Thomas Aquinas on the Nature and Powers of the Human Soul

*Summa Theologiae*

Part I, Question 75. The Soul’s Nature

The first of these inquiries breaks up into seven problems:

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

Article 1. Whether the soul is corporeal

The first point:  

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

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

1 Cf. *CG* ii, 65. In *De Anima* ii, lect. 1.  
2 *Physics* viii, 6. 259b32–260a1; 10. 267b3.
3. Again, there has to be some contact between the cause of change and the thing changed, yet contact is only between bodies. Since the soul moves the body, it must therefore be some sort of body.

On the other hand we have Augustine’s remark that the soul is said to be simple in relation to the body, because it is not extended quantitatively through the various parts of the body.  

Reply: Inquiry into the nature of the soul presupposes an understanding of the soul as the root principle of life in living things within our experience. We speak of living things as 'animate', and of non-living things as 'inanimate'. Now the chief manifestations of life are the two activities of knowledge and movement. Philosophers of old, unable to transcend imagination, supposed that some body was the source, for they held bodies alone to be real things; that which was not a body was not anything at all. And so they maintained that the soul was some sort of body.

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

Hence: 1. Granted that what changes is changed from outside, and that this process cannot be prolonged through an infinite regress, we must assert that not every cause of change is subject to causal influx from outside. Since all change is a passage from potentiality to actuality, the cause of change gives what it has to the subject of change to the precise extent that it actuates it. But as shown in the Physics, there is a wholly unchangeable cause of change, which does not undergo change either from itself or from elsewhere. And such a source of change can produce a perpetually uniform pattern of effect. But there is another change-inducing agent which, while not essentially changeable, is changeable because of attendant conditions, and on this account does not give rise to a uniform pattern of effect. Such is a soul. Then there is another source of change which is of itself essentially changeable, namely, a body. Since the cosmologists of antiquity reckoned that nothing incorporeal existed, they held that every cause of change was itself subject to change, that the soul is essentially changeable, and something corporeal.

2. A likeness of the thing known does not need to be actually present in the nature of the knower. If there be something that passes from being capable of knowing to actually

3  De Trinitate vi, 6. Pl. 42, 929.
4  Cf. 1a. 50, 1.
5  Physics viii, 5. 258b4–9.
6  St Thomas’s source here is De Anima i, 2. 403b29f.
knowing, then the likeness of the thing known need not be in the nature of the knower in actuality. It is enough if it is potentially in the knower, as colour is potentially in the retina, not actually. So there is no need for an actual likeness of corporeal things to be in the nature of the soul; it merely needs to have a capacity for such likenesses. But because the ancient cosmologists could not see the distinction between actuality and potentiality, they held that the soul must be a body in order to know a bodily thing. And to explain how it could know all bodily things they held that it was compounded of the elements of all physical things.7

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

**Article 2. Whether the human soul is something which subsists**

The second point:8 1. There are reasons for saying that the human soul is not something which subsists. For what subsists is said to be ‘this particular thing’. But the soul is not ‘this particular thing’; only the compound of soul and body can be said to be that. Hence the soul is not something subsisting.

2. Besides, whatever subsists can be described as acting. But the soul is not described as acting; because, to quote the *De Anima*,9 to speak of the soul sensing or understanding would be like speaking of it weaving or building. Hence the soul is not something which subsists.

3. Besides, if the soul were something subsisting, there would be some activity of the soul without the body. But it has no activity without the body, not even the act of understanding; for understanding does not take place without images, and there are no images apart from the body. Hence the soul is not something which subsists.

On the other hand we have what Augustine says, *Whoever sees the nature of the mind to be both substantial and incorporeal can see that those who hold it to be corporeal make the mistake of committing it to the things without which they cannot think of any nature,*10 namely the pictures they form of bodily things. The human mind is incorporeal in nature, and indeed substantial: it is something which subsists.

