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## A Thomistic metaphysics of participation accounts for embodied rationality

### *Abstract*

Rationality should not be seen as a ghostly process exclusive of the world of matter, but rather as a transcendent process within matter itself by virtue of a participated power. A Thomistic metaphysics of embodied participation in being effectively answers Robert Pasnau's objection that the standard hylomorphic account confuses ontological and representational immateriality, and is more satisfying than nonreductive physicalist accounts of rationality, and the Anglo-American hylomorphic accounts reliant on formal causality. When the active intellect is understood as a participated power and not as a formal or constitutive principle of rationality, the transcendent basis of rationality is clarified; all embodied rational operations are seen to utilize, without being reduced to, a substrate of neurophysiological systems, processes and structures. I utilise an allegory of alien abduction, to illustrate participation as a key to understanding the intrinsic relationship between transcendent, immaterial thought and embodiment.

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1. *The embodied rationality account based on a metaphysics of participation is a plausible reading of Aquinas.*

In this paper I suggest that a Thomistic account of *embodied participated rationality*, is resilient against the Robert Pasnau's charge that hylomorphism confuses ontological and representational immateriality.<sup>1</sup> I argue that this Thomistic account based on a metaphysics of participation in being is a plausible reading of Aquinas and that it provides an attractive

alternative to nonreductive physicalist accounts, as well as to those hylomorphic accounts where participation in being is absent.

Rationality and its accompanying immateriality should not be seen a ghostly process exclusive of the world of matter, but rather a transcendent process within matter itself by virtue of a participated power. In his metaphysics of participation in being, Aquinas diverges from Aristotle in order to better account for the reality of immateriality of thought and human free will in this way. It is this approach that provides an effective refutation of Pasnau's argument against the immateriality of thought.

A corollary of this view is the requirement that the immateriality of thought be wholly mediated by, but not reducible to, neurobiological structures and processes. All intellectual activity in an embodied state utilizes the material causality of embodied rational operations. There can be only one principle of operations, the embodied person; thus the least taint of dualism is avoided, and Thomistic hylomorphism may also be seen to offer an alternative, plausible, embodied account of rationality to that offered by the nonreductive physicalisms.

A Thomistic metaphysics of participation, hinges on the notion of participation of the soul in the perfect 'act' that is God, participation in the being of God himself; "being" not understood as a substance but as a principle of existence.

"The soul communicates to bodily matter *the being in which it itself subsists* (my italics); from this matter and the intellectual soul there comes into existence a unity such that the being of the compound whole is the being also of the soul. This does not happen in other forms which are not subsistent."<sup>ii</sup>

Participation, in the view of Aquinas, is “like taking a part; thus when something receives a part of what belongs to another fully, it is said to participate in it.”<sup>iii</sup>

Participation the being of the Infinite Source itself, to utilize the terminology of Norris Clarke,<sup>iv</sup> is the transcendental foundation of embodied agency and rationality.

Koterski writes:

“In the basic sense of participation, all beings participate in existence, that is, they share in being and its transcendental properties, more perfectly or less so, since they are caused by the one first being, which is being perfectly. Participation, taking a part, having a limited share of something else which is wholly that, expresses for Thomas the non-identity of that which is with its being, and the inner ordering of the nature, the thing's principle of movement and rest, toward that which is the fulfillment, the completion of the movement.”<sup>v</sup>

This argument is not based on theological beliefs but on observation and reflection on “being understood as actual in the concrete”.<sup>vi</sup> It is a reasoned and coherent account of the very source of being and rationality. At its essence lies an enriched view of material substances.

## *2. Responding to Pasnau's claim concerning content fallacy.*

Robert Pasnau claims that Aquinas fails to demonstrate the necessity of immateriality of thought because he confuses the intrinsic and the intentional; he refers to this as the “content fallacy”.

The charge of content fallacy gains traction when there is lacking an apparent explanation for immaterial operations in an embodied state, and when rationality is reduced from the subject's capacity to understand reality, to material processes and representations.

There have been various hylomorphic responses to Pasnau published.<sup>vii</sup> It is beyond the scope of this current article to do justice to these attempts. Below I offer further reflections, but initially I wish to make two simple observations: that all emphasise difference, what is rather “alien”, in the words of Klima, between the hylomorphic approach and that of contemporary philosophy, and that they verge on dualism. Implicit to the rebuttal of Pasnau are approaches that appear at odds with scientific data. For example, Madden requires that the abstracting faculty should be “non-physical”<sup>viii</sup>, but in the absence of a notion of participation in being this suggests a dualism of one sort or another. Whether or not Pasnau’s objections hold for Aristotelian hylomorphism, I suggest they certainly do *not* hold within a Thomistic metaphysics of participation in being.

