

**Beyond body and mind: psychology and the unity of the human person in Aquinas**

Além do corpo e da mente: a psicologia e a unidade da pessoa humana em Tomás de Aquino

Más allá del cuerpo y la mente: la psicología y la unidad de la persona humana en Tomás de Aquino

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[andretonyathanasi@gmail.com](mailto:andretonyathanasi@gmail.com) (correspondence)**ABSTRACT**

Human persons are at once simple and complex: simple, because they possess a unified and indivisible essence in the form of the soul; and, complex, since this immaterial soul is conjoined to a material body, accounting for the human whole. This paper highlights the nature of this union and explores the psychology of the human person based on Thomistic philosophical tradition. Our thesis is that Aquinas's hylomorphism, which counters in advance the claims of Descartes on human identity, offers a comprehensive understanding of the human person and provides a robust foundation that understands the human person as transcending the limitations of body and mind, and this has implications for philosophical, psychological and scientific enquiries.

**Keywords:** Thomas Aquinas; human person; body; soul; mind; psychology; philosophy.

**RESUMO**

As pessoas humanas são ao mesmo tempo simples e complexas: simples, porque possuem uma essência unificada e indivisível na forma da alma; e, complexo, uma vez que esta alma imaterial está unida a um corpo material, dando conta do todo humano. Este artigo destaca a natureza desta união e explora a psicologia da pessoa humana com base na tradição filosófica tomista. Nossa tese é que o hilomorfismo de Tomás de Aquino, que contraria antecipadamente as afirmações de Descartes sobre a identidade humana, oferece uma compreensão abrangente da pessoa humana e fornece uma base robusta que entende a pessoa humana como algo que transcende as limitações do corpo e da mente, e isso tem implicações para investigações filosóficas, psicológicas e científicas.

**Palavras-chave:** Tomás de Aquino; pessoa humana; corpo; alma; mente; psicologia; filosofia.

**RESUMEN**

Las personas humanas son a la vez simples y complejas: simples, porque poseen una esencia unificada e indivisible en la forma del alma; y complejo, ya que esta alma inmaterial está unida a un cuerpo material, dando cuenta del todo humano. Este artículo destaca la naturaleza de esta unión y explora la psicología de la persona humana basada en la tradición filosófica tomista. Nuestra tesis es que el hilomorfismo de Tomás de Aquino, que contradice de antemano las afirmaciones de Descartes sobre la identidad humana, ofrece una comprensión integral de la persona humana y proporciona una base sólida que entiende que la persona humana trasciende las limitaciones del cuerpo y la mente, y esto tiene implicaciones para investigaciones filosóficas, psicológicas y científicas.

**Palabras clave:** Tomás de Aquino; persona humana; cuerpo; alma; mente; psicología; filosofía

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Inform fruitful dialogue among psychologists, scientists and philosophers, with an openness and humility that recognizes that not everything about the human person can be explained existentially or expressed phenomenologically.

**Originality/value:**

In contemporary debates on human consciousness, self-awareness and identity, this article takes an approach that transcends reductionist limitations, and embraces instead a holistic understanding of human existence.

## INTRODUCTION

Essentially, psychology focuses on the human person, yet this focus on the human person extends to the realm and perspective of philosophical discourses since philosophy is all-encompassing. It rests on the ontological and existential character of the human person and provides a solid foundational framework for understanding human nature and its external manifestations. The different narratives about the human nature have assumed a lot perspectives and forms through the many centuries of philosophical thought, right from the time that formal philosophy developed in the halls and public squares of the ancient Greek cities until our times. We never stop asking the questions, tough though they may be, about our nature. Nor is it possible to stop questioning. Indeed, because these questions are tough, they are even more worth asking. These questionings, at different epochs and to varying degrees, have elicited many arguments and counterarguments. In all, the truth remains that the human person provides the source as well as an aim for philosophical and theological researches or the researches of the other humanities or sciences.

