

Resurrection and the Separated Soul

The soul as substantial form

Aquinas takes human beings to be material things, and he takes the human soul to be the form of the human body.¹ Although Aquinas thinks that not all forms are forms of material objects, on his view all material things are composites of matter and form. In the case of human beings, the soul is the substantial form of the whole. A substantial form of a material object such as a human being is that in virtue of which the material object is a member of the species to which it belongs. In general, form for Aquinas is not static but dynamic. And a substantial form is the configuration or organization that gives a thing its species-specific causal powers. According to Aquinas, at death, the human soul is replaced in the body by a different, non-animating substantial form that takes the place of the soul. In consequence of its configuration by that form, the matter of the dead body is substantially different.² That is why after death the body can be called 'a human body' only equivocally. For the same reason, Aquinas thinks that when we use the names of the parts for the dead body, we use those words equivocally. Once a human being dies and the soul is gone, Aquinas says, we use words such as 'flesh' or 'eye' equivocally if we apply them to parts of the corpse.³

For Aquinas, the individuation of a substance is also a function of its substantial form. Any given particular substance is *this* thing just in virtue of the fact that the form which configures it is *this* form. For example, a material substance such as Socrates is this human being in virtue of having *this* substantial form. What is necessary and sufficient for something to be identical to Socrates is that its substantial form be identical to the substantial form of Socrates.⁴

But how are the substantial forms of material objects such as human beings individuated? The answer is expressed in Aquinas's line that matter individuates.⁵ The line is well-known, but its meaning is less evident.

For Aquinas, the substantial form of any material substance configures *prime* matter, that is, matter which is devoid of every form, without any configuration. On the other hand, when Aquinas attempts to explain the concept of matter relevant to individuation, he tends to speak of it as matter under *indeterminate* dimensions,⁶ that is, matter which is extended in three dimensions but where the degree of extension in any dimension is not specified. Any actually existing matter has *determinate* dimensions. But the particular degree of extension in a dimension is one thing; the materiality, as it were, of matter is another thing. The determinate dimensions of a material thing have to do with exactly what space that thing occupies. On the other hand, matter under indeterminate dimensions, that is, the *materiality* of the matter, is responsible for the space-occupying feature itself. Matter is the sort of thing which is *here* now, in a way that numbers, for example, are not. But this feature of matter, its space-occupying character, can be considered without specifying the precise spatial locations which any particular material thing occupies. Matter is *this* matter in virtue of occupying *this* space, even if the dimensions of that space are indeterminate.⁷

And so because matter has an irreducible space-occupying character, we can distinguish one substantial form from another by its association with matter. This substantial form is the configuration of this matter, and that one is the configuration of that matter.⁸ For Aquinas, all the matter of a material substance is configured directly by a particular substantial form. That is, the substantial form of a substance such as a cat does not weave together the integral parts of the cat -- the legs and trunk and so on -- or any other matter-form composites in the cat. Rather, every material part of the cat is a cat-ish part, which is what it is in virtue of being informed by the

substantial form *cat*. But what makes a substantial form *cat* this particular substantial form *cat* is that there is some particular materiality, *now* and *here*, which is informed by that form. In the case of human beings, Aquinas's idea is the same. What individuates Socrates is *this* substantial form of a human being; and a substantial form of a material substance such as Socrates is *this* substantial form in virtue of the fact that it configures *this* matter. On this way of understanding the form that is the human soul, it is easier to see why Aquinas thinks that the soul makes matter to be not just human but also this human being. The soul configures prime matter, whose basic materiality or extensibility then differentiates this form with its spatio-temporal location from any other. In fact, Aquinas thinks that, for human beings, each soul is, as it were, handcrafted by God to inform *this* matter.

