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Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect

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I. Introduction

Contemporary philosophers tend to become interested in Aquinas's conception of the mind when they perceive it as possibly offering a promising alternative between "the Scylla of materialism and the Charybdis of dualism". They tend to become disillusioned, however, when they run into the problem of the apparent *inconsistency* in Aquinas's conception. Furthermore, if they manage somehow to get over that apparent inconsistency, they find the support for the *necessity* of Aquinas's view rather weak.[1] In this paper I will address both of these problems. I will first argue that with the proper understanding, Aquinas's conception of the human soul and intellect does offer a consistent alternative to the dilemma of sheer materialism and post-Cartesian dualism. Furthermore, I will also argue that in their own theoretical context, Aquinas' arguments for the materiality of the human soul and immateriality of the intellect provide a strong justification of his position. However, that theoretical context is rather "alien" to anything we are familiar with in contemporary philosophy. The conclusion of the paper will point in the direction of what can and needs to be done to render Aquinas's position more palatable to contemporary philosophers.

II. The Soul as the Substantial Form of the Living Body

The starting point of Aquinas' position on what *we* would describe as "the mind–body problem" is the Aristotelian conception of the soul as

1. The best illustration would be Kenny (1995). See also Klima (1998).

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the substantial form of the living body. Aquinas' rationale for this conception is very simple. The term *anima* ("soul") for Aquinas designates whatever it is on account of which something is *animatum* ("animated," "ensouled"), that is to say, an animate being, a living thing. Thus, for Aquinas, it is not built into the meaning of the term (as it is for our post-Cartesian intuitions) that a soul must be a "ghost in the machine," some immaterial, spiritual entity, mysteriously lurking in the biological mechanism of our body. On the contrary, for him, the claim that something has a soul simply amounts to the claim that it is alive, and *vice versa*. (Thus, *pace* Descartes, worms, plants, etc. also have their own characteristic kinds of soul, which may be nothing but the specific constitution of their bodies.) However, as Aquinas often quotes Aristotle, for a living thing to live is for it to exist (*vivere viventibus est esse*).[2] Clearly, for a living thing to come to exist is for it to be born, and for it to cease to exist is for it to die; therefore, "in between," for it to live is for it to exist. Thus, the soul, that on account of which a living thing is alive, is that on account of which the thing exists. However, in Aristotle's hylomorphist metaphysics, that on account of which a material thing exists is its substantial form. Therefore, the soul must be the substantial form of a living body.[3]

Obviously, this conclusion can make good sense for us, only if we properly understand what is meant by "a substantial form" of a material thing. There are many possible ways to introduce the notion, but perhaps the simplest, "minimalistic" way (one making the minimal number of assumptions unpalatable to the modern reader) to do so is from a linguistic perspective: a form, any form, is nothing but a "truth maker" of a simple predication. For example, this sheet of paper is white; thus, the predication "this sheet is white" is true. But what is it in reality that makes this predication true? For Aquinas, it is the actual presence of whatever is signified by the predicate in the thing referred to the subject, that is to say, in this case, the presence of the whiteness of this sheet in this sheet. In general, let us just call whatever the predicate F signifies in a thing x "the F-ness of x" or "the form signified by 'F' in x". Using this linguistic convention, we may say that the simple predication "x is F" is true, if and only if the form signified

2. SN1, d. 8 q. 5 a. 3 ad 3; ST1, q. 18 a. 2 s.c.; *De veritate*, q. 13 a. 4 arg. 3; *De virtutibus*, q. 1 a. 2 arg. 15; *De unione Verbi*, a. 1 arg. 10; *Sentencia de Anima*, lb. 1, lc. 14 n. 11; *Sententia Metaphysicae*, lb. 1, lc. 1, n. 14.

3. See Aquinas' *Sentencia de Anima*, lb. 2 lc. 2.

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by "F" in x is actually present in x, that is to say, if and only if the F-ness of x exists.[4]

It is important to keep in mind that in order just to lay down such linguistic truisms connecting predicates, what they signify in things, and the truth of their predication of these things, we really don't have to know anything about the nature of things. We do not have to know what heat is to make the claim that the predication "this kettle is hot" is true because of the actual heat of the kettle, namely, the actuality of the form signified by the predicate "hot" in this kettle. Indeed, as far as this characterisation of the form signified by the predicate "hot" is concerned, nothing depends on whether heat is a simple active quality as Aristotle believed, or it is a rapid motion of particles, as modern high school physics teaches. That issue is a matter of physics. But that it is the presence of heat in the kettle that makes the predication of "hot" of this kettle true is just a matter of semantics. It is in this sense that this "linguistic" way of introducing the notion of form (as whatever is signified by our common predicates in individual things) is "minimalistic". It does not assume any sort of knowledge about the nature of the items signified by our predicates in the things of which they are true. However, this way of articulating the notion of form does presuppose a certain sort of *semantic* conception. In particular, this semantic conception requires that common predicates do signify something in individuals of which they are predicable (whether truly or not), and that what verifies these predicates of these individuals is the actual existence of their *significata* in these individuals.[5]

I am not going to argue for this semantic conception here. I believe its basics are intuitive enough, and it would be hard to argue against its consistency. For the purposes of this paper, I just want to *assume* this semantic conception, as something being helpful in elucidating Aquinas's notion of substantial form.