**Reply:** The principle of the act of understanding, which is called the soul of man, must of necessity be some kind of incorporeal and subsistent principle. For it is obvious that man’s understanding enables him to know the natures of all bodily things.11 But what can in this way take in things must have nothing of their nature in its own, for the form that was in it by nature would obstruct the knowledge of anything else. For example, we observe how the tongue of a sick man with a fever and bitter infection cannot perceive anything sweet, for everything tastes sour. Accordingly, if the intellectual principle had in it the physical nature of any bodily thing, it would be unable to know all bodies. Each of them has its own determinate nature. Impossible, therefore, that the principle of understanding be something bodily.

And in the same way it is impossible for it to understand through and in a bodily organ, for the determinate nature of that bodily organ would prevent knowledge of all bodies. Thus

7 Cf. 1a. 84, 2c.
8 Cf. *De potentia* iii, 9, 11. In *De Anima* iii, lect. 7. Q. *de anima* i, 14. *De spiritualibus creaturis* 2.
9 *De Anima* i, 4. 408b9–18.
10 *De Trin.* x, 7. PL 42, 979.
11 Cf. 1a. 84, 7.
if you had a colour filter over the eye, and had a glass vessel of the same colour, it would not matter what you poured into the glass, it would always appear the same colour.

The principle of understanding, therefore, which is called mind or intellect, has its own activity in which body takes no intrinsic part. But nothing can act of itself unless it subsists in its own right. For only what actually exists acts, and its manner of acting follows its manner of being. So it is that we do not say that heat heats, but that something hot heats. Consequently the human soul, which is called an intellect or mind, is something incorporeal and subsisting.

Hence: 1. This particular thing’ can be taken two ways. First, it can refer to anything which subsists; again, it can be taken to refer to something subsisting in the full integrity of its nature, according to its type. Now the first sense of the phrase excludes its being an inhering accident or a form which can exist only when materialized. The second sense of the phrase excludes also the kind of incompleteness which pertains to a part. A hand can be considered to be ‘this particular thing’ in the first sense, because it subsists, but not in the second, because it is part of a thing. For it is the whole compound of body and soul that is described as ‘this particular thing’.

2. Aristotle, in this passage, was expressing the views of those who held that intellectual understanding was a case of physical change; he was not expressing his own views, as is clear from the context.12

But you could well say that while nothing acts with an activity truly its own unless it has existence in its own right, nevertheless something which exists in its own right, even if it is only a part, can be described as something, provided it is not inhering as an accident or a material constituent of something else. But we describe a thing as subsistent in the most proper sense, or subsisting per se, when it is not inhering in the manner mentioned, or is not a part. And in this sense an eye or hand cannot be described as subsisting per se, nor in consequence as acting per se. For this reason the activities of parts are attributed to the whole through the parts. For we speak of a man seeing with his eye or feeling with his hand, but not in the same sense as when we speak of something hot heating by reason of its heat; for strictly speaking heat in no sense heats. It can be said, therefore, that the soul understands just as the eye sees; but it is much better to say that the man understands with his soul.

3. The body is necessary for the activity of the intellect, not as the organ through which it acts, but in order to supply it with its object; for images stand in relation to the intellect as colour in relation to sight. This dependence on body does not show that the intellect is non-subsistent; no more than the fact that it requires exterior sense-objects for sensation shows that an animal is not a subsisting thing.

Part I, Question 76. The Soul’s Union with the Body

Next we must consider the union of the soul with the body. This raises eight problems:

1. whether the intellective principle is united to the body as its form;
2. whether there are as many intellective principles as there are human bodies, or whether there is one intellect for all men;
3. whether in the body whose form is the intellective principle there is some other soul;

12 De Anima 1, 4. 408a34.
4. whether there is in it some other substantial form;
5. what kind of body the intellectual principle informs;
6. whether it is united to such a body by means of some other body;
7. or by means of some accidental disposition;
8. whether the whole soul is in every part of the body.

Article 1. Whether the intellectual principle is united to the body as its form

The first point: 1. There are reasons for holding that the intellectual principle is not united to the body as its form. For Aristotle, understanding is separate, 14 and not the act of any body. Hence it is not united to a body as its form.