Aquinas holds that the separated soul can exist independently of the body after death, but Aquinas's way of individuating the substantial forms of material substances has seemed to some people to pose a problem for this claim of his. It is true that the separated soul of Socrates will differ from the separated soul of Plato in virtue of having configured the body of Socrates rather than the body of Plato. But some philosophers suppose that, even so, Aquinas is stuck with an incoherent position. So, for example, Richard Swinburne says,

"If Aquinas' view is to be spelled out coherently, it must be done ... [in terms of intrinsic properties of the soul]. What did happen to a soul in the past, namely that it was united to a certain body, and will happen to it in future cannot make it the soul it is now. That must be something internal to it now. Religious believers who believe that humans can exist without their bodies, even if only temporarily, must hold that. So too must any believer who holds that there is life after death, even if souls do not exist separately from bodies."⁹

For Aquinas, however, there *will* be intrinsic differences between the separated soul of Socrates and the separated soul of Plato. On Aquinas's position,

"everything has its being and its individuation from the same source. ... Therefore, as the being of the soul is from God as from an active principle, ... so also the individuation of the soul, even if it has a certain relationship to the body, does not perish when the body perishes."¹⁰

One reason for his holding this position is that there is continuity of cognitive and conative faculties, with their dispositions and occurrent conditions, between an embodied person such as Socrates and his subsisting separated soul. For example, the separated soul of Socrates has the memories of Socrates rather than those of Plato.¹¹ As far as that goes, all the intellectual faculties, including the rational will, of Socrates are preserved in his separated soul. But what is contained in these faculties of the separated soul of Socrates, including the habits of the will as well as the mind's memories and knowledge, will be different from those in the faculties of the separated soul of Plato. And so there are these intrinsic differences between the separated souls of Socrates and Plato: the things known, willed, and remembered by the separated soul of Socrates are different from those known, willed, and remembered by the separated soul of Plato. Consequently, on Aquinas's view, there are intrinsic characteristics that differentiate one separated soul from another.

Constitution and identity

In addition to this much of Aquinas's basic metaphysics of the nature of substantial forms in general and the substantial form that is the human soul in particular, it is also important to understand that on Aquinas's views constitution is not identity.¹² Or, to put the same point another way, for Aquinas a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In many places in his texts, Aquinas makes plain that, in virtue of having its elements configured by the form of the whole, a whole has emergent properties not had by any of its parts, so that a sum of the parts and the properties of the parts will not be equivalent to the whole. So, for example, Aquinas says,

“a composite is not those things out of which it is composed, ... [as, for example,] flesh is not identical to fire and earth [the elements of which it is composed].”¹³

In fact, Aquinas's views of change commit him to the claim that constitution is not identity. On the Aristotelian understanding of change Aquinas inherits and accepts, a thing which gains or loses an accidental form undergoes change while remaining one and the same thing. Quantities, including quantity of matter, are also accidents. So, on Aquinas's position, a human being who loses a quantity of matter, such as a hand or a leg, for instance, remains one and the same thing while undergoing change. If, however, constitution were identity for Aquinas, then a human being whose material constituents changed would cease to be the thing he was and become some other thing instead. In that case, contrary to Aquinas's position, the gain or loss of an accident such as quantity of matter would be not be a change in a human being; it would be the destruction of one thing and the generation of another.

Furthermore, because constitution is not identity for Aquinas, it is also possible for him to suppose that a particular substance survives even the loss of some of its metaphysical constituents, provided that the remaining constituents can exist on their own and are sufficient for the existence of the substance. The point applies especially in the case of human beings. A human being is not identical to either the integral or the metaphysical parts which constitute him. Normally, the integral parts of a human being include two hands, but a human being can exist without being in the normal condition. A human being can survive the loss of a hand or other of his larger integral parts, as well as the elemental bits of which such larger integral parts are composed. That is why the loss of a hand or the amputation of a limb is not the destruction of a human being. Aquinas would therefore repudiate the sort of mereological essentialism which identifies a person as the whole sum of his material parts. Analogously, although the metaphysical constituents of a human being normally include matter and a substantial form, Aquinas thinks that a human being can exist without being in the normal condition in this way, because what constitutes a human being is not the same as that to which a human being is identical. On Aquinas's view, a human being can survive even the loss of his entire body, when the substantial form remains.