A metaphysics of participation in being *in esse subsistens* demonstrates the agent intellect as a *participated* power and not as a formal or constitutive principle, to use the terminology of Fabro.<sup>ix</sup> Such a power underpins not only existence *in esse subsistens* but also understanding, ie the knowledge of universals; truth and goodness find their ground also in being. If the agent intellect is a power, participating in what belongs fully to another, then we look not to the form of the human being, the soul, for an explanation of intellect, but to the Infinite Source itself. In this conception, immaterial processes take place in matter, facilitated by matter, owing to participation in a power in which that matter participates. Immateriality is not extrinsic to matter, a ghostly process, opening a door for dualism.

### *2.1 A metaphysics respecting immateriality of thought and free will.*

As a basis for the argument that follows, let us consider the intention of Aquinas for whom it is non-negotiable to preserve immateriality and freewill. The second is a consequence of the first. On basis of our knowledge of reality, our capacity to grasp essences and reason to further truths

in the real world, we can make rational choices and therefore we are free, albeit in a freedom that is somewhat conditioned by our upbringing, temperament and environment.

Aquinas writes in *Contra Gentiles* that his purpose is to affirm the “operation of understanding which it is an operation ‘completely surpassing the range of bodily things’”.

“the operation of no active power exceeds the genus to which that power belongs. But the intellectual soul transcends the whole genus of bodies, since it enjoys an operation completely surpassing the range of bodily things, namely, the operation of understanding. Therefore, no corporeal power can produce the intellectual soul.”<sup>x</sup>

Immateriality of thought then, refers to the claim that the power of understanding is effected in a way completely beyond the capacity of bodily things.

Consequently, Aquinas notes also human free will “is a power employing no organ, as neither does the intellect”.<sup>xi</sup> The freedom of the will is directly derived from its proper action of choosing which necessitates an understanding of reasons proposed by the intellect.<sup>xii</sup>

“The intellect has no operation pertaining to the body, except by way of moving it; because understanding is not an operation that can be exercised through any bodily organ, and, for the same reason, neither is the act of the will.”<sup>xiii</sup>

It is the acts that are immaterial, not the substance. As we know the nature of something through its actions, “The powers of the soul are known through their acts”;<sup>xiv</sup> The power of understanding is known through the grasping of truths, and of the will, in choice. This is what is immaterial... the very acts of knowing and choosing on the basis of knowledge, operations effected by the subject in a way that transcends matter. Matter can explain neither

consciousness which is a type of self knowledge, nor knowledge of external realities, nor choices that presuppose that knowledge.

In Part 1 of the *Summa*, he discusses this capacity for understanding. He explains that we understand through immaterial species.

“For the intellect knows bodies by understanding them, not indeed through bodies, nor through material and corporeal species; but through immaterial and intelligible species, which can be in the soul by their own essence.”<sup>xv</sup>

Aquinas says that these immaterial and intelligible species are produced by the active intellect as a result of a “Divine light”.<sup>xvi</sup> Thomists are by no means in agreement about the nature of the active or agent intellect and its activity. But here I adopt the reading that it is a “participated power” precisely because of this “Divine light”, a power not properly its own, but one which “belongs to another fully”.<sup>xvii</sup> Hence these immaterial species are present *by participation* in the same way that the soul is present, neither as agent nor as substance, within matter but transcending matter.

All knowledge starts in the senses. We apprehend and take in a phantasm, an image in our mind. In the “light” of our participated active intellect which is therefore attuned to being and act, we grasp the object in the passive intellect “in its existence” and as a substantial form. Note the emphasis on operations, not on structures, and on independence of understanding from the body itself. A metaphoric paraphrase can help us here. What if I should write:

The capacity to appreciate one’s own whistling has no operation pertaining to the body, except by way of moving it; because the appreciation of music is not an operation that can be exercised through any bodily organ.



We would agree. The appreciation of one's own whistling is distinct from the act of whistling. The bodily organ is the formation of the whistling notes by the mouth. The operation of understanding is our power of appreciation transcending the physics of sound. The physical whistling is integral to the act of understanding but is nevertheless something distinct. At no point does Aquinas state that the physical is not *always* involved. My contention is that understanding is materially mediated by the physical for *every* operation of understanding and willing in human embodied existence. Understanding and willing in this embodied life take place in a transcendent domain but one nevertheless intrinsically dependent on the physical.

Such embodied transcendent activity is equivalent to the nonreductive physicalist claim that mental life is not reducible to the physical (although the nonreductive physicalist adds that it is "wholly explained by" the physical, a claim that Aquinas refutes: "the greater is not brought about by the lesser, for nothing acts outside its species".<sup>xviii</sup> *Nemo dat quod non habet*.)

