



# The Irreducible Opposition between the Platonic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Soul and Body in Some Ancient and Mediaeval Thinkers

Kevin Corrigan

Volume 41, numéro 3, octobre 1985

50e anniversaire de la Faculté de philosophie

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/400195ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/400195ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Corrigan, K. (1985). The Irreducible Opposition between the Platonic and Aristotelian Conceptions of Soul and Body in Some Ancient and Mediaeval Thinkers. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 41(3), 391–401.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/400195ar>

# THE IRREDUCIBLE OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE PLATONIC AND ARISTOTELIAN CONCEPTIONS OF SOUL AND BODY IN SOME ANCIENT AND MEDIAEVAL THINKERS

Kevin CORRIGAN

*RÉSUMÉ.* — Cet article voudrait montrer qu'on ne peut limiter sans plus la conception aristotélicienne de l'âme à la théorie de l'entéléchie. On y suggère aussi que l'opposition irréductible entre les formulations tranchées des positions platonicienne et aristotélicienne fut reconnue avant Thomas d'Aquin (par exemple par Plotin) et qu'une « réconciliation » de ces conceptions opposées fut alors entreprise.

*SUMMARY.* — This article attempts to show that the Aristotelian view of soul was not absolutely limited to the entelechy theory. It further suggests that the irreducible opposition between the extreme formulations of the Platonic and Aristotelian positions was clearly recognised before Aquinas (in particular by Plotinus) and that an attempt was then made to "reconcile" the two theories.

---

IN A RECENT book on Robert Grosseteste it is claimed that Grosseteste and his whole generation did not perceive the irreducible opposition between Plato's and Augustine's conception of the soul as substance and mover, and the Aristotelian definition of the soul as substantial form animating and perfecting the body. The contradiction, it is further stated, was not detected by anyone before Aquinas.<sup>1</sup> It is true that this assessment implicitly recognises the quality of Aquinas' achievement in maintaining the biological and integrated individual unity of the human person while at the same time developing in a plausible Aristotelian manner (against the Platonists

---

1. See J. MCEVOY, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, Oxford 1982, pp. 263-264, pp. 273-274; cf. T. CROWLEY, *Roger Bacon: The Problem of the Soul in his Philosophical Commentaries*, Louvain—Dublin 1950, p. 191 ff.; A.C. PEGIS, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 1934, p. 147 ff.

and especially the Averroists) the notion of soul's self-subsistence in such a way as to include the essential spirit of Platonism in man's spiritual nature and yet to point out the incompleteness of soul necessary to a holistic view of human development and to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In the light of this achievement the Platonic association of soul and body, where the essence of man resides in the soul or, according to the definition of *Alcibiades I*, man is "soul using body", can only appear to be an accidental union. It is, therefore, remarkable that so many Mediaeval thinkers (e.g. Alexander of Hales, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, St. Albert and St. Bonaventure) could hold simultaneously that soul is a complete substance and that it is form or entelechy of the body and feel naïve confidence in employing Aristotelian language and arguments concerning the relationship between body and soul.<sup>2</sup> Now, it is possible that a certain lack of reflection will account for this mistake. But there is more here than meets the eye. The assessment that the two positions are irreconcilable depends firstly, upon an extreme view of Platonism and secondly, upon the assumption that there is one view of soul in the Aristotelian *corpus*. I am going to suggest in this article that the irreducible opposition between extreme formulations of the Platonic and Aristotelian positions was clearly recognised before Aquinas and that an important attempt to *develop* Aristotelian thought on the basis of Aristotle's own principles was made long before Aquinas. This attempt made possible the proper philosophical assimilation of Aristotelian vocabulary in a Platonic cause. But before we can proceed further, we must clear up some of the basic terms and questions of the debate. For example, we can not significantly ask whether the two positions are irreconcilable in Aristotelian thought, since it was the Platonic conception which Aristotle was concerned to refute. Rather we must ask what is the meaning and scope of the entelechy doctrine itself and whether this meaning will change in the perspectives of different Aristotelian treatises (e.g. *Physics* and *Metaphysics*)?

