

CHAPTER 2

THE MIND–SOUL PROBLEM

Robert Pasnau

1. Introduction

Few notions about the history of philosophy are more widely held than the notion that Descartes began something important in the way we think about the mind. But what exactly did he begin? A good place to look for an answer to this question is the start of his caustic set of replies to Gassendi, where Descartes clarifies a point of terminology. On his usage, he explains, the term ‘mind’ should be taken not in the traditional way, as referring to a part of the soul, but as referring to the whole soul. Hence the two terms, ‘mind’ (*mens*) and ‘soul’ (*anima*), are to be treated as co-referential: ‘I consider the mind not as a part of the soul, but as the whole soul that thinks.’¹ To be sure, this is no mere point of terminology. On the contrary, his erasure of the distinction between mind and soul constitutes the most fundamental respect in which Descartes’s conception of mind has influenced our own. In fact, one might reasonably think of this passage as marking out a kind of dividing line between medieval psychology and modern philosophy of mind.

In what follows I will consider some of the medieval background to Descartes’s position, and show how this dividing line, though significant, is less clear than one might suppose. But before turning back to that earlier tradition, it is worth a closer look at how Descartes accounts for his choice of terminology. He suggests to Gassendi in this same passage that the traditional usage of ‘soul’ had its origins in our primitive ancestors, who failed to distinguish between the principle by which we think and the principle by which we carry out the operations we share with other animals, such as nutrition and growth. The earliest humans therefore used the same term ‘soul’ to refer to each principle. Once they came to recognize the difference, they referred to the principle of thought as ‘mind’, and took it to be a part, the principal part, of the soul.

¹ R. Descartes, *Responsio ad quintas objectiones*, in: C. Adam & P. Tannery (eds), *Œuvres de Descartes*, Paris 1996 (henceforth: AT), 7: 356: ‘Mentem enim non ut animae partem, sed ut totam illam animam quae cogitat considero.’ For the translation, see *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2, transl. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch, Cambridge, London, New York 1984, 246 (with some alterations).

I, by contrast, recognizing that the principle by which we are nourished is entirely distinct in kind from that by which we think, have said that the term 'soul' when it is used to refer to both these principles, is ambiguous. If we are to take 'soul' in its special sense, as the *first actuality* or *principal form* of a human being, then the term must be understood to apply only to the principle by which we think; and to avoid ambiguity I have generally used the term 'mind' for this.²

In this way, the traditional conception of the soul can be viewed as based on a crude confusion, and as giving rise to a damaging ambiguity between principles that are entirely distinct in kind.

This passage is remarkable above all for its implausibility. First, it seems incredible that early human beings might have somehow failed to notice the difference in rationality between themselves and other animals, and only much later have come to need a way of talking about what makes human beings special. Second, it seems unlikely that primitive theories would have begun with the supposition that all animals (perhaps all living things?) have some one principle in common. This is of course one of the most noteworthy features of Aristotle's theory of soul, but the reason it is noteworthy is that it is surprising and unintuitive. It is hard to imagine that the first theories of soul were Aristotelian in this way.

Let us put aside this anthropological speculation, however, and focus on the grounds for Descartes's own usage. He is surely right to notice the potential for ambiguity between the two usages of soul, and so he is right to make these clarifying remarks. But what is the rationale for his own preferred usage? Here, too, his remarks are hard to accept. His rationale consists in the following claim, that *if* we take 'soul' in its special technical sense, as the first actuality or principal form of a human being, *then* we ought to treat 'soul' as referring only to the mind. This seems extremely puzzling. Indeed, at first glance, this may seem exactly backwards, given that the technical sense in question is the Aristotelian definition of the soul. If we are speaking as Aristotelians, then surely we do *not* want to treat the soul as just the mind. Evidently, Descartes is making a subtler move, which seems to run as follows. To say that the soul is the first actuality is to say that it is the 'principal form'. But the primitive view canvassed earlier eventually came to describe the mind as the 'principal part' of the human soul. Hence when we are

² Descartes, *Responsio*, 356: 'Ego vero, animadvertens principium quo nutrimur toto genere distingui ab eo quo cogitamus, dixi *animae* nomen, cum pro utroque sumitur, esse aequivocum; atque ut specialiter sumatur pro *actu primo* sive *praecipua hominis forma*, intelligendum tantum esse de principio quo cogitamus, hocque nomine *mentis* ut plurimum appellavi ad vitandam aequivocationem' (for the translation, see Cottingham *et al.*, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2: 246 [with some alterations]). Descartes makes similar points elsewhere: e.g., *Responsio ad secundas objectiones* (AT 7: 161); *Notae in programma quoddam, sub finem Anni 1647 in Belgio editum* (AT 8/2: 347).

discussing human beings, even the Aristotelian should identify the mind with the human soul, inasmuch as the mind just is first among the actualities that constitute the soul.