Once we are willing to accept the linguistic/semantic truisms described earlier, it should become clear that in this framework we have to distinguish between two kinds of forms, namely, substantial and accidental forms. For if what verifies the predication of a predicate F of an individual x is the existence of the form signified by this predicate in x, then it is obvious that the existence of this form is either

4. Cf. Geach (1955).
5. For further elaborations of this semantic conception, see Klima (1996); Klima (2002b).

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identical with the existence of x itself or not. In the former case, F signifies a substantial form; in the latter, an accidental form. The point of this distinction, however, can properly be understood only if we have a proper understanding of what is meant by "the existence of something," or what Aquinas refers to as the *esse* of a thing, i.e., the act of being of the thing.

Again, within the semantic framework sketched earlier, the answer is trivial: just as what the abstract form of any other verb truly predicable of something refers to is what renders the verb true of this thing, namely, the act signified by the verb, so what the abstract form of the verb *est* ("is") refers to is what renders the verb true of this thing, namely, the thing's existence or, in other words, its act of being. For example, if Socrates is running, the verb "runs" (*currit*) is truly predicable of him on account his act of running (*currere*). In the same way, if Socrates actually exists (*est*), which is to say, he is alive (*vivit*), the verb is truly predicable of him on account of his act of being (*esse*), which is nothing but his act of living (*vivere*) or his life (*vita*). Thus, since "is" is truly predicable both of Socrates and of his forms (if and when he is alive),[6] we have a simple criterion for distinguishing his substantial form from any of his accidental forms: if that on account of which "is" is true of Socrates and of the form is one and the same act of being, then the form is substantial, otherwise it is accidental.

Indeed, this characterisation of the distinction at once entails the usual ways to mark the distinction between substantial and accidental predicates. Obviously, since the act of being of an accidental form of a substance is not the same as the act of being of the substance itself, the substance may lose this form without its destruction (since the form may lose its existence, while the substance retains its own, distinct existence). Thus, any predicate that signifies an accidental form of a substance can become false of this substance without the destruction of the substance. By contrast, this is clearly not possible with a predicate that signifies the substantial form of the thing. For losing the substantial form would mean that the form ceases to exist. However, since the existence of the substantial form is the same as the existence of the thing itself, the thing cannot lose this form without losing its own existence, i.e., without being destroyed. Thus, the accidental

6. Anybody still worried about the predicability of existence of individuals (prompted by worries about "the problem of negative existentials") is kindly asked to consult Klima (2004).

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predicates of a thing are simply those that signify its accidental forms, whereas its substantial predicates are those that signify its substantial form.

We should note here, however, that in talking about the "accidental forms" of a thing in the plural and its "substantial form" in the singular, we are implicitly "buying into" one of Aquinas' controversial metaphysical doctrines, namely, the doctrine of *the unity of substantial forms*. For as far as the general semantic framework is concerned, of course, it would be quite possible to have a substance with several true substantial predicates, each of which signifies a distinct substantial form in the same individual. For example, since Socrates is substantially a man, an animal, a living being, and a physical body, it might be possible that all these substantial predicates apply to him on account of distinct substantial forms, namely, a rational soul accounting for his rational functions, a sensitive soul accounting for his animal functions, a vegetative soul that accounts for his basic vegetative functions, and a substantial form on account of which he is a body extended in space.[7] However, given Aquinas' claim that the act of being of a substantial form and that of the thing whose substantial form it is are one and the same act, it is easy to be led to Aquinas' position by the following simple consideration. Take two forms of the same thing x, say, *f* and *g*. If *f* and *g* are distinct, then so are their acts of being. But then only one of them can have its act of being as identical with the act of being of x, because two distinct acts of being cannot be identical with one and the same act of being. Thus, since this reasoning applies to any two forms of the same thing x, any x can only have one substantial form.[8]

For the proper understanding of this little piece of reasoning, we should be clear about two points. In the first place, as we have seen, the verb "is" is truly predicable both of substances and of their forms (whether accidental or substantial) on account of their actually having an act of being signified in them by this verb. In the second place, however, on account of the categorial distinction between substances and their inherent forms, it is not exactly in the same sense that the predicate "is" is true of a substance and of its forms, for it is not in the same way that a substance and its forms have their respective acts of

7. Here I ignore niceties concerning the difference between *forma totius* and *forma partis*. For those otherwise important niceties, see Klima (2002a).
8. For further discussion, see Klima (2007).

