

## On the Separated Soul according to St. Thomas Aquinas

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### Introduction

There is an ongoing debate between two predominantly analytic<sup>1</sup> groups of Thomists, those holding the “survivalist”<sup>2</sup> view of the human person after death and those maintaining the “corruptionist”<sup>3</sup> view. Those who defend

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<sup>1</sup> Although this debate appears to be particularly intense among analytic Thomists (see those cited below), others have also weighed in on the topic, such as: Serge-Thomas Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” *Revue thomiste* 116 (2016): 71–103; Stephen L. Brock, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas: A Sketch* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 51–82 and 109–144; Joseph G. Trabbic, “The Human Body and Human Happiness in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*,” *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1041 (September 2011): 552–64; and Gilles Emery, “The Unity of Man, Body and Soul, in St. Thomas Aquinas,” chapter 8 in *Trinity, Church, and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* (Naples, FL: Sapientia, 2007), 209–35.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of the “survivalist camp” include: Lynne Rudder Baker, “Why Constitution is Not Identity,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 94 (1997): 599–621; Eleonore Stump, “Resurrection and the Separated Soul,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 458–66; Mark Spencer, “The Personhood of the Separated Soul,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 12, no. 3 (2014): 863–912; and Christopher M. Brown, “Souls, Ships, and Substances: A Response to Toner,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (2007): 655–68.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of the corruptionist view are: Patrick Toner, “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (2010): 588–99; Toner, “Thomas versus Tibbles: A Critical Study of Christopher Brown’s *Aquinas and the Ship of Theseus*,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81, no.

the survivalist view wish to claim that the human person does not cease to exist at death, and although, according to Mark Spencer, the survivalist camp does not identify the human person with the separated soul, it nevertheless “contends that, in the separated state, a person is constituted by a soul, while remaining an individual rational animal and individual substance of a rational nature.”<sup>4</sup>

The corruptionist view, on the other hand, will be represented in the present article by Patrick Toner<sup>5</sup> in his “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul,” in which he argues that St. Thomas held that “human beings cease to exist at their deaths,”<sup>6</sup> at least until the resurrection of the body. Toner presents this in the following manner: (1) “human beings” are composites of body and soul (therefore, as he quotes Aquinas, “my soul is not me”<sup>7</sup>); (2) death is a substantial corruption of the composite; and (3)

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4 (2007): 638–53; Christina Van Dyke, “Not Properly a Person: The Rational Soul and ‘Thomistic Substance Dualism,’” *Faith and Philosophy*, 26, no. 2 (2009): 186–204; Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas* (London: Continuum, 2008), 65, 123; B. Carlos Bazán, “The Human Soul: Form and Substance? Thomas Aquinas’s Critique of Eclectic Aristotelianism,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64(1997): 95–126; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993), 138–39; Brian Davies, *Aquinas* (London: Continuum, 2002), 109–14; and Turner C. Nevitt, “Aquinas on the Death of Christ: A New Argument for Corruptionism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2016): 77–99.

<sup>4</sup> Spencer, “The Personhood of the Separated Soul,” 869.

<sup>5</sup> I chose Toner not because his version is the most extreme of the corruptionist view, but because he clearly lays out the corruptionist argument in “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul.”

<sup>6</sup> Toner, “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul,” 587.

<sup>7</sup> Toner, “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul,” 588, quoting from Aquinas’s *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, where Aquinas comments on 1 Cor 15:12–19 (particularly vv. 17–19), in which St. Paul exclaims: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.” Since the passage is obviously emphasizing the resurrection of the body, St. Thomas comments: “Therefore, if the dead do not rise, we will be confident only in this life. In another way, because it is clear that man naturally desires his own salvation; but the soul, since it is part of man’s body, is not an entire man, and *my soul is not I*; hence, although the soul obtains salvation in another life, nevertheless, not I or any man. Furthermore, since man naturally desires salvation even of the body, a natural desire would be frustrated” ([dhspritory.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm](http://dhspritory.org/thomas/SS1Cor.htm)). Brian Davies explains the above quotation of Aquinas thus: “Aquinas thinks that I can be there as myself after my death. How? Because God can raise my body from the grave. But if there is only my soul, . . . [Aquinas] argues, then I do not exist” (*Aquinas*, 110).

“hence, humans stop existing at their deaths.”<sup>8</sup>

In this article, I would like to propose that Aquinas’s view is more nuanced than either side appears ready to acknowledge.<sup>9</sup> It seems to me important to emphasize that, although death truly involves a separation of body and soul (thus constituting a corruption of the human person as such), nevertheless, the soul remains the “essential part” of the person and maintains a certain identity with that person as a subject of attribution<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Toner, “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul,” 594.

<sup>9</sup> Although I have chosen in the present article to focus on the corruptionist view, one should also note the serious metaphysical difficulty involved in the survivalist position, in which a substance (i.e., the human person) once composed of body and soul (matter and form), is said to be after death “constituted by” only its form, though not identical with (see Rudder Baker’s and Stump’s respective articles above), although at the resurrection, it will again be composed. This raises the question of the type of relationship that exists between body and soul before and after the interim state, with the danger of a kind of Cartesian dualism, due to an apparently merely accidental union of body and soul, such that, at least during the interim state, the soul “constitutes” the person, as the thinking subject. For example, Spencer states, “on my revision of Thomistic principles, the human person can be said to be ‘essentially’ material in the sense that this is its natural state and is necessary for the human person’s ordinary and perfected life, but *not in the sense that actually having matter is necessary to be a human person*” (“The Personhood of the Separated Soul,” 908; emphasis added). However, Spencer believes that: “The survivalist view does not turn Thomistic hylomorphism into substance dualism. There is only one substance and one nature for each human person. . . . *In the state of separation, the one substance is constituted just by the soul.* The human person is incomplete without matter, since matter is needed for the complete explication of its nature; *matter is substantially, not accidentally, united to the soul*” (906; emphasis added).

Nevertheless, the survivalist view raises at least two questions: First, since Aquinas appears to agree that “in mere men, a person is constituted by the union of the soul to the body” (*Summa theologiae* [ST] III, q. 2, a. 5, ad 1: in puris hominibus ex unione animae ad corpus constituitur persona; translation mine), would he also agree that, in the interim state, one can rightly say that the *person* is constituted by only the soul, especially since he states that “the form does not constitute the species, except inasmuch as it becomes the act of matter” (ST III, q. 2, a. 5, resp.; my translation)? Secondly, is it metaphysically possible to hold *both* that matter is substantially united to the soul *and* that, in the interim state, the soul constitutes the same substance, which is the human person, *without being united to matter*? It would appear that the latter question could be resolved only by simply admitting an accidental union of body and soul (i.e., Cartesian dualism), reducing the human person to a mere *res cogitans*.

<sup>10</sup> By “subject of attribution,” I mean that the separated soul remains a *hoc aliquid* in the first sense of being subsistent, and as such, remains the first principle of its own act of being and of its own operations.

already capable of enjoying the absolute bliss of the Beatific Vision (or the suffering of temporal or eternal punishment in purgatory or hell, respectively), even before the general resurrection.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, it would be wrong, and even spiritually dangerous, to ignore the importance of the intermediate state. It is not at all clear to me that Toner means to do this, but in emphasizing the destruction of the human person at death, he and other corruptionists do appear to leave themselves open to that sort of interpretation.

In fact, Serge-Thomas Bonino, who calls these two camps<sup>12</sup> the “minimalists” (i.e., corruptionists) and the “maximalists” (i.e., survivalists), points out that:

According to the minimalists, the refusal to attribute personhood to the separated soul not only means that St. Thomas calls into question the identity between the current “me” and the separated soul, but also *implies a minimal conception of the activity of the*

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<sup>11</sup> See Pope Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus*, Constitution On the Beatific Vision of God (1336), which proclaims that the souls of the just, “*already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment*, have been, are and will be with Christ in heaven . . . [and] have seen and see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face . . . and in this vision . . . enjoy the divine essence,” and he continues with regard to the damned: “We define that . . . the souls of those who die in actual mortal sin go down into hell immediately after death and there suffer the pain of hell” (Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* [DH], ed. Peter Hünermann, 43rd ed., English ed. Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012], no. 1000). The text also explains that those in need of purification will be “purified after death.”

<sup>12</sup> A third option, which proposes to mediate between the preceding two views, has recently been proposed by Jeffrey Brower in *Aquinas’s Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, & Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): “Insofar as Socrates . . . retains his human soul as a proper part or constituent after death, he will also retain a natural disposition to be human. Evidently, therefore, Socrates can be said to survive his death as a human person (in my broad sense) [i.e., insofar as he retains the aforesaid disposition]” (295–96). Therefore, continues Brower, “all human beings survive their death along with their souls as human persons (in my broad sense), despite ceasing thereafter to be human beings, precisely because their souls cease to be united to their matter, and hence the substances to which they are identical cease to belong to the kind *animal*” (297). Consequently, Brower advocates a “non-human survivalism.” In other words, he says, “we can also describe non-human survivalism as the view according to which all human beings survive their death as human *persons* but not as human *beings*” (300). However, as will be seen below, I would advocate the opposite view: the soul continues to be essentially human in its nature even after death, although it would be metaphysically incorrect to call it a person as such.

*separated soul*, reduced to a comatose state of prolonged vigil. The separated soul would have . . . an *existence similar to that . . .* which the Ancients would concede to the *shadows which haunt Sheol*.<sup>13</sup>

As an example of this, Bonino cites B. Carlos Bazán, who declares, “a soul without its ontological correlate [i.e., matter] cannot operate, and consequently does not *live*.”<sup>14</sup> This statement will be shown to be false when we speak of the operations of the separated soul. First, however, I would like to review each of Toner’s three points mentioned above.