This will necessarily bring us to the question whether the two positions are irreconcilable in the tradition of interpretation. Here we will obtain two different, but not very helpful, answers. For some Peripatetic commentators (notably Alexander of Aphrodisias) they are irreconcilable. For many of the Greek commentators on Aristotle, for Middle Platonists, Neoplatonists and Platonisers in general, Aristotle and Plato were considered to be in perfect accord. To avoid this patently absurd conclusion we shall have to phrase our question in a different way and ask: (a) where there any *good* reasons for thinking that Aristotle and Plato could be reconciled on this matter, or — a different and easier question — that *Plato* could be reconciled with Aristotle? and (b) did any thinker confront the text of Aristotle (recognising that his position was inimical to that of Plato) in the attempt to make an interpretative development of Aristotle and Plato in philosophical terms which could be properly Aristotelian? This is the most fundamental question. And if we can answer it, it will also help us to understand why it is that St. Augustine, for instance, can state both that man is soul using a body and that man is not mere soul, nor mere body, but soul

---

2. For a general survey see T. CROWLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 119 ff.

and body,<sup>3</sup> and why it is that Roger Bacon can argue that soul is the form of the body and yet that the body is the prison-house of the soul.<sup>4</sup>

Our first question concerns the meaning of the entelechy doctrine itself? *Prima facie*, this is not in doubt. Soul and body are not two separable things or substances. Soul is the form (*eidos*), essence (*ousia*), definition (*logos*) or actuality (entelechy, *energeia*) of the physical, organic body, which does not have life without soul and which is therefore conceived to be in a dynamic relation to soul (“potentially having life”).<sup>5</sup> But whilst this definition indicates the intimate psycho-physical unity of man and rejects Platonic dualism, it is entirely another question whether it intends to dispense *altogether* with the language of psycho-physical dualism. For firstly (and especially for the pre-Jaegerian interpreter) we find juxtaposed in Aristotle a biological view of man and a different, much more Platonic view in which man is seen as a spiritual being in association with a living body. In fact, the gap between the biological composite and the more developed composite is emphasised even in the *De Anima* by Aristotle’s distinction between what contributes to “being” and what contributes to “well-being”. Air, for instance, is both a means of maintaining existence and also necessary to the production of speech, to well-being<sup>6</sup>. In what sense, then, is soul the entelechy of body and how are the two views of man to be related?

Secondly, Aristotle compares the relation of the soul to the body with the relation between the shape imprinted on the wax and the wax.<sup>7</sup> But it is clear that the unity in animate things can not be exactly the same kind of unity as in inanimate things. And if the soul is incorporeal — no matter how intimately present to the body, the soul is *not* the shape, although it may be primarily manifested therein.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, it has been argued recently<sup>9</sup> that Nuyens’s<sup>10</sup> attempts to delineate three stages in the development of Aristotle’s psychology (e.g. (1) an early period where soul is a Platonic *eidos*, (2) a middle period of an instrumentalist notion in which the

3. *De Civ. Dei* XIX, cap. 3 (on the views of Varro, Cicero, Antiochus and the Old Academy).

4. See T. CROWLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 120 and p. 123, who cites *Opera Hactenus Inedita* XI, p. 182 (“anima est actus per se et immediate corporis physici organici”) and XI, p. 10 (“Unde anima infunditur in pejus, scilicet in corpus, non ut pejoretur, sed ut in pejori melioretur, unde ut mundificetur in ignominia et sanctificetur in sorde”).

5. *De Anima* 412 A 26-27: cf. the causal definition at *De An.* 414A 12-13 (“the soul is that by which we live, perceive and have understanding primarily”): cf. also *Metaphysics* 1035 B 14-16; 1043A 29 — 1043 B 4.

6. *De An.* 420 B 16-33.

7. *De An.* 412 B 6-8; 10-15; cf. 412B 18-12 (the example of the living eye seems more appropriate: if the eye were a living creature, eyesight would be its soul).

8. On this see the remarks of AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles II*, caput 68: “Non autem minus est aliquid unum ex substantia intellectuali et materia corporali quam ex forma ignis et ejus materia, sed forte magis; quia quanto forma magis vincit materiam, tanto ex ea et materia magis efficitur unum.” Cf. the problems felt by Siger of Brabant, John of Jandun and others concerning an immaterial substantial form in A.C. PEGIS, “Some Reflections on *Summa Contra Gentiles II*”, 56 (*An Etienne Gilson Tribute*, Milwaukee, 1959), p. 170 ff.