## 2.2 Understanding powers of the soul'.

A further clarification is needed. Discussion of immateriality and associated concepts can be made unnecessarily difficult by the language of Aquinas.<sup>xix</sup> Aquinas' texts are replete with synecdoche where he makes the soul the active agent: for example, "it is not the intellect that understands, but the soul through the intellect"<sup>xx</sup>; "the soul understands nothing without a phantasm."<sup>xxi</sup> Elsewhere even the intellect is the acting subject: "The intellect needs not the body, for its operation, save on account of the phantasms, save wherein it looks on the intelligible truth as stated in I.84.7."<sup>xxii</sup>

Aquinas' habit of referring to the agent as the soul, or even the intellect as agent, has been adopted by some Thomistic commentators. I suggest that this is not particularly helpful in the

current philosophical climate where such attributions lend themselves to dualistic interpretation. For example note a typical text from Christina Van Dyke in which “senses” and “intellect” are presented as subjects of action. (Van Dyke does capture effectively the interplay between the body and mental awareness.)

“Aquinas’s theory of human cognition is extremely complex; in short, the physical senses provide sense data which the inner sense employs in making phantasms, from which the intellect can abstract universal, ‘intelligible species’. The intellect’s proper operation involves the contemplation of these abstract intelligible species—contemplation which could occur apart from matter (as it does in the case of angels and God). In the case of human beings, however, the intellect requires the body to get to this stage of operation, and also needs to turn back to the phantasms each time it cognizes.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

Aquinas makes it abundantly clear in many texts however that to make the soul or the intellect agents of action is indeed a figure of speech: “It can be said that the soul understands . . . but it is said more properly that the human being understands through the soul”;<sup>xxiv</sup> again, “To man in the present state of life, the natural way of knowing intelligible truth is by means of phantasms”;<sup>xxv</sup> and yet again, “The soul and the body ... from these two things one actually existing substance is made”;<sup>xxvi</sup> and finally, “Action belongs to the composite, as does existence.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

Aquinas appears to use synecdoche also with the purpose of elevating the dignity of the soul which continues to exist when disembodied. In that state it understands not through phantasms but through bestowed ideas, mediated by its participation *in esse subsistens*. Yet, the Thomistic position is that disembodied existence, bereft of senses and sense apprehension, is *by exception*

because of the Fall. I suggest that in contemporary commentary this is not emphasised sufficiently.

It is essential therefore to understand the embodied person as agent, who has come into being through the co-principles of matter and soul, with the soul as “rational principle”<sup>xxviii</sup> and *actus essendi*; and so the embodied person is the subject endowed with agency and capable of those perfections of virtue including those that are embodied.<sup>xxix</sup> Human actions should not be attributed in any absolute sense to the soul, nor the intellect. Understanding and choosing are essential operations of the human embodied subject that transcend the physical; in doing so they demonstrate that human nature itself transcends the physical.

We do well to remember that Aristotle and Aquinas were seeking to represent reality on the basis of close observation. Above we have seen that understanding and choosing are operations of the human embodied subject, operations that transcend the physical, yet demonstrate that human nature transcends the physical.

Affirmation of the primacy of the embodied person resists the necessity of dualism, albeit property dualism primarily, that surfaces in contemporary Anglo-American Thomism.<sup>xxx</sup> I suggest that an integrated embodiment, an embodied human nature as subject and agent, is better preserved by direct recourse to metaphysics of participation *in esse subsistens*.

3. *A Thomistic metaphysics of participation in being allows immateriality of thought that is wholly mediated by, but not reducible to, neurobiological structures and processes.*

3.1 *A significant claim.*

Having affirmed the immateriality of rationality and agency of the person, it is now possible, on the basis of a metaphysics of participation *in esse subsistens*, to further the case that all rational

operations in the embodied life are carried out with neural bases. This is a significant claim. It will hinge on the notion that participation in truth is founded on participation in being. I will deal with this in three ways: by a thought experiment, by consideration of the convertibility of the Aristotelian transcendentals grounded in being, and finally by analysis of what is meant of the active intellect as a “participated power”.

### *3.2 A thought experiment in alien abduction.*

A thought experiment in alien abduction can assist in coming to grasping the notion of a participated power. Consider the tiniest infant abducted to the cyanide planet by benign, cyanide breathing aliens. The child, kept alive on oxygen, learns from all he experiences to the point that he is as adept as a local in all matters, except in of course breathing. Like the Hebrew Joseph in the court of Pharaoh, he rises to the very top of alien society. The child eventually becomes the Child Ruler, thinking like an alien, acting like an alien in every way except for his breathing. All the child’s understanding and reasoning have been dependent on his prior alien experiences and ultimately on the oxygen apparatus. The oxygen and his alien experiences have made him who he is. Both his life and his understanding may therefore be considered as aspects of an existential participation.

Only if he understands his world can he rule. He cannot remain “an alien” and be Ruler. His *understanding* as Ruler and his *being* as Ruler are inseparable and existential. This metaphor offers an allegory of the convertibility of truth and being. Our Child Ruler would have no understanding of this alien world and his fellow aliens, and therefore would not *be* the Ruler, but for knowledge that he has been given. By his *forma mentis*, by all his learning and experiences, he makes sense of his world and who he is.