### The Composite Human Person

With regard to Toner’s first point, it is certainly true that, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, the human person, “an individual substance of a rational nature,”<sup>15</sup> is a composite of *both* body and soul, together with a human *esse*. Gilles Emery explains that “since the person is an *individual substance*, it is a reality that possesses its proper being in a complete manner, in itself and through itself, and which exercises on its own the act of existing. . . . [Therefore,] what accounts for my uniqueness is not only my concrete individual essence (my own humanity), but my proper act of existing in the human nature common to all human beings.”<sup>16</sup>

In other words, other than in the case of Christ, the union of body and a rational soul necessarily implies the act of existence proper to a human person (since the act of being comes to the composite through the soul). Therefore, Aquinas explains in the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*], “the body is not of the essence of the soul; but the soul by the nature of its essence can be united to the body, so that, properly speaking, not the soul alone, but the ‘composite,’ is the species.”<sup>17</sup> He also notes in the *Summa contra gentiles*

<sup>13</sup> Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” 75 : “Selon les minimalistes, le refus d’attribuer le statut de personne à l’âme séparée non seulement signifie que saint Thomas remet en cause l’identité entre le ‘moi’ actuel et l’âme séparée, mais implique aussi une conception minimale de l’activité de l’âme séparée, réduite à un état comateux de veille prolongée. L’âme séparée aurait, . . . une existence assez semblable à celle, . . . que les Anciens concédaient aux ombres qui hantent le shéol” (emphasis added ; all translations of Bonino are my own).

<sup>14</sup> Bazán, “The Human Soul,” 125. Another example is Davies, who states that, “when it comes to our life after death, *Aquinas does not believe in the immortality of the soul*” (*Aquinas*, 114; emphasis added), although Davies does admit that Aquinas thinks the soul is incorruptible.

<sup>15</sup> Aquinas cites this Boethian definition of person in *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>16</sup> Gilles Emery, O.P., “The Dignity of Being a Substance: Person, Subsistence, and Nature,” *Nova et Vetera* (English) 9, no. 4 (2011): 991–1001, at 995.

<sup>17</sup> *ST* I, q. 75, a. 7, ad 3. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from *ST* are taken from

[SCG] that “body and soul are not two actually existing substances, but one actually existing substance is made from them.”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, in asking the question of “whether the soul is man,” Aquinas affirms that “man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body.”<sup>19</sup>

But what sort of composite are we speaking of here? In what manner does it come about? St. Thomas explains that the human soul is the form of the body—“For that whereby primarily anything acts is a form of the thing to which the act is to be attributed”<sup>20</sup>—and that by which the body lives is the soul. The soul, in fact, is the principle of all *bodily* operations. Aquinas clarifies: “For the soul is the primary principle of our nourishment, sensation, and local movement; and likewise of our understanding. Therefore this principle by which we primarily understand, whether it be called the intellect or the intellectual soul, is the form of the body.”<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, it is the soul that gives being to the composite. In *De principiis naturae*, Aquinas points out that there are two kinds of *esse*, essential/substantial (as in “man exists”) and accidental (“man is white”).<sup>22</sup> What is in potency to each is a kind of matter (prime matter in the case of substantial being, and the subject in the case of accidental being.) The substantial form gives *esse* to prime matter (which has an incomplete being),<sup>23</sup> whereas the subject (which has complete being in itself) gives being to the accidental form, rather than vice versa. Therefore, there are two kinds of generation (with two corresponding kinds of corruption): (1) generation and corruption *simpliciter*, which “are only in the genus of substance,” and (2) generation and corruption *secundum quid*, which “are in all the other genera.”<sup>24</sup> Since death involves the separation of the

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the translation of the Dominican Fathers of the English Province (New York: Benziger, 1947) as presented in the NovAntiqua Latin–English edition (Ypsilanti, MI: NovAntiqua, 2009–).

<sup>18</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [SCG] II, ch. 69, n. 2. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from SCG are taken from translation of the Dominican Fathers of the English Province (London: Aeterna, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> ST I q. 75, a. 4, resp.

<sup>20</sup> ST I, q. 76, a.1, resp.

<sup>21</sup> ST I, q. 76, a.1, resp.

<sup>22</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *De principiis naturae*, no. 1: “Sed duplex est esse: scilicet esse essenziale rei, sive substantiale ut hominem esse, et hoc est esse simpliciter. Est autem aliud esse accidentale, ut hominem esse album, et hoc est esse aliquid” (trans. R. A. Kocourek, [dhspriority.org/thomas/DePrincNaturae.htm](http://dhspriority.org/thomas/DePrincNaturae.htm); all further quotation will be from this source).

<sup>23</sup> Aquinas, *De principiis naturae*, no. 4: “Hence, simply speaking, the form gives existence to matter [*forma dat esse materiae*].”

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *De principiis naturae*, no. 7.

substantial form (i.e., the soul) from matter, the composite is corrupted *simpliciter*. Nevertheless, in the case of the human person, the soul (which has being of itself) is *not* corrupted, although it lacks the completeness due to its nature (which is to be the form of a body).<sup>25</sup>

### Death as a Substantial Corruption of the Composite

From what has been said, therefore, we can see that Toner's second point, that death is a substantial corruption of the composite, is undoubtedly true. So then, how can we say that the soul remains once it has separated from the body, and in what state does it remain? Is it something like Joe's old hat, which is laid aside in the corner until it is time to put it on again?

At this point, I would like to look, step by step, at Aquinas's explanations of the incorporeality, subsistence, incorruptibility, immortality, and (even when separated) individuality of the human soul. With regard to the incorporeality of the soul, St. Thomas points out:

It is indeed clear that by means of the intellect man can know the natures of all corporeal things. However, it is necessary that whatever can know some things must not have any of them in its own nature; because that which inheres in it naturally would impede the knowledge of other things. . . . Therefore, if the intellectual principle were to have in itself the nature of some body, it would be unable to know all bodies. Moreover, every body has some determinate nature. Therefore, it is impossible for the intellectual principle to be a body.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1. In the Supplement, it is stated, "For the soul, even after separation from the body, retains the being which accrues to it when in the body, and the body is made to share that being by the resurrection, since the *being of the body and the being of the soul in the body are not distinct from one another*, otherwise the union of soul and body would be accidental. Consequently there has been *no interruption in the substantial being of man*, as would make it impossible for the self-same man to return on account of an interruption in his being, as is the case with other things that are corrupted, the being of which is interrupted altogether, since their form remains not, and their matter remains under another being" (*ST Suppl.*, q. 79, a. 2, ad 1; emphasis added).

<sup>26</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, resp.: "Manifestum est enim quod homo per intellectum cognoscere potest naturas omnium corporum. Quod autem potest cognoscere aliqua, oportet ut nihil eorum habeat in sua natura, quia illud quod inesset ei naturaliter impediret cognitionem aliorum; . . . Si igitur principium intellectuale haberet in se naturam alicuius corporis, non posset omnia corpora cognoscere. Omne autem corpus habet aliquam naturam determinatam. Impossibile est igitur quod princip-

In other words, the intellect is open to understanding many different kinds of corporeal objects and is not determined to one. It would not be able to transcend corporeal things, however, if it were itself corporeal.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, says Aquinas, it is “impossible for [the soul] to understand by means of a bodily organ; since the determinate nature of that organ would impede knowledge of all bodies,”<sup>28</sup> just as looking through colored glass determines the color of everything one sees. Consequently, the soul must be incorporeal, and because it is incorporeal and is an intellectual principle, the soul “has an operation *through itself*, in which the body does not communicate,” but “nothing . . . can operate *through itself*, except that which subsists *through itself*.”<sup>29</sup>

An important aspect to this argument of subsistence *through itself* is explained by St. Thomas: “For nothing operates, except it be a *being in act*, thus, something operates, *according to the mode by which it is*.”<sup>30</sup> In this,

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ium intellectuale sit corpus” (translation mine).

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note with Emery that there are *two senses of corporeity*. The first sense is that of “an accidental determination such as quantity” (“The Unity of Man,” 225), which is the sense Aquinas is denying here when he argues that the soul is not corporeal. However, Emery continues: “On a deeper level, corporeity can also be considered in terms of substantial determination of this corporeal being, that is, man: Here then, corporeity is that which makes the body to be a body, that which makes man corporeal. In this case, corporeity must be the body’s substantial form, that is, the principle of actuality of the body, from which derive the dimensions of extension” (225). Based on this explanation, therefore, Emery stresses: “It is on account of the soul that the human body is a human body, and specifically *on account of its substantial union with the soul. . . . Man’s corporeity is his soul*” (226). Emery explains that St. Thomas is following the Fourth Lateran Council, which teaches that “all will rise with their own bodies, which they now wear” (Constitution on the Catholic Faith [DH, no. 801]). But the only way to explain the identity of the earthly and resurrected body is by making the previously mentioned distinction of the two senses of corporeity. For Aquinas, says Emery: “At the deepest level, corporeity is the substantial form of man, since *it is from the soul that the human body has all its reality as body. . . .* Since the soul is by nature the form of the body, it is permanently ordered toward this body. The material and quantitative elements that constitute this body today constitute it only in virtue of the soul. In this way, the soul is defined in terms of its relationship to the body, and the body is defined by the soul. Thus the primary *raison d’être* of corporeal identity is found not in matter, but rather in the soul of the human person. *The identity of this subsistent soul sustains our hope in the resurrection*” (227; final emphasis added).

<sup>28</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, resp.

<sup>29</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, resp.: “. . . habet operationem per se, cui non communicat corpus. Nihil autem potest per se operari, nisi quod per se subsistit” (translation mine).

<sup>30</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, resp. (translation mine). Interestingly, most English versions of the *Summa* leave the second half of the sentence untranslated. But see the Latin:



Aquinas shows that a thing operates insofar as it is in act, insofar as it has being. In other words, it can *act* only as it *is*. It is the soul that gives being to the composite,<sup>31</sup> as noted above. Consequently, the fact that a soul can operate *per se* without the body indicates that it is not dependent on the body, but rather is subsistent through itself.