This makes hash out of Aristotle's psychology. In speaking of the first actuality of a body (*De anima* II 1, 412a28), Aristotle wasn't referring to the role of soul that was principal or most important. First actuality is contrasted with second actuality, and explained in terms of the contrast between having knowledge and actually using it (412a24). Accordingly, the soul is the first, basic actuality that gives a body life, as distinct from those actualities responsible for the subsequent operations (motion, perception, thought) associated with life. So although the mind might on this picture be a component part of the more basic, first actuality, that actuality could not simply consist in mind.

These are commonplaces of Aristotelian psychology; they would have been familiar to anyone with even the rudiments of a seventeenth-century education in philosophy. So we have to suppose that Descartes realizes what he is doing. Presumably, he is distorting Aristotle for his own benefit because he doesn't really care about doing justice to Aristotelian psychology. Descartes's readers are often happy to follow his lead in this regard, treating his work not as the end of a tradition, but as the beginning, even a beginning *ex nihilo*. Although this approach may today be pedagogically convenient, it tends to obscure the motivations behind Descartes's thought. In the present case, if we read Descartes in the proper historical context, we can understand him as offering just one more solution to what is perhaps the most fundamental problem in ancient and medieval psychology: the problem not of how the mind relates to the body, but of how the mind relates to the soul.

2. *The Way of Exclusion*

Unlike the mind–body problem, the mind–soul problem is not obviously a problem at all, let alone a fundamental problem. And indeed it may be that there was no such recognized problem in philosophy before Aristotle. Plato leaves the relationship between mind and soul quite obscure, apologizing for his metaphors with the remark that 'to describe what the soul actually is would require a very long account, altogether a task for a god in every way'.³ But Aristotle of course attempts this god-like task, at least in outline. His remarks on the mind are extremely brief and tentative, amounting to just a small fraction of his discussion of the soul and its powers. But despite their brevity (or perhaps because of it), these remarks have generated endless controversy. The fiercest and most dramatic

³ Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a, transl. A. Nehamas & P. Woodruff, in: Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. J.M. Cooper, Indianapolis, Cambridge 1997, 524.

dispute, continuing to this day, concerns whether any part of the mind belongs to the soul at all.⁴ But that dispute considers just one dimension of the general issue I mean to address here: what is the relationship between mind and soul?

The *De anima* certainly supplies ample material to generate a puzzle. By definition, the soul is 'the first actuality of a natural, organized body' (412b5–6).⁵ Yet Aristotle implies that the mind is not the actuality of body: 'the mind seems implanted in us as a kind of substance' (408b18–19). Still, the mind is a 'part' of the soul (429a10). Indeed, *the mind's* immateriality seems to be sufficient for *the soul* to be separated: 'if *any* of the soul's actions or passions [including in particular those of the mind] are proper to it, then *the soul* could be separated' (403a10–11). No wonder such a vast range of solutions to the mind–soul problem emerged out of the Aristotelian tradition.

Descartes can be read as offering one kind of solution. On his view, the mind just is 'the whole of the soul that thinks'; in other words, the relationship between mind and soul is one of identity. It seems safe to say that this simple answer could not satisfy anyone attempting to remain even remotely faithful to Aristotle. The *De anima* is quite clear that the mind is just one part of the human soul, and that the human soul's other parts include the nutritive and the sensory capacities. Descartes does construe 'mind' widely enough to include sensation (*Principia*, I 32), but he of course cannot allow the nutritive powers (feeding, growing, reproducing) to be a part of the soul. And even in the case of sensation, the account is fundamentally at odds with Aristotle, inasmuch as Descartes denies that we share the soul's sensory power with nonrational animals. Generally, in fact, Descartes resists attributing souls of any kind to plants and animals (e.g., *L'Homme*, XI 202). And this shows that his identification of soul and mind is not limited to the special case of human beings. He holds the more general view that the soul, in all its instances, just is the mind. In effect, soul is reduced to mind.