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being. Primarily, it is the substance that exists, or has its act of being. Its forms, on the other hand, exist only insofar as the substance is actually informed by them. As in an important passage Aquinas explains:

> . . . being [*esse*] is said to be the act of a being [*ens*] insofar as it is a being, that is, that on account of which something is denominated as a being in the nature of things. And being [*esse*] in this way is attributed only to the things themselves that are contained in the ten categories, whence "being" [*ens*] predicated on account of such an act of being [*esse*] is divided by the ten categories. But this act of being [*esse*] is attributed to something in two ways. In one way, as to *that which* [*quod*] properly and truly has being, or is. And thus it is attributed only to a *per se* subsisting substance; whence that which truly exists is said to be a substance in bk. 1 of the *Physics*. All those [things], however, which do not subsist *per se*, but in others and with others, whether they are accidents or substantial forms or any sorts of parts, do not have being [*esse*] so that they themselves would truly exist, but being [*esse*] is attributed to them in another way, namely, as to that *by which* [*quo*] something is; as a whiteness is said to be, not that it itself would subsist in itself, but because it is on account of [this whiteness] that something has its being white [*habet esse abum*]. Being [*esse*], therefore, is properly and truly attributed only to a *per se* subsisting thing. To this, however, two kinds of being are attributed. The one is that results from those from which its unity is integrated, which is the proper substantial being of a suppositum. Another being is attributed to a suppositum besides those that integrate it, which is an additional being, namely, accidental being; as being white is attributed to Socrates when it is said: Socrates is white.[9]

9. ". . . esse dicitur actus entis in quantum est ens, idest quo denominatur aliquid ens actu in rerum natura. Et sic esse non attribuitur nisi rebus ipsis quae in decem generibus continentur; unde ens a tali esse dictum per decem genera dividitur. Sed hoc esse attribuitur alicui dupliciter. Uno modo ut sicut ei quod proprie et vere habet esse vel est. Et sic attribuitur soli substantiae per se subsistenti: unde quod vere est, dicitur substantia in i Physic. Omnia vero quae non per se subsistunt, sed in alio et cum alio, sive sint accidentia sive formae substantiales aut quaelibet partes, non habent esse ita ut ipsa vere sint, sed attribuitur eis esse alio modo, idest ut quo aliquid est; sicut albedo dicitur esse, non quia ipsa in se subsistat, sed quia ea aliquid habet esse album. Esse ergo proprie et vere non attribuitur nisi rei per se subsistenti. Huic autem attribuitur esse duplex. Unum scilicet esse resultans ex his ex quibus eius unitas integratur, quod proprium est esse suppositi substantiale. Aliud esse est supposito attributum praeter ea quae integrant ipsum, quod est esse superadditum, scilicet accidentale; ut esse album attribuitur Socrati cum dicitur: Socrates est albus." *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* 9, 2, 2, in corp.

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From our present point of view, the most important point of this passage is the distinction Aquinas makes between the way a subsistent substance is, as something that primarily has being, as that which is (*ut quod est*), and the way an inherent form is, not as that which is, but as that by which a substance is (somehow) [*ut quo substantia est (aliquid)*]. This is the fundamental distinction between subsistent and inherent being. For an inherent being, i.e., for an inherent form, to exist is for its subject to be informed by it: for a whiteness to exist is for its subject to be white; and for a human soul to exist as the substantial form of this human being is nothing but for this human being to be human, i.e., for the matter of this human body to be organised into a living human body. By contrast, for a human being to exist is not for anything else to be informed by this being; a human being is not the form of anything, a human being simply exists.

However, if this is true, namely, that for the human soul to exist is nothing but for the matter of this body to be organised into a living human body, then it should be clear that the human soul is a material form, a form inherent in matter. Indeed, one should say that the soul on this conception is nothing but the specific organic structure of the matter of a living human body. But then, how does Aquinas' conception differ from sheer materialism, apart from his willingness to use the atavistic language of talking about the organic structure of a living body as its "soul"? Indeed, given this conception, how can Aquinas possibly believe, as he certainly does, in the immortality of the human soul?

III. The Human Soul as both Inherent and Subsistent

Aquinas' solution to the problem of avoiding materialism concerning the human soul is his claim that the human soul, and the human soul alone, is both subsistent (existing as *quod est*) and inherent in matter (existing as *quo aliquid aliud est*).[10] But how is *that* possible, if at all?