Someone might object at this point that the soul clearly needs the senses in order to understand, which it does by means of phantasms. It would seem, consequently, that the soul cannot act apart from the body. To this objection, Aquinas replies that, although it is true that the body is necessary for the intellect to act, this is “not as the organ by which such action is exercised, but by reason of the object; for the phantasm is compared to the intellect as color is to the sight.”<sup>32</sup> He goes on to explain that this does not mean the soul is not subsistent, because if that were true, a *living* animal, as such, would be nonsubsistent, “since it requires external objects of the senses in order to perform its act of perception.”<sup>33</sup> However, the souls of *nonrational* animals are *not* subsistent: they do not continue to subsist once the animal dies. This is because of the above-mentioned principle, commonly referred to by the Scholastics as *operari sequitur esse* (“acting follows on being”), and the kind of act possible to one depends upon the kind of thing one is. The soul of a nonrational animal is not able to operate apart from the body (since the nonrational animal has only a sensitive, rather than intellectual, soul), and so is not subsistent.<sup>34</sup>

This argument is also important with regard to our understanding of the condition of the separated soul, about which we will speak more later. As noted above, phantasms are necessary as objects by which the soul understands, but as Bonino points out, “cerebral activity is not the *cause* of thought.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, Aquinas believes that the soul is not dependent on the corporeal organ of the brain. Rather, the soul exercises a kind of

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“Non enim est operari nisi *entis in actu*, unde eo modo aliquid operatur, *quo est*” (emphasis mine).

<sup>31</sup> See *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1, ad 5: “The soul communicates that existence in which it subsists to the corporeal matter, out of which and the intellectual soul there results unity of existence; so that *the existence of the whole composite is also the existence of the soul*. . . . For this reason the human soul retains its own existence after the dissolution of the body.” See also *ST I*, q. 29, a. 2, ad 5, and q. 75, a. 5, ad 3.

<sup>32</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, ad 3: “. . . non sicut organum quo talis actio exerceatur, sed ratione obiecti, phantasma enim comparatur ad intellectum sicut color ad visum” (translation mine).

<sup>33</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, ad 3.

<sup>34</sup> See *ST I*, q. 75, a. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” 73: “L’activité cérébrale n’est la cause de la pensée.”

autonomy with regard to its understanding. Therefore, Bonino notes, “this noetic autonomy of the human intellective soul at the level of acting is the sign of its ontological autonomy in virtue of which it subsists *post mortem*, despite the corruption of the composite.”<sup>36</sup>

However, although the soul is subsistent, this does not mean it is a complete substance. It is still naturally part of the body–soul composite referred to as “man.” St. Thomas differentiates between a particular thing (*hoc aliquid*) that is subsistent and a particular thing (*hoc aliquid*) that is both subsistent “and is complete in a specific nature”:

The former sense excludes the inherence of an accident or of a material form; the latter excludes also the imperfection of a part, so that a hand can be called “this particular thing” [*hoc aliquid*] in the first sense, but not in the second. Therefore, as the human soul is a part of human nature, it can indeed be called “this particular thing” [*hoc aliquid*] in the first sense, as being something subsistent; but not in the second, for in this sense, what is composed of body and soul is said to be “this particular thing” [*hoc aliquid*].<sup>37</sup>

From the fact that Aquinas lumps together the human soul and the hand as both subsisting in the first sense, it is evident that, although they are very different in other ways, the human soul and the hand have in common that they are *parts*. Yet the hand is obviously not incorruptible. Consequently, something more than simple subsistence in the first sense is required in order to be able to claim that the soul is in fact incorruptible.

A few articles later, St. Thomas notes that a thing can be corrupted in two ways: *per se* (i.e., through itself) or *per accidens* (accidentally, i.e., through something else). However, no substance can be generated or corrupted *per accidens* (through something else), because a thing is generated or corrupted in accordance with its *esse*. (Recall our discussion of substantial being above.) “Therefore, whatever has *esse per se* can only be generated or corrupted *per se*, whereas those things which do not subsist, such as accidents or material forms, are said to become and be corrupted through the generation and corruption of the composite things.”<sup>38</sup> On the

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<sup>36</sup> Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” 73: “Cette autonomie noétique de l’âme intellectuelle humaine au plan de l’agir est le signe de son autonomie ontologique en vertu de laquelle elle subsiste *post mortem*, malgré la corruption du composé.”

<sup>37</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, ad 1.

<sup>38</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 6, resp.: “Unde quod per se habet esse, non potest generari vel corrumpi nisi per se, quae vero non subsistunt, ut accidentia et formae materiales,

contrary, from the fact that the human soul subsists *through itself* (i.e., *per se*), it could not be corrupted except through itself, which is impossible, since the soul is a form only, without any matter.

For it is clear that what belongs to a thing by virtue of itself is inseparable from it; but existence belongs to a form which is an act, by virtue of itself. Wherefore matter acquires actual existence as it acquires the form; while it is corrupted so far as the form is separated from it. But it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself; and therefore it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, being (*esse*) belongs to the form (which is act) and comes to the composite through the form. Therefore, matter receives its being through the form, and so is corrupted when separated from the form. But the form that is subsistent cannot naturally be separated from its own act of being, and so is not corruptible.

In the *Disputed questions on the soul*, St. Thomas points out two additional reasons for saying that the soul is incorruptible. One is the fact that the intellect can understand things (which are corruptible in themselves) in a universal way, with the result that those things become incorruptible insofar as they are understood by the intellect. The second argument for the incorruptibility of the soul comes from the natural appetite:

Natural appetite [desire springing from the nature of man] cannot be frustrated. Now we observe in men the desire for perpetual existence. This desire is grounded in reason. For to exist [*esse*] being desirable in itself, an intelligent being who apprehends existence in the absolute sense, and not merely the here and now, must desire existence in the absolute sense and for all time. Hence it is clear that this desire is not vain, but that man, in virtue of his intellective soul, is incorruptible.<sup>40</sup>

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dicuntur fieri et corrumpi per generationem et corruptionem compositorum” (translation mine).

<sup>39</sup> *ST I*, q. 75, a. 6, resp.

<sup>40</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* [*QDA*], a. 14, resp., trans. Patrick Rowan (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1949; and at [dhspriority.org/thomas/QDde-Anima.htm](http://dhspriority.org/thomas/QDde-Anima.htm)). St. Thomas also states: “The thing that is properly corrupted is neither the form nor the matter nor the act of existing itself but the composite. Moreover, the body’s act of existing is said to be corruptible inasmuch as the body by corrupting is deprived of the act of existing which it possessed in common with the soul; which act of existing remains in the subsisting soul” (*QDA*, a. 1, ad 14).

For Aquinas, since the soul is incorruptible, it simply follows that it is immortal. For example, he notes in *SCG*, “Now the corruption of the body does not cause the soul to cease to exist, for the latter is immortal, as we have proved above.”<sup>41</sup> However, elsewhere, St. Thomas also explains that “a thing ordained to an eternal end must be capable of enduring forever. That is why the soul’s immortality can be proved from the eternity of intelligible truth.”<sup>42</sup> Earlier in *SCG*, he offered another proof for the immortality of the soul:

The Philosopher thereupon adds: That alone is separate which truly is. This remark cannot apply to the agent intellect, since it alone is not separate, for he had already spoken of the possible intellect as being separate. Nor can that statement be understood to refer to the possible intellect, since Aristotle had already said the same thing concerning the agent intellect. It remains that the above remark applies to that which includes both intellects, namely, to the intellect in act, of which he was speaking; because that alone in our soul which belongs to the intellect in act is separate and uses no organ; I mean that part of the soul whereby we understand actually and which includes the possible and agent intellect. And that is why Aristotle goes on to say that this part of the soul alone is immortal and everlasting, as being independent of the body in virtue of its separateness.<sup>43</sup>

In saying that “this part of the soul alone is immortal,” St. Thomas does not mean that the soul can be divided, which is impossible, since it is a form, but rather that it is the rational soul that is immortal, whereas the vegetative and sensitive powers do not actually remain in the soul, but only virtually,<sup>44</sup> or “in root,” and cannot be activated without the senses, which require corporeal organs.

Yet, one might ask how it is that, if the soul was created to be part of a

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<sup>41</sup> *SCG* II, ch. 86, no. 9 (referring to ch. 79, which is on the incorruptibility of the soul).

<sup>42</sup> *SCG* II, ch. 84, no. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *SCG* II, ch. 78, no. 12.

<sup>44</sup> What Aquinas means by “in root” can be seen in the Supplement of *ST*: “The sensitive and other like powers do not remain in the separated soul except in a restricted sense, namely radically, in the same way as a result is in its principle: because there remains in the separated soul the ability to produce these powers if it should be reunited to the body; nor is it necessary for this ability to be anything in addition to the essence of the soul” (q. 70, a. 1, resp.)

composite as the form of the body, it does not lose its individuation once it has separated from the body. It would in fact appear that, if the soul, as form, is individuated by matter (i.e., the body), once it leaves the body, it would lose its individuation, and therefore would no longer subsist as this particular thing. On the other hand, if it were individuated in itself, either it would need to be a simple form, which is its own species, as in the case of the angels, or it would itself have to be composed of matter and form.

Aquinas answers this objection by explaining that, even though the soul has a relationship to the body, its act of being comes not from the body, but from God. For this reason, “the soul’s act of existing does not cease when the body corrupts, nor does the soul’s individuation cease when the body corrupts.”<sup>45</sup> He notes that this is because: “The act[s] of existing [*esse*] and individuation [*individuat*] of a thing are always found together. For universals do not exist in reality inasmuch as they are universals, but only inasmuch as they are individuated.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, since the soul has its own act of being, it also retains its individuation. In summary, then, we can say that the soul, which is the substantial form of the body, is incorporeal, subsistent, and incorruptible, and thereby immortal and individual, even when separated.

### **What It Means to Say That a Human Person Ceases to Exist at Death**

This brings us to Toner’s third point. Is it true that human beings stop existing when they die? Yes, if you mean existing as composites of body and soul, but no, if you mean there is nothing *personal* left after death. The soul remains “personal” in the sense of retaining the individuality of the person (even to the point of being judged in place of the person), and as a subject of attribution, it continues to be the first principle of the act of existence and of the operations of the person. Toner stresses that “the soul which survives my death, is not me,”<sup>47</sup> reiterating Aquinas. Yet there is a danger that one may stop at this point and fail to clarify what it is that remains between death and the final resurrection and that the soul is not like the old hat we mentioned earlier.