Three philosophers – Battista Mondin, Cajetan Cuddy and Ernst Cassirer – help us to put this reality in proper perspective. Mondin makes a valid point about the significance of the question about the human person as the foundation for all other philosophical questions and the measure of their importance and validity: “Man is the supreme question for man. That this is the principal and fundamental question for us as men is an obvious thing, because every other interrogative, every other question...acquires relevance only with reference to our being” (Mondin 1). While Mondin’s concern with the fundamentum of philosophy is hinged on anthropology, Cajetan Cuddy, goes further by expressing how this anthropological question must be constructed with the ultimate goal of the search for the truth about who the human person is, based on a valid knowledge of the human soul. His point is that since seeking the truth about the human soul is something inevitable, our facility with the truth about who we are as humans will invariably give us the satisfaction in seeking the truth about other things that matter to us, and offer us a profound sense of expectation for a positive outcome of our quest, whether in the physical or intellectual realms (Cuddy iv-v). On the other hand, Ernst Cassirer, employing historical consciousness and context, attempts to articulate the crisis of the human person’s knowledge of himself and to interpret the ability of the human person to resolve human problems through the use of the mind, insisting that knowledge of the self “is the first prerequisite of self-realization” (Cassirer 1).

These perspectives, at once profound and consistent with the history of the development of philosophical thought, give a fitting introduction to our study of the nature of the human person as the one who engages in the philosophical enterprise. They lay a solid credence to our understanding of psychology as a fundamental aspect of philosophy and anthropology and that the discourse concerning the human person is very important and fundamental – and, perhaps, even especially – in our contemporary setting. Since philosophy is principally “the human attempt” at reflecting on, and expressing systematically the most fundamental structures of human existence and the reality of the natural and supranatural orders (Lawhead 1), questions about the ontological status of the human person and the psychological framework with which he is constituted cannot fail to be of utmost importance.

This paper examines these questions from a Thomistic perspective. Our argument is that though Aquinas’s thoughts on the human person reflects a form of substance dualism in which the body and the soul are distinct substances that nonetheless interact and form a unified whole human person, it is completely opposed to the Cartesian dualism that though also considers the body and soul as separate does not allow for any connection except a casual one. We consider also what it means from a Thomistic point of view to speak of a human person as a single being expressed in two dimensions in a way that does not arrive at the epiphenomenalism of some of the philosophers of the modern age, notably Hume and Berkeley. Against the backdrop of Aquinas’s insistence that the human person manifests complexity in being, we argue that the unity of the human person proves that he manifests both complexity and simplicity, and, as such, reflects the rich tapestry of the human reality in which a complex being of many parts manifests a harmony of existence typical of simple beings. Our overarching thesis remains that the philosophical psychology of Thomas Aquinas, better than any of the modern interpretations of the human person, provides helpful insights that considers the human person as a being transcending body and soul to one with an integrative ontological identity. Therefore, no matter how far away from Thomism anyone may want to go, it is impossible not to find in Aquinas an influential thinker even in contemporary discussions about the nature of the human person.

### **The Human Person as a Composite**

The human person, for Thomas Aquinas, is a composite of soul and body, form and matter, like all material substances in hylomorphic union (Oguegofor 33). In this hylomorphic union of the first matter and the first form of every human being, there is a perfect substantial union. What this means, in more concrete terms, is that the body of a human being, as first matter, is an incomplete substance. It belongs to the soul of the human person, as its first form, which is equally an incomplete substance, to be joined with the body. The body and soul, together, in a bond of mutual complementation, brings about a complete substance: the human person. The substantial union between the material and formal elements of

man's nature was so clear in Aquinas' mind that he staked his entire philosophical anthropology on this foundation. Whereas it is the soul, as the intellect and will, that is the efficient and transcendent cause of the body, the body is activated and specified by the Form (in contrast to 'second matter', which is said to be 'designated by quantity'). Within this context, there is a fundamental difference between human beings and other created things.

Human beings are distinct from other animals because of their intellectual capacity to reason and self-reflect, the suprasensible power to abstract from the sensible, and the ability to apprehend the universal. As a result, Thomas attributes complexity rather than simplicity to human beings, because they are "situated at the juncture of the material and the immaterial" (Aquinas<sup>1</sup> x) Thomas explains that the human person is regarded a complex creature because he is situated between these two orders, possesses the perfections of both (*Summa Theologiae* [hereafter referred to as *ST*] I-II, q. 77, a. 2). This intimate union between both allows the soul to communicate substantially with the body, together with the act of being. This is why the human individual is a perfect unit and all the actions of the individual, whether those of the soul alone or of the composite, are predicated of the whole person. For instance, while the soul is the principle by which the individual knows, the person is the principle that understands. It, therefore, follows that it is to the person as a whole, and not only to the soul, that all operations must be attributed (Henri 44).