2. Besides, every form is limited by the matter it informs; otherwise there would be no need for proportion between matter and form. If, then, intellect were united to the body as its form, it would follow, since every body has a limited nature, that the intellect would have a limited nature. In which case its knowledge would not extend to all things, in the manner explained above. 15 But this is against the very notion of understanding. Therefore the intellect is not united to a body as its form.

3. Besides, whenever a receptive capacity is an actuality of some body, it receives form in its material individuality, for the form must be received according to the recipient’s manner of receiving. But the form of something understood is received by the understanding, not materially and individually, but rather immaterially and according to its universality. Otherwise the intellect would, like sense, know only singulars, not immaterial and universal forms. Therefore the intellect is not united to the body as its form.

4. Besides, power to act and activity pertain to the same subject; the thing that can do is the same as the thing that does. But intellectual activity is not bodily, as we saw above. 16 So intellectual power is not a power of some body. But no power can be more immaterial and simple than the thing it is a power of. So the substance of the intellect is not the form of the body.

5. Besides, what has being of itself is not united to the body as its form. For form is that by which something is, and so the form’s being is not something it cannot not have. But the intellectual principle has being of itself, and is something subsisting, as we said above. 17 So it is not united to the body as its form.

6. Besides, what belongs to a thing by virtue of what it is always belongs to it. But it belongs to form by virtue of what it is to be united to matter; for by its essence, not by some accident, it actuates matter, otherwise matter and form would not constitute something substantially one, but rather something merely accidentally one. And therefore form cannot exist without its proper matter. But since, as we showed, 18 the intellectual principle is incorruptible, it remains after the body’s corruption, not united to a body. Therefore the intellectual principle is not united to the body as its form.

14 De Anima iii, 4. 429a24–7.
15 1a. 75, 2.
16 Loc. cit.
17 Loc. cit.
18 1a. 75, 6.
On the other hand, for Aristotle, logical differentiation of species depends on real formative principles. But the difference constitutive of man is rationality, said of man by virtue of his intellective principle. So the intellectual principle is the form of man.

Reply: The intellect, as the source of intellectual activity, is the form of the human body. For the prime endowment by virtue of which anything acts is the form of that to which the activity is attributed, as health is the prime endowment by virtue of which the body is made healthy, and knowledge is the prime endowment by virtue of which the soul knows, and health, therefore, is the form of the body and knowledge of the soul. And the reason for this is that what a thing actually does depends on what it actually has to give; a thing acts precisely by virtue of its actuancy. Now it is obvious that the soul is the prime endowment by virtue of which a body has life. Life manifests its presence through different activities at different levels, but the soul is the ultimate principle by which we conduct every one of life’s activities; the soul is the ultimate motive factor behind nutrition, sensation and movement from place to place, and the same holds true of the act of understanding. So that this prime factor in intellectual activity, whether we call it mind or intellectual soul, is the formative principle of the body. And this is how Aristotle proves it in the De Anima.

Should anyone wish to maintain that the intellective soul is not the form of the body, he would have to find some way of making the act of understanding an act of this particular person. For each is conscious that it is he himself that understands. Now an action is attributed to somebody in three ways, as Aristotle shows. For a thing is said to cause or act either through its whole self, as when a doctor heals; or through a part of itself, as when a man sees with his eyes; or per accidens, as when we say that a white man is building, his whiteness having nothing directly to do with the fact that he is building. When, then, we say that Socrates or Plato understands, it is obviously not attributed to him per accidens, for it is attributed to him in virtue of the fact that he is a man, which belongs to him by his essence. So we must either say that Socrates understands through his whole self, as Plato held, saying that man is an intellective soul, or else we must say that the understanding is a part of Socrates. Now the first of these alternatives is untenable, as shown above, on the grounds that one and the same man perceives himself both to understand and to have sensations. Yet sensation involves the body, so that the body must be said to be part of man. It remains, therefore, that the intellect whereby Socrates understands is a part of Socrates, in such wise that the intellect is in some way united to the body of Socrates.