9. By W.F.R. HARDIE, *Aristotle’s Ethical Theory*, Oxford 1968, pp. 68-93.

10. F. NUYENS, *L’Évolution de la psychologie d’Aristote*, Louvain 1948.

heart is the central organ and (3) the final soul-entelechy period) are seriously flawed and that some interpretation of the instrumentalist conception is not incompatible with the entelechy theory and finally that Aristotle himself leaves the question open at *De Anima* 413 A8-9.<sup>11</sup> Doubtless, the sailor-ship analogy is too misleading in too many ways; but even the possibility of the statement tends to support the more likely and less dogmatic hypothesis that Aristotle did not absolutely exclude other ways of looking at soul, or that, given the basic provisos of the entelechy theory, the theory still had room for flexible thinking and, therefore, could accommodate a spiritual view of man or a psycho-physical, dualist way of speaking, once the unity and concreteness of the animate sensible object had been secured.<sup>12</sup>

Fourthly, — and perhaps most importantly — how is this essentially biological view of man, proposed in the *De Anima*, to be related to other elements in Aristotle's work? We can pose this question in two ways: (a) Is the intellect a part of soul or is the intellect, as Aristotle proposes in *De Gen. Anim.*, "from outside"? (b) Is the soul primarily the domain of the physicist or does the metaphysician also have something to say on the subject? This was a pressing problem in the history of interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

Fifthly, and finally (following from the previous question), if soul is the *form* or *substance* of an organic body, and if it is according to the form that the composite and the matter are said to be individual things, and if the form is the highest instance of the thing, what relation does soul have to the matter as manifested in the σύνθετος οὐσία? This could be taken to be the central problem of *Metaphysics* ΖΗΘ.<sup>14</sup>

These problems, then, will serve to show that the entelechy doctrine, while apparently unambiguous on the surface, very quickly loses its appearance of solidity when examined more closely.

Our second question concerns the history of interpretation. At the end of the Middle Ages Cardinal Cajetan, in his commentary on the *De Anima*,<sup>15</sup> distinguishes two extreme positions: on the one hand, the view that the study of soul is primarily the work of the metaphysician, and only secondarily the work of the physicist; on the other hand, the view that this study belongs entirely to physics. He himself rejects both views and adopts the theory that the study belongs primarily to the physicist, and only secondarily to the metaphysician. Broadly speaking the two extreme positions can be illustrated, on the one hand, from Alexander of Aphrodisias, a Peripatetic commentator of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., and, on the other, from Simplicius, a Neoplatonist and commentator on Aristotle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Alexander held that the human soul developed out of the mixture of the body's elements. The soul is different from the elements and supervenes upon the mixture, but as a logos in matter

11. HARDIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

12. See HARDIE, pp. 82-83. Whether or not one can accept Hardie's argument *in toto*, his call for a more flexible understanding of the entelechy theory deserves to be taken seriously.

13. On this see below.

14. Cf. *Metaphysics* Ζ 17 on the causal definition of man. Soul is the cause or principle of the body in three senses, formal, final and efficient, *De An.* 415 B 8-20.

15. *Commentaria in De Anima Aristotelis*. (Rome 1938), vol. I, pp. 55-57.

(*enulos logos*) it can not exist separately and, therefore, is corrupted together with the body.<sup>16</sup> In order to safeguard the idealist side of Aristotle's thought, he introduced a theory of three intellects culminating in the active intellect, but the relationship between the active intellect and the individual soul is obscure. Alexander, then, is a good example of one tendency in Aristotle's work: soul as the form of body constitutes a biological explanation, and as such seems to have reference solely to the realm of physics.

Simplicius, by contrast, takes a broader view. Following Iamblichus, and Proclus, he finds that Aristotle's definition of soul applies properly to the embodied soul, but does not exhaust the full significance of soul, soul's intelligence or the wider universe of soul in itself.<sup>17</sup> For the Neoplatonists a principle can be looked at in two ways: as it is in itself and in so far as it acts as a cause to something beneath itself. The examination of soul's own essence is more properly the work of Metaphysics. Similarly for Avicenna in the 11<sup>th</sup> century the Aristotelian definition as the study of the relation of soul to body pertains to physics: but for the proper study of soul's essence, a different kind of research is necessary.<sup>18</sup>