Thomas Aquinas studied and taught at a time when the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were considered the principal frameworks for a philosophy of the human person. Yet the anthropologies of these two philosophical giants were opposed to each other. Plato, on the one hand, had insisted that the human being as a person is the soul and nothing else. Aristotle, on the other, argued that the human person is a subject to the general ontological composition of matter and form. Plato had reasoned that the soul is a substance, independent of the body, which had descended from its previous existence above. In this way, the soul is only living in an accidental and uncomfortable manner in the body within which it plays the role of commanding and ruling the body, though ideally tending towards its primordial origin outside of the body, in 'the world of forms'. Plato maintained that it is only at its separation from the body that it actualizes its nature. He believed that the material body, being vile, was the source of evil in the soul.

The influence of Plato gradually entered the thirteenth century philosophical debates through the dominant impact of Augustine's philosophy. Clearly, Aquinas was enamoured by Augustine's intellectual stature, and in fact occasionally uses the phrase "on the authority of Augustine" in his *Summa Theologiae* to refer to the opinions of Augustine in the same way as he calls St. Paul 'the Apostle' and Aristotle 'the Philosopher'. Undoubtedly, he held Augustine in high esteem for his great contributions to the development of Christian thought, engaged with his thoughts and cites him profusely in his works (for instance, he is among the most cited in the *Summa Theologiae*, behind only St. Paul and Aristotle), especially on topics related to grace and original sin, even when he parts ways with him on some of subjects. For instance, Aquinas does not agree with a large part of his philosophical anthropology. Instead, he argues, with great philosophical energy, against the thesis that the soul is a mysterious entity that, by trickery or even by miracle, has to be fitted into the body. For him, it is in the very nature of the soul to be united with matter since it is only with this unity that the soul is able to expand and perfect its powers. Forming a union with matter, the soul constitutes the integral being of human beings. Just as the foot or hand, taken independently, cannot be said to be a body but only a member of a particular body, so too the human soul or the human body, considered in this way (that is, separately), is not called a person but only a part of a person. The complete being must be the human person composed of body and soul. To be a person, the individual must have a body and a soul, combined in a substantial union (*ST* I, q. 75, a. 4).

Since the human being is not only a rational being, but also sensitive, the body provides the framework for the fulfilment of this aspect of human existence, without which it is impossible for the person to manifest externally the activities of the senses. Embodiment is thus inevitable for full human operations and engagements. As Stump has rightly asserted, it is only as an embodied being that the human person can truly be considered as an "individual substance in the category rational animal" (Stump 166). Thus, since it has been proven that the human person is a composite being, it follows that their essence lies not in either the soul (Form) or the body (Matter) but in the combination of both. It is therefore not *Either/Or* approach but a *Both/And* system that yields a valid anthropology.

### **The Human Soul as a Subsistent Form**

In Aristotelian-Thomistic hylomorphism, it is impossible to conceive of matter and form, the two basic principles in creatures, as existing independent of one another. It would amount to a logical fallacy to separate the form of a being from its material component. Plato has no difficulty with this but affirms that the form of every being, as a pre-existent reality in the "World of Forms", is absolutely destined for separation from its material component which holds it captive. In fact, Plato understands the soul of the human person as serving a sort of punishment for which reason it is condemned to be cojoined with the body in this world. Though he does not mention the crime of the soul, Plato seems to suggest that the soul that is unified with the body is stripped of some its powers and thus bereft of its full potential while locked up in the body.

Clearly, Plato's assertion projects the soul as being in a disunified state while 'trapped' in the body and is plagued by

“inner conflicts and competing forces warring within us” (Lawhead 58). As the superior element, in spite of its banishment from the other world, the soul still exercises control over the body until it is completely separated from the body at death. Certainly, Plato’s description would fit in neatly with the Christian belief in the immortality of the soul at death even after the decay and disintegration of the body. In this case, the mind-body problem becomes a trivial issue since it is only the soul that acts on the body without any form of intervention or reciprocity on the part of the body. In Plato’s assessment, therefore, the body and soul are only contingently and accidentally joined in this world, “without effectively forming a single substance” (Mondin 238). This leaves no room for any doubt on the subsistence of the soul.