Now Averroes, the Commentator, says that this union takes place through the automatic intelligibility of the mind’s contents. But to say mind is to say two distinct powers, the receptive understanding, and the imagination with its dependence on the nervous system. And thus the receptive understanding is joined to the body of this man or that through the automatic intelligibility of the mind’s contents. But such joining or linking is not enough to make the activity of the intellect an activity of Socrates. This is obvious if we compare the

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20 De Anima ii, 2. 414a4–19.
21 Physics V, 1. 224a21–34.
22 1 Alcibiades 25. 129b–130.
23 1a. 75, 4.
24 De Anima iii, comm. v, 5.
process of sensation, as Aristotle does before going on to consider the process of understanding. For as sense-images are to understanding, says the De Anima,\(^25\) so are colours to sight. Therefore, as colours, with their seerableness, are to sight, so sense-images, with their intelligibility, are to the receptive understanding. Now it is obvious that while being seen the colours remain in the wall, and that consequently the activity called seeing is not attributed to the wall; the wall is the seen not the seer. And likewise, from the mere fact that sense-images, in their intelligibility, are received into the receptive understanding, it does not follow that Socrates does the understanding, merely because he has the images in him; all that follows is that he or his sense-images are understood.

Now some have sought to assert that the understanding is linked to the body as its motor, so that understanding and body form a unit to which the activity called understanding can be attributed. This is meaningless on many counts, however.\(^26\) In the first place, the understanding moves the body only by virtue of a drive which itself presupposes intellectual activity. It is wrong to say that Socrates understands something because he is moved into action by his understanding. The truth is the reverse of this: Socrates is moved into action by his understanding because he understands something.

In the second place, consider the fact that Socrates is a particular individual whose unity of nature and essence is a compound unity, matter plus form. In that case, if the understanding is not the formative principle it must be something not belonging to Socrates’ essence, and thus the understanding will be related to the whole Socrates as motor to thing moved. But understanding is not an activity that effects changes in things the way an activity like heating does; the act of understanding is something completely within the intellect. So understanding cannot be attributed to Socrates merely because he is acted on by understanding.

In the third place, the activity of a moving agent is attributed to the thing it moves in one case only, when it uses it as an instrument, as when a carpenter imparts his motions to his saw. Therefore if understanding were to be attributed to Socrates on the ground that it was the activity of some agent acting on him, it would follow that he was said to understand because being used for understanding. This is incompatible with the Philosopher’s contention that understanding takes place without physical instrumentality.\(^27\)

In the fourth place, grant that the action of a part may be attributed to the whole, as the action of the eye is said to be the action of the man, nevertheless such an action is never attributed to another part of the same whole (except by metonymy). We do not say the hand sees because the eye sees. If, then, Socrates and the power of understanding form a single whole in the manner in question, the activity of the understanding cannot be attributed to Socrates. Indeed, if Socrates is a whole composed by uniting the understanding with the rest of the things that go to make up Socrates, and yet the understanding is united to the rest only as their motor, it would follow that Socrates is not properly speaking one thing, that Socrates as Socrates does not have an existence of his own. A being exists as being one.

The only explanation left is the one Aristotle gives: each man understands because his intellective principle is his formative principle. So it is clear from the very activity of the understanding that the intellectual principle is united to the body as its form.

The same thing can be shown from the nature of man as a species. Each thing’s nature declares itself through its activities. Now the activity peculiar to man is understanding; it is

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27 De Anima iii, 4. 429a24–7.
by this that he transcends all animals. Hence it was that Aristotle fixed on this activity, as the most human of human activities, as the ultimate constituent perfecting human happiness. It is natural therefore that the power behind this activity should determine the kind of being man is. But everything has its species determined by its formative principle. So we are left with this, that the intellective principle is the formative principle determining man as a species.

Yet we should bear in mind that the nobler a form is, the more it dominates physical matter and the less it is immersed in it, and the more it transcends it in activity and permanent power to act. We note, for instance, that the form of a chemical compound has activities which do not belong to the elements it is composed of. And the more valuable the form, the more its powers are found to exceed those of elementary particles of matter, as vegetable life has operations metals do not have, and sense-life has operations vegetable life does not have. Now the human soul stands at the top of the scale. Hence its powers so transcend the material world that it has an activity and a permanent power to act to which material forces contribute nothing. This is the power we call the understanding.

