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Timothy Suttor

Excerpt

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On the nature
and abilities of
the soul

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, Ia. 75-83

POST CONSIDERATIONEM creaturæ spiritualis et corporalis, considerandum est de homine, qui ex spiritali et corporali substantia componitur:

et primo, de natura ipsius hominis;
secundo, de ejus productione.

Naturam autem hominis considerare pertinet ad theologum ex parte animæ, non autem ex parte corporis, nisi secundum habitudinem quam habet corpus ad animam. Et ideo prima consideratio circa animam versabitur. Et quia, secundum Dionysium,¹ tria inveniuntur in substantiis spiritalibus, scilicet *essentia*, *virtus* et *operatio*,

primo considerabimus ea quæ pertinent ad essentiam animæ;
secundo, ea quæ pertinent ad virtutem sive potentias ejus;
tertio, ea quæ pertinent ad operationem ejus.

Circa primum duplex consideratio:

quarum prima est de ipsa anima secundum se;
secunda, de unione ejus ad corpus.

¹*De Cælesti Hierarchia*, 2. PG 3, 284

²This might appear to be an Augustinian remark, Neoplatonic, dualist and anti-body, an echo of a rhetoric which this particular treatise of Thomas's put an end to, at least for many. Yet it remains valid as a point of scientific theology. As a body, man is studied by physics and chemistry; as a living thing, by biology; and as a physical process, along with the rest of the physical world, he is treated by theology, but lumped in with all things visible. Now Christian theology means understanding that the existence of all things, visible and invisible, cannot be explained except by a continuing act of free creation out of nothing, with no possible motive but God's sheer generosity and disinterested benevolence. From this point

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PROLOGUE

AFTER CREATED spirits and created bodies, man must be considered, a compound whose substance is both spiritual and corporeal:

- first, the nature of man (75–89);
- second, how he is brought into being (90–3).

Human nature demands distinct theological treatment precisely by virtue of the soul, not of its bodily character, except so far as soul bespeaks embodiment. And so our first consideration concerns the soul.^a And since, as Dionysius says,¹ in spiritual substances are found essence, power, and activity, we shall take up what pertains

- first, to the essence of the soul (75–6);
- second, to its power of acting or abilities (77–83);
- third, to its activity (84–9).

On the first point, there are two subjects of inquiry:

- first, the soul in itself (75);
- second, its union with its body (76).

of view man is simply one more thing. But when we examine more closely the body we call man, we perceive that we can explain what it is, and the fact that it is, only through its ensoulment by a living spirit. Yet at the same time we can understand that spirit only in terms of its embodiment in the physical world-process. And this ensoulment or embodiment, whichever way we put it—the Greeks might have used verb-forms in the middle voice—constitutes a special theological topic, since, as an on-going process it is of a *nature* capable of enjoying God himself in friendship. In this sense, then, it is true that man is a theological topic, not precisely by virtue of his bodiliness, but by virtue of his soul.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 75, 1

Quaestio 75. de ipsa anima secundum se

Circa primum quaeruntur septem:

1. utrum anima sit corpus;
2. utrum anima humana sit aliquid subsistens;
3. utrum animæ brutorum sint subsistentes;
4. utrum anima sit homo, vel magis homo sit aliquid compositum ex anima et corpore;
5. utrum sit composita ex materia et forma;
6. utrum anima humana sit incorruptibilis;
7. utrum anima sit ejusdem speciei cum angelo.

articulus 1. utrum anima sit corpus

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod anima sit corpus. Anima enim est motor corporis. Non autem est movens non motum. Tum quia videtur quod nihil possit movere nisi moveatur, quia nihil dat alteri quod non habet, sicut quod non est calidum non calefacit. Tum quia, si aliquid est movens non motum, causat motum sempiternum et eodem modo se habentem, ut probatur in *Physic.*,² quod non apparet in motu animalis, qui est ab anima. Ergo anima est movens motum. Sed omne movens motum est corpus. Ergo anima est corpus.