The Cartesian way of reduction is therefore not open to the Aristotelian. And if we reject the option at the other extreme, which is to deny that the mind is a part of the soul at all (call this the way of exclusion), then we are left looking for some way to include mind within soul as a proper part. But this middle way, the way of inclusion, faces difficulties at every turn. The most fundamental of these was articulated earlier by Descartes when he remarked (as above) that 'the principle by which we are nourished is entirely distinct in kind from that by which we think.' Unlike the other doubtful assertions from that passage, this is a claim that earlier Aristotelians would have embraced. As Descartes implies, it is not at all clear how

⁴ See, e.g., F. Brentano, 'Nous Poiêtikos: Survey of Earlier Interpretations,' in: M. C. Nussbaum & A. Oksenberg-Rorty (eds), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, Oxford 1992, 313–341, and V. Caston, 'Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal,' *Phronesis*, 44 (1999), 199–227.

⁵ Translations from the *De anima* are my own.

parts ‘entirely distinct in kind’ are to be brought together as parts of the same form. The way of inclusion seems to founder, then, on what I will call the problem of heterogeneity.

It was precisely this problem that motivated the way of exclusion, which for Averroes and others notoriously amounted to a kind of monopsychism. Siger of Brabant, the best-known Latin proponent of this view, considers two ways of explaining the incorporeal mind’s union with a corporeal body. Granted that the intellect somehow actualizes or perfects the body, should we suppose that it does so with respect to substance or power?⁶ The first alternative entails that the intellect is that which makes the body exist as a full-fledged substance. On the second view, the body exists independently of the intellect, and requires intellect only for the sake of certain cognitive operations. Siger’s principal argument against the first view, and in favor of the second, is that the first would enmesh the intellect in the body, destroying the intellect’s immateriality and immortality. In arguing that this unacceptable result would follow, Siger does little more than repeat the same point over and over, in various forms, for instance: ‘if the intellect were the perfection of the body through its substance, its operation would be proportioned to the body,’ and, ‘an actuality that through its substance is the actuality of a body is an organic actuality.’⁷ He seems to regard the point as virtually self-evident, and perhaps that is reasonable. If the intellect did actualize the body in the first way, then how could it not be a material form? This is a question we will meet again.

In favor of the first view, one might appeal to the traditional idea that the mind does give existence to the body. Siger flatly rejects this claim:

To the argument for the opposite one should reply by rejection. For I say that the intellect, with respect to its form, does not give existence to the body. Rather, the intellect, having its own essence, has existence in itself and not in anything else.⁸

⁶ In what follows, so as better to bring out the continuity across historical periods, I will not always distinguish between *mind* and *intellect*. In some contexts it is important to keep these terms separate, because the scholastics took ‘mind’ to cover both intellect and will (and any other powers of the rational soul). Such nuances are not relevant to the present context, however.

⁷ Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones in tertium De anima*, q. 7 (*Utrum intellectus sit perfectio corporis quantum ad substantiam*), ed. B. C. Bazán, Leuven, Paris 1972 (Philosophes médiévaux, 13), 22 (‘Si enim intellectus esset perfectio corporis per substantiam suam, operatio eius proportionaretur corpori’) and 24 (‘Omnis enim actus qui est actus per sui substantiam corporis, est organicus’).

⁸ Siger of Brabant, *Quaestiones in tertium De anima*, q. 7, 24: ‘Ad rationem in oppositum sic est dicendum per interemptionem. Dico enim quod intellectus non dat esse corpori quantum ad formam suam intellectus; immo intellectus, essentiam suam habens, esse habet in se et non in alio.’

There are two distinct claims here. Siger first denies that the intellect plays the familiar Aristotelian role of actualizing the body by giving it existence. Second, he insists that the intellect has existence independent of the body. These claims do not immediately commit Siger to monopsychism. It requires further discussion to establish that an independently subsisting intellect would not be multiplied according to the number of human beings. And though Siger explicitly undertakes that further task in a later question, it is interesting to see that at this halfway point Siger's position is much like Descartes's, as far as the mind is concerned. The two do differ dramatically regarding the soul: whereas Siger preserves an Aristotelian theory of soul, as the first actuality of the body, and excludes the mind from it, Descartes sees no need for a soul in that sense, and so he avoids talking about the soul, or else reserves the term exclusively for the mind. This, however, is a general disagreement in metaphysics: hylomorphism against mechanism. As far as the mind itself is concerned, Siger and Descartes agree to a surprising extent: they agree that the mind is not what gives the body existence, and they agree that the mind is an independent substance. Of course, Descartes goes on to postulate a distinct mind for each distinct human being, whereas Siger thinks that all human beings share the same intellect. And this naturally leads them to different accounts of the relationship between mind and body. But if in the end the two theories seem almost diametrically opposed, they nevertheless begin from quite similar premises.