Avoiding the danger of stopping there, St. Thomas calls the soul the “chief part” of man,<sup>48</sup> and Cardinal Cajetan does not hesitate to call the separated soul a “*semi-persona*, and not only a *semi-natura*,”<sup>49</sup> when

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<sup>45</sup> *QDA*, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>46</sup> *QDA*, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>47</sup> Toner, “St. Thomas Aquinas on Death and the Separated Soul,” 593.

<sup>48</sup> *ST* III, q. 50, a. 4, ad 2.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *Commentaria summa theologiae* III, q. 6, a. 3: “Imaginan-

commenting on Aquinas's article regarding whether the soul of Christ was assumed to the Divine Person before his flesh. After noting St. Thomas' reply that it would not be fitting for Christ's soul to be created from the beginning and assumed later by the Word (which would either result in the corruption of its subsistence or mean that it was not united according to its subsistence), Cajetan goes on to say that "the Author is speaking here concerning the subsisting thing [i.e., the soul] just as if he were speaking of personhood [*personalitate*]:<sup>50</sup> because the separated soul differs from a person only by the fact that it is incomplete in its species; because it is not the species, but a part of the species."<sup>51</sup>

Cajetan then explains in a second note that, if the soul of Christ preexisted its being assumed by the Word, it would be corrupted, which could be understood in two ways: "First, as to the act of subsisting. . . . In another way, not only as to the act of subsisting, but as to that which underlies the act of subsisting."<sup>52</sup> The subject of the act of subsisting would also be corrupted:

And thus it seems that this text should be understood in keeping with what has already been determined with respect to personhood [*personalitate*]. Indeed, it should be imagined that the separated soul is a semi-person, and not merely a semi-nature. For united to flesh it is a semi-nature, since it is the essential part of human nature. But it does not subsist through itself as such, but through the hypostasis, to which as soul, as the defining principle [*ratio*] of subsisting according to its proper genus, namely, the immaterial order, it conveys the act of being and subsisting. But as soon as it is separated

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dum est enim quod anima separata est semi-persona, et non solum semi-natura" (Leonine ed. 11 [Rome: S. C. de Propaganda Fidei, 1903]). All the translations here of Cajetan are mine, with the help of Sr. Tamsin Geach, O.P., and Fr. Timothy Bellamah, O.P., a collaborator of the Leonine Commission.

<sup>50</sup> As Fr. Bellamah pointed out to me, the term that best expresses the concept "person" in an abstract form is "personhood," rather than "personality," which is really a concrete term used in the modern age "to designate the external (visible and audible) aspect of a person's being." However, it is clear from the context that Cajetan wants to speak of "person" in an abstract, universal way, for which the word "personhood" is a better fit.

<sup>51</sup> Cajetan, *Commentaria* III, q. 6, a. 3. "Auctor loquitur hic de subsistentia tanquam si loqueretur de personalitate: quia anima separata differt a persona solum per hoc quod est incompletae speciei; quia non est species, sed pars speciei."

<sup>52</sup> Cajetan, *Commentaria* III, q. 6, a. 3: "Primo, quoad actum subsistendi. . . . Alio modo, non solum quoad actum subsistendi, sed quoad id quod subiicitur actui subsistendi."

from the body, from this very fact by which it is constituted in separate being, it is constituted *in a certain totality and completeness*, so that it be that which subsists (inadequately, however, with respect to its being, in which even the body has been born, and [in which] the whole man subsists). For it has already been said that the separation gives a certain totality and completeness. And therefore, once separated, the soul is a semi-person, and as such is delimited by its own limit—though, while existing in the body, it was delimited by the limit of the whole man.<sup>53</sup>

Cajetan seems to be saying that St. Thomas's point is that, just as the Word assuming a preexisting angel would corrupt the personhood of that angel, so also the Word assuming a preexisting soul would corrupt the terminus of that soul, "by which it is constituted in being that which it is: both of a semi-person and of a subsisting thing."<sup>54</sup> However, if the Word assumed a soul that was not pre-existing, "only then would it be assumed and united as a semi-nature."<sup>55</sup> This view of the soul as a semi-person would seem to accord well with Aquinas's answer to an objection that states that "each man is his intellect,"<sup>56</sup> to which St. Thomas replies: "Man is said to be his own intellect, not because the intellect is the entire man, but because the intellect is the chief part of man, in which man's whole disposition lies virtually; just as the ruler of the city may be called the whole city, since its entire disposal is vested in him."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cajetan, *Commentaria* III, q. 6, a. 3: "Et hoc modo intelligendus videtur hic textus, conformiter ad praedeterminata de personalitate. Imaginandum est enim quod anima separata est semi-persona, et non solum semi-natura. Nam unita carni est semi-natura, cum sit pars essentialis humanae naturae: sed non subsistit per seipsam ut quod, sed per hypostasim, cui ut anima, ut ratio subsistendi ex proprio genere, scilicet immateriali ordine, defert actum essendi et subsistendi. Sed statim ut separata est a corpore, ex hoc ipso quo constituitur in esse separato, constituitur in *quadam totalitate et completionem*, ut scilicet sit quod subsistit (inadequate tamen ad suum esse, in quo natum est etiam corpus, et totus homo subsistere): iam enim dictum est quod separatio dat quandam totalitatem et completionem. Et ideo statim separata anima est semi-persona, ac per hoc proprio termino terminatur: quae, in corpore existens, terminabatur termino totius hominis" (emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup> Cajetan, *Commentaria* III, q. 6, a. 3: "... qua constituitur in esse quod est, et semi-personae et subsistentis."

<sup>55</sup> Cajetan, *Commentaria* III, q. 6, a. 3: "... tunc solum ut semi-natura assumitur et unitur."

<sup>56</sup> *ST* III, q. 50, a. 4, obj. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *ST* III, q. 50, a. 4, ad 2.

In other words, as Steven A. Long points out, even though the soul is not the person as such, it “is the noblest and most formal subsistent principle, root of the noblest operations of the ‘I.’”<sup>58</sup> In addition, as shall be explained below, the soul continues to understand, continues to remember (with its intellectual memory), and continues to love (as a simple act of willing), even after it is separated from the body. While it can no longer perform the operations proper to its sensitive powers (which, although originating in the soul, belong to the composite as such), it is still able to perform other operations that do not require the body:

The proposition advanced, . . . namely, that no operation can remain in the soul when separated from the body, we declare to be false, in view of the fact that those operations do remain which are not exercised through organs. Such are the operations of understanding and willing. Those operations, however, do not endure which are carried out by means of bodily organs, and of such a kind are the operations of the nutritive and sensitive powers.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, the separated soul continues to act, though in a way much different from the way it did when it was in the body. We will now discuss more in detail some of its operations.

#### *The Understanding of the Separated Soul*

In speaking of the knowledge of the separated soul, Aquinas presents the difficulty in the following way. In the Platonist understanding of the soul as being only accidentally tied to the body (which would mean that death would be a release for the soul from the impediment of the body, such that it would, as Aquinas states in *ST* I, q. 89, a. 1, resp., “at once return to its own nature, and would understand intelligible things simply, without turning to the phantasms”), it would appear that there is no real difficulty with explaining how the separated soul understands: it would understand in a way similar to the angels. However, that view of the soul would seem to require all who held it to also hold that “the union of soul and body would not be for the soul’s good, for evidently it would understand worse in the body than out of it; but for the good of the body, which would be unreasonable, since matter exists on account of the form, and not the form for the sake of the matter.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> I thank Steven A. Long, of Ave Maria University, for his comments.

<sup>59</sup> *SCG* II, ch. 81, no. 11.

<sup>60</sup> *ST* I, q. 89, a. 1, resp.



St. Thomas continues with the dilemma: “But if we admit that the nature of the soul requires it to understand by turning to 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>61</sup> In short, then, if we do not wish to hold that the soul is only accidentally tied to the body, it would appear that, once the composite is corrupted, the soul is no longer able to understand anything, since the senses and imagination, which belong to the sensitive part of the soul, make use of corporeal organs to produce the phantasms the soul uses to understand. Nevertheless, Aquinas resolves this problem by returning once again to the axiom of *operari sequitur esse*:

To solve this difficulty, we must consider that nothing acts except so far as it is actual, *the mode of action in every agent follows from its mode of existence [modus operandi uniuscuiusque rei sequitur modum essendi ipsius]*. Now the soul has one mode of being when in the body, and another when apart from it, its nature remaining always the same; but this does not mean its union with the body is an accidental thing, for, on the contrary, such union belongs to its very nature. . . The soul, therefore, when united to the body, consistently with that mode of existence, has a mode of understanding, by turning to corporeal phantasms, which are in corporeal organs; but when it is separated from the body, it has a mode of understanding, by turning to simply intelligible objects, as is proper to other separate substances.<sup>62</sup>

One might ask here why it is not better, then, for the soul to simply remain separated from the body, as the Platonists would have it, rather than be reunited to the body in the final resurrection. Aquinas explains that this mode of understanding (i.e., turning directly to intelligible objects, rather than to corporeal phantasms) is not really suited to the nature of the soul: “While it is true that it is nobler in itself to understand by turning to something higher than to understand by turning to phantasms, nevertheless such a mode of understanding was not so perfect as regards what was possible to the soul.”<sup>63</sup> The reason for this, he says, is that every separated intellectual substance understands by means of the divine light, and the further away one is from the First Principle, “the

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<sup>61</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, resp.

<sup>62</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, resp. (emphasis added).