To see this, we should first understand Aquinas' conception of subsistent forms in general. Again, our metaphysically non-committal semantic way of interpreting the notion of form as the truth maker of a simple predication may come in handy here. For in this semantic framework, what makes a simple predication true of a subject need not

10. See for example, ST1, q. 75, a. 2, *Quaestiones de Anima*, q. 1, etc.

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be some inherent formal *part* of the subject in question; it might just as well be the subject itself. For example, even if when we say that Socrates is a man what renders this predication true is the formal part of a composite material substance, when we say that Gabriel is an angel, the form signified by the predicate "angel" need not be distinct at all from Gabriel himself. As far as the semantics of these predications is concerned, the form signified by the predicate is anything whatsoever that renders the predication true; just *what* it is in the nature of things that this predicate signifies is a further, metaphysical issue. So, Aquinas' semantics leaves open the possibility of the existence of subsistent forms, i.e., forms signified by some of our predicates, which are nothing but the substances themselves of which these predicates are true. It is a matter of further, metaphysical argument whether there really are such forms in the nature of things. For Aquinas, it is a claim one may establish by means of metaphysical argument that whereas material forms, which are received and multiplied in matter, cannot be identified with their subjects, immaterial forms are subsistent, since they are nothing but immaterial substances themselves. Such subsistent forms, according to Aquinas, are angels (also identified with Aristotle's movers of the celestial spheres) and God (whose existence, of course, needs to be established first by separate metaphysical arguments that we cannot go into here).

Now these subsistent forms (assuming they exist) are obviously immaterial not only in the sense that they do not have matter as their mereological component (in the way material substances have matter as their component), but also in the sense that they do not inform matter. So, these forms only have subsistent being: they exist as *quod est*. However, if a subsistent form is necessarily immaterial in this sense, then how can Aquinas possibly claim that the human soul is *both* subsistent and inherent? The soul is certainly material in the sense that it is inherent in matter. But then, how can Aquinas claim that it is also subsistent, if that means that the soul is also *immaterial* in the same sense as are subsistent forms in general? What can he possibly mean?

Here we should first observe that Aquinas does not tie the notions of subsistence or inherence of forms to their immateriality or materiality. After all, he holds that there are inherent immaterial forms, such as the acts of thinking and willing of angels, and he also holds that there are material forms, namely, the human souls actually informing our bodies, which are, nevertheless, also subsistent. Instead, as we could see earlier, what determines for Aquinas the issue of the subsistence vs.

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inherence of any being [*ens*] is its *mode of being*, the way in which it has its act of being [*esse*].

If something is an inherent being, such as an accidental or substantial form, whether it is material or not, i.e., whether it inheres in matter or not, then it has its act of being as *quo [aliquid aliud] est*, i.e., as that by which something else, its subject of inherence, is actualised in its regard. That is to say, for an inherent form signified by the predicate F in a substance x to be is nothing but for x to be actually F, or for x to be actual with regard to its F-ness. By contrast, a subsistent being has its being as *quod est*, as something that primarily exists, in the sense that it may exist even if its existence does not actualise anything else.

But then the soul's inherence and subsistence are not directly tied to its materiality or immateriality either. It is certainly material in the sense that it is inherent in the matter of the human body, simply because it has its being as *quo est*, as that by which this matter is actualised in a human form. In fact, it has the very same act of being that the whole human being has in a different way, namely, as *quod est*, as that which primarily exists. But Aquinas' further claim is that it is not only the whole human, but also the soul that has, again, the same act of being (the life of this human) not only as *quo est*, but also as *quod est*, i.e., also in the sense as the whole human person has it.

And there is certainly no inconsistency in *this* position. The soul is material, insofar as it is inherent in the matter of the human body, having the substantial act of being of this human as *quo est*, as that by which this body is actualised, organised into a living human being. But with this it is certainly compatible that the soul also has this act of being not only as *quo est*, but also as *quod est*. And then, of course, it is also possible that the soul's separation from the body in death only means that it loses one of these *modes* of being, ceasing to be as *quo est*, while it retains its act of being in the other mode, namely, as *quod est*. So it can survive its separation from the body, provided it had its act of being in this mode in the first place.

But why *should* it? Even if perhaps it is not impossible for the material soul to have its being already in the body also in this other mode, as a subsistent being, and so it can have the natural ability to survive its separation from the body, why *should* we say that it also has this other mode? However, that question already concerns the *necessity* of Aquinas' position, namely, the question of why we should have to attribute to the human soul and to the human soul alone, subsistent as well as inherent existence.

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IV. The Immateriality of the Intellect and the Subsistence of the Human Soul

Aquinas' basic idea can be stated very simply. The human soul *has to be* a subsistent (as well as an inherent) being because it has its own activity, and its own power whereby it exercises this activity, namely, understanding or intellect. By saying that it is "its own," Aquinas means that the intellect, the power to think, an inherent active quality, and its activity of thinking are not inherent in the soul-body composite in the way bodily activities (such as running or perceiving) are, but they are inherent in the substance of the soul alone.