2. Præterea, omnis cognitio fit per aliquam similitudinem. Non potest autem esse similitudo corporis ad rem incorpoream. Si igitur anima non esset corpus, non posset cognoscere res corporeas.

3. Præterea, moventis ad motum oportet esse aliquem contactum. Contactus autem non est nisi corporum. Cum igitur anima moveat corpus, videtur quod anima sit corpus.

SED CONTRA est quod Augustinus dicit, quod anima *simplex* dicitur respectu corporis, quia mole non diffunditur per spatium loci.*³

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod ad inquirendum de natura animæ, oportet præsupponere quod anima dicitur esse primum principium vitæ in his quæ apud nos vivunt. Animata enim viventia dicimus, res vero inanimatas vita carentes. Vita autem maxime manifestatur duplici opere, scilicet

*Piana: *simpliciter*

¹cf CG II, 65. In *De Anima* II, lect. 1

²*Physic* VIII, 6. 259b32–260a1; 10. 267b3

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THE SOUL'S NATURE

Question 75. the soul's nature

The first of these inquiries breaks up into seven problems:

1. whether the soul is corporeal;
2. whether the human soul is something which subsists;
3. whether the souls of brutes subsist;
4. whether the soul is the man, or whether, rather, man is not a compound of soul and body;
5. whether the soul is compounded of matter and form;
6. whether the human soul can pass away;
7. whether the soul is the same sort of thing as an angel.

article 1. whether the soul is corporeal

THE FIRST POINT:¹ 1. There are reasons for thinking that the soul is something corporeal. For the soul causes change in a body. But there is no cause of change which is not subject to change. For one thing, it does look as though nothing can bring on change without being changed itself, since nothing can give what it has not got; things that are not hot do not heat. And for another, if anything were an unchanged cause of change, it would give rise to an effect unendingly uniform in manner, as is proved in Aristotle's *Physics*.² But this is not what we observe in animal behaviour, which derives from soul. So the soul is not an unchanged cause of change. Now every cause of change that is subject to change is corporeal. Consequently the soul must be corporeal.

2. Besides, all knowledge comes through some likeness. But there can be no likeness between a body and a non-bodily thing. Accordingly, unless the soul were corporeal it could not know corporeal things.

3. Again, there has to be some contact between the cause of change and the thing changed, yet contact is only between bodies. Since the soul moves the body, it must therefore be some sort of body.

ON THE OTHER HAND we have Augustine's remark that the soul *is said to be simple in relation to the body, because it is not extended quantitatively through the various parts of the body*.³

REPLY: Inquiry into the nature of the soul presupposes an understanding of the soul as the root principle of life in living things within our experience. We speak of living things as 'animate', and of non-living things as 'inanimate'. Now the chief manifestations of life are the two activities of

³*De Trinitate* VI, 6. PL 42, 929

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 75, 1

cognitionis et motus. Horum autem principium antiqui philosophi, imaginationem transcendere non valentes, aliquod corpus ponebant, sola corpora res esse dicentes, et quod non est corpus nihil esse.⁴ Et secundum hoc, animam aliquod corpus esse dicebant.