What is ‘correct’ for Plato is however a matter of contention for Aristotle and Aquinas. They argue that the soul and the body are both necessary, and complementary, parts of the essence of the human being. As a part of the whole, each belong to the category of substance, though neither, alone, is a complete substance, since neither of them alone is a complete species (Brennan 303). The human soul, like all souls, is a substantial form of matter. Thus, the presence of a material substrate as a coefficient of its being is a requirement. It is this material substrate, in harmonious coexistence with its substantial form, that brings about the complete substance that we call the human person. Without this union, it is impossible to give a human qualification for the being that emerges. However, there seems to be a problem. It is difficult, at least at this stage, to explain how it is possible for the soul to be considered as a subsistent form, capable of its independent existence, if it is impossible for it to stand apart from the human body and yet still be considered as complete. Though surprising and somewhat inconsistent with his theory of matter-form relationship, Aquinas has some explanations.

Aquinas emphasizes that the human soul, unlike other forms, is a subsistent form – and not simply a principle of being as are other material substantial forms – since it can exist apart from the matter that it specifies (*Quaestiones disputatae de anima* [hereafter referred to as *QDA*], a. 1 and a. 14; *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2). He does not seem to see any contradiction in holding the position that the human soul is the substantial form of the body and still retains its quality as subsistent. Like Aristotle, before him, he understands the inseparability of each specific Form from Matter. However, he goes beyond Aristotle to posit that the human soul is different from other types of ‘forms’ since it is a subsistent form, capable of its own existence (Oguejiofor 39). He brings novelty into the debate as the first philosopher to postulate and argue for the subsistence of the soul in spite of its nature as an inseparable Form for the body of the human person. This blending of subsistence with inseparability is a keystone in Aquinas’ psychology and is fundamental to his interpretation of the human person and the nature of the soul.

We should recall that Aristotle had insisted that matter is the principle of potentiality and form is its actuality. It was clear from his own version of hylomorphism that any Matter that is not ‘informed’ (that is, not joined with its specific form) is nothing more than a conceptual reality without any concreteness. In the same way, any Form that is not specified by matter is simply illogical to conceive. Quite remarkably, Aquinas departs from this Aristotelian position, insisting that, when it comes to the human soul as the substantial form of the body, experiential analysis demonstrates the veracity of both the composite nature of the human person and the subsistent nature of the soul which allows it to engage in intellectual activities independent of its material substrate (Regan xxiv). The Aristotelian argument in which the soul is conceived of as a form, but not a substance, was not received favourably by Christian thinkers who regarded it with suspicion since it did injury to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul (Emery 53-76; Bazan 101-103). What Aquinas does is to show that it is possible for the soul to survive death as a subsistent form and at the same time be incapable of independent identity as the human person. What this means is that the soul, though gifted with its own being, is not to be considered the human person since a part does not equate to the whole.

Among the thirteenth century thinkers, as Oguejiofor observes, Aquinas is the first to subscribe completely to the Aristotelian definition of the soul as the substantial form of the body and demonstrate how its implications could, if understood properly, fit into the traditional notion of the soul as subsistent (40). Since the soul operates in a distinct mode from that of the body, it retains its own act of being, and thus can subsist on its own and by itself (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 2). As the intellectual principle of the human person, and because the soul’s origins and powers are not derived from the body to which it is joined, its operations do not depend on the body. Yet, as we shall soon see, its operations are dependent on this union, not on its subsistence, since the powers of the soul – though some survive the body – are incapable of acting after disintegration from the body.

The soul, which Aquinas sometimes interchangeably calls the *intellect* or the *mind* (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 2), performs the higher cognitive functions of reasoning, understanding and knowing. We must point out here that though Aquinas understands the intellect and the mind to mean the same thing, it is clear from his treatment of the faculties of the soul that while he sometimes calls the soul the intellect or mind, he considers the intellect to be a faculty of the soul and thus not exactly the same as the soul. While one (the intellect) is the faculty and carries out specific operations, the other (the soul) is the form, as it were, of the body. Thus, for Aquinas, the intellect or the mind is rooted in the soul, but it is not the soul. Stephen Brock agrees with this interpretation and argues that since, for Thomas Aquinas, “the essence of a thing does constitute a sort of capacity or power”, it is highly improbable that Aquinas would have thought of the intellect – which is the

power of the soul – as identical with the essence itself – which is the soul. In essence, Brock's point is that an effect cannot be the same as its essence, but only a manifestation of the essence which is its principle for operation (Brock 231-258).

