have already argued, a physical property, but it is a part of the world of nature. The mystery of the “Cartesian soul” need not be invoked, but the presence of a Thomistic “form” or a Spinozistic *conatus* might very well need to be recognized.

As it seems to me, at least, acceptance of the point of view common to such otherwise diverse thinkers as Spinoza and Aquinas, offers the prospect of new insights into the way that mind and body “interact.” And even if McGinn is actually correct that our minds have a conceptual barrier – one analogous to the perceptual barrier that makes us unable to see certain aspects of the electromagnetic spectrum – standing in the way of our attempts to comprehend the relationship between ourselves *qua* biological and ourselves *qua* conscious-thinking beings, we might, at least, gain a better grasp of why that is the case. It could very well be, as it seems to me, that the limits that we in fact face are not the result of our lacking the cognitive apparatus requisite for conceiving of the relationship. They may, at least to a large extent, be the result of our embrace of a false perspective on the question. It could well be the case that, as the hylomorphism of Aquinas and Spinoza suggest, we need to push back the categories of the relationship between mind and body to the earlier question of what it really takes for an organism

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<sup>59</sup> Kim, 12. Also, Cf. above, 34. My emphasis.

such as a human being to be endowed with rationality. It is not question-begging to suggest that the kind of moderate dualism that one finds in Aquinas and Spinoza in this respect can serve us well. But for that to happen, we would have to abandon the fears that any kind of dualism at all leads us to what Kim describes as conceiving “that there are things in the space-time world other than physical things, *like Cartesian souls*, or at least that some things in the world have certain properties that are independent of their physical nature.”

Admittedly, what I have put forth in this regard is just an intimation of the way in which the “hylomorphism” that we have been considering by way of Spinoza and Aquinas might in fact become a dialogue partner in this discussion of present-day concern. But by recovering the idea that there could indeed be a *form* that gives organization to a body, so as to make it apt for a mind, and thereby equally makes possible a mind that is apt for the body, we might perhaps begin to look with newly opened eyes to the mystery of human origins and of the DNA code itself. And in regarding the latter as a bearer of *information*, in particular, we might find that we are after all closer to that hylomorphism than might otherwise have been supposed. Perhaps then we could begin to begin to see that recovering the “soul” is not an impulse of obsolete or antiquated quaintness. Rather, it might help us to understand more deeply Wittgenstein’s observations about a human person: “My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.” For as Wittgenstein understood, “the human body is the best picture of the human soul.”<sup>60</sup> And *qua* conatic

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<sup>60</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans., G. E. M. Anscombe, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), II.iv.178.

form the soul is, as well, the best account of the mind's presence in the "one and the same thing."



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