Hujus autem opinionis falsitas licet multipliciter ostendi possit, tamen uno utemur, quo et communius et certius patet animam corpus non esse. Manifestum est enim quod non quodcumque vitalis operationis principium est anima. Sic enim oculus esset anima, cum sit quoddam principium visionis; et idem esset dicendum de aliis animæ instrumentis. Sed primum principium vitæ dicimus esse animam. Quamvis autem aliquod corpus possit esse quoddam principium vitæ, sicut cor est principium vitæ in animali, tamen non potest esse primum principium vitæ aliquod corpus. Manifestum est enim quod esse principium vitæ, vel vivens, non convenit corpori ex hoc quod est corpus; alioquin omne corpus esset vivens aut principium vitæ. Convenit igitur alicui corpori quod sit vivens, vel etiam principium vitæ, per hoc quod est tale corpus. Quod autem est actu tale habet hoc ab aliquo principio quod dicitur actus ejus. Anima igitur, quæ est primum principium vitæ, non est corpus, sed corporis actus, sicut calor, qui est principium calefactionis, non est corpus, sed quidam corporis actus.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, cum omne quod movetur ab alio moveatur, quod non potest in infinitum procedere, necesse est dicere quod non omne movens movetur. Cum enim movere sit exire de potentia in actum, movens dat id quod habet mobili, in quantum facit ipsum esse in actu. Sed sicut ostenditur in *Physics*,⁵ est quoddam movens penitus immobile, quod nec per se nec per accidens movetur, et tale movens potest movere motum semper uniformem. Est autem aliud movens quod non movetur per se, sed movetur per accidens, et propter hoc non movet motum

⁴cf 1a. 50, 1

⁵*Physics* VIII, 5. 258b4-9

^aThis preliminary sketch of the notion of 'soul' presupposes what has been already said of life in 1a. 18, 1 (Vol. 4 of this series). That which is alive moves by itself and is moved by itself. That which is not alive moves from itself (everything has some activity proper to it, dynamic, chemical, electro-magnetic), but is moved only by something else outside it. A lifeless substance has the principle of its activity in itself but not the term; it can act only to alter other things, not to conserve itself in being; for it to act is to lose something, as sulphuric acid and iron lose their identity through chemical interaction. A living substance, on the other hand, is the term as well as the principle of its own activity. The term of the process of nutrition is not some third thing which is neither the consumer nor the consumed (as is the case with chemical interaction or physical collision), but is, rather, the living substance of the consumer.

^bSuppose someone who maintains that the heart, the physical organ, is the principle of life in man. At once it can be seen that this leaves the question exactly where it

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knowledge and movement. Philosophers of old, unable to transcend imagination, supposed that some body was the source, for they held bodies alone to be real things; that which was not a body was not anything at all.⁴ And so they maintained that the soul was some sort of body.

Though we could show the error of this view in many different ways, let us employ just one line of reasoning, at once very accessible and certain, by which it becomes plain that the soul is not corporeal. It is obvious that not every principle of vital activity is a soul. Otherwise the eye would be a soul, since it is a principle of sight; and so with the other organs of the soul. What we call the soul is the root principle of life.^a Now though something corporeal can be some sort of principle of life, as the heart is for animals, nevertheless a body cannot be the root principle of life. For it is obvious that to be the principle of life, or that which is alive, does not belong to any bodily thing from the mere fact of its being a body; otherwise every bodily thing would be alive or a life-source. Consequently any particular body that is alive, or even indeed a source of life, is so from being a body of such-and-such a kind. Now whatever is actually *such*, as distinct from *not-such*, has this from some principle which we call its actuating principle. Therefore a soul, as the primary principle of life, is not a body but that which actuates a body.^b Much as heat, as the source of the heating process, is not the body heated, but a certain actuation of it.

Hence: 1. Granted that what changes is changed from outside, and that this process cannot be prolonged through an infinite regress, we must assert that not every cause of change is subject to causal influx from outside. Since all change is a passage from potentiality to actuality, the cause of change gives what it has to the subject of change to the precise extent that it actuates it. But as shown in the *Physics*,⁵ there is a wholly unchangeable cause of change, which does not undergo change either from itself or from elsewhere. And such a source of change can produce a perpetually uniform pattern of effect. But there is another change-inducing agent which, while not essentially changeable, is changeable because of attendant conditions, and on this account does not give rise to a uniform

was. The question we began by asking of the whole human body—what makes it alive?—has now to be asked of the heart. This is the gist of the reasoning.