### *3.3 Consideration of the convertibility of Aristotelian transcendentals.*

In an analogous way it is the connaturality of grasped-truths with being that enables us to make sense of the world. This is a practical consequence of Aquinas' teaching that truth and goodness are convertible with being.

“As good has the nature of what is desirable, so truth is related to knowledge. Now everything, in as far as it has being, so far is it knowable. Wherefore it is said in *De Anima* iii that ‘the soul is in some manner all things’, through the senses and the intellect. And therefore, as good is convertible with being, so is the true. But as good adds to being the notion of desirable, so the true adds relation to the intellect.”<sup>xxx</sup>

Further, in *De Veritate*, Aquinas writes:

“a thing is apt to be conformed (*adaequari*) to the intellect in the degree to which a thing has entity (*entitas*). Consequently, the notion of truth follows upon that of being.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

### *3.4 Active intellect as a participated power, and not as a formal or constitutive principle of rationality.*

Think now of our Child Ruler, peering out the window at his alien world and understanding it, grasping of the truth of what he sees. He does not see a succession of unintelligible phenomena. He transcends individual sense impressions, to understand what he is seeing. He comprehends essences and meanings. Knowledge is access to a reality beyond the senses. Knowledge is a participation in reality, in the way that a living dictionary could delight in meanings.

If the Child Ruler is to understand the Alien world he must transcend singular phenomena, so too, Aquinas insists, the operation of understanding pertains to natures and essences, not to singular objects.

‘Human nature has in the intellect existence abstracted from all individuals, and thus it is related uniformly to all individuals that exist outside the soul, as it is equally similar to all of them, and it leads to knowledge of all insofar as they are men.’<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Let us look briefly at the Thomistic understanding of how the intellect grasps reality. We have seen that the intellective power of abstraction of the active intellect is a participated power, a grasping of the nature of reality.

First, that which is intelligible is intelligible to the extent it is in potentiality to being. “We grasp being first of all not essences.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> Truth is understood to the extent it is revealed by being.

Rationality is an essential quality of human nature, and as an essential quality is therefore participating in the same *actus essendi* of the subject. Rationality is a participation in being. For this reason, by a connaturality of being, Klima notes that forms “can properly be understood *only if* we have a proper understanding of what is meant by ‘the existence of something’, or what Aquinas refers to as the *esse* of a thing, i.e., the act of being of the thing.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

Second we know what things are. Their essences are grasped. This must be mediated, Aquinas insists, by a “Divine light”. For to grasp essences, to understand what a thing is (as opposed to classifying, ordering and categorising it - tasks which may be performed without understanding) is beyond the capacities of unaided matter.

Thereafter, understanding is a discursive process:

“(We have) no special power by which simply and absolutely, and without moving from one thing to another, we might obtain knowledge of the truth.”<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Reasoning is an essential pathway to truth by which we come to understand truth about essences and individuals.

“At other times, however, reason proceeds from one item to another within the mental order, as for example when it progresses according to the order of intrinsic causes: by synthesis (*componendo*) when we advance from the most universal forms to the more particular, by resolution (*resoluendo*) when we move in the converse order because the more universal is the most simple. Then, because the supreme universals are what are common to all beings, therefore the conclusion of the resolution (*terminus resolutionis*) according to this mode of reasoning is the consideration of being and the properties of being as being.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

At all times, the corporeal is implicated. Aquinas is adamant that such understanding starts in, but may not be reduced to, the “corporeal phantasm”<sup>xxxviii</sup>: “the soul understands nothing without a phantasm.”<sup>xxxix</sup> And elsewhere:

“the soul united to the body can understand *only* (my italics) by turning to the phantasms...we admit that the nature of the soul *requires* (my italics) it to understand by turning to the phantasms, it will seem, since death does not change its nature, that it can then naturally understand nothing; as the phantasms are wanting to which it may turn.”<sup>xl</sup>

These phantasms are the “material cause” of all intellectual knowledge.<sup>xli</sup> For intelligibility, the essence, the quiddity, of the phantasm has to be revealed however, by the light of the active intellect:

“...intellectual knowledge is caused by the senses. But since the phantasms cannot of themselves affect the passive intellect, and require to be made actually intelligible by the active intellect, it cannot be said that sensible knowledge is the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge, but rather that it is in a way the material cause.”<sup>xlii</sup>

This participated light is the agent, or active, intellect. It is “that power which it derives from the supreme intellect, and whereby it abstracts from matter”.<sup>xliii</sup>

“...the active intellect, of which we have spoken above (I:79:4) causes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction.”<sup>xliv</sup>

And this active intellect is the participated power:

“...every intellectual substance possesses intellective power by the influence of the Divine light.”<sup>xlv</sup>

In language shrouded reverence, we see Aquinas explaining that, just as the being of a substance is participation *in esse subsistens*, so too the rational power of man participates in the light of the Divine intellect. How are we to understand this? Most evidently Aquinas is claiming that, owing to participation in an active principle beyond their capacities, human beings are sustained in being, and are capable of grasping the essential truths that underpin phantasms.