The Neoplatonic two tier interpretation, soul as a self-subsistent substance and soul as the organising form of the body seems far removed from the perspective of Aristotle's *De Anima*, and this is not mitigated by Simplicius' statement that Aristotle is the best interpreter of Plato!<sup>19</sup> True it is that some of Plato's many statements on the nature of soul and body (especially on the making of the All Soul in the *Timaeus*, that it is compounded from the indivisible essence and the essence divided about bodies<sup>20</sup>) could quite naturally (and carelessly) be taken to include in their extension the meaning of the Aristotelian doctrine. In this sense it is always easier to "reconcile" Plato with Aristotle than vice versa. True it also is that one can hardly dispense with psycho-physical dualistic ways of speaking, or indeed with the two poles of the history of the term *psyche*, vulnerability and value,<sup>21</sup> or perhaps with the language of the movements which did most to develop its transcendental significance (eg. Orphism, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, Christianity). However, as to the interpretation of Aristotle, if Alexander's view of soul was too materialistic, and if the Neoplatonists' view was too syncretistic, was it possible nonetheless to find some common ground between Plato and Aristotle where a fruitful development could take place. The answer, I think, is yes. "Reconciliation" in this case, however, means

16. ALEXANDER, *De Anima, Liber Cum Mantissa* (Bruns), p. 24, 21-24; p. 25, 2-9; p. 17, 11-15.

17. SIMPLICIUS, *In De Anima* (Hayduck), p. 87, 18; p. 18, 20 ff.

18. On this see G. Verbeke's introduction, p. 11, to S. VAN RIET, *Avicenna Latinus, Liber De Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus IV-V*, Louvain/Leiden-Brill 1968.

19. *In De Anima*, p. 245, 12.

20. *Timaeus* 35A.

21. The immense complexity of this topic even in Homer can be glimpsed by comparing E. ROHDE, *Psyche: The cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, New York, 1966; R.B. ONIANS, *The Origins of European Thought about the Body, the Soul, the work, Time and Fate*, Cambridge, 1954; B. SNELL, *The Discovery of the Mind*, New York, 1953. The limited point I wish to make here is that in Homer, since *psyche* is that which stands to be lost in battle or in the trials of homecoming, *psyche* is both vulnerable and of inestimable value. See its usage in *Iliad* 9 especially (322, 401-409).

something rather different. If Thomas Aquinas adopts the viewpoint of Aristotle as his place of departure and makes his way from there into uncharted territory, a philosopher of the third century A.D., Plotinus, starts from Plato and looks at Aristotle from that standpoint. This adoption of a position from the start means that "reconciliation" in both cases will have to be interpretive development.

It will seem unlikely at first sight that a Platonic thinker like Plotinus could be sympathetic to Aristotle on the questions of soul and body and the definition of man; and indeed he is not. It has even been suggested by the foremost contemporary commentator on Plotinus' psychology that he may not have understood the spirit of the Aristotelian doctrine at all.<sup>22</sup> However, in an early treatise IV, 7 (2), chapter 8 (5),<sup>23</sup> and following, Plotinus makes several criticisms of Aristotle's entelechy doctrine, and Alexander's materialistic interpretation thereof, which are pertinent to the issue at hand and implicitly set forth some of the consequences of interpretation. Plotinus argues that if the soul-entelechy is to be interpreted as the shape of a statue in relation to the bronze, then not only will this make nonsense of the distinction between first and second entelechies<sup>24</sup>, but we will not be able to account for the development of the higher faculties of reason and perhaps even perception (IV, 7, 8, (5), 5–15). For this reason, he continues, Aristotelians have to duplicate psychic reality and introduce a second soul or intellect, an entelechy of a different sort. But if the second soul, the reasoning soul or intellect, is to be immortal, why not also the lower faculties of soul, since experience tends to show that, even though they depend upon corporeal functions, they too can be separable (lines 15–43)?