For clearly, if I see something, then the act of my sight is the activity of my visual organs, my eyes, optical nerve and cerebral cortex. The lesion of any of these organs would at once terminate this activity. By contrast, Aquinas' claim that intellectual operations, namely, the formation of universal concepts, judgments and reasoning, are the activities of the intellective soul alone amounts to the claim that these activities are not the activities of any material organ of our bodies. To put it simply, we do not think with our brains. Our brains simply provide highly processed sensory information for our thinking performed by our intellect, but the intellectual activity itself is not the activity of our brains. Of course, this conception certainly raises the question of interaction on the "interface" between the soul-informed (since living) brain, and the allegedly immaterial intellect. However, this is not "the interaction problem" of post-Cartesian dualism, raising the unwieldy issues of how two substances of radically different natures, one physical and another "non-physical" can act on each other. The question of the working of the "interface" between the soul-informed brain and the immaterial intellect of the human soul is rather the question of what kind of mechanism is capable of channelling information between different modules of the same information-processing unit. However, whatever the answer to *this* question is, it is clear that it can meaningfully be raised only if we first have established Aquinas' conclusion that the intellect itself and its activity cannot be the acts of any material organ.

In any case, *if* that conclusion is sufficiently established, *then*, it follows that, being a subject of the inherence of this power and its activity, the soul has to be a subsistent substance itself. Indeed, since its own activity is not something inherent in the living body, but in the soul alone, it can in principle exercise this activity whether it is united

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with the body or not. However, since only something existing can be active, then it should also be able to exist whether it is united with the body or not; therefore, it has to have the natural ability to survive its separation from the body: it is immortal.

Obviously, in this reasoning, the crucial assumption that needs to be proved is the immateriality of the intellect. In his Commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Aquinas summarises a proof he attributes to Aristotle in the following way:

> Aristotle . . . shows that the intellect has an act of being separate [from matter], not dependent on the body; and for this reason it is not said to be an act of the body; and Avicenna calls it a form not submersed in matter, and in the *Liber de Causis* it is called a form not brought down on the body. And the middle term for demonstrating this is taken from its operation. For, since nothing can operate except a thing that exists *per se*, it is necessary for a thing that has a separate operation *per se* also to have a separate act of being. But the operation of the intellect belongs to it separately, so that it does not communicate in this operation with a bodily organ. And this is clear for three reasons. First, because this operation covers all corporeal forms as its objects; therefore, it is necessary that the principle of this operation be free from all material forms. Second, because understanding concerns universals, whereas in a corporeal organ only individuated intentions can be received. Third, because the intellect understands itself; but this does not occur in a power whose operation is performed by means of a corporeal organ.[11]

The main argument can be put in an explicit syllogistic form as follows:

(1) Whatever has an operation not dependent on matter has an act of being not dependent on matter.
(2) The intellect has an operation not dependent on matter.

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11. 2SN, d. 19, q. 1. a. 1-co Hanc autem opinionem Aristoteles, sufficienter infringit, ostendens intellectum habere esse absolutum, non dependens a corpore; propter quod dicitur non esse actus corporis; et ab Avicenna dicitur non esse forma submersa in materia; et in libro de causis dicitur non esse super corpus delata. Hujus autem probationis medium sumitur ex parte operationis ejus. Cum enim operatio non possit esse nisi rei per se existentis, oportet illud quod per se habet operationem absolutam, etiam esse absolutum per se habere. Operatio autem intellectus est ipsius absolute, sine hoc quod in hac operatione aliquod organum corporale communicet; quod patet praecipue ex tribus. Primo, quia haec operatio est omnium formarum corporalium sicut objectorum; unde oportet illud principium cujus est haec operatio, ab omni forma corporali absolutum esse. Secundo, quia intelligere est universalium; in organo autem corporali recipi non possunt nisi intentiones individuatae. Tertio, quia intellectus intelligit se; quod non contingit in aliqua virtute cujus operatio sit per organum corporale.

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(3) Therefore, the intellect has an act of being not dependent on matter.

The three auxiliary arguments Aquinas is briefly alluding to in the text are meant to prove the minor premise. Here I am only going to deal with the second of these arguments, which I think has the best chances "to work". The argument concerns the universality of the *immediate objects* of understanding, insofar as it targets the individuated material natures of individual material objects in their universality, by means of *universal concepts* that abstract from their individuating conditions.[12]

The main claim of the argument is that the universal concepts of our understanding cannot be received in a material medium, because their universality is achieved precisely by their being abstracted from matter. To be sure, the universal, abstract mode of representation of the concepts of the intellect alone cannot guarantee their immateriality – after all, we are all familiar with material, universal signs, such as the words we utter or write. However, these universal symbols can have their universal representative function only because they correspond to the primarily universal concepts of the understanding. So, their derivative, conventional universality need not entail any ontological constraints upon their nature. Such a constraint may, however, be entailed by the representative function of the concepts of the understanding, which are formed as a result of the natural causality of sensible objects on the senses.

The question then is why the primarily universal mode of representation of the concepts of the understanding formed as a result of the causality of sensible objects should entail the immateriality of these concepts, in the sense that the subject in which they are received, the intellect, cannot be a form of any bodily organ. In fact, since we may just better understand what is going on in sensory cognition, we should rather consider the contrapositive of this question: why should the materiality of some representation entail its singularity?