Most fundamentally, Siger and Descartes agree from the start that there is no room for the mind within soul, when the soul is conceived in Aristotelian terms. Hence Siger pursues the way of exclusion, and Descartes pursues the way of reduction. Siger's approach would of course be roundly condemned, and in time largely forgotten. But Descartes's approach, as I have already remarked, was destined to overthrow the Aristotelian tradition entirely. His reduction of soul to mind has flourished to such a degree, in fact, that contemporary philosophers no longer have a clear sense of what it would even mean for the mind to be part of the soul. This strikes me as unfortunate, because I think the Aristotelian conception of soul can play an important role in our understanding of human nature. What I have in mind is the metaphysical work that a theory of substantial form can do in individuating substances and distinguishing true individuals from mere aggregates. Instead of exploring these metaphysical issues here,⁹ however, I want to consider various ways in which scholastic philosophers attempted to make a place for mind within soul. Since this was one of the key issues on which Aristotelian psychology foundered, a clearer understanding of this mind-soul problem may help to rehabilitate the notion of soul.

⁹ See R. Pasnau, 'Form, Substance, and Mechanism,' *The Philosophical Review*, 113 (2004), 31-88.

3. *The Way of Unification*

The straightest path down the way of inclusion is to deny any distinction between mind and soul. Call this the way of unification. It is a view that would recur again and again in the Middle Ages, and eventually become ascendant in the fourteenth century. Unlike Descartes's way of reduction, the way of unification preserves an Aristotelian notion of soul as the actuality of body. Unlike the way of exclusion, it does so while including mind within soul. Indeed, the way of unification pursues the simplest route possible, at least on its face, insisting that the soul and its rational powers are entirely identical.

Such a view has its roots in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, which in developing an analogy between the human mind and the Trinity remarks that 'since these three, the memory, the understanding, and the will, are, therefore, not three lives but one life, not three minds but one mind, it follows that they are certainly not three substances, but one substance.'¹⁰ This claim was further confirmed by the pseudo-Augustinian treatise *De spiritu et anima*:

It is called soul when it nourishes, spirit when it contemplates, sense when it senses, intellect when it is wise, mind when it understands, reason when it discerns, memory when it remembers, will when it consents. But these do not differ in substance as they do in name, because they are all one soul. Their properties are distinct, but their essence is one.¹¹

Many early thirteenth-century theologians, such as Hugh of Saint-Cher, William of Auvergne, and Philip the Chancellor, likewise embraced this account.¹²

It is perhaps too much to refer to this as a *solution* to the mind–soul problem, given that it leaves the problem virtually untouched. The way of unification simply turns it back on the critical problem of heterogeneity, majestically insisting that the soul is perfectly simple and that there is no distinction between it and its powers. This is particularly apparent in the passage from the *De spiritu et*

¹⁰ Augustine, *De Trinitate libri xv*, X XI 18, ed. W.J. Mountain, Turnhout 1968 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 50), 330: 'Haec igitur tria, memoria, intellegentia, uoluntas, quoniam non sunt tres uitae sed una uita, nec tres mentes sed una mens, consequenter utique nec tres substantiae sunt sed *una substantia*' (transl S. McKenna, Washington [DC] 1963 [The Fathers of the Church, 45], 311).

¹¹ Pseudo-Augustine, *Liber de spiritu et anima*, in: J.P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus Completus*, Series Latina, 40, Paris 1845, 788–789: 'Dicitur namque anima dum vegetat, spiritus dum contemplatur, sensus dum sentit, animus dum sapit, dum intelligit mens, dum discernit ratio, dum recordatur memoria, dum consentit uoluntas. Ista tamen non differunt in substantia quemadmodum in nominibus, quoniam omnia ista una anima est. Proprietates quidem diversae, sed essentia una.'