The metaphor of “light” emphasizes that this active principle brings a capability beyond the material capacities of man. The parallel with the light of grace is deliberate. Aquinas explains: “Both the natural powers of thought and the superadded powers given in grace and glory both operate through participation in the uncreated and intelligible light of the divine intellect.”<sup>xlvi</sup>



Aquinas says that in the same way that a soul in grace sees the truth of supernatural realities, so the natural soul, is assisted in seeing the truth of natural realities. The light of faith illumines realities that lies beyond the senses; so too the light of reason illumines realities presented by the senses.

Aquinas goes so far as to affirm: “That which is in the soul is *by participation* (my italics) from some higher intellect.”<sup>xlvii</sup> Yet he insists that the soul does not know by infused ideas but by this Divine light. The intellect itself participates in the uncreated light of the divine intellect, just as the person exists by participation *in esse subsistens*, there being no division in God. The intellect is a way of grasping reality as God sees it, in other words, as things are in their essences; this is the power of understanding bestowed by virtue of participation in being.

We read, “Understanding concerns universals, whereas in a corporeal organ only individuated intentions can be received.”<sup>xlviii</sup> Understanding by its nature is nonreductive comprehension of reality by the person, but necessarily universals too are signified at the level of material representation by neurobiological processes and structures. The intellectual truth of objects pertains to their essence grasped in such nonreductive comprehension; the sensible truth of things pertains to sense knowledge and phantasms. These are categories completely in all contrast... the first is a grasping of an intellectual truth; the second a sensing of an object by its appearances only, the nature of which we grasp by an intellectual comprehension.

We understand universals by virtue of the participated power of abstraction acting within and transcending the structures and processes of neurobiology. The immateriality of human thought is a participated power delivering outcomes that are neurobiologically retained in reasoning processes (that, having duration, are material), and as memory. This is consistent with texts from Aquinas which, as we have seen, explicitly note that bodily organs are the cause of *all*

intellectual knowledge, including that which is the result of reasoning. Although Aquinas wrote this without any understanding of neurobiology, yet he was determined, as we have seen, to retain immateriality of thought in the intellect as a means of dealing with essences, and free will. These two outcomes are achieved by means of a principle of abstraction that is a participated power.

These reflections lead us to a deeper understanding of immateriality of thought and to the understanding that all rational operations in the embodied life are carried out with neural bases. As for nonreductive physicalist accounts these two statements hold:

1. The mental life of human beings is not reducible to their physical life.
2. All operations of understanding and reasoning in the embodied life are sustained but not explained by physical elements, processes and systems.

Having looked at the need to preserve free will and immaterial operations in rationality, and having noted the need to reserve agency for the embodied person, we have focused on the operation of the active intellect as a “participated” power. This is a key to what I suggest is an authentic Thomistic understanding of ‘immateriality’ of thought.

#### *4. Answering Pasnau.*

In questioning the subsistence of the human soul, Robert Pasnau raises an objection to immateriality of intellectual thought: the content objection whereby he claims that Aquinas’ arguments fail to demonstrate subsistence of the soul, because he confuses ontological immateriality from representational immateriality.<sup>xlix</sup>

In support of Pasnau's position, Benzoni observes, "An unstated premise of this argument is the Aristotelian principle, 'Everything is received in another according to the mode of the recipient.' If [universals] are received in an immaterial way, then the recipient [soul] itself must be immaterial."<sup>1</sup> The flaw in the hylomorphic position, Benzoni submits, is that it infers "from the representative qualities of our thoughts to the intrinsic qualities of our thoughts without any suitable middle term. It assumes that the intrinsic character of our thoughts must literally resemble what they are about."

Whether or not this objection holds for Aristotelian hylomorphism, "everything is received according to the mode of the recipient" holds an entirely different meaning for a *participated* rationality in a metaphysics of participation in being, where the mode of the recipient is embodied, and yet where mental life is nonreductively *sine qua non* dependent on matter.

I suggest that Pasnau's objection may be answered on two counts.

First subsistence of the soul cannot be construed, within a metaphysics of participation in being, as agency of the soul. Hence immaterial operations must be understood in a fully embodied sense, in which all intellectual operations are underpinned by neurobiological processes and structures. We have seen, I suggest that such an approach does not compromise Aquinas' priorities of knowing universals and preserving free will.

Second, a paradigm of participation in being, which considers the intellect and in particular the active intellect as a participated power, provides a way of understanding immateriality of intellectual thought by showing that ensouled mental life is implicit to neurobiological processes, by virtue of the participated capacity for abstraction, a power that is participated, and not possessed absolutely, by the human being.