12. Cf. *Qu. Disp. De Anima*, a. 2, obj. 20 "Praeterea, si anima unitur materiae corporali, oportet quod recipiatur in ea. Sed quidquid recipitur ab eo quod est esse a materia receptum, est in materia receptum. Ergo si anima est unita materiae, quidquid recipitur in anima recipitur in materia. Sed formae intellectus non possunt recipi a materia prima; quinimmo per abstractionem a materia intelligibiles fiunt. Ergo anima quae est unita materiae corporali non est receptiva formarum intelligibilium; et ita intellectus, qui est receptivus formarum intelligibilium, non erit unitus materiae corporali." For more discussion, see Klima (2001a,b), and Pasnau (2001).

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The main idea is the following. The senses represent singulars in their singularity because they necessarily represent the sensible features of material objects together with the material individuating conditions of these features, namely, the spatio-temporal dimensions determining the designated matter of these objects here and now.[13] The reason why this is necessary is that the causally active sensible features of sensible objects necessarily exercise their causality on the senses under these determinate dimensions, and so these sensible features are necessarily encoded by the senses *as determined by these dimensions*.[14] Therefore, what encodes these spatio-temporal features in the senses is precisely some corresponding spatio-temporal features of the sense organs. For example, the spatial arrangement of distinct patches of colour in my visual field is encoded by the spatial pattern of neurons firing in the retina of my eyes, and similar considerations apply to the other senses. In the process of abstraction, forming its universal representations, therefore, the abstractive intellect has to "cut out" precisely this part

13. Cf. *In De Anima* lb. 2, lc. 12, n.-5. Circa ea vero quae hic dicuntur, considerandum est, quare sensus sit singularium, scientia vero universalium; et quomodo universalia sint in anima. Sciendum est igitur circa primum, quod sensus est virtus in organo corporali; intellectus vero est virtus immaterialis, quae non est actus alicuius organi corporalis. Unumquodque autem recipitur in aliquo per modum sui. Cognitio autem omnis fit per hoc, quod cognitum est aliquo modo in cognoscente, scilicet secundum similitudinem. Nam cognoscens in actu, est ipsum cognitum in actu. Oportet igitur quod sensus corporaliter et materialiter recipiat similitudinem rei quae sentitur. Intellectus autem recipit similitudinem eius quod intelligitur, incorporaliter et immaterialiter. Individuatio autem naturae communis in rebus corporalibus et materialibus, est ex materia corporali, sub determinatis dimensionibus contenta: universale autem est per abstractionem ab huiusmodi materia, et materialibus conditionibus individuantibus. Manifestum est igitur, quod similitudo rei recepta in sensu repraesentat rem secundum quod est singularis; recepta autem in intellectu, repraesentat rem secundum rationem universalis naturae: et inde est, quod sensus cognoscit singularia, intellectus vero universalia, et horum sunt scientiae.
14. *Sentencia De anima*, lb. 2, lc. 13, n. 12. Differentiam autem circa immutationem sensus potest aliquid facere dupliciter. Uno modo quantum ad ipsam speciem agentem; et sic faciunt differentiam circa immutationem sensus sensibilia per se, secundum quod hoc est color, illud autem est sonus, hoc autem est album, illud vero nigrum. Ipsae enim species activorum in sensu, actu sunt sensibilia propria, ad quae habet naturalem aptitudinem potentia sensitiva; et propter hoc secundum aliquam differentiam horum sensibilium diversificantur sensus. Quaedam vero alia faciunt differentiam in transmutatione sensuum, non quantum ad speciem agentis, sed quantum ad modum actionis. Qualitates enim sensibiles movent sensum corporaliter et situaliter. Unde aliter movent secundum quod sunt in maiori vel minori corpore, et secundum quod sunt in diverso situ, scilicet vel propinquo, vel remoto, vel eodem, vel diverso. Et hoc modo faciunt circa immutationem sensuum differentiam sensibilia communia. Manifestum est enim quod secundum omnia haec quinque diversificatur magnitudo vel situs. Et quia non habent habitudinem ad sensum, ut species activorum, ideo secundum ea non diversificantur potentiae sensitivae, sed remanent communia pluribus sensibus.

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of the code. So it has to form its concepts encoding the universal information contained in a huge number of different sensory representations stored in sensory memory, the so-called *phantasms*, in a medium that will not encode the information about the singularity of singulars represented by the phantasms. But then, since what encodes this information in the phantasms is precisely the spatio-temporal features of the organs in which they are received, the medium in which the universal concepts are formed must be something that does not have such spatio-temporal features, i.e., something that does not have its own dimensions, which can only be a thing that is immaterial; therefore, the intellect receiving these concepts has to be immaterial.

As can be seen, the most important idea in this argument is that the materiality of representation entails its singularity. Sensory representation is necessarily singular because it is material, since the singularity of the information in sensory representation is encoded precisely by the material features of sensory representations, namely, the spatio-temporal features of the sense organs (including relevant parts of the brain) that are modified according to the spatio-temporal features of sensory objects, which determine their singularity. But if this much is acceptable, then the argument can indeed establish its desired conclusion.[15]

In any case, after these preliminaries, let us see the reconstructed argument itself.