It is certainly true that much of this criticism is proposed against the general background of Platonism and specifically the doctrine of *metensomatosis*; but Plotinus' arguments are pertinent nonetheless. He proposes that if one understands entelechy in terms of one of the examples Aristotle uses (in terms of the physical-sensible shape), then one will have to end up with some kind of materialism where the soul will be defined as Alexander defines it, as an *enulon eidos*, a form which *belongs to* a particular body of a certain kind.<sup>25</sup> And if one wants to avoid multiplying entities in the explanation of soul's relation to body, it will be more natural to align soul (in the sense of what it means to be ensouled) with body and shape.<sup>26</sup> This is not to separate form and shape abstractly, but rather to recognise that form and matter are different explanations and ultimately have to be treated as such. The principle which underlies Plotinus' criticism is this: if one is going to define the  $\tau\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota$ , one must try to define it at its best.<sup>27</sup> He argues this against Stoic materialism and even in the case

22. H.J. BLUMENTHAL, *Plotinus' Psychology*, Nijhoff 1971, p. 12.

23. In IV, 7 [2], 8 (5), the roman numeral IV, represents the Ennead, the first arabic numeral, the treatise number, and the second, in square brackets, the chronological number of the treatise according to Prophyry's account in the *Vita Plotini*; the third arabic numeral gives the chapter and the fourth in brackets indicates, exceptionally, that this is the fifth of five chapter eights. Normally, the line number will follow immediately after the chapter number.

24. Cf. lines 9–11. I take this to be the point of Plotinus' statement that a retreat into sleep will become impossible, if the entelechy is to be so understood.

25. Cf. ALEXANDER, *De Anima*, p. 120, 10; *Quaestiones II*, 10, p. 55, 9–13.

26. Cf. I, 1 [53], 4, 18–25.

27. Cf. IV, 7 [2], 10, 27–30.

of forms in matter he insists, with reason, that even if the form is as inseparable as it can be from matter, we must try to understand it bare.<sup>28</sup> Now if it is true that in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* the form is the primary instance of the substance, not abstractly separated, but an indwelling reality, and if the form is the object of definition according to which the individual substance is known<sup>29</sup>, then the principle that Plotinus is urging in the case of soul may not be entirely indefensible on Aristotelian grounds.

Plotinus, therefore, feels compelled to interpret Aristotle's doctrine of soul and body in the light of the *Metaphysics* primacy of form; and it is important to realise that the so called *tertium quid*, "which Plotinus called the ζῶον or συναμφοτέρον"<sup>30</sup> (Dodds p. 244) and which he interposed between soul and body, has to be understood in terms of a hierarchy of form, compound and matter, in which the two latter terms derive their "thisness" and separability from the form. Nowhere is this more evident than in his treatment of the nature of man in VI, 7 (38), 4-5. How will we define "this man"? he asks. Will his definition be different from the soul which makes him, or will such a soul be man, or will man be soul using a body of a specific kind? But if man is a rational animal, and an animal, or living creature, is a compound of soul and body, then the definition of man can not be identical with that of soul. But, having granted that, a further problem suggests itself; if the definition of man is a compound of rational soul and body, how could it be an eternal reality, for the definition is simply indicative: it tells you "that", but not "why". It simply points to the physical reality in front of you, which is clearly already a compound, and says AB; whereas the whole point of definition is that it should include the cause, or in another way of speaking, that it should tell you *why* the matter is disposed in such and such a way.<sup>31</sup>

Plotinus resumes that man can only be known according to the definition. Having dealt with a simplistic, indicative definition of the sensible compound, he next turns to another major problem from the *Metaphysics* — the logical universal. Can a man, he asks, be a compound of the form and matter taken universally and in this sense a τὸδε ἐν τῷδε? His answer is definitive; if we take it in this way, we do not take account of "that according to which each individual thing is"<sup>32</sup>. Even if and especially if, we are dealing with forms in matter and definitions which must include matter, if we are to define the τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι ἐφ' ἑκάστου correctly, the definition must include the productive cause of man; and this, what it means to be man (τὸ εἶναι ἀνθρώπου), is that which makes *this man*, *indwelling*, *not separate* (τί ἐστι τὸ πεποιηκὸς τοῦτον τὸν ἀνθρώπου ἐνυπάρχον, οὐ χωριστόν).<sup>33</sup> Plotinus, therefore, following Aristotle's cardinal principles of definition, suggests that the definition of

28. See IV, 7 [2], 4, 19-20 and II, 7 [37], 3, 12-14.

29. Cf. *Metaphysics* 1042 A 28-29, 1070 A 11-12; *De An.* 412 A 7-9; *Metaphysics* 1031 B 6-7; 1037 A 5.

30. This is the assessment of E.R. DOODS, *Proclus — The Elements of Theology*, Oxford 1963, p. 244.

31. VI, 7 [38], 4, 6-21; cf. *De An.* 413A 13-16; *Post. An. II*, 93 A 4-5; *Metaphys. Z 17 Passim*.

32. Lines 21-23: Εἰ δὲ τις λέγος τὸν λόγον δεῖ τὸν τῶν τοιοῦτων εἶναι συναμφοτέρον τι, τόδ' ἐν τῷδε, καθ' ὃ ἐστιν ἕκαστον, οὐκ ἀξιοῖ λέγειν.