<sup>63</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, resp.

more this light is divided and diversified,”<sup>64</sup> and so the greater the number and the less universal are the species that can be possessed by the intellect. The result is that the degree of comprehension is also less. “If, therefore,” he adds, “the inferior substances received species in the same degree of universality as the superior substances, since they are not so strong in understanding, the knowledge which they would derive through them would be imperfect, and of a general and confused nature.”<sup>65</sup>

Aquinas likens this to human understanding in this life, where more universal concepts are less easily understood by those of a “weaker intellect,” who need these things explained to them in greater detail. The same is true of the human soul, which is the lowest of the intellectual substances. If it were meant to understand in the same way as the angels, it could possess only a more confused and general knowledge, rather than perfect. St. Thomas continues:

Therefore to make it possible for human souls to possess perfect and proper knowledge, they were so made that their nature required them to be joined to bodies, and thus to receive the proper and adequate knowledge of sensible things from the sensible things themselves; thus we see in the case of uneducated men that they have to be taught by sensible examples.

It is clear then that it was for the soul’s good that it was united to a body, and that it understands by turning to the phantasms. Nevertheless it is possible for it to exist apart from the body, and also to understand in another way.<sup>66</sup>

Consequently, it is through a certain participation in the species given by means of the divine light that the separated soul is able to understand, although not in a perfect way, but in a way that is rather “confused and general,” since the soul was created to naturally turn to phantasms for its understanding. Yet Aquinas insists that this way of knowledge (i.e., turning directly to the species given through the divine light) is not in itself unnatural, “for God is the author of the influx both of the light of grace and of the light of nature [i.e., the light of reason].”<sup>67</sup> These new real-

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<sup>64</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, resp.

<sup>65</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, resp.

<sup>66</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, resp.

<sup>67</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 1, ad 3. Without getting into the debate of whether or not the state itself of the separated soul can properly be called unnatural, I will simply cite two authors on this point. First, Emery states: “In a certain way, the immortality of the

ities, however, although they have God for their cause, are known by the separated soul “directly through its essence.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, as Bonino explains, “the separated substance knows other realities by way of introspection, that is to say, in knowing itself.”<sup>69</sup> The separated soul knows in a similar way, although more imperfectly than the angel.

### *The Intellectual Memory*

But will the soul continue to remember the things it knew in this life? Yes. Aquinas states that the habit of knowledge acquired in this life remains in the separated soul, not with regard to the sensitive powers, but with regard to the intellect itself:

Because, as it is said in the book, *On the Length and Shortness of Life* [Aristotle], some form may be corrupted in two ways; in one way, *per se*, when it is corrupted by its contrary, as heat, by cold; and another way, *per accidens*, namely, through the corruption of its subject. Now it is clear that knowledge which is in the human intellect cannot be corrupted through corruption of the subject, since the intellect is incorruptible. . . . Similarly, neither can the intelligible species which are in the passive intellect be corrupted by their contrary, because nothing is contrary to intelligible *intentions*,

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soul implies its union with the body, since a perpetual existence in a state ‘contrary to nature’ is hardly thinkable. The immortality of the soul must be considered in terms of its relation to the resurrection” (“The Unity of Man,” 231). However, Bonino argues that, although Aquinas speaks of the state of the separated soul as unnatural when emphasizing the resurrection of the body, “the expression *praeter naturam* [preternatural] applied to the state of the separated soul and its knowledge is found in St. Thomas [L’expression *praeter naturam* appliquée au statut de l’âme séparée et de sa connaissance se trouve chez Thomas]” (“L’âme séparée,” 79n23, citing *ST* I, q. 89, a. 1, and q. 104, a. 6–7, and *In II sent.*, d. 18, q. 1, a. 3). The use of “preternatural,” for Aquinas, would indicate a state that is neither strictly speaking against nature nor completely natural, but rather something above its nature, “modes of being and knowing which transcend its connatural mode of being and of knowing” (“L’âme séparée,” 87: “des modes d’être et de connaître qui transcendent son mode connatural d’être et de connaître”). Bonino explains that, “from this perspective, human nature, without ever losing its essence or formal identity, enjoys a certain plasticity” (87: “Dans cette perspective, la nature humaine, sans jamais perdre son essence ou identité formelle, jouit d’une certaine plasticité”).

<sup>68</sup> Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” 84. “. . . directement par son essence. ”

<sup>69</sup> Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” 84: “La substance séparée connaît les autres réalités par manière d’introspection, c’est-à-dire en se connaissant elle-même.”

and especially with regard to the simple intelligence by which is understood *that which is*.<sup>70</sup>

St. Thomas goes on to explain that, although knowledge can be corrupted directly by forgetfulness or deception, neither of these can take place in the separated soul.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, the soul retains its habit of knowledge insofar as this habit of knowledge is in the intellect. But this applies only to the intelligible species the soul knew in this life, not to sensitive memory, which relies on phantasms. Therefore, as Bonino puts it, “the separated soul continues to know by means of the ideas acquired during the course of this life and conserved in the intellectual memory,”<sup>72</sup> whereas new knowledge, as noted above, is received by the soul in a way analogous to the angels, by means of intelligible species infused by God.

#### *The Will in the Soul*

As has been mentioned, although all the powers have the soul as their principle, some powers inhere in the soul alone<sup>73</sup> (as the intellect and will), whereas others have the whole composite for their subject (the sensitive and nutritive powers). Once the composite is corrupted, only the intellect and will remain (the intellectual memory also remains in the mind, but not

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<sup>70</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 5, resp.: “Quia, ut dicitur in libro de longitudine et brevitate vitae, dupliciter corrumpitur aliqua forma, uno modo, per se, quando corrumpitur a suo contrario, ut calidum a frigido; alio modo, per accidens, scilicet per corruptionem subiecti. Manifestum est autem quod per corruptionem subiecti, scientia quae est in intellectu humano, corrumpi non potest, cum intellectus sit incorruptibilis. . . . Similiter etiam nec per contrarium corrumpi possunt species intelligibiles quae sunt in intellectu possibili, quia intentioni intelligibili nihil est contrarium; et praecipue quantum ad simplicem intelligentiam, qua intelligitur quod quid est” (translation mine; emphasis mine).

<sup>71</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 5, resp. Cf. *SCG II*, ch. 81, no. 14: “Now, recollection, being an act performed through a bodily organ, . . . cannot remain in the soul after the body, unless recollection be taken equivocally for the understanding of things which one knew before. For there must be present in the separate soul even the things that it knew in this life, since the intelligible species are received into the possible intellect inexpugnably.”

<sup>72</sup> Bonino, “L’âme séparée,” 83 : “L’âme séparée continue de connaître au moyen des idées acquises au cours de cette vie et conservées dans la mémoire intellectuelle.”

<sup>73</sup> Although Aquinas points out that “we may therefore say that the soul understands, as the eye sees; but it is more correct to say that man understands through the soul” (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2). When the soul is united to the body, it is really the composite that understands or wills. However, these acts are performed without a direct dependence on the body, as shown above.

the sensitive memory, as we have said<sup>74</sup>):

All the powers of the soul belong to the soul alone as their *principle*. But some powers belong to the soul alone as their *subject*; as the intelligence and the will. These powers must remain in the soul, after the destruction of the body. But other powers are subjected in the composite; as all the powers of the sensitive and nutritive parts. Now accidents cannot remain after the destruction of the subject. Wherefore, the composite being destroyed, such powers do not remain actually; but they remain virtually in the soul, as in their principle or root.<sup>75</sup>

One of the objections in the article then asks how it is that, *without the body*, the blessed soul can experience joy and the condemned soul suffer sorrow? Interestingly enough, Aquinas replies, “in the separate soul, sorrow and joy are not in the sensitive, but in the intellectual appetite, as in the angels.”<sup>76</sup> He explains further in *SCG* that, with regard to operations of the soul such as loving and rejoicing, a distinction must be made between passions of the soul (which are acts of the sensitive appetite) and the simple act of willing:

Sometimes [these types of operations] are taken for passions of the soul: and thus they are acts of the sensible appetite in respect of the irascible and the concupiscible faculties, together with a certain bodily transmutation. And thus they cannot remain in the soul after death. . . . But sometimes they are taken for a simple act of the will, that is without any passion. Wherefore Aristotle says in the seventh book of *Ethics* that God rejoices by one simple operation; and in the tenth book that in the contemplation of wisdom there is wonderful pleasure; and in the eighth book, he distinguishes the love of friendship from the love that is a passion. Now since the will is a power that uses no organ, as neither does the intellect, it is clear that these things in so far as they are acts of the will, remain in the separated soul.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See *ST I*, q. 77, a. 8, ad 4: “The recollection spoken of there is to be taken in the same way as Augustine (*De Trin.* x, 11; xiv, 7) places memory in the mind; not as a part of the sensitive soul.”

<sup>75</sup> *ST I*, q. 77, a. 8, resp. (emphasis mine).

<sup>76</sup> *ST I*, q. 77, a. 8, ad 5.

<sup>77</sup> *SCG II*, ch. 81, no. 15.

It is important to note, however, that the soul, upon being separated from the body, immediately has its will fixed either in good or in evil. Unlike in this life, where the will is changeable, upon death, the will can no longer change from good to evil or from evil to good:

So long as the soul is united to the body, it is in a changeable state; but not after its separation from the body. For a disposition of the soul is accidentally [*per accidens*] subject to change in accordance with some change in the body: because, since the body serves the soul in the soul's proper operations, it is natural that while the soul is in the body, it should be perfected by being moved to perfection. Hence, when it departs from the body, it will no longer be in a state of mobility towards the end, but of quiescence in the end. Consequently the will, as regards the desire for the ultimate end, will be immovable.<sup>78</sup>

In other words, whatever ultimate end the soul had chosen at the moment of death, whether it be God or something else, is the ultimate end upon which the will of the soul is fixed for all eternity, just as the angels, "as soon as they adhere to an end, due or undue, . . . abide therein immovably."<sup>79</sup> Aquinas also warns that the adherence of the will to the object chosen as its ultimate end does not alter even once the soul has been reunited to the body at the resurrection. "On the contrary," he states, "it will remain thus, because . . . at the resurrection, the body will be disposed according to the exigencies of the soul, and the soul will not be influenced by the body, but will remain unchangeable."<sup>80</sup> That is, it will remain unchangeable with regard to the ultimate end, although, according to Aquinas, there will still be a kind of changeability in the soul with regard to the desire of lesser things that are ordered to whichever ultimate end the soul had previously chosen. "Therefore," he notes, "the will of the separated soul is not changeable from good to evil, although it is changeable from the desire for one thing to the desire for another, provided the order to the [same] ultimate end be observed."<sup>81</sup>

Consequently, adds St. Thomas, the will of the separated soul remains free. He declares, "it is now apparent that such immutability is not in

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<sup>78</sup> *SCG IV*, ch. 95, no. 5.