To bring the discussion up to date, note that the responsiveness peculiar to living things bears the technical name *irritability*. All physical reactions involve molecular modification and electrical changes. Vital response shares these features with non-vital physical interaction. But it adds this specific feature, irritability, instanced in heart-beat, endocrine glandular secretions, saliva, an amoeba's change of shape, muscular contraction, nervous transmission, pain, and so forth. And if we argue that one of these causes others, as we might argue that the heart's beat causes others because it circulates blood, we would have still to account for that 'first mover', that base for other manifestations of irritability.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a. 75, 2

semper uniformem; et tale movens est anima. Est autem aliud movens quod per se movetur, scilicet corpus. Et quia antiqui naturales nihil esse credebant nisi corpora, posuerunt quod omne movens movetur, et quod anima per se movetur et est corpus.⁶

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod non est necessarium quod similitudo rei cognitæ sit actu in natura cognoscentis. Sed si aliquid sit quod prius est cognoscens in potentia et postea in actu, oportet quod similitudo cogniti non sit actu in natura cognoscentis, sed in potentia tantum; sicut color non est actu in pupilla sed in potentia tantum. Unde non oportet quod in natura animæ sit similitudo rerum corporearum in actu, sed quod sit in potentia ad hujusmodi similitudines. Sed quia antiqui naturales nesciebant distinguere inter actum et potentiam, ponebant animam esse corpus, ad hoc quod cognosceret corpus; et ad hoc quod cognosceret omnia corpora, quod esset composita ex principiis omnium corporum.⁷

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod est duplex contactus, quantitatis et virtutis. Primo modo, corpus non tangitur nisi a corpore. Secundo modo, corpus potest tangi a re incorporea quæ movet corpus.

articulus 2. utrum anima humana sit aliquid subsistens

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod anima humana non sit aliquid subsistens. Quod enim est subsistens dicitur 'hoc aliquid'. Anima autem non est 'hoc aliquid' sed compositum ex anima et corpore. Ergo anima non est aliquid subsistens.

2. Præterea, omne quod est subsistens potest dici operari. Sed anima non dicitur operari; quia, ut dicitur in *De Anima*,² dicere animam sentire aut intelligere simile est ac si dicat eam aliquid texere vel ædificare. Ergo anima non est aliquid subsistens.

3. Præterea, si anima esset aliquid subsistens esset aliqua ejus operatio sine corpore. Sed nulla est ejus operatio sine corpore, nec etiam intelligere;

⁶St Thomas's source here is *De Anima* 1, 2. 403b29f

⁷cf 1a. 84, 2c

¹cf *De potentia* III, 9, 11. In *De Anima* III, lect. 7. Q. de anima 1, 14. *De spiritalibus creaturis* 2

²*De Anima* 1, 4. 408b9-18

^cThe notion of life as self-movement must not be confused with the notion of life as simple spontaneity. There is always some stimulus to which irritability responds. It may be environmental, but it may also be within the living body as a physical and chemical whole. Thus the internal metabolism of the living thing causes it to act nutritively.

^aSee Appendix 2 for an historical perspective on the evolution of the semantics of

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pattern of effect. Such is a soul. Then there is another source of change which is of itself essentially changeable, namely, a body. Since the cosmologists of antiquity reckoned that nothing incorporeal existed, they held that every cause of change was itself subject to change, that the soul is essentially changeable, and something corporeal.^{6c}

2. A likeness of the thing known does not need to be actually present in the nature of the knower. If there be something that passes from being capable of knowing to actually knowing, then the likeness of the thing known need not be in the nature of the knower in actuality. It is enough if it is potentially in the knower, as colour is potentially in the retina, not actually. So there is no need for an actual likeness of corporeal things to be in the nature of the soul; it merely needs to have a capacity for such likenesses. But because the ancient cosmologists could not see the distinction between actuality and potentiality, they held that the soul must be a body in order to know a bodily thing. And to explain how it could know all bodily things they held that it was compounded of the elements of all physical things.⁷

3. There are two kinds of contact, quantitative and causal. According to the first kind of contact, bodies are touched only by bodies, but according to the second a body can be touched by an incorporeal agent acting upon it.

article 2. whether the human soul is something which subsists^a

THE SECOND POINT:¹ 1. There are reasons for saying that the human soul is not something which subsists. For what subsists is said to be 'this particular thing'. But the soul is not 'this particular thing'; only the compound of soul and body can be said to be that. Hence the soul is not something subsisting.