V. A Reconstruction of the Argument from the Universality of the Concepts of Human Thought

(1) A cognitive faculty represents individuals qua individuals as a result of the natural causality of these individuals iff it represents their principle of individuation (self-evident).
(2) The principle of individuation is designated matter (from Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*, c. 3. and passim).
(3) Therefore, a cognitive faculty represents individuals qua individuals as a result of the natural causality of these individuals iff it represents their designated matter (from 1 and 2).

15. In fact, this is all that is needed to avoid Francisco J. Benzoni's recent criticism of Aquinas' argument (basically repeating the contention of Pasnau (1998)), according to which Aquinas' arguments "do not succeed in demonstrating that the human soul is subsistent because they depend upon an inference between representative immateriality and ontological immateriality without any suitable middle term." Benzoni (2007, 93).

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(4) Designated matter is matter contained under particular dimensions, here and now (from Aquinas's *De Ente et Essentia*, c. 3. and passim).
(5) Therefore, a cognitive faculty represents individuals qua individuals as a result of the natural causality of these individuals iff it represents their matter contained under their particular dimensions, here and now (from 3 and 4).
(6) Dimensions here and now are common, *per se sensibilia*.[16]
(7) Common, *per se sensibilia* can be represented as a result of the natural causality of the things having them only by the corresponding spatio-temporal properties of what represents them. (From Aquinas's commentary on the *De Anima* bk. 2, lc. 12 and 13.).
(8) Therefore, a cognitive faculty represents individuals qua individuals as a result of the natural causality of these individuals iff it represents their matter contained under their particular dimensions, here and now, by its own corresponding spatio-temporal properties (from 5 and 6 and 7).
(9) Any cognitive faculty that has its own spatio-temporal properties is material (self-evident).
(10) Therefore, any cognitive faculty represents individuals qua individuals iff it is material (from 8 and 9).
(11) The human intellect is a cognitive faculty that does not represent individuals qua individuals, but represents individuals in a universal manner (from Aquinas's explanations of the theory of abstraction, e.g., in ST1 q.85, a. 1.).
(12) Therefore, the human intellect is immaterial (from 10 and 11).

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16. *Per se sensibilia* are sensible qualities that, as such, can directly affect one or more senses. *Per accidens sensibilia* are other sensible qualities, which are joined in the object to its *per se* sensible qualities. For example, in perceiving a sugar cube, its whiteness is the *per se* object of sight, its sweetness is the *per se* object of taste, but of course, *per accidens*, i.e., coincidentally, by looking at the sugar cube we perceive something sweet, even if we do not perceive it by our sight as such. *Proper sensibilia* are *per se sensibilia* which, as such, can directly affect only one of the senses. *Common sensibilia* are *per se sensibilia* which directly affect any and all of the senses. This is because *common sensibilia* are the necessary spatio-temporal determinations of all proper *sensibilia*. Again, in the perception of the sugar cube, we perceive its shape, size and location by all our senses that are *per se* affected by it, precisely through perceiving its *per se* proper *sensibilia* as being localized here and now. The main claim in the next step is that these determinations can only be represented by the corresponding spatio-temporal determinations of the *representing act*; thus, it also has to be material.

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To be sure, in this argument, it may not seem *logically necessary* that the spatio-temporal features of sensible objects be encoded in the senses by means of some corresponding spatio-temporal features of the sense organs (including relevant parts of the brain), but, given the spatio-temporally determined causality of material agents, this may still be a *natural necessity*, which is, at any rate, not implausible to assume concerning sensory information processing in general.

Again, it may not be logically necessary that the concepts of the understanding, just by virtue of not representing particular dimensions of sensible objects, would have to be encodings of universal information about these objects such that they (in their real existence) cannot be received in a material medium. However, it may seem an altogether plausible assumption that it is a natural necessity that any encodings generated in this natural process of receiving, storing, and further manipulating sensory information, as long as they have their own spatio-temporal features, will thereby encode information about the individuality of their objects, and so, in order to extract their purely universal content, the abstractive intellect (the so-called agent intellect, *nous poietikos*) has to strip them precisely of these material conditions;[17] but this is all the argument assumes.[18]

Thus, the crucial premise in this argument is premise 7, stating that *common sensibilia*, the spatio-temporal features of sensible objects that allow the singular cognition even of otherwise qualitatively identical individuals, are naturally represented by corresponding spatio-temporal features of the senses. In a different context, Aquinas provides an interesting reason why spatio-temporal dimensions have this naturally distinctive role in singular cognition, while discussing the sensory cognition of *common sensibilia*:

> . . . there are certain *sensibilia* which differentiate sensation with respect, not to the kind [*species*] of the agent, but to the mode of its activity. For as sensible qualities affect the senses corporeally and

17. Cf. *Summa contra Gentiles*, lb. 1, c. 65. "Forma igitur rei sensibilis, cum sit per suam materialitatem individuata, suae singularitatis similitudinem perducere non potest in hoc quod sit omnino immaterialis, sed solum usque ad vires quae organis materialibus utuntur; ad intellectum autem perducitur per virtutem intellectus agentis, inquantum omnino a conditionibus materiae exuitur; et sic similitudo singularitatis formae sensibilis non potest pervenire usque ad intellectum humanum."
18. Indeed, it seems this is all that is needed to address Robert Pasnau's concerns about Aquinas' apparent conflating of two radically different senses in which we can say that the abstractive agent intellect operates on phantasms. See Pasnau (1998, 313–314).