For Aquinas, the soul possesses 'being' as its proper property, and so does not require the body for some form of remedial support or foundational force. On its own, the soul develops all the fundamental functions of a substance like autonomy, permanence and identity. More so, it is the cause of certain operations in the human body, and is also the subject of certain attributions. Aquinas uses the argument of the subsistence of the soul to prove the immortality of the soul – an aspect which is not fancied in the philosophy of Aristotle, who held tenaciously to the mortality of the soul based on his own version of hylomorphism (Copleston 384). Whereas for Aquinas, the human soul, being a subsistent form, cannot be subject to mortality since it does not really depend on the body for its existence (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 6), Aristotle does not envisage any situation in which the soul can outlive the body and still be rightly called its form. Still, on its own, without the body, the soul has its limitations in operations, especially within the area of human sensitive faculties and expressions.

In Thomistic psychology, the soul's incorporeality is the foundation for the soul's subsistence, and the soul's subsistence explains its incorporeality. The human soul's subsistence follows from its incorporeality. Activities proper to the higher levels of human rationality, for example, intellectual cognition and willing (which are absent in other animals and thus distinguish human souls from animal souls) are performed without the help of the element of the body. These functions are independent of the body in principle, though they cannot be exercised outside the body in practice. Thus, we can say the soul is both independent on one level and somewhat dependent at another level. In this lies the novelty of Aquinas' thought.

### **The Subsistence of the Human Soul as Evidence of its Divine Origin**

In Aquinas, there is a clear affirmation that, since the human soul does not have matter as part of itself, it cannot be derived from anything material. Instead, it is created. And, since creation is "the proper work of God, it follows that the soul is created immediately by God alone" (*Summa Contra Gentiles* [hereafter referred to as *SCG*], 87). In effect, Aquinas means that the soul of the human person is of spiritual origin, just as his whole nature is. The soul is not brought forth from matter, as the evolutionists and materialists claim. It is not a product of one's parents or an emergent of the universe; neither is it an effect of the constant and all-pervading developmental tendencies of nature. Instead, it is created by God and is unique for every person since it is created "in the body" (*ST I*, q. 90, a. 4, ad. 1; Gratsch 60). However, though God creates the human soul, it is not an outpouring or the sharing of the substance of God, since God is pure actuality and absolute simplicity. Instead, the human soul is a creature; a thing made by God (*ST I*, q. 90, a.1). Yet it is not made from any preexisting matter, but *ex nihilo* (from nothing) (*ST I*, q. 90, a. 2). It is a spirit, "having in itself no material element nor any essential dependence upon what is material" (Gleen 76). Every human soul, being created precisely as the actuality of the body in a living human person, is essentially unique as the body it informs (*ST I*, q. 76, a. 5; *SCG II*, 86-87). As we have noted, Aquinas does not believe that the rational soul comes from one's parents in any way (*ST I*, qq. 118, aa. 1 and 2). Instead, what happens is that the fusion of sperm and egg, in the human generative process, is brought into being and fitted to receive a human soul. Therefore, one cannot say that because parents produce their offspring then they generate a human soul, but simply that they produce a body that is able to act as the receptacle of a human soul which has been created immediately by God and gifted with subsistence (*ST I*, q. 90, a. 3; Brennan, 314).

When Aquinas calls the human soul 'subsistent', he means that it continues to exist even when the body it informs dies. That is, the soul remains alive even after its physical separation from the body (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 2; O'Donnell, 57). Subsistence here indicates an intrinsic independence from its material corelate. Subsistence cannot be predicated of the body because, like all matter, it ceases to exist when its component parts disintegrate, and depends completely on its form for specification. On the other hand, the human soul is not a body, but its "first principle of life" and "the act of a body" (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 1). Thus, it is simple and without parts, and is not liable to any form of disintegration. In this way, the question of its nonexistence after the body's death becomes irrelevant and completely superfluous. The human soul is not only incorporeal in nature, but also a substance. Aquinas' description of the human soul as a substance while insisting that it is incapable of fulfilling its complete operations without the body, is one which has been the subject of critique and controversies for scholars. Though important, we are unable to treat these controversies here for limited space (For more, see Kelly 213-219).