2. Besides, whatever subsists can be described as acting. But the soul is not described as acting; because, to quote the *De Anima*,² to speak of the soul sensing or understanding would be like speaking of it weaving or building. Hence the soul is not something which subsists.

3. Besides, if the soul were something subsisting, there would be some activity of the soul without the body. But it has no activity without the body, not even the act of understanding; for understanding does not take

substance, subsistence, essence, existence, in Christian Latin from A.D. 200 onwards St Thomas's greatest service to Latin as a technique of thought was the way he fixed such terms in a necessary pattern of interrelated meanings. The earlier references in the *Summa* are surprisingly terse and sparse: 1a. 3, 4; 5 c & ad 1; 29, 2 c & especially ad 2. Here he seeks to apply this conceptual system to the problem of man's unity.

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quia non contingit intelligere sine phantasmate, phantasma autem non est sine corpore. Ergo anima humana non est aliquid subsistens.

SED CONTRA est quod Augustinus dicit, *Quisquis videt mentis naturam et esse substantiam et non esse corpoream, videt eos qui opinantur eam esse corpoream ob hoc errare, quod adjungunt ei ea sine quibus nullam possunt cogitare naturam*,³ scilicet corporum phantasias. Natura ergo mentis humanæ non solum est incorporea, sed etiam substantia, scilicet aliquid subsistens.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod necesse est dicere id quod est principium intellectualis operationis, quod dicimus animam hominis, esse quoddam principium incorpoream et subsistens. Manifestum est enim quod homo per intellectum cognoscere potest naturas omnium corporum.⁴ Quod autem potest cognoscere aliqua oportet ut nihil eorum habeat in sua natura, quia illud quod inesset ei naturaliter impediret cognitionem aliorum, sicut videmus quod lingua infirmi quæ infecta est cholericis et amaro humore non potest percipere aliquid dulce, sed omnia videntur ei amara. Si igitur principium intellectuale haberet in se naturam alicujus corporis, non posset omnia corpora cognoscere. Omne autem corpus habet aliquam naturam determinatam. Impossibile est igitur quod principium intellectuale sit corpus.

Et similiter impossibile est quod intelligat per organum corporeum, quia etiam* natura determinata illius organi corporei prohiberet cognitionem omnium corporum; sicut si aliquis determinatus color sit non solum in pupilla, sed etiam in vase vitreo, liquor infusus ejusdem coloris videtur.

Ipsum igitur intellectuale principium quod dicitur mens vel intellectus habet operationem per se cui non communicat corpus. Nihil autem potest per se operari nisi quod per se subsistit; non enim est operari nisi entis in actu, unde eo modo aliquid operatur quo est. Propter quod non dicimus quod calor calefacit, sed calidum. Relinquitur igitur animam humanam, quæ dicitur intellectus vel mens, esse aliquid incorporeum et subsistens.

*Piana: *si esset*

³*De Trin.* x, 7. PL 42, 979

⁴cf 1a. 84, 7

⁵Elsewhere St Thomas has other proofs of the spirituality of human intelligence. His use of this line of analysis in this place shows the high value it had in his eyes. Modern men find the reasoning opaque because they think of thinking as an activity in the way that talking or eating are activities. On the contrary, according to him, thinking is *being* things. His proof is intelligible only in the light of this principle: to be able-to-be all bodies, a thing must not-actually-be any body. On this, as Cajetan comments *in loc.*, Aristotle, 'the Prince of Philosophers' was prepared to rest his entire system.

It may help to draw attention to Cajetan's pleasantly absurd example here, as it