There have been various hylomorphic responses to Pasnau's claims. I refer to three below. All adopt an Aristotelian hylomorphic perspective, or a Thomistic account without overt recourse to "one first being" as source of being and intelligibility. In contemporary Anglo American hylomorphism, formal causality, without any overt acknowledgement of participation *in esse subsistens* is proposed as the basis of immateriality of thought.<sup>li</sup> There is not scope here to explore the history of this, but I suggest that in the absence of participation *in esse subsistens*, advocates of formal causality open themselves to Pasnau's charge of content fallacy and a lack of necessity. I suspect this is because, when the soul is regarded only as formal or constitutive principle *and not so explicitly by a participated power*, in other words when the intellectual substance is considered as intellectual in its own right, the assertion of ontological immateriality is but an assertion without necessity. Furthermore representational immateriality is dependent on the soul's capacity to inform matter with transcendent powers of abstraction, by its participated power. Only when truth and goodness are convertible, as transcendentals grounded in being, may representational immateriality be retained as a necessity.

James Madden argues that thought involves a universal entity, and suggests that "the objective ground of universal exists as universal only in the intellect, which seems to be enough to support the Thomistic thesis that the intelligible aspect of thought involves a separable non-physical process".<sup>lii</sup> I suggest this tells half the story, and furthermore with the necessity that it should be so. It is an argument for an understanding of universals, but it fails to communicate what the immaterial process of "understanding" could possibly mean in an embodied subject. Being of the human subject and the power of understanding, both understood as participated powers in what belongs to another fully, must be associated for necessity to reign. Further, Madden or any non-participatory solution, is unable to present immateriality except as some sort of invisible coexisting power, and not one that by participation pertains directly to the *embodied* subject

allowing that subject to perform intellectual operations that transcend the normal potency of matter.

Gyula Klima argues that Aquinas provides “strong justification” in response to concerns about about necessity, and although he quotes *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* (9, 2, 2) in reference to *actus entis*, distinguishing subsistent and inherent being, but there is no further step to discussion of participation *in esse subsistens*.<sup>liii</sup> There is no reference to the work of the active intellect working in Divine light.<sup>liv</sup> Yet without a metaphysics of participation *in esse subsistens* that makes possible intellectual activity, it would seem impossible to argue the necessity of a Thomistic response.

Therese Cory adopts what she calls an “Active Principle Model”.<sup>lv</sup> She notes Aquinas’s view of “the mind’s innate abstractive mechanism accounts for intellectual concepts as having a certain mode of existing and representing, but it does not determine the content of those concepts.” Again there is no linkage to participation in Absolute Being, and so the abstractive power remains innate. Yet Cory moves from Aquinas’s statement: “The possible intellect cannot receive anything except insofar as [that thing] receives the form of intelligibility [*formam intelligibilitatis*] from the agent intellect.” (De veritate 18.8, ad 3), to stating that “the agent intellect or intellectual light is a form of sheer intelligibility or immateriality, inhering in the individual soul.” These notions appear not to be the same: in Aquinas the agent intellect illumines the intelligible form, but the meaning of the agent intellect as “a form of sheer intelligibility” seems difficult to grasp. Rather I suggest that the active intellect brings to bear a participated power far beyond that of the matter.<sup>lvi</sup>

In contrast, Aquinas’ principle of participation relies on his new application of Aristotelian act and potency. The key question is “from whence does the power derive?” that enables the active

intellect to grasp the essence of the object in the phantasm. If we view the active intellect as a *participated* power and not as formal or constitutive principle, then the source of the power is evident: Being itself becomes the ground upon which nature and essence are grasped, from within the phantasm itself, through a participated “divine light”. By focusing on the bestowed source of the intellectual power, any need to “explain” intellection by assertions of formal causality of material beings is obviated. When the bestowed act of being on the soul is made clear, the power (the active principle) of intellection is clarified.

Thus, the content objection is resolved, and also the objection questioning “necessity”. The very necessity of this *embodied participated rationality* solution derives from participation: only a participated power can explain the immateriality of intellection. Klima attempts a refutation of the content fallacy by reference not to participation in being, but to the process of abstraction transcending “spatio-temporal features of organs”. This approach I suggest, captures the importance of the immediate representation of reality in the phantasm, but only indirectly addresses the question of necessity, as it offers no reasoned understanding of how the power of abstraction can be present in the soul.<sup>lvii</sup>

Without a paradigm of participation, self-sufficiency of the soul is more easily overemphasised, the work of the active intellect becomes “constitutive”, and most seriously, a Thomistic metaphysics of participation in being becomes just one more competing account. The necessity imparted by the participation account is lost and Thomistic hylomorphism loses its persuasive power.