Note, though, that even if someone were to claim that the soul is compounded of matter and form, he could still on no account say that the soul was the form of the body. For since form is actuality, while matter is mere potentiality, there is no way for something compounded of matter and form to be in its entirety the formative principle of some other thing. But if it is formative by virtue of something in it, then we call the formative part the animating principle or soul and that of which it is the form the basic living or animated thing, as was said above.

Hence: 1. It must be observed, with Aristotle, that the loftiest natural form, at which the study of natural philosophy culminates, that is to say, the human soul, is at once non-material yet im-mattered. He argues that man and the sun generate man from matter. Man is non-material in respect of his intellectual power because the power of understanding is not the power of an organ the way sight is of the eye, for understanding is an activity that cannot be exercised through a bodily organ as sight is. Yet it is material to the extent that the soul it is a power of is the form of the body and the term of human generation. Accordingly he says that the understanding is separate because it is not the power of a bodily organ.

2 & 3. For man to be able to understand everything through his intellect, including non-material things and universal concepts, it is enough that the power of understanding is not a bodily act.

4. The human soul, being so lofty, is not a form immersed in physical matter or wholly swallowed up by it. So nothing prevents it from having some non-bodily activity, even though the soul’s essence is to inform a body.

5. That act of being, in which it itself subsists, the soul communicates to physical matter; this matter and the intellectual soul form a unity such that the act of being of the compound whole is the soul’s act of being. This does not happen in other forms which are non-substinent. And for this reason the human soul continues in its act of being when the body is destroyed, whereas other souls do not.

6. It belongs to the very essence of the soul to be united to a body, just as it belongs to a light body to float upwards. And just as a light body remains light when forcibly displaced,
and thus retains its aptitude and tendency for the location proper to it, in the same way the human soul, remaining in its own existence after separation from the body, has a natural aptitude and a natural tendency to embodiment.

Article 2. Whether there are as many intellectual principles as there are human bodies

The second point:31 1. There are reasons for thinking that there are not as many intellectual principles as there are human bodies, but rather one intellect in all men. For no non-material substance is multiplied as individuals within the same species. But the human soul is a non-material substance, for it is not compounded of matter and form, as was shown above.32 So there are not many souls in one species. Now all men are of a single species. Therefore there is a single intellective principle for all.

2. Besides, when a cause is taken away, its effect will be too. Therefore if the number of souls depended on the number of bodies, the consequence would seem to be that on removal of the bodies there would no longer be many souls but one. Now this is heresy, since it would abolish the different rewards and punishments allotted to individuals.

3. Again, if my intellect differs from your intellect, then my intellect has its individuality and yours does too. Individuals differ numerically but agree in kind. But what a thing receives it receives on its own terms. So the presence of things in my understanding and in yours would differ according to our different individualities. But this goes against the very nature of intellect, which lifts universally valid notions clear of encumbering particulars.

4. Again, the thing understood is in the understanding actually at work. So if my intellect is different from yours, what is understood by me must be different from what is understood by you. And so what is understood will have numerical individuality and will be understood only potentially, and it will be necessary to abstract whatever common content there is in our separate minds (in any group of things, no matter how diverse, there is always some intelligible aspect common to all of them). But this goes against the very notion of intellect, since it does not seem to distinguish it from imagination. So the only alternative seems to be one power of understanding for all men.

5. Again, when a learner learns from a teacher, it cannot be said that the knowledge of the teacher begets the knowledge in the learner, because that would make out that knowledge is an active cause like heat, which is obviously untrue. It would seem, then, that the same individual bit of knowledge that is in the teacher gets into the learner, and this could not happen unless they both have the same intellect. So it seems that there is one intellect in both learner and teacher, and this goes for all men.

6. Besides, Augustine says, Were I to say there were many human souls I would laugh at myself.33 Now the soul must be a unity above all in the field of understanding. So there is one intellect in all men.