The separated soul

Since what makes Socrates this individual substance is the individual substantial form which configures him, and since the substantial form can exist independently of the body, then for Aquinas the existence of the substantial form separated from the body is sufficient for the existence of the human being whose substantial form it is. Socrates can continue to exist when all that remains of him is his separated soul. But it does not follow that Socrates is identical to his soul, because constitution is not identity.

Given these views, Aquinas should be interpreted as holding that, in Socrates's disembodied condition, when he is not composed of the normal constituents for human beings, Socrates is

nonetheless identical to the same thing he was identical to in his embodied condition: an individual substance in the category *rational animal*.¹⁴

It is easy to become confused about Aquinas's position here, however, because Aquinas is adamant in his rejection of Platonic dualism, (or Cartesian dualism, as we would say). He is at pains to make clear that in his view a human being is not identical to his soul. So, for example, in his commentary on I Corinthians¹⁵, Aquinas says,

"Since a soul is part of a body of a human being, it is not the whole human being, and my soul is not me."¹⁶

In consequence of passages such as this, some scholars take it as evident that for Aquinas the separated soul is not the same as the human being whose soul it was during that person's bodily life. On their interpretation of Aquinas, Aquinas thinks that the soul of Socrates, separated from the body of Socrates, is not a human being and that, for this reason, the soul of Socrates is not Socrates.

If the soul is not *Socrates*, but the soul of Socrates is all that continues to exist after the death of Socrates's body, then it seems to follow, on Aquinas's views as these scholars read him, that *Socrates* does not survive bodily death. Without any doubt, however, Aquinas accepted the Christian doctrine that, after the death and before the resurrection of the body, the soul persists in a separated state. And so, on the views of these scholars, Aquinas has to be read as holding that a human being ceases to exist at bodily death and comes back into existence only with the resurrection of the body.¹⁷ The persisting separated soul is not to be identified with the person who died.

The consistency of Aquinas's position

This interpretation, however, is not plausible if Aquinas's views of the separated soul are considered in the context of his theological claims about it.

To take just one example of many which could be given, on Aquinas's theological views, before the general judgment of all humanity, each separated soul is judged, individually, at the moment of the bodily death of the human being whose soul it is. But at that individual judgment, the separated soul is judged on the basis of the actions and dispositions of the human being it informed. The separated soul of Socrates is judged by Christ on the basis of the life of Socrates; and, on the basis of this judgment, the soul either enjoys the blessings of heaven or the pains of the fires of hell. Aquinas says,

"When the soul is separated from the body, it receives its reward or punishment immediately for those things which it did in the body... In the providence of God, rewards and punishments are due to rational creatures. Since when they are separated from the body, they are immediately capable both of glory and of punishment, they immediately receive one or the other; and neither the reward of the good nor the punishment of the bad is put off until the souls take up their bodies again."¹⁸

But if the soul of Socrates is not Socrates, then what justice is there in assigning to the separated soul either the reward or the punishment merited by Socrates, who is not the soul? Furthermore, at the resurrection Socrates will exist again; and the separated soul-which-is-not-Socrates will cease to exist since the separated soul will then cease to exist as a separate subsisting thing. But why should the separated soul-which-is-not-Socrates lose its bliss when Socrates is resurrected?

The views implied by the position that a human being fails to exist in the period between bodily death and bodily resurrection are theological gibberish, and they are contradicted in multiple places by explicit claims on Aquinas's part. So, for example, about the nature of the separated soul's bliss, Aquinas says that

“souls immediately after their separation from the body become unchangeable as regards the will.... [B]eatitude, which consists in the vision of God, is everlasting.... But it is not possible for a soul to be blessed if its will did not have rectitude And so it must be that the rectitude of the will in the blessed soul is everlasting....”¹⁹

This text and many others like it make plain the unacceptability of the interpretation which assigns to Aquinas the view that a human being ceases to exist at death and that a separated soul is not the same human being as the person whose soul it is. That interpretation has to attribute to Aquinas views which make his theological position bizarre and which are explicitly denied by him in one place or another. It is abundantly clear therefore that for Aquinas the existence of the separated soul is sufficient for the existence of the human being whose soul it is.