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> locally, they do so in different ways if they are qualities of large or small bodies or are diversely situated, i.e. near, or far, or in the same place or in diverse places. And it is in this way that the common *sensibilia* differentiate sensation.[19]

So, the *common sensibilia* are the necessary spatio-temporal determinations of all *proper sensibilia*. The *proper sensibilia*, in turn, are the individualised sensible qualities of material individuals that the external senses are specifically attuned to be affected by, such as colour, sound, smell, taste, texture and temperature. But these *proper sensibilia* are individualised precisely by their spatio-temporal determinations here and now, the *common sensibilia*. The cognition of *common sensibilia*, therefore, provides precisely that distinctive sensory information that singularises the cognition of individualised sensible qualities, presenting the singulars having these qualities *qua* the singulars actually affecting the senses *here and now*.

However, if the external senses receive this distinctive, singular information about the individuating spatio-temporal conditions of their objects precisely on account of receiving the causal impact of these objects through their own spatio-temporal features, then this seems to establish the implication that the materiality of a cognitive power entails the singularity of its cognitive act. For if sensory representation is singular *precisely because* it represents its object in a material fashion, encoding the distinctive, singular information about the object by its own material features, then this means that sensory representation is singular *because* it is material, i.e., *its materiality implies its singularity*.

But this is all that is needed for the last step of Aquinas' argument. For the contrapositive of this implication is that the non-singularity of a representation entails its immateriality; therefore, the intellect's universal, i.e., non-singular representation must be immaterial, whence the intellect itself, receiving this representation, must be immaterial too, which then entails the further conclusions about the subsistence and immortality of the soul, as discussed earlier.

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19. *Sentencia De anima*, lib. 2, lc. 13 n. 12. "Quaedam vero alia faciunt differentiam in transmutatione sensuum, non quantum ad speciem agentis, sed quantum ad modum actionis. Qualitates enim sensibiles movent sensum corporaliter et situaliter. Unde aliter movent secundum quod sunt in maiori vel minori corpore, et secundum quod sunt in diverso situ, scilicet vel propinquo, vel remoto, vel eodem, vel diverso. Et hoc modo faciunt circa immutationem sensuum differentiam sensibilia communia."

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VI. Conclusion: Aquinas and Us

The foregoing discussion, especially the argument for the immateriality of the intellect, still very heavily relies on a number of Aquinas' metaphysical positions (such as his doctrines on individuation and the distinction between singular and universal cognition) that may appear to the contemporary reader not only dubious, but rather hopelessly obscure, couched as they are in a rather "alien" conceptual idiom. But just because they appear to be obscure to us, it does not mean that they do not make any sense. Their sense, however, can become clear to us, only if we manage to acquire this conceptual idiom, which, just as the acquisition of a foreign language, is certainly not a matter of one "lesson."

Therefore, I certainly have no high hopes that this paper would produce many "converts" of Aquinas' conception. And, in fact, that is not the point. The point rather is that we become conversant with Aquinas, as someone who may in fact provide a genuine theoretical alternative to the dilemmas that necessarily crop up and intransigently persist in *our* conceptual idiom. The reason is that conversing with Aquinas can allow us such re-conceptualisation of *our own issues* that we couldn't even think of while staying within the bounds of our own idiom.

Thus, instead of a "conversion," we should rather hope for a "fusion of our horizons" with Aquinas, to use Gadamer's catchy phrase. If anything, this paper is an indication of how much more work is to be done toward this goal. However, I hope that the "linguistic-semantic approach" of this paper may provide some useful pointers toward this goal. After all, if the task is like that of acquiring a foreign language, then the linguistic-semantic approach illustrated in this paper seems to be the best way to go, especially in approaching analytic philosophers, who *ex professo* are supposed to reflect carefully on the language we use in our philosophising. Indeed, if the goal is the "fusion of our horizons" through acquiring Aquinas' conceptual idiom, then what better way is there to do so, than by first introducing its "vocabulary" through the conceptual means that are accessible to us? In any case, whether this approach is "the best" or not, it seems to be clear that it is only after we have achieved this "fusion" that Aquinas' theory can function today not merely as an historical curiosity or the mantra of a "Thomistic enclave," but as a genuine theoretical alternative to be considered seriously by contemporary philosophers.

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