On the other hand Aristotle says that as universal causes have universal effects, in the same way particular cases are related to their own particular effects.34 But just as it is absurd

31 Cf. 1 Sent. 8, 5, 2 ad 6; 11, 17, 2, 1. CG ii, 73, 75. De spiritualibus creaturis 9. Q. de anima 3. Compend. theol. 85. De unitate intellectus.
32 1a. 75, 5.
33 De quantitate animae 32. PL 32, 1075.
to postulate one kind of soul for different kinds of animals, so it is impossible that one individual intellective soul should ensoul different individuals.

Reply: It is absolutely impossible for there to be one intellect operating in all men.

This would be quite clear if, as Plato thought, the man is the intellect. For it would follow that if Socrates and Plato were one intellect they would be one man, distinguished from one another only by extrinsic factors. The distinction between them would be like the distinction between a man with his tunic on and the same man with his hat on, which is silly.

But the same impossibility holds if, as Aristotle thought, the intellect is a part or power of the soul that makes man what he is. For a number of diverse individual things can no more have one form they can have one existence, since form gives existence.

But however the union of the intelligence with the individual man is conceived, the thesis in question is impossible. For it is obvious that if you have one principal agent and two instruments you can speak of one agent but you must speak of more than one action; thus if a man touches things with both hands there is one toucher but two touches. If, on the other hand, you have one instrument and several principal agents, you will speak of many agents but one action; thus if several haul a boat by the same rope, there are many haulers but one haul. And if there is one principal agent and one instrument you will speak of one agent and one action; thus when a workman uses a hammer there is one hammerer and one hammering. Now it is obvious that however the intellect may be united or linked with this man or that, it enjoys a position as principal in relation to man’s other faculties; the sense powers obey the understanding and minister to it. So then, if we were to postulate distinct intellects but one sense-power in two men – two men with one seeing eye, for instance – there would be more than one person seeing, even though there were only one visual faculty in act. (The thesis then fails.) If, though, the intellect is one, however diverse its instruments, then Socrates and Plato cannot but be one understander. And if we add to this that the understanding (gerund) done by the understanding (noun) does not take place in an organ, it will further follow that there is one action as well as one agent – I am speaking, of course, with respect to any one given object of understanding.

However, my intellectual activity might differ from yours thanks to our different sense-images, that is, because the image of a stone in me was one thing and its image in you another. This could be the case, provided the mere sense-image, in its individuality in me as distinct from you, were what informs the recipient understanding: for the same agent produces different actions according to the different qualities it has, as for instance there are different objects of its sight. But the sense-image is not what informs the recipient understanding; what is intelligible to the receptive understanding is the idea latent in the images, from which it is abstracted. And the intellect, from diverse images of one kind of thing, abstracts only one intelligible idea. This is plain in any one man. There can be many images of stones in his mind, but from all of them he gets one intelligible idea of what it is to be a stone; through this idea, one man’s intellect in one act grasps the nature ‘stone’ despite the variety of images. So that if there were one intellect in all men the various sense-images in this man and that could not give rise to different acts of understanding attributable to this man and that respectively, the way Averroes imagines. We are left with the fact that

35 1 Alcibiades 25. 129a–30. cf 1a. 75, 4.
36 De Anima ii, 2 & 3. 414a4–19 & 29–32.
37 In De Anima. iii, 5, 5.
it is absolutely impossible and incongruous to posit one single power of understanding among all men.

Hence: 1. Although the intellective soul, like an angel, is not constituted out of matter, none the less it does, unlike an angel, inform matter. Hence there are many souls of one species due to material differentiation, but there simply cannot be many angels of one species.

2. A unit, metaphysically speaking, is what has one existence. Hence whether there can be many of a thing depends on whether many such things can be. Now it is obvious that the intellectual soul’s very existence involves embodiment as a body’s form and yet, when the body goes, the intellectual soul continues to exist. By the same token, there are many souls because there are many bodies, yet when the bodies disappear, the many souls continue to exist.