¹² For texts from all three authors, see O. Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, Gembloux 1957, 1:483–490. All my information in this paragraph comes from that source.

anima: how could the soul be entirely one and simple and yet be responsible for operations as distinct as nourishment, sensation, and thought? It was generally agreed that the first is in some sense a material operation, the last a paradigmatically immaterial operation. But how can the soul, if simple, be both material and immaterial? And if it is entirely immaterial, then in what sense are the nutritive operations material? Or, in what sense is the soul responsible for these operations?

For these and other reasons, later thirteenth-century theologians came to insist on a distinction between the soul and its powers. Alexander of Hales led the way, and he was followed by Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Godfrey of Fontaines, and others.¹³ By the end of the thirteenth century, however, the pendulum was swinging back toward unification, under the influence of Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, and many lesser figures. Scotus drew his characteristic formal distinction between the soul and its rational powers. But the way he reached this conclusion is remarkable:

I say, therefore, that the intellect and will are not really distinct things. Moreover, it *can* be maintained that they are entirely the same in both reality and reason, or that the soul's essence, entirely indistinct in both reality and reason, is the source of multiple operations, without any real diversity of capacities.¹⁴

This view, Scotus wrote, 'cannot be disproved through reason,' and can be defended by the following principles:

- few should be posited, where more are not necessary;
- possibility should be posited, where impossibility cannot be proved;
- nobility in nature should be posited, where ignobility cannot be proved.¹⁵

¹³ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, is again valuable on accounts prior to Aquinas. For another useful discussion, see P. Künzle, *Das Verhältnis der Seele zu ihren Potenzen. Problemgeschichtliche Untersuchungen von Augustin bis und mit Thomas von Aquin*, Freiburg 1956 (Studia Friburgensia, N.F. 12). On Godfrey of Fontaines, see J.F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines. A Study in Late Thirteenth-Century Philosophy*, Washington (DC) 1981, 202–207. For Bonaventure, see *Commentarius in primum librum Sententiarum*, d. 3, p. 2, a. 1, q. 3, Quaracchi 1882 (Opera omnia, 1), 84–87, and *Commentarius in secundum librum Sententiarum*, d. 24, p. 1, a. 2, q. 1, Quaracchi 1885 (Opera omnia, 2), 558–563, where he remarks that the question of the distinction between reason and will 'is one more of curiosity than of utility, given that it has no bearing on either faith or morals whether one part is picked out or the other' ('praedicta quaestio plus contineat curiositatis quam utilitatis, propter hoc quod, sive una pars teneatur sive altera, nullum praeiudicium nec fidei nec moribus generatur' [559^b]).

¹⁴ John Duns Scotus, *Reportata Parisiensia* II, d. 16, q. un., Lyon 1639, repr. Hildesheim 1969 (Opera omnia, 11/1), 348^a: 'Dico igitur quod intellectus et voluntas non sunt res realiter distinctae; sed potest sustineri quod sunt omnino idem re et ratione; vel quod essentia animae omnino indistincta re et ratione est principium plurium operationum sine diversitate reali potentiarum, quae sint vel partes animae, vel accidentia, vel respectus eius.'

¹⁵ Scotus, *Reportata* II, d. 16, q. un., 348^a: 'Dico igitur ad quaestionem quod paucitas est

All of this points to the conclusion that there is no diversity within soul, but Scotus goes on to reject that conclusion anyway, because ‘it cannot account for so much authority’ in favor of some sort of distinction.¹⁶ Presumably, the authority he has in mind is that of his illustrious Franciscan predecessors, Bonaventure and Alexander. In deference to them, he posits a formal distinction.

Ockham would later take note that Scotus’s view was defended ‘not because of any argument, but only because of authority.’¹⁷ Unimpressed with that consideration, Ockham quickly comes to the conclusion that there is only a distinction of reason between the rational soul and its powers. After Ockham, that view became almost universally accepted, at least at Oxford. Even Dominicans such as Robert Holcot and William Crathorn took for granted that the rational soul’s essence is identical with its capacities – even though they were under an official obligation to follow the teachings of Thomas Aquinas (by this time, Saint Thomas). Indeed, Crathorn went one step further. Drawn as always to extreme positions, he took the unprecedented and unpromising step of identifying the soul, its powers, *and its actions*.¹⁸