33. Lines 18-30, cf. *De An.* 413 A 15: (δεῖ)... τὴν αἰτίαν ἐνυπάρχειν καὶ ἐμφαίνεσθαι.



man can not be a merely indicative definition of the sensible compound, nor can it be a logical universal, for this misses both the τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι and the particular substance, but that it must be definition of the form which contains and manifests the cause, includes the matter, and is so intimately present to the particular that the latter is thereby also defined correctly. Therefore, Plotinus concludes, since man can not be soul alone, why can he not be a compound, συναμφότερόν τι, soul in a *logos* of a determinate kind (ψυχὴν ἐν τοιῷδε λόγῳ) the *logos* being an activity of a certain kind which is not empowered without the acting subject?<sup>34</sup> For Plotinus, therefore, the form is prior to both the universal and the singular, and in light of the form indwelling in the singular substance, the definition of man is simultaneously a definition of the *species* and also of *this man*.

Some of St. Thomas' major problems with Platonism consisted in the fact that the unity of soul and body could only be conceived as an *accidental union*, that the unity, if such there were, was a unity of operation and not of *esse*, and thirdly, that there could not be a union of two essentially separate substances.<sup>35</sup> From the analysis of the above chapter of the *Enneads* we can see that Plotinus' answer to these problems would have been subtle indeed. Firstly, at the level of definition, which is not an abstract level, but the most concrete level of form, the unity of soul and body is an essential unity; and since the form is not separate from the individual thing, but rather illuminates its potential meaning, this is also true of the individual man, "this man". Secondly, the union of soul and body is not just a unity of operation, but since this unity includes the making cause it is also a unity of being. Thirdly, and by contrast, when one looks (literally) to the material compound (the object of indicative definition solely) one is looking not so much to substance (which is *κατὰ τὸν λόγον*) as to accidentality. It is in this sense that for Plotinus so called "sensible substance" is in fact a "collection of qualities in matter"<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, the object of indicative definition, the compound of soul and body, is indeed an accidental union, for even if it succeeds in touching upon something substantial, it is still a "union" of substance (grounded in the causal definition) and accident.<sup>37</sup>

In the above chapter of the *Enneads* Plotinus is clearly arguing for an interpretation of Aristotle. Whether or not one agrees with the Platonic use to which he will eventually subject this argument, it seems to me that this is the most important interpretation of Aristotle before Aquinas, an interpretation not only of the *Metaphysics*, but also of some of Aristotle's statements in the *De Anima* concerning definition and the unity of the three causes (formal, final and efficient) in soul. It is evident that Aristotle himself believed that the study of *psyche* contributed much to the understanding of nature.<sup>38</sup> But if this study is also to be related to man's higher nature and to the "whole field of truth", then perhaps the most penetrating link is to

34. VI, 7 [38], 5, 1-5.

35. See eg. *Summa Contra Gentiles II*, 56, 57. *Summa Theologica I*, O. 76 (espec. articles 3 and 4).

36. Cf. VI, 3 [44], 8, 19-23.

37. Cf. II, 6 [17], 3, 24-29.

38. Cf. *De An.* 402 A 4 ff. *De Part. An.* 641 A 21 ff.

be sought in the nature of form and the non-abstract causal definition grounded in that nature.