The intellectual principle in the human person has essentially an operation in which the body does not share. Its mode of operation as well as the potential to operate is something distinctively proper to its own being. It possesses a "single substantial existence" (which means that it is of a single essence), though it has several powers (*ST I*, q. 77, a. 2, ad. 3), and incorporates the powers of the body and the soul together since "it is on the confines of spiritual and corporeal creatures" (*ST I*, q. 77, a. 2). The subsistence of the soul ensures that it is capable of independent existence even when the body it informs ceases to exist (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 2). More so, only that which subsists in itself can have an operation in itself, since nothing can operate except what is in act. Also, a thing operates according to its nature. Therefore, it follows that the human soul, which is the intellect, is something incorporeal and subsistent (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 2). It is thus a substance of its own, even if only a special kind of substance since it must be cojoined to the body to complete the human person (Sweeney 143-187; Nichols 303-318;

Coulter 161-179; Fisher 1053-1072; Dewan 383-393). Notwithstanding, the body is necessary for the action of the intellect or soul, not as its organ of action, but by reason of the object.

Going further, we see that, since the soul is of spiritual composition and origin, it makes room for its immortality. The subsistence of the soul, which itself reflects its spiritual nature, represents the context for understanding the immortality of the soul. Thus, we can say that the soul's subsistence gives the conceptual framework for responding to the question of the immortality of the soul. More than this, it is because the soul is of divine origin, subsistent in nature, and immaterial in character, that the human person is able to transcend the tangibility of space and time through activities like intellection, imagination, abstraction, memory and willing. Since the soul, as we have seen, is a subsistent form and can therefore not be disintegrated in itself, it is incapable of mortality since mortality entails the loss of the form of a being (*QDA*, a. 14; *ST I*, q. 75, a. 6). Clearly, when Aquinas talks about the death of the human person, he means a temporary separation of the body from the soul, which awaits a reunion in the afterlife. The life of the human person (who is both body and soul) has not ended. What has ended is his material substrate, the body, which, because it is corporeal, disintegrates. Yet the soul does not die with it because the soul is indeed incapable of death due to its incorporeality. In Aquinas, therefore, we see how subsistence, substantiality, bodily death and immortality could be reconciled. Nevertheless, how the body resurrects eventually to be reunited with the soul is a subject for theological reflection and not for our present study.

### **The Union of the Body and Soul in the Human Person**

Thomas offers not only a profound understanding of the human person within his philosophical framework, but also harmonizes neatly the philosophical traditions of ancient Greek thought and the Christian faith. His psychology provides immense insights into the nature of the human soul, human intellectual faculties, and the interplay between the soul and external factors, as well as offers invaluable perspectives on the complex and multifaceted nature of human existence and consciousness. While Aquinas' philosophical system is heavily indebted to Aristotle's metaphysics, there are certainly clear points of divergence and manifold novelty in Thomistic psychology as we have seen. Aquinas is unequivocal in establishing the composite nature of the human person in the same manner that Aristotle does, but does not fail to show how this union does no injury to the soul's subsistence, something alien to Aristotelian thought. His approach takes into account the variables of human consciousness absent in Aristotelian metaphysics. Besides, Aquinas views the soul as the substantial form of the body which stands as its animating and organizing principle, but which cannot, on its own and independent of the body, be considered a human person. Therefore, the soul necessarily needs the body, inextricably linked with it, not only for the whole human person to be brought into existence but also for the proper functioning of some of the human capacities.

This perspective allows Aquinas to transcend the dualistic tendencies of human definitions and to establish a holistic understanding of human nature. For Aquinas, the unity of the substance of the human person comes from its act of existence, or *esse*, as opposed to merely its essence. It is this act of existence that gives substance its individuality since, as he argues, a thing is only considered an individual if it has its own proper act of existence, its own *esse*. Thus, the substantial unity of the human person is accounted for by the *esse*, which is the perfect actuality of its being. In this way, the *esse* of the human person is the body and the soul. Together they comprise a single act of existence for the human person (*ST I*, q. 4, aa. 1 & 3; *SCG II*, 68, 3-5; *QDA*, a. 1, ad. 2; Gilson<sup>1</sup>, 50-51; Gilson<sup>2</sup> 196-198).

Human persons, in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, are composed of the two substantial elements, primal matter and substantial form. What this means is that, in the case of human beings, just as it belongs to the nature of the individual to have a body and a soul, the body's materiality must be considered in the definition of the human person (*ST I*, q. 75, a. 4). J. Owens, interpreting Aquinas, affirms that it is precisely this composition that makes the human person unique. The material aspect of the human person would only be prime matter without its form (the soul), and if the soul is not united to its material correlate, the body, it would perhaps be angelic in nature, but definitely not human. Owens reasons that for Thomas Aquinas, the human person has a single nature, though made up of two elements, one spiritual and the other material. This is where the uniqueness of human nature lies: even though composed of matter and spirit, it does not suffice to express it as having two natures. We possess only one nature manifested in two dimensions (54-82).