What about the problem of heterogeneity? It is this, recall, that primarily generates the mind–soul problem, making it hard to see how the soul can be an immaterial intellect and at the same time a form, ‘the first actuality of a natural, organized body’ (*De anima* II 1, 412b5–6). If the way of unification is as poor a solution to this problem as I have been suggesting, then it is hard to see how the theory could have seemed so plausible to so many in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. There is a simple answer. Advocates of soul–power unity were largely also advocates of the plurality of substantial forms. Hence they could insist on the rational soul’s utter simplicity and immateriality without worrying about how such a soul could also actualize the organs of a physical body. They could appeal to an entirely different form – a sensory soul, or a nutritive soul, or a form of corpor-

ponenda vbi pluralitas non est necessaria; et possibilitas vbi non potest probari impossibilitas; et nobilitas in natura vbi non potest probari ignobilitas.’

¹⁶ Scotus, *Reportata* II, d. 16, q. un., 348^b: ‘Ista via non salvat tot auctoritates sicut potest alia.’

¹⁷ William of Ockham, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum (Reportatio)*, q. 20, ed. G. Gál & R. Wood, *St. Bonaventure (NY)* 1981, (*Opera theologica*, 5), 433: ‘Alia est opinio quod potentiae sunt eadem inter se et ad essentiam animae realiter, sed differunt formaliter, non sicut respectus, sed sicut absoluta. Et istud non ponit propter aliquam rationem sed tantum propter auctoritates.’

¹⁸ See William Crathorn, *Quästionen zum ersten Sentenzenbuch*, q. 1, ed. F. Hoffmann, Münster 1988 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, N. F. 29), 67–151, esp. 74–97, translated in R. Pasnau (ed.), *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts*, 3: *Mind and Knowledge*, Cambridge, New York 2002, 246–301, esp. 254–263. H. Schepers, ‘Holcot contra dicta Crathorn. II. Das “significatum per propositionem.” Aufbau und Kritik einer nominalistischen Theorie über den Gegenstand des Wissens,’ *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 79 (1972), 106–136, at 108, remarks that the identity of the rational soul with its powers became the ‘opinio communis’ at Oxford in the early fourteenth century.

eality – to actualize the body. Ockham, for instance, in arguing against any real distinction within the rational soul, considers the following objection:

Some operations are so distinct that they could in no way come from the same principle and power – as an operation that cannot be exercised without an organ is distinct from an operation that occurs without an organ. So there will be a similar distinction between powers, one of which is organic whereas the other is not.¹⁹

To this Ockham has a quick reply:

I grant that there is a distinction between organic and non-organic powers, as will be clear elsewhere. Here, however, we are asking about intellect and will.²⁰

It is important to notice, therefore, that when scholastic authors consider the distinction between the soul and its powers, they almost always ask about the identity of intellect and will (and sometimes memory), which is to say that they limit the discussion to the *rational* soul. In the background is usually the assumption that there will be other souls, or at least other substantial forms, to play the role of actualizing the body. (Most authors resist speaking in this context of multiple *souls*, preferring to speak of multiple *forms* that constitute a single soul. Ockham, however, has no scruples about describing the various substantial forms as different souls.²¹)

It should now become clear that what I have been calling the way of unification is not even nominally a solution to the mind–soul problem, because it doesn't propose unifying the whole soul, but only the rational soul. (The *De anima et spiritu* is an exception, as quoted earlier, in that it explicitly extends the identity across all of the soul's powers, nutritive, sensory, and rational.) The very essence of the mind–soul problem, however, was to explain how the rational part of the soul could be unified with the rest of the soul. Those like Scotus and Ockham who embrace the plurality of substantial forms still owe us an account of the relationship between mind and soul (that is, now, between the rational soul and a human being's other substantial forms). And it is once again striking how at this juncture the medieval debate seems to be in just the position that Descartes would later

¹⁹ Ockham, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, q. 20, 426: 'Item, aliquae operationes ita diversificantur quod nullo modo possunt esse ab eodem principio et potentia, sicut operatio quae non potest exerceri sine organo corporali diversificatur ab operatione quae fit sine organo. Igitur erit consimilis diversitas inter potentias quarum una est organica et alia non.'

²⁰ Ockham, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, q. 20, 428–429: 'Ad aliud concedo quod est distinctio inter potentias organicas et non organicas, sicut alias patebit. Sed quaestio ista quaerit de intellectu et voluntate.'