But, then, we need to ask, how can Aquinas also hold that a human being is a material composite? It seems as if, for Aquinas, either a human being is identical to his soul, in which case a human being is not a material composite, or else a human being is a material composite, in which case he is not identical to his soul. How is it possible for a human being to be a material composite and yet to continue to exist in the absence of his body?

The consistency of Aquinas's position is manifest if we give proper weight to the distinction between constitution and identity in his thought. A human person is not identical to his soul; rather, a human person is identical to an individual substance in the species *rational animal*. A particular of that sort is normally, naturally, composed of form and matter configured into a human body. Because constitution is not identity for Aquinas, however, a particular can exist with less than the normal, natural complement of constituents. It can, for example, exist when it is constituted only by one of its main metaphysical parts, namely, the soul. And so although a person is not identical to his soul, the existence of the soul is sufficient for the existence of a person. Once we are clear about Aquinas's distinction between constitution and identity, we can see that a rejection of the Platonic position that a human being is identical to a soul is not equivalent to the acceptance of the position that a human being cannot exist without a body.

Resurrection, reassembly, and reconstitution

Some philosophers and theologians suppose that resurrection is a matter of the reassembly of the atoms of a person's earthly body, but this is not Aquinas's view at all. For Aquinas, preservation of identity is not something which has to be guaranteed by recomposing the human being of the same bits of matter-form composites, such as atoms, as before. Rather, on Aquinas's account, the soul is what makes unformed prime matter into this human being by configuring prime matter in such a way that the matter is this living animal capable of intellectual cognition. In the resurrection of the body, by informing unformed matter, the soul makes unformed matter this human being again. And so puzzles about what happens when the same atoms have been part of more than one human being are avoided.

Furthermore, the material and causal continuity between the matter that composed Socrates at the moment of his death and the matter that at any subsequent time composes him is provided by

the substantial form itself. For Aquinas, the individuation and identity of anything at all is provided by its substantial form. And so the matter configuring Socrates's resurrected body is the same as the matter configuring Socrates's earthly body in virtue of the fact that it is configured by the same particular substantial form which is the soul of Socrates.

For these reasons, on Aquinas's views, God's resurrecting Socrates is not like bringing back the snows of yesteryear,²⁰ because, unlike the snows of yesteryear, Socrates never ceased to exist. The re-embodiment of Socrates is not a reassembly of those atoms still available as constituents for Socrates's new body. On Aquinas's account, resurrection is not so much reassembly of integral parts as it is reconstitution of metaphysical parts. The constituents of Socrates in his resurrected state are the same as those of Socrates during his earthly life: this substantial form, the soul, and the prime matter which is configured by the soul into a body. Unlike the snows of yesteryear or the atoms of Socrates's earthly life, prime matter has no form of its own. It exists only in potentiality; and in order to be the same matter as it was before, it needs only to be configured by the same form as it was before.

The Thomistic synthesis of Aristotelian hylomorphism and Christian theology therefore yields a doctrine of the resurrection less open to objection than some of its critics suppose.²¹

¹ For further discussion of the metaphysical issues raised here and in subsequent sections in connection with Aquinas's theory of forms, see the chapter on Aquinas's theory of things in my *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003).

² *In DA* II.11.226.

³ *QDA* un.9.

⁴ *In BDT* 2.4.2; cf. also *ST* Ia.119.1 and *QDP* 9.1.

⁵ Perhaps the most detailed exposition of this view of his is in his *In BDT* 2.4.2.