<sup>79</sup> *SCG IV*, ch. 95, no. 8.

<sup>80</sup> *SCG IV*, ch. 95, no. 9.

<sup>81</sup> *SCG IV*, ch. 95, no. 6.

conflict with the power of free will whose act it is to choose, for choice is of the things for the end; choice is not of the ultimate end.”<sup>82</sup>

### On the Particular Judgment of the Soul

According to Aquinas (and the teaching of the Catholic Church), the soul, upon its separation from the body, will be immediately judged by God and will receive “the recompense he has deserved.”<sup>83</sup> In other words, it does not have to wait until it is rejoined to the body to be judged. Rather, as noted above, the souls of the just “immediately after death and, in the case of those who need purification, after the purification . . . already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment, have been, are, and will be with Christ in heaven . . . [and] enjoy the divine essence [by means of the Beatific Vision].”<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, the souls of the wicked “go down into hell immediately after death and there suffer the pain of hell.”<sup>85</sup>

One might think it strange, however, that the separated soul is immediately judged, since one would normally think of judgment as being a judgment of the *person*.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, it is evident that the soul is so personal that it “stands in” or “takes the place of” the person who is judged in the particular judgment. Nevertheless, there is a certain fittingness to the fact that the soul is judged even before the resurrection, as Aquinas explains:

As soon as the soul is separated from the body, it is made capable of the divine vision, which it could not arrive at while it was united to a corruptible body. And moreover, man’s ultimate happiness, which is the reward of virtue, . . . consists in the vision of God. Now there is

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<sup>82</sup> SCG IV, ch. 95, no. 7.

<sup>83</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology* I [Faith], ch. 242: “. . . retribuitur quantum ad animam secundum quod meruit” (trans. Cyril Vollert [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1947; dhspriority.org/thomas/Compendium.htm]).

<sup>84</sup> Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (DH, no. 1000).

<sup>85</sup> Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* (DH, no. 1002).

<sup>86</sup> The two judgments are explained in this way: “Each man is both an individual person and a part of the whole human race: wherefore a twofold judgment is due to him. One, the particular judgment, is that to which he will be subjected after death, when he will receive according as he hath done in the body [see 2 Cor. 5:10], not indeed entirely but only in part since he will receive not in the body but only in the soul. The other judgment will be passed on him as a part of the human race: thus a man is said to be judged according to human justice, even when judgment is pronounced on the community of which he is a part. Hence at the general judgment of the whole human race by the general separation of the good from the wicked, it follows that each one will be judged” (*ST* Suppl., q. 88, a. 1, ad 1).

no reason why a punishment or reward should be deferred, after the moment in which the soul can be a participant [in these]. Therefore, as soon as the soul is separated from the body, it receives its punishment or reward, for those things which it did in the body.<sup>87</sup>

St. Thomas goes on to clarify further why it is appropriate for the soul to be judged first:

The order in punishment and reward should correspond to the order in fault and merit. Now merit and fault are not ascribed to the body except through the soul: since nothing is deserving of praise or blame, except in so far as it is voluntary. Consequently both reward and punishment are awarded to the body through the soul: but it does not belong to souls on account of the body. Hence there is no reason why the punishment or reward of souls should await the resumption of their bodies: indeed it would seem more fitting that souls, in which there was first fault or merit, should also be first in being punished or rewarded.<sup>88</sup>

However, with regard to the souls of the just who are not yet completely purified in this life, Aquinas notes that they will not immediately receive their reward, which consists in the Beatific Vision (the vision of God himself), until after their purification is complete:

The rational creature cannot be raised to that vision, unless it be wholly purified. . . . Now the soul is defiled by sin, whereby it adheres inordinately to things beneath it: and in this life it is cleansed from this defilement by Penance and the other sacraments. . . . Sometimes, however, it happens that this cleansing is not entirely completed in this life, but the soul still owes a debt of punishment, through either neglect, or occupations, or because it has been surprised by death. Nevertheless, it does not for this reason deserve to be wholly deprived of its reward, since these things may happen

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<sup>87</sup> *SCG* IV, ch. 91, no. 2: “Ex hoc enim quod anima separatur a corpore, fit capax visionis divinae, ad quam, dum esset coniuncta corruptibili corpori, pervenire non poterat. In visione autem Dei ultima hominis beatitudo consistit, quae est *virtutis praemium*.... Nulla autem ratio esset quare differretur poena et praemium, ex quo utriusque anima particeps esse potest. Statim igitur cum anima separatur a corpore, praemium vel poenam recipit *pro his quae in corpore gessit* [cf. II *Cor.* V, 10]” (translation mine; Latin from the Leonine edition).

<sup>88</sup> *SCG* IV, ch. 91, no. 4 (translation modified).



without mortal sin, which alone takes away charity, to which the reward of eternal life is due. . . . Consequently, after this life, the soul will need to be cleansed before it can receive its final reward. Now this cleansing [*purgatio*] is effected by means of punishment. . . . Therefore, the souls of the just, who have something that could have been cleansed in this world, are debarred from receiving their reward, until they have suffered a purgatorial punishment: and this is why we hold that there is a Purgatory.<sup>89</sup>

It is clear, then, that the separated soul is so *personal* that it is even held accountable for the sins of the *person*, and made to atone for whatever it did not atone for while still in the body before it is allowed to participate in the Beatific Vision.

### *The Separated Souls of the Damned*

The greatest suffering of the souls of the wicked is, of course, the loss of the Beatific Vision, the forfeiting of their enjoyment of God forever. This is known as the pain of loss. However, the souls of the wicked will also receive the punishment known as the pain of sense. With regard to this, it is interesting to note that, according to Aquinas, the condemned separated soul, even before being reunited to its body, already suffers the corporeal fire of hell (which the devils also suffer). In explaining how this is possible, St. Thomas points out that there are two kinds of suffering in an intellectual being. The first is by being directly acted upon in a way that effects change and corruption. This, however, is impossible for the soul (as well as for the evil spirits), and so it does not suffer sensible pain from the fire in this manner. Aquinas continues:

However, the soul can suffer by corporeal fire according to the second kind of suffering, *inasmuch as it is hindered from its incli-*

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<sup>89</sup> SCG IV, ch. 91, no. 6. The Supplement of *ST* offers an interesting explanation of the separate purgation of the body versus the soul: “The soul is compared to the body, not only as a worker to the instrument with which he works, but also as form to matter: wherefore the work belongs to the composite and not to the soul alone, as the Philosopher shows (*De anima* i, 4). And since to the worker is due the reward of the work, it behooves man himself, who is composed of soul and body, to receive the reward of his work. Now as venial offenses are called sins as being dispositions to sin, and not as having simply and perfectly the character of sin, so the punishment which is awarded to them in purgatory is not a retribution simply, but rather a cleansing, which is *wrought separately in the body, by death and by its being reduced to ashes, and in the soul by the fire of purgatory*” (*ST* Suppl., q. 75, a. 1, ad 3).

*nation or volition by fire of this kind. . . .* For the soul and any incorporeal substance, inasmuch as this belongs to it by nature, is not physically confined in any place, but transcends the whole corporeal order. Consequently it is contrary to its nature and to its natural appetite for it to be fettered to anything and be confined in a place by some necessity; and I maintain that this is the case except inasmuch as the soul is united to the body whose natural form it is, and in which there follows some perfection.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, the separated soul suffers from the pain of sense, as well as from the pain of loss, inasmuch as it is weighed down by the corporeal fire. And, in case anyone should scoff at the possibility of a spiritual substance being hindered by a corporeal one, Aquinas quotes St. Augustine:

If men's souls, having been created incorporeal, are now in this life incarnate in bodily members, and shall one day be bound thereto forever, then why cannot we truly say, though you may marvel at it, that even incorporeal spirits may be afflicted by corporeal fire? Therefore these spirits, even though incorporeal, shall dwell in tormenting corporeal fires . . . and, instead of giving life to these fires, they shall receive punishment from them.<sup>91</sup>

Aquinas notes that this corporeal fire acts on the soul as an instrument of divine justice, by means of divine power. The fire afflicts the condemned soul with great interior sadness. St. Thomas explains that this sadness is "because the soul, which was born to be united to God through possession, meditates on the fact that it occupies a place below the lowest things in existence."<sup>92</sup> In summary, then, "the greatest affliction of the damned will be caused by the fact that they are separated from God; secondly, by the fact that they are situated below corporeal things, and in the lowest and meanest place."<sup>93</sup>

### *The Happiness of the Souls of the Just*

In speaking of the invisible mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit to all those who are in grace, Aquinas points out that this mission continues to

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<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *QDA*, a. 21, resp. (emphasis mine).

<sup>91</sup> St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 21.10, as found in Aquinas, *QDA*, a. 21, resp.

<sup>92</sup> *QDA*, a. 21, resp.