In contradistinction from Plato, the essence of the human being, in Thomistic thought, is not set as opposed to its nature. Aquinas understands that human beings are part of nature, and as such strives to simply accentuate the commonalities of the human species. Etienne Gilson makes the argument that, "it would be completely foreign to the Thomistic perspective to regard the material universe as the result of some calamity and the union of soul and body as the consequence of a fall" (Gilson<sup>2</sup> 189). This union is not to be conceived as that in which the body is the prison of the soul. Instead, the union of the soul and the body in human persons is not only natural and appropriate, but also provides a suitable vehicle for the communication of love (Aquinas<sup>1</sup> xxi).

The first and most obvious dimension of the human person is the body. This is clearly invisible and incontestable since it presents itself in the external and is immediately perceptible. However, it is also true that the body does not, by itself, make up the whole human reality; it does so only with the soul. Nevertheless, between the two constitutive elements of man,

the soul and the body, there exists a distinction quite essential in its nature, and simultaneously a bond too profound to be downplayed upon, as the Platonic philosophers and Cartesians do. The two elements are essentially distinct because while one (the soul) belongs to the spiritual sphere, the other (the body) is essentially material. Yet they are profoundly united since they give origin to a single being.

Aquinas avers that the union that exists between the body and the soul is a substantial, not accidental, one. Though human existence is not essential as we have already established, the human composite is essential to human nature in order to fulfil its operations. Reacting against the neo-Platonic philosophers who settled for only an accidental union which favours the obvious fact of the immortality of the soul, Aquinas – following Aristotelian tradition which, though favours a sound philosophical explanation for the body-soul relationship, would be problematic in proving the soul's immortality – argues forcefully in defence of a substantial union. He believes that there is a profound weld between the soul and the body, a bond so profound and strong that in all of human operations, "there is always a contribution both from the soul and the body" (Mondin 239).

In this regard, "the soul is only a part of man, and in this case, there must be a sufficiently close union between the soul and the body that the activity of the soul may be attributed to the man himself" (Gilson<sup>2</sup> 191). For him, the Platonic error of uniting the soul to the body as its motor is due largely to the fact that he could not place human essence in the composite of soul and body, but in the soul using the body as an instrument (Gilson<sup>2</sup> 193). Thus, human persons are not merely souls using their bodies; instead, they are true wholes, composites of soul and body (Gilson<sup>2</sup> 193; *ST*, q. 117, a. 4). However, an interesting twist is when Aquinas, in *SCG* II, 65, writes that the soul moves the body, which has implications for his hylomorphism (For more, see Cory 144-186). For Aquinas, "the soul and body [of the human person] enter the constitution of the essence, so much so that, as it is often said, man is neither his soul nor his body but the unity of both" (Gilson<sup>3</sup> 211). It is thus inconceivable to think of the human rational soul apart from its proper body, though the nature of the soul, as the first actuality of the body, can be philosophically defined. However, it is only in relation to the body that a physical study and observation of the capacities of the soul is possible (García-Valdecasas 293).

The human person, in the philosophy of Aquinas, is a perfect unity, a composite of body and soul – two principles which form a natural, substantial unit, because they are transcendently related to each other as *act* and *potency*. The soul actuates while the matter (or body) individuates. The soul is the principle of intellectual life, but it needs the body in order to know. This is the fundamental truth which Descartes failed to realize when he postulated his *Cogito*. Furthermore, the soul is not the person, nor is it an angelic substance. Also, unlike other substantial forms, it is not immersed in matter; for the human soul is not a material form, but spiritual. The fundamental solution which Aquinas gives, according to Renard Henri, is that the act and the form of the body, the soul, which is a spiritual, subsistent but incomplete substance, is transcendently related to the body as an act to its potency (42). Thus, neither of them qualifies as the human substantiality; but that they enter into a union to make up the whole person.

We have come to a conclusion concerning the essential diversity of the body and the soul, yet ascertaining that neither of them qualifies as the human substantiality; but that they enter into a union to make up the whole person. They are to be conceived as uniting within the context of act and potency. First, of matter, since the body contributes in giving the soul individual characteristics; second, of potency, in that the body is disposed to receiving perfections conferred by the soul, from the perfection of being to the perfection of life, simplicity, affectivity, speech (Mondin 240).