## 5. Conclusion

I have sought to draw conclusions based on a metaphysics of participation of the soul *in esse subsistens*.

This paper presents the view that a Thomistic metaphysics of participation in being clarifies the role of the active intellect and that this enhances our understanding of what is meant by immateriality of human thought, permitting the claim that in the human subject there is an immaterial life of the mind with embodied neural bases materially underpinning all operations of embodied intellectual life. The paper argues that this embodied participated rationality is not only a plausible reading of Aquinas but that such a reading offers an understanding the human soul and its essential properties to be actualized by an act of being participating in esse subsistens. Thus it is possible to argue for a *necessary* distinction between rational and non-rational life, and a *necessary* explanation in participation. By doing so it is better able to answer Robert Pasnau's objections based on content fallacy and necessity.

I offer a number of conclusions for more complete, future articulation.

- a. A metaphysics of participation offers reasoned support for the view that within the unity of the human beings there is an embodied immaterial life of the mind that coexists with but may not be reduced to the physical. Nonreductive physicalist accounts support the notion of immateriality of thought by assertions of emergence or by whatever approach the specific philosopher has adopted, but physicalism is shown to be perennially vulnerable to challenges that at their core evoke the charge of dualism or the principle of non-contradiction. A participationist solution offers an attractive alternative as it better preserves the unity of the acting subject while affirming that all embodied cognitive activity requires but is not reducible to the biological.

- b. Thomistic metaphysics of participation in being offers a more complete and coherent understanding of rationality as an *essential* operation of human nature, and by grounding epistemology in being, is able to argue for the role of truth and love in human teleological fulfilment.
- c. In contrast to non-participationist hylomorphic accounts, a Thomistic metaphysics of participation appears better able to answer objections based on the content fallacy and on necessity. Without a paradigm of participation, non participationist hylomorphic accounts are unable to argue for a *necessary* distinction between rational and non-rational life. For this reason the standard hylomorphic refutation of nonreductive physicalism, utilising formal causality as an alternative argument for unity of the subject, seems less effective.

Without compromising Thomistic essentials the Thomistic account of participated rationality embraces the notion of a human being in whom there is an immaterial life of the mind with embodied neural bases. In contrast to the emergent assertion that intellectual life is an unexplained phenomenon, this account presents a coherent argument that the being and operations of an intellectual substance must be a direct consequence of participation in the Infinite Source. This paper demonstrates the potential for a Thomistic metaphysics of participation in being to offer a significant way forward in philosophy of mind.

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<sup>i</sup> Robert Pasnau, "Aquinas and the content fallacy," *The Modern Schoolman* 75.4 (1998): 293-314.

<sup>ii</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.76, a.1, ad. 5.



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<sup>iii</sup> Aquinas, *Expositio* 1,2, cited in Cornelio Fabro and B. M. Bonansea, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27.3 (1974): 449-491, p. 454.

<sup>iv</sup> '...the Infinite Source, who alone possesses this perfection in unlimited intensive plenitude as pure Subsistent Act of Existence.' W Norris Clarke, S. J., *Explorations in metaphysics: being-God-person* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), Chap1. Section III. Participation in Being: Essence and Existence.

<sup>v</sup> Joseph W. Koterski, "The Doctrine of Participation in Thomistic Metaphysics" in *The Future of Thomism*, ed. D. Hudson and D. Moran (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 1992), p.193.

<sup>vi</sup> O. Blanchette, *Philosophy of Being* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), p.530.

<sup>vii</sup> Most notable: Gyula Klima, "Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect," *Philosophical Investigations* 32.2 (2009): 163-182; James Madden, "Thomistic hylomorphism and philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion," *Philosophy Compass* 8.7 (2013): 664-676; Therese Scarpelli Cory, "Rethinking Abstractionism: Aquinas's Intellectual Light and Some Arabic Sources," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53.4 (2015): 607-646. Note also the debate between Klima and Pasnau in "The Immateriality of the Human Mind, the Semantics of Analogy, and the Conceivability of God" (*Volume 1: Proceedings of the Society for Medieval Logic and Metaphysics*), ed. Alexander W Hall and Gyula Klima (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011).

<sup>viii</sup> Madden, p.671.

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<sup>ix</sup> Fabro, C. (1950). La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo san Tommaso d'Aquino. Soc. Ed. Internazionale. pp 272-273. Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo san Tommaso d'Aquino* (Soc. Ed. Internazionale, 1950). Reference in Jason A. Mitchell, (Dissertation), "Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection according to Cornelio Fabro," (Pontificii Athenaei Regina Apostolorum, 2012).

<sup>x</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2,86,7.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid., 2,81.

<sup>xii</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I,83.

<sup>xiii</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 90,4

<sup>xiv</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II, q. 77, a.3, co; I, q.77, a.1.

<sup>xv</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 84,a.1.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ibid., I, 89,a.1.