<sup>93</sup> *QDA*, a. 21, resp.

be directed toward the blessed “at the very beginning of their beatitude.”<sup>94</sup> He adds: “The invisible mission is made to them subsequently, not by ‘intensity’ of grace, but by the *further revelation of mysteries*; which goes on till the day of judgment. Such an increase is by the ‘extension’ of grace, because it extends to a greater number of objects.”<sup>95</sup>

In this we see that the separated soul is able to understand and enjoy further revelation even before being united again to the body up until the final judgment. In fact, Aquinas explains elsewhere that the separated soul already enjoys the perfect happiness of the Beatific Vision even before the resurrection of the body:

But as to perfect Happiness, which consists in the vision of God, some have maintained that it is not possible to the soul separated from the body; and have said that the souls of saints, when separated from their bodies, do not attain to that Happiness until the Day of Judgment, when they will receive their bodies back again. And this is shown to be false, both by *authority* and by *reason*.<sup>96</sup>

With regard to the argument from authority, St. Thomas points to St. Paul’s statement that, “while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:6), and he explains that “the souls of the saints, separated from their bodies, are in God’s presence . . . whence it is evident that the souls of the saints, separated from their bodies, ‘walk by sight,’ seeing the Essence of God, wherein is true Happiness.”<sup>97</sup>

As for the argument from reason that he mentions, St. Thomas again points out the fact that the intellect is not dependent on the body for its operation, except with regard to the forming of phantasms, which are unnecessary for the Beatific Vision, in which the soul contemplates the divine essence. “Consequently,” he says, “without the body the soul can be happy.”<sup>98</sup> However, the question remains as to whether the separated soul’s happiness constitutes *human* happiness. Joseph Trabbic thinks we can designate it only *loosely* as human happiness: “Indeed, the intellect is perfected in such a state and human happiness consists primarily in the perfection of the intellect. But if, as Aquinas believes, neither the body by

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<sup>94</sup> *ST I*, q. 43, a. 6, ad 3.

<sup>95</sup> *ST I*, q. 43, a. 6, ad 3.

<sup>96</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, resp. (emphasis mine).

<sup>97</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, resp.

<sup>98</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, resp.

itself nor the soul by itself is a human person, then *true happiness* cannot be had by a disembodied but perfected human intellect.”<sup>99</sup>

Two points must be made in reply to this objection. First, although the mode of being of the soul has changed, as mentioned above, from a mode of being united to the body to the mode of being separated from the body, the soul nevertheless remains “human” in its *nature* (as it is the *soul* that causes the composite to *be human*, since the form gives the species, according to Aquinas),<sup>100</sup> although it is not a *person* in the metaphysical sense mentioned above. (That is, it is not a *complete, individual, rational substance*, a composite of body and rational soul with its own act of being.) In fact, if the soul were no longer “human” in its nature, it would have to have been changed into some other species at death, which is absurd.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, one can and should say that the happiness of the separated soul *is human happiness*.

The second point regards the meaning of “true happiness.” If “true happiness” means “essential” happiness, then the soul already experiences it even prior to the resurrection of the body. St. Thomas explains

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<sup>99</sup> Trabbic, “The Human Body and Human Happiness in Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*,” 560 (emphasis added).

<sup>100</sup> See *ST I*, q. 76, a. 1, resp. In this article, Aquinas explains: “The nature of each thing is shown by its operation. Now the proper operation of man as man is to understand; . . . Whence Aristotle concludes (*Ethic. x, 7*) that the ultimate happiness of man must consist in this operation as properly belonging to him. Man must therefore derive his species from that which is the principle of this operation. But the species of anything is derived from its form. It follows therefore that the intellectual principle is the proper form of man.” But the intellectual principle to which St. Thomas refers is the rational soul. Therefore, it is the soul that makes the composite human in its nature. However, by saying that the soul remains human at death, I do *not* mean to imply that *only* the soul belongs to the human species, something that Aquinas clearly denies: “Some held that the form alone belongs to the species; while matter is part of the individual, and not the species. This cannot be true; for to the nature of the species belongs what the definition signifies; and in natural things the definition does not signify the form only, but the form and the matter” (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 4, resp.) However, just as the soul, although individuated by matter, retains its individuality at death, together with its act of being, I contend that the soul also retains its humanity, although it is not a complete substance, since the soul is meant to be the form of a body, and therefore is a part. For this reason, although Aquinas declares that “whatever subsists in human nature is a person” (*ST III*, q. 16, a. 12, resp. and ad 1), one could still argue that the soul is not a person, since it is not complete in its nature.

<sup>101</sup> Bonino points out that, “with death, the human soul does not change [its] nature, but it changes [its] state, [its] mode of being” (“L’âme séparée,” 76: “Avec la mort, l’âme humaine ne change pas de nature mais elle change d’état, de mode d’être”).

that “something may belong to a thing’s perfection in two ways”: first, as constituting its essence; second, as “necessary to the perfection of the thing which *pertains to the good of its being*.”<sup>102</sup> The Angelic Doctor continues:

Wherefore though the body does not belong in the first way to the perfection of *human* happiness [*ad perfectionem beatitudinis humanae*; to the *essence* of human happiness], yet it does in the second way. For since operation depends on a thing’s nature, the more perfect is the soul in its nature, the more perfectly it has its proper operation, wherein its happiness consists.<sup>103</sup>

Notice that Aquinas says here that the body does not belong to the essence of the perfection of *human* happiness (*beatitudinis humanae*). Therefore, although the *essence* of the soul’s happiness does not require the body, the fact that the soul is not yet complete in its nature (as the form of the composite) indicates that it still lacks some degree of perfection, and therefore lacks happiness *secundum quid*. Aquinas further expounds on how the happiness of the soul is affected by the absence of the body in his reply to the fourth objection:

One thing is hindered by another in two ways. First, by way of opposition; thus cold hinders the action of heat: and such a hindrance to operation is repugnant to Happiness. Secondly, by way of some kind of defect, because, to wit, that which is hindered has not all that is necessary to make it perfect in every way: and such a hindrance to operation is not incompatible with Happiness, but *prevents it from being perfect in every way*. And thus it is that separation from the body is said to hold the soul back from tending with all its might to the vision of the Divine Essence. For the soul desires to enjoy God in such a way that the enjoyment also may overflow into the body, as far as possible. And therefore, as long as it enjoys God, without the fellowship of the body, its appetite is at rest in that which it has, in such a way, that it would still wish the body to attain to its share.<sup>104</sup>

However, Aquinas is quick to add that “the desire of the separated soul is entirely at rest, as regards *the thing desired* [i.e., it is completely satisfied

<sup>102</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, resp.: “. . . requiritur ad perfectionem rei quod pertinet ad bene esse eius” (translation mine).

<sup>103</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, resp. (emphasis added).

<sup>104</sup> *ST I-II*, q. 4, a. 5, ad 4 (emphasis added).

by God himself], . . . but it is not wholly at rest, as regards the *desirer*, since it does not possess that good in every way that it would wish to possess it [i.e., it does not yet possess the fullness of its nature until it is reunited to the body].”<sup>105</sup> For this reason, says Aquinas, “after the body has been resumed, Happiness increases *not in intensity, but in extent*.”<sup>106</sup> Consequently, although there seems to be little doubt that the soul can be truly happy *simpliciter* even apart from the body, it is still apparent, from what we have said, that the soul without the body is incomplete in its specific nature (which is to be the form of a body), and so, lacking this perfection, thereby lacks some happiness *secundum quid*.

### What Is a Person?

It would appear from the debate regarding whether or not the soul is a person that there are at least two equivocal notions of “person” at play here. The first notion is the objective, metaphysical view, the one that is clearly indicated by Aquinas in citing Boethius’s well-known definition of person as an “individual substance of a rational nature.”<sup>107</sup> The second view, however, is one of the modern notions of person<sup>108</sup> as a sort of reified center of consciousness, which I would like to call the subjective, “existential” view. St. Thomas’s understanding of “person” is obviously that of the objective, metaphysical sense, which presumes that the individual substance be complete, and not only a part.

Emery points out that Aquinas makes a distinction “between the *common* notion of person, and the *special* notion that applies distinctly to God and to humans.”<sup>109</sup> With respect to the common notion, there is the Boethian definition of person mentioned above, which, Emery notes, “is applied by analogy to the divine Three, to angels, and to human beings.”<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 5 (emphasis added).

<sup>106</sup> *ST* I-II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 5: “. . . corpore resumpto, beatitudo crescit non intensive, sed extensive” (emphasis mine).

<sup>107</sup> *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>108</sup> Emery points out that there are “various conceptions that put the principal accent on the subjective aspects of the person, either in terms of thought (a person is a subject who thinks and who has self-consciousness), or in terms of moral autonomy and freedom (to be a person is to be able to dispose freely of oneself and to be autonomous in one’s action), or in terms of relations (to be a person is then defined by his or her insertion into the network of social relationships, or the person is understood as being constituted by the otherness of other persons), . . . or in terms of forming projects, or again in terms of the capacity to enjoy something, and so on” (“The Dignity of Being a Substance,” 993).

<sup>109</sup> Emery, “The Dignity of Being a Substance,” 998.

<sup>110</sup> Emery, “The Dignity of Being a Substance,” 998.

With regard to human beings, Aquinas explains that:

The “individual substance,” which is included in the definition of a person, implies a complete substance subsisting of itself and separate from all else; otherwise, a man’s hand might be called a person, since it is an individual substance; nevertheless, because it is an individual substance existing in something else, it cannot be called a person; nor, for the same reason, can the human nature in Christ, although it may be called something individual and singular.<sup>111</sup>

However, unlike Christ’s human nature or a hand, the separated soul does subsist of itself. Nevertheless, it is not a complete substance in itself, but as noted above, is a part of a greater whole. This brings us to what Emery regards as the *special* notion of person, which “is applied distinctly either to human beings, or to God the Trinity.”<sup>112</sup> With regard to the Trinity, it signifies a subsistent relation, but with respect to the human person, Aquinas explains that “formally a term signifies that which it was chiefly intended to signify and this is the definition of the term: thus man signifies something composed of a body and a rational soul.”<sup>113</sup>

One should also note here, with regard to Boethius’s definition of person, an important *objection* Aquinas addresses: “The separated soul is an individual substance of the rational nature; but it is not a person. Therefore person is not properly defined as above.”<sup>114</sup> To this, St. Thomas replies: “The soul is a part of the human species; and so, although it may exist in a separate state, yet since it ever retains its nature of unibility, it cannot be called an individual substance, which is the hypostasis or first substance, as neither can the hand nor any other part of man; *thus neither the definition nor the name of person belongs to it.*”<sup>115</sup> Clearly, then, Aquinas

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<sup>111</sup> *ST* III, q. 16, a. 12, ad 2. Emery also points out, with regard to the second half of Boethius’s definition (i.e., “of a rational nature”): “This is the ultimate determination that makes of an individual substance a person: a nature endowed with a power of understanding the truth and of loving the good” (“The Dignity of Being a Substance,” 996).