⁶ *In BDT* 2.4.2. Aquinas does not always describe his position on this score in the same way, and the variation in terminology suggests to some scholars either a development in his thought or a series of changes of mind. The issue is complicated, and so I am leaving it to one side here. For the discussion of the scholarly controversy, see John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas. From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), pp.357-373.

⁷ But see also Jeffrey Brower's contribution to this volume.

⁸ Cf., e.g., *ST* IIIa.3.7 ad 1 where Aquinas says that a substantial form is multiplied in accordance with the division of matter.

⁹ Richard Swinburne, "Soul, nature and immortality of the", *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹⁰ *QDA* un.1 ad 2.

¹¹ In fact, for Aquinas, there are two memory capacities, one which is dependent on the senses and phantasia, and one which is dependent on the intellect. The second is the memory at issue here. For further discussion of Aquinas's views of human cognitive capacities, see the chapter on the mechanisms of cognition in my *Aquinas*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹² See, for example, *In Metaphysica* VII.17.1672 -1674. There Aquinas says that in cases in which the composite is one thing, the composite is not identical with its components; rather the composite is something over and above its components. For interesting contemporary arguments against the reduction of wholes to their parts, see Mark Johnston, "Constitution is Not Identity", *Mind* 101 (1992) 89-105, and Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Constitution is Not Identity", *Journal of Philosophy* 94 (1997) 599-621. For an excellent discussion of the constitution relation, see Lynne Rudder Baker, "Unity Without Identity: A New Look at Material Constitution", in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 23 (1999) 144-165. Cf. also Lynne Rudder Baker, *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹³ *In Metaphysica* VII.17.1673-1674.

¹⁴ For more defense of this position, see my “Resurrection, Reassembly, and Reconstitution: Aquinas on the Soul,” in *Die menschliche Seele: Brauchen wir den Dualismus?* Bruno Niederberger and Edmund Runggaldier (eds.), (Ontos Verlag, 2006).

¹⁵ . I am grateful to Brian Leftow for calling this passage to my attention.

¹⁶ *In I Cor* chapter 15, 1.2.

¹⁷ So, for example, Peter van Inwagen says,

“Aquinas sees the human person as essentially a composite of a human soul and a human body. According to the ‘composite’ theory, a person cannot exist without a body: to exist is for one’s soul (always numerically the same) to animate some human body or other. (In the interval between one’s death and one’s receiving a new body at the time of the general resurrection, one’s soul exists and thinks and has experiences, but *one* does not, strictly speaking, exist.)” [Peter van Inwagen, “Resurrection”, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 1999)]. Robert Pasnau also argues that for Aquinas a separated soul is not a human being and therefore that a human being ceases to exist at death, on Aquinas’s position. As one example supporting this interpretation, Pasnau cites a passage from Aquinas’s *Sentence* commentary in which Aquinas is discussing the separated soul of Abraham. In that place, as Pasnau rightly points out, “Aquinas remarks . . . that ‘Abraham’s soul is not, strictly speaking, Abraham himself’”. (The passage is cited by Pasnau as *IV Sent.* 43.1.1.1 ad 2.) Pasnau claims that Aquinas “insists on this point precisely so as to argue that bodily resurrection is necessary for human immortality. Hence [Aquinas] immediately concludes: ‘So Abraham’s soul’s having life would not suffice for Abraham’s being alive.’” In Pasnau’s view, this passage shows that Aquinas cannot have supposed that “the persistence of the soul ‘is sufficient for the existence’ of the human being”. Rather, in Pasnau’s view, the passage makes plain that Aquinas “would deny that a human soul could constitute a human being.” (See Robert Pasnau’s review of my *Aquinas* in *Mind* 114 (2005) 203-6.

¹⁸ SCG IV.91.

¹⁹ SCG IV.92.

²⁰ The phrase is Van Inwagen’s; see Van Inwagen 1999.

²¹ I am grateful to Brian Davies for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.