Thomas Aquinas's hylomorphic paradigm demonstrates a comprehensive framework and offers a unique perspective on what can best be described as the complex simplicity of the human person. By affirming the composite nature of human beings, he shows the enduring legacy of Aristotelian metaphysics, yet by introducing the idea of the soul as a subsistent form, he departs from the school of Aristotle and indeed also from other known philosophical traditions of the time. His insistence that the soul has a divine origin helps to root his conviction on the soul's subsistence and, ultimately, its immortality. And if the spiritual nature of the soul works for his theory of the soul's subsistence, the union of the body and the soul becomes the framework for constructing a valid identity for the person. These two ideas – subsistence based on the soul's spiritual origin, and identity based on the hylomorphic union – set the human person apart from all other beings, even the angels.

In contrast to the competing philosophies that consider the soul as merely an accidental prisoner of the body or as a part of it subject to disintegration along with the body, Aquinas's system presents a compelling logic that not only challenges dualistic views that seek to bifurcate the human reality but also presents a philosophical system that ensures respect for human dignity. This logic is one that sees the human person, not as two beings (one as body and the other as soul) or as simply a material being, but as a single reality whose being and existence is manifested in two manifestations – the spiritual and material. These two aspects of the human reality are certainly distinguishable, and yet they are not separable. As each acts according to its specific nature, it aids the operations of the other. The boundaries of operation for each are not to be confused as imposing some limitations on the nature of the other. The transcendental nature of the soul, for instance, does

not limit the capacity of the body for growth and development. Nor does the nature of the body as material impede the spiritual capacities inherent in the soul. There is neither opposition nor conflict between the operations of the body or the soul, for they are neither one nor similar. Instead, each is enriched by, and in turn enriches, the other and promotes the harmony within the human person. Certainly, affirming the powers and splendour of the soul does not mean that the body is insignificant nor does it negate its reality. It is in fact by reason of the lower powers of the body that the higher powers of the soul come to be recognized as such. Conversely, it is by reason of the higher powers of the soul that the lower powers of the body are raised up to act in synchrony with the soul's higher powers without losing its own proper powers or being absorbed in the soul's faculties.

## CONCLUSIONS

Undoubtedly, Aquinas's philosophical psychology remains relevant and enriching in contemporary debates concerning consciousness, self-awareness and identity as well as the nature of the human person. It invites philosophical, psychological, anthropological and scientific inquiries that transcend the limitations of reductionist approaches, and embraces instead a holistic understanding of human existence. Furthermore, a focus on the person and his relation towards the society and the world is what is needed today. The human person, in his dignity, value, spiritual origin and destiny, has to become a unifying ontological and epistemological principle in the various approaches of the sciences. We have to rescue the human person from annihilation and a false anthropology which may appear generous, but is ultimately self-defeating. In the end, this has implications for the work of psychologists and scientists as much as it does for theologians and philosophers. Without a solid and true philosophical anthropology, the work of the psychologist and scientist winds up in a chaotic and unbridled form of scientism that yields only catastrophe for humanity, treats us as merely material and empties us of our ontological core. As we continue to investigate the mysteries of human existence, Aquinas's psychology offers us a perspective that extends beyond the boundaries of the body and mind and allows us to grasp the profundity of what it means to be human, ontologically and existentially. It will surely inspire our generation of psychologists, scientists and philosophers to engage in a fruitful dialogue, with an openness and humility that recognizes that not everything about the human person can be explained existentially or expressed phenomenologically.

As the world continues to grapple with the ethical and anthropological challenges associated with the advances of science and technology, it is important to understand the dynamics of the human person beyond that which is perceptible by the senses. In the light of this, we propose a deepening of understanding on the philosophical principles that are at play in neuroscience, psychology and other scientific endeavours that touch on the human person. More research ought to be done, especially employing some of the philosophical perspectives which we have outlined in this work, in addressing issues of consciousness, self-awareness, and identity. There is also the need to further examine the ethical considerations arise from adopting a hylomorphic perspective, and how they influence our approach to issues like human dignity, autonomy, and societal responsibilities. This can only be possible, as we have pointed out, through meaningful dialogue that is interdisciplinary. Thus, further research should explore what concrete ways this interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophers, psychologists, scientists, and even theologians can be carried out in order to enrich our understanding of the human person and thus facilitate a better foray of the sciences into aspects of human existence that touch the core of our being.

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