<sup>112</sup> Emery, “The Dignity of Being a Substance,” 998.

<sup>113</sup> Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 9, a. 4, corp. St. Thomas goes on here to say: “Materially a term signifies that which is requisite for that definition: thus man signifies something that has a heart, brain and such parts as are required in order that the body be animated with a rational soul” (trans. Dominican Fathers, at [dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdePotentia9.htm](http://dhspriority.org/thomas/QDdePotentia9.htm)).

<sup>114</sup> *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1, obj. 5.

<sup>115</sup> *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 5 (emphasis added).

does *not* consider the separated soul to be a person.

Nevertheless, he clearly believes that the soul has a continued act of existence and operations, even once separated from the body. In fact, in speaking of the knowledge of the separated soul, St. Thomas declares that, “when, however, it is separated from the body, it understands no longer by turning to phantasms, but by turning to simply intelligible objects; hence in that state *it understands itself through itself*,”<sup>116</sup> an obvious reference to a kind of self-consciousness in the soul. In the same place, Aquinas cites Augustine as saying, “our mind acquires the knowledge of incorporeal things by itself,” to which St. Thomas immediately adds that it does so by knowing itself: “Therefore from the knowledge that the separated soul has of itself, we can judge how it knows other separate things.”<sup>117</sup>

How, then, is the self-consciousness of the soul to be understood? In speaking of the Trinity, St. Thomas also utilizes Richard of St. Victor’s definition of person as an “incommunicable existence of the divine nature.”<sup>118</sup> Generally, corruptionists point to the argument of incommunicability as a reason why the separated soul cannot be a human person, since as an essential part, it is communicated to the whole, and so cannot be termed “incommunicable,” and therefore is not a person.<sup>119</sup> This is absolutely true, metaphysically. But might it not also be true that the self-consciousness of the person can be said to be incommunicable? My consciousness is mine, and no one else’s. Even if others experience similar events, their consciousness of the same happenings will be somehow different from mine.

One may reply, however, with Edouard Hugon, that “consciousness and freedom, although they do not essentially constitute the person, are, however, properties of the person.”<sup>120</sup> They are not entities in themselves, but properties. So, my soul is conscious and performs incommunicable acts but is not itself incommunicable, since it remains a part. Therefore, as Hugon also points out, although the soul does retain a degree of individuality: “It lacks that complete individuality which is the totality, autonomy [and] *absolute* incommunicability. It is not a definitive whole; it demands to be united to another [i.e., to the body.]”<sup>121</sup>

<sup>116</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 2, resp.

<sup>117</sup> *ST I*, q. 89, a. 2, resp., citing *De Trinitate* 9.3. Cf. *ST I*, q. 88, ad 1.

<sup>118</sup> *ST I*, q. 29, a. 3, ad 4.

<sup>119</sup> See Spencer, “The Personhood of the Separated Soul,” 895–96.

<sup>120</sup> Edouard Hugon, O.P., “Si l’âme séparée est une personne,” *Revue thomiste* 17 (1909): 590–96, at 593. “La conscience et la liberté, bien qu’elles ne constituent pas essentiellement la personne, sont cependant des propriétés de la personne” (translation mine).

<sup>121</sup> Hugon, “Si l’âme séparée est une personne,” 594: “Il lui manque cette individualité



Consequently, in order to balance Aquinas's metaphysical understanding of "person," on the one hand, with the self-consciousness of the separated soul, on the other, it seems helpful to follow Bonino's view:

One *should not exaggerate* the consequences of the thesis of the non-personhood of the separated soul. Saint Thomas gives here a very precise, and so, limited, *metaphysical sense* of "person": the person is a complete, subsisting whole, of a rational nature, a definition which does not effectively apply to the separated soul, since it is only a subsisting part of a whole, which no longer exists as such. But that does not at all imply that Saint Thomas refuses to the separated soul the properties which define what we today call personhood, that is to say, the cognitive activity, the movements of affectivity, the consciousness of oneself.<sup>122</sup>

In other words, on the one hand, it is clear that Aquinas is *not* an anachronized Cartesian, let alone a Platonist. He clearly is *not* a dualist, and he places a great deal of emphasis on the fact that the soul is the form of the body, *not* a separate, complete substance. On the other hand, the soul is also *not* a mere shadow of existence. In some way, it remains a conscious subject of attribution, capable of acting. This is not to say, however, that the continuation of consciousness is sufficient for one's existence, as Descartes might have it. Rather, it is because the separated soul retains its act of existence, with its own proper operations even apart from the body (although less perfectly performed without the body), that it also retains a certain consciousness of itself, of God, and of others, and is still able to experience sorrow or joy.

That is, as Emery notes, unlike in the case of Cartesian anthropology, here the soul is not to be *identified* with thought (or consciousness). It

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achevée qui est la totalité, l'autonomie, l'incommunicabilité absolue. Elle n'est pas un tout définitif, elle demande à s'unir à un autre" (translation mine).

<sup>122</sup> Bonino, "L'âme séparée," 75–76: "Qu'il ne faut pas majorer les conséquences de la thèse de la non-personnalité de l'âme séparée. Saint Thomas donne ici à 'personne' un sens métaphysique très précis et donc limité: la personne est un tout complet subsistant de nature rationnelle, définition qui ne s'applique effectivement pas à l'âme séparée puisqu'elle n'est qu'une partie subsistante d'un tout qui n'existe plus comme tel. Mais cela n'implique aucunement que saint Thomas refuse à l'âme séparée les propriétés qui définissent ce que nous appelons aujourd'hui la personnalité, c'est-à-dire l'activité cognitive, les mouvements de l'affectivité, la conscience de soi" (emphasis added).

is not simply a *res cogitans*, first because it is not a complete substance<sup>123</sup> as Descartes proposes, and secondly, because there is a “real difference between the soul and its powers.”<sup>124</sup> As stated above, the soul is a substantial form. Emery explains:

Since the soul is a form, it is in act, not in potency. To identify the soul and thought would signify that we are always engaged in the act of thinking, which experience clearly disproves. Thus St. Thomas holds that the soul is act and form (first act) as regards its essence. The soul’s operations (second act: to know, to will), for their part, are really distinct from the soul’s essence.<sup>125</sup>

In other words, the separated soul should not be reduced to its act of understanding or its act of willing. It is more than the operations it performs and is really distinct from these. Consequently, it seems that this modern, more subjective account of “person” (i.e., the individuality and incommunicability of one’s self-consciousness, act of existence, and continued operations, particularly that of understanding) is incomplete. The separated soul should not be thought of as simply a “center of consciousness” in the Cartesian sense, but as a “conscious quasi-substance”<sup>126</sup> that is perhaps better called a “semi-person,” to use Cajetan’s term. Any modern, existential sense of “person” must be subordinate to and ordered to the metaphysical notion of the human person found in Aquinas. As Hugon also notes, “The separated soul exists a bit in the manner of a person—it is what lives, that which acts with consciousness and freedom—but it is not the person in the strict sense, because it remains essentially the form of the human body, the essential part of the human composite, and because it necessarily aspires to this reunion, from which will result, once again, the human personhood.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> This is my addition, although Emery makes it clear earlier in his article that the soul is not a complete substance, because “the complete substance is the human individual, not the soul; thus we can speak of the soul as a substance only in a derivative sense (*per reductionem*)” (“The Unity of Man,” 222).

<sup>124</sup> Emery, “The Unity of Man,” 223.

<sup>125</sup> Emery, “The Unity of Man,” 223.

<sup>126</sup> As a form, the soul is in reality a substantial principle, not a complete substance of itself, or as mentioned above, it is a *hoc aliquid*, only in the first sense. I thank Fr. Raphael Mary Salzillo, O.P., for all his helpful comments.

<sup>127</sup> Hugon, “Si l’âme séparée est une personne,” 594 : “L’âme séparée existe un peu à la manière d’une personne, elle est ce qui vit, ce qui agit avec conscience et liberté; mais elle n’est pas la personne au sens strict, parce qu’elle reste essentiellement

### Conclusion

From all that we have seen, therefore, it should be evident that, while it is true that the human person is a composite that is corrupted at death, nevertheless, one should not downplay the fact that the soul that remains is not only incorporeal, subsistent, incorruptible, and immortal but also—even when separated—individual, *personal*, and a free and conscious subject of attribution, the principle of its own act of being<sup>128</sup> (caused by God) and its own operations. It is the “essential part” of the human person, the noblest principle of the composite, whose being *is* the being in which the composite subsists.

The separated soul is not something thrown aside until the resurrection of the body. It continues to understand, remember, and love, although in a manner different from the way it did in the body. It is something so personal that, even before the general resurrection, the soul will be judged for the deeds the *person* did in this life and will immediately either begin its purification (if still necessary for a just soul) or receive its eternal reward or punishment, for which it will experience either great joy or sorrow, respectively. In fact, the separated soul retains a kind of consciousness, and so can perhaps be termed a “semi-person” or a “person” in a wider, existential sense, although it is not a person in the objective, metaphysical sense.

However, it is most fitting for the soul to be reunited with its body again in the final resurrection, since it will only then be complete in its specific nature (as the form of the body), and its then-incorruptible body will also be able to participate in the overflowing joy (or sorrow, in the case of the wicked) experienced by the soul. In this way, the composite will now be perfected in both body and soul, adding to the happiness (or unhappiness) of the human person in *extension*, although not in *intensity*. N&V

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forme du corps humain, partie essentielle du composé humain et qu'elle aspire nécessairement à cette réunion d'où résultera, une nouvelle fois, la personnalité humaine” (translation mine).

<sup>128</sup> Aquinas explains that “being is consequent upon form through itself; for by through itself we mean according as that thing is such; and each and every thing has being according as it has form” (*SCG* II, ch. 55, no. 3).