Of course, Plotinus will now go on to speak of “soul using body”. Indeed, for him, the “subject” can be viewed (1) as the material substratum or (2) as “that which possesses”, the compound of soul and body or (3) as the form. But he will also speak of the compound being by virtue of the soul in the manner of Aristotle’s second definition in the *De Anima* 414 A 12-13 (“soul is that by which we live, perceive and think primarily”)<sup>39</sup> And although the intelligible universe is to the forefront of his thinking, the human intellectual soul does start upon its historical existence as a kind of *tabula rasa*, requiring considerable development before its potential powers can be brought to actuality.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, like Aquinas (but unlike Avicenna), he rejects the description of soul in body *sicut nauta in navi* and is much more concerned to explore the meaning of soul’s presence in body.<sup>41</sup>

Plotinus may, therefore, extend the soul-body range in a way unfamiliar to Aristotelians, but he is doing this on the grounds that the soul is an immaterial cause or form, which unites in itself formal, final and efficient causality, and which is present to matter where, by virtue of what it gives to body (i.e. by virtue of the *real effect* it has upon body)<sup>42</sup>, it makes not just a material compound, but “something different”. Plotinus even uses the Aristotelian phrase from *Metaphysics* Z 17, ἔτερον τι, to emphasize this point.<sup>43</sup> For him, therefore, the soul is not in matter as in a substratum, nor is it the form of body if by this is intended a form which belongs to matter. Soul must be immaterial, self-subsistent and the productive form of a body of a specific kind. Hence, the doctrine that soul is self-subsistent and that it is the causal form of the body stands at the heart of Neoplatonism’s dialogue with Aristotelianism. On the other hand, although the soul’s presence in body is the more powerful and intimate because of its immateriality, and although soul can also make herself “enmattered” (enule)<sup>44</sup>, soul is not a “sense” form *as such*, and, therefore, the notion of corporeity can come to the fore in a new way. For Plotinus corporeity can mean two things: the basic compound (sometimes termed body qua body) or the *enulos logos*. As we have emphasised above, the latter is to be understood properly in terms of soul. The former (although by no means a fixed conceptual point in Plotinus) is simply the recognition that matter is never without form, that the individual soul builds upon nature (i.e. there *are* secondary causes)<sup>45</sup> and that, however one may

39. This is especially characteristic of one of his last works, I, 1 [53]; see eg. Chapter 13.

40. I, 1 [53], 11, 1 ff.

41. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles II*, 57. Plotinus, IV, 3 [27], 21, 5–11.

42. Plotinus speaks of “a sort of light” it gives to body (I, 1 [53], 7, 4). In his earlier work on psychology, however, he prefers the image of air that is heated (IV, 4 [28], 14, 2–10). Clearly, ensouled warmth is not too far removed from Aristotle’s “psychic warmth” conveyed in the *pneuma* (*De Gen. An.* 762A 21).

43. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics* 1041 B 17 and 19. Plotinus, I, 1 [53], 7, 1 ff.

44. Cf. I, 8 [51], 13, 21–26; 14, 18.

45. Cf. ST. BONAVENTURE, *In IV Sent*, d. 43, a. 1, q. 4, concl. “Supponamus nunc quod natura aliquid agat, et illud non agit de nihilo, et cum agat in materiam, oportet quod producat formam”.

view body, there is no denying the fact that (without soul) it is a corruptible aggregate.

This double two tier system or continuum — (a) that soul is a self-subsistent substance and also the productive or highest substantial form of the body and (b) that the ensouled body can also be viewed in two ways as a substantial form or as an aggregate of qualities in a substratum — is, perhaps paradoxically, developed out of a reflection upon the text of Aristotle and its implications; and it was transmitted in ancient and mediaeval times not only through the later history of Neoplatonism, but also through Arabic thought (notably Avicenna) and especially through the *Fons Vitae* of the Jewish philosopher, Avicbron, to the works of Dominicus Gundissalinus where it became accessible to St. Bonaventure, Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon etc. For it is clearly in Plotinian Neoplatonism and its interpretive development of Aristotle that the whole question of the plurality of forms comes to a head for the first time. Indeed, the theory of light worked out in Bonaventure, Grosseteste and Bacon depends ultimately upon an understanding of this continuum. But this topic is too vast to be treated separately here.