3. The fact that the knower is an individual and his knowledge an individual piece of knowledge does not preclude it from being knowledge of something universal. Otherwise, since disembodied intelligences are subsistent and consequently have their own particular existence, they would not be able to understand universally valid truths. But if the knower and the form he knows by are material, this prevents knowledge of anything universally valid. For as all activity depends on the energy previously informing the agent, as heating depends on something being hot, so knowledge depends on what manner of form the knower knows by. Now it is obvious that a nature shared by many is distinguished and multiplied among them according to their material individuation. If, therefore, the form that accounts for knowledge is material, immersed in matter as its proper condition, such a form of knowledge will reflect the nature of the species or general category of the thing known only in so far as this is immersed in the abrupt individuality of the particular case, and hence the fact that the nature can be shared will not be known. If indeed the form is abstracted from the individual material conditions, it will be a reproduction of the nature without the things that individuate it when shared by many, and thus something universally valid will be known. On this point, it is of no consequence whether there is one human intelligence or many, for even if there were one only, it would have to be a certain particular one, and so would the form by which it understood anything.

4. Whether human intelligence is one thing or many, the thing it understands is one thing. For what is understood is in the understanding not in its physical being, but in a reproduction of it. What is in the mind, says the De Anima, is not the stone but the intelligibility of the stone. Nevertheless the stone is what is understood, not its intelligibility (except in the case where the intellect is reflecting on its own processes), otherwise knowledge would be of ideas, not things. Now it is possible for many things to share the likeness of one same thing in many ways. And since knowledge involves a likening of the knower to the known, it follows that the same thing can be known by different knowers. This is clear at the level of sensation, for many can see the one patch of colour according to different reproductions of it. And so too many intelligences understand the same thing understood.

But in Aristotle’s opinion, sense and intellect differ in that a thing is sensed just as it is in its individuality outside the sensing soul, whereas the nature of a thing, while indeed it is extra-mental, does not exist in the mind in the same manner as it exists outside of it. For the nature as shareable by many is understood regardless of its individual features in the concrete. Now it does not have this sort of existence outside the mind. Plato, though,
maintained that a thing understood does have the same sort of existence outside the mind as it does in the understanding. 40 For he posited matterless natures of things.

5. It is not the same identical knowledge in the learner and the teacher. The process will be explained below. 41

6. Augustine did not understand souls to be many in the sense that there are many distinct kinds of soul.

Article 3. Whether there are other souls in man essentially different from the intellectual soul

The third point.42 1. There are reasons for thinking that apart from the intellectual soul there are other souls in man essentially different, namely, the sensitive and nutritive souls. For the same substance cannot be both corruptible and incorruptible. But the intellective soul is incorruptible, whereas the other kinds of soul, the sensitive and nutritive, are corruptible, as was made clear above.43 Hence there cannot be one essence in man comprising the intellective, sensitive and nutritive souls.

2. Were it said that the sensitive soul is incorruptible in man’s case, a saying in the Metaphysics contradicts us: Corruptible and incorruptible differ in genus.44 The sensitive soul in horse and lion and any other brute is corruptible. So if it were incorruptible in man’s case, sensation would not be the same kind of thing in man and brute. Now a thing is called an animal because it has a sensitive soul. As a result man would not belong to the same genus, animal, with the other animals, which makes little sense.

3. Besides, Aristotle says that the embryo is an animal before it is a man.45 But this could not be so if the essence of the sensitive soul was the same as that of the intellective soul, since the sensitive soul makes it an animal, the intellective a man. So the essence of the sensitive soul and of the intellective soul are not the same thing in man.

4. Again, Aristotle says that genus stems from matter, while the differentiating feature stems from form.46 But rationality, the differentiating feature constituting humanity, comes from the intellective soul, while man is said to be an animal because he has a body animated by a sense-soul. Thus the intellectual soul is related to the body animated by the sense-soul as form to matter. So the intellectual soul is not the same as the sensitive soul in man, but presupposes it as the matter it energizes.

40 Cf. 1a. 84, 1; 85, 1.
41 1a. 117, 1.
43 1a. 75, 6.
44 Metaphysics X, 10. 1058b26–9.
45 De generatione animalium ii, 3. 736b2–5.