<sup>xvii</sup> Aquinas, *Expositio* 1.2, cited in Cornelio Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," *Review of Metaphysics* 27(1974): 451-457, p. 454.

<sup>xviii</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q.79, a.2, ad.3.

<sup>xix</sup> Klima describes as 'alien' the theoretical context of Aquinas' work. "Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect," *Philosophical Investigations* 32.2 (2009); T.S Cory refers to 'mysterious language'. See A Mullins, "Philosophical Prerequisites

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for a Discussion of the Neurobiology of Virtue," *Ethical Perspectives* 23:4(2016): 689-708, for a discussion of the complexities of Thomistic language.

<sup>xx</sup> Aquinas, *Quæst. Disp., De Veritate*, X, 9, ad. 3.

<sup>xxi</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 84, a.7.

<sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, I.II, 4, a.4.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Christina Van Dyke, "Not Properly a Person: The Rational Soul and 'Thomistic Substance Dualism'," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 26.2 (2009): Note 28.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 75, a.2

<sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, I.II, 5, a.1

<sup>xxvi</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 69.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q.77,a.1, ad.3.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Aristotle, 1107a,3.

<sup>xxix</sup> Aquinas, *Disputed questions on the cardinal virtues*, 4, ad.13. "It should be said that some teach that the irascible and concupiscible, the subjects of temperance and fortitude, are in the higher part, not in the sensitive part of the soul. But this conflicts with what the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 3, namely, that virtues are in the irrational parts. Others say that the powers of the sensitive part remain in the separated soul either according to potency alone or according to act.

But this cannot be because the acts of the sensitive power cannot exist without the body; otherwise the sensitive soul of the brutes would be incorruptible, which is erroneous.:

<sup>xxx</sup> For example J. P. Moreland and Scott Rae, *Body and Soul: Human Nature and the Crisis in Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000);

<http://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2019/11/was-aquinas-property-dualist.html>; Madden,

“Thomistic hylomorphism and philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion”.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>i</sub> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 16, a.3.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>ii</sub> Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 1, a.1, ad 5.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>iii</sub> Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, III.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>iv</sub> Klima, Gyula, “Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect,” *Philosophical Investigations* 32.2(2009): 163-182.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>v</sub> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>vi</sub> Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 15.1 corpus, pars 2, p.480, lines 356–58;

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>vii</sub> Aquinas, *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina 50 (Rome/Paris, 1992) 6.1, corpus 3, p. 162: lines 372–82.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>viii</sub> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 89, ad.1.

<sup>xxx</sup><sub>ix</sub> *ibid.*, I, 84, a.7.

<sup>x</sup><sub>l</sub> *ibid.*, I, 89, a.1.

<sup>xli</sup> Ibid., I, 79, a.3.

<sup>xlii</sup> Ibid., I, 84, a.6.

<sup>xliii</sup> Ibid., I, 79. a.4.

<sup>xliv</sup> Ibid., I, 84. a.6.

<sup>xlv</sup> Ibid., I, 89. a.1.

<sup>xlvi</sup> Ibid., I, 12. a.2.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Ibid., 79, a.4.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, 2SN, d. 19, q. 1. a. 1-co. (Reference drawn from Klima, “Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect”.)

<sup>xlix</sup> Pasnau, “Aquinas and the content fallacy”.

<sup>l</sup> Benzoni, F. J. *Ecological Ethics and the Human Soul: Aquinas, Whitehead, and the Metaphysics of Creation* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p.97.

<sup>li</sup> For example of Anglo-American hylomorphic philosophy of mind emphasising formal causality, but omitting overt discussion of participation: Edward Feser, *Philosophy of mind: A short introduction* (London: Oneworld Publications Limited, 2005); William Jaworski, *Structure and the metaphysics of mind: How hylomorphism solves the mind-body problem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); J. Madden, *Mind, Matter, and Nature: A Thomistic Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013).

<sup>lii</sup> Madden, “Thomistic hylomorphism and philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion”.

<sup>liii</sup> Klima, “Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect,” p.176.

<sup>liv</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 89, a.1.

<sup>lv</sup> Cory, pp. 607-646.

<sup>lvi</sup> Cory’s article is a rich discussion of the meaning of abstraction, in the context of how Aquinas understood certain terms. She notes that “Consequently, the intellect’s act of considering or understanding does not produce the intelligible species, but itself occurs in virtue of an abstracted species.” But although quoting Aquinas, “Because being [*esse*] is the common effect of all agents—for every agent makes something actually exist—it is necessary that they produce this effect insofar as they are ordered under the first agent and act in its power [*in virtute ipsius*]. *Sum. contra gent.* 3.66 [Leon. 14.188]”, she does not develop the notion of participation that lies, I suggest, at the source of the work of the agent intellect.

<sup>lvii</sup> Klima, “Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect,” p.176.