Perhaps the most fascinating result of the present enquiry, however, is the discovery that this original theory of a plurality of forms in no way prejudices the essential, causal unity of body and soul and the substantial unity of man. Rather, it takes account of the logic of the living compound, namely, that both the accident in the substratum and the definition of body must be distinguishable in notion from the nature of soul in body. At the same time it does not preclude a further analysis into the *loci* of substantial form and prime matter. However, for Plotinus, prime matter here will be the barest logical subject, whereas for Aquinas it is the proper subject of life.<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, I wish to suggest firstly, that for Bonaventure (and Robert Grosseteste) to define soul as both the “actus et entelechia corporis humani” and “hoc aliquid”<sup>47</sup> is not necessarily to misinterpret or ignore the spirit of Aristotle’s psychology. Instead one may well argue that this definition implicitly recognises (a) that it is by means of the “thisness” of the substantial form that the biological and the intellectual are to be united and (b) that soul’s relation to body must be conceived according to its substantial *ratio* (“non accidentalem, quia ratione illius est anima forma substantialis”<sup>48</sup>). Furthermore, the perception that the unity of rational soul and body is not the unity of form and matter in the stone or even the tissue leads properly to a perception of the more perfect unity of the human individual. And this is at the centre of Bonaventure’s thought on the human person.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, in the case of Roger Bacon the fact that, amidst the Aristotelian formulae, body is also described as the prison-house of soul is not necessarily

46. Cf. AQUINAS, *De Anima*, N. 222.

47. BONAVENTURE, *II Sent*, d. 18, a. 2, q. 1, fundam.

48. *II Sent*, d. 1, p. 2, a. 3, q. 2, opinio 3. Cf. also on the question of individuation *II Sent*, d. 18, l.2., q. 1, conclusio ad 1.

49. On this see E. GILSON, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N.J. 1965, pp. 285–307.

evidence that Bacon radically misunderstood Aristotle, but rather that he could see Aristotle in a larger context such as we have outlined here, a context in which man can perceive and live an accidental union between “soul” and “body”. The perfectability of man must lie within the scope of his nature, but in no simple sense is it the form of matter.

Thirdly, when St. Augustine defines man in radically different ways (soul using a body and neither soul nor body, but soul and body) he is drawing primarily upon Plato (*Alcibiades* I and *Phaedrus* 246 C 5; and, as we have indicated above, Platonic formulae can more easily be taken to include Aristotelian positions than vice-versa), and also upon ways of speaking basic to classical antiquity and indeed to the history of *psyche/anima-animus*. In this context Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Bk.2, is ignored; but it is perhaps understood that it does not express the whole of the picture. On the other hand, Augustine can stress the union of soul and body in a way which would not have been unfamiliar to Plotinus (“the soul forms the material of the body which it animates into a harmonious unity and secures and preserves its integrity”).<sup>50</sup>

Finally, this presentation seeks to correct the commonly held view that no one understood, or confronted, Aristotle’s entelechy-form theory before Aquinas. It does not seek to undermine Aquinas’ unique development of that theory, but only to present an important interpretation of Aristotle which should be known for its own sake and also for the extra light it seems to shed upon the positions of some Mediaeval thinkers. When one looks generally at Plotinian Neoplatonism and at St. Thomas on this subject, the gulf separating the two seems immense. Different world views, different methodologies, the plurality of forms, hylomorphic composition of soul, the mortality of animal souls, metempsychosis, resurrection of the body — the list of distinguishing characteristics seems endless. However, what is fascinating to realise is that, despite even the difference of approach, both Plotinus and Aquinas seek a solution to the problem in the *causal definition* of man. For both, if the soul is that by which the human body exists, then the human soul is the cause and form of the human body. For both, an intellectual substance is not immersed in matter or totally comprehended by matter<sup>51</sup>, but forms a more perfect union with body “quam ex forma ignis et ejus materia”.<sup>52</sup> For both, man is truly a spiritual, intellectual creature. Ultimately, both seek the reason why the matter is so and so, how an intellectual substance can be united to a body as its substantial form.<sup>53</sup> An affinity of insight, therefore, should also be remarked, even if we cannot explore the finer details of the problem in this place.

50. *De Gen. c. Man.* II, 7, 9. This passage is cited and translated by R.A. Markus, “Marius Victorinus and Augustine”, p. 358 in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Mediaeval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong, Cambridge 1970.

51. *S.C.G.* II, 69 (Non Autem Oportet...). *S.T.* I, *Q.* 76, a. 1, ad 4.

52. *S.C.G.* II, 68.

53. *S.C.G.* II, 56 and 68. *S.T.* I, *Q.* 76, a. 5, Respondeo.