²¹ William of Ockham, *Quodlibet* II, q. 10, ed. J. C. Wey, St. Bonaventure (NY) 1980, (*Opera theologica*, 9), 156–161 (transl. A. J. Freddoso & F. E. Kelley, New Haven, London 1991 [Yale Library of Medieval Philosophy], 1:132–136).

find himself in. Pluralists like Scotus and Ockham share with Descartes the desire to make a clean break between soul as first actuality and soul as mind. Like Descartes, they continue to describe the mind as a soul that informs the body. Both Descartes and Ockham, for instance, speak of the rational soul as existing wholly in the whole body and wholly in each part of the body, and they both contrast that with those animal operations that are extended and material.²² There are, of course, striking differences: most notably, Ockham continues to speak of souls and substantial forms at the material level, whereas Descartes replaces this Aristotelian analysis with a thoroughly mechanistic account. But though they have this disagreement from the neck down, so to speak, Ockham (and others) seems thoroughly Cartesian above the shoulders. This is to say that the pluralists share precisely Descartes's predicament when it comes to the mind. All agree that the mind is a substance in its own right, and that it should be sharply distinguished from those capacities possessed by other animals. All likewise agree that in some sense the mind is the form of the body, even the actuality of the body. But with mind severed from the rest of soul, it becomes extremely hard to see how that analysis can be spelled out.²³

Perhaps it is wrong to say that these medieval pluralists are in a certain sense Cartesian; perhaps I should say instead – as others have suggested – that Descartes is in some respects Aristotelian. I won't here try to adjudicate this issue, which would require deciding on what sort of theory should count as authentically Aristotelian (which might or might not be the same thing as deciding what Aristotle himself actually thought). But I do want to suggest that there is another way to go, another approach to the mind–body problem that holds out the hope of in-

²² For Ockham, see *Quodlibet* II, q. 10, 159: 'Sed anima sensitiva in homine est extensa et materialis, anima intellectiva non, quia est tota in toto et tota in qualibet parte' (134: 'But in a human being the sentient soul is extended and material, whereas the intellectual soul is not, since it exists as a whole in the whole body and as a whole in each part'). For Descartes, see the *Responsio ad sextas objectiones* (AT 7: 443), *Les passions de l'âme* I 30 (AT 11:351) and *Principia philosophiae* IV 189 (AT 8/1:315–316). On Descartes's similarity to the scholastics in this respect, see P. Hoffman, 'The Unity of Descartes's Man,' *The Philosophical Review*, 95 (1986), 339–370. Of course, Descartes disagrees with most scholastics on whether the sensory operations should be included within the rational soul or regarded as common among all animals.

²³ Of course, the matter requires extended discussion. Authors like Peter John Olivi, Henry of Ghent, Scotus, and Ockham all worked hard to show how a human being could be genuinely unified despite having a plurality of substantial forms. I discuss Olivi's view in R. Pasnau, 'Olivi on the Metaphysics of Soul,' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 6 (1997), 109–132. For a detailed discussion of Scotus's view, see R. Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus. The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision*, Oxford 1998, chapters 4 & 5. On Ockham's view, see M. McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, Notre Dame (IN) 1987 (Publications in Medieval Studies, 26/1–2), 2: 647–669. For a valuable study of these issues during the Renaissance, see E. Michael, 'Renaissance Theories of Body, Soul, and Mind,' in: J. P. Wright & P. Potter (eds), *Psyche and Soma. Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind–Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, Oxford 2000, 147–172, who likewise stresses the affinities between Averroism, pluralism, and Descartes.

cluding mind within soul without fracturing the unity of the human person. The approach I have in mind rejects the plurality of substantial forms, holding that a human being is actualized by a single soul that is a single form. For reasons we have seen, this kind of view is defensible only on the assumption that the soul is not identical with its powers. So the soul will be one in essence, but diverse in its powers. Among medieval philosophers, the only prominent figure to defend such a view was Thomas Aquinas.²⁴ In the remainder of this paper, I want to sketch Aquinas's view of the mind's relationship to the soul, an aspect of his thought that remains under-appreciated.

4. *The Way of Aquinas*

Aquinas conceives of the soul as having many functions: it not only provides existence, but is also responsible for the various operations that a living thing performs. The intellect is one part of the soul. But Aquinas believes that the intellect is not the soul's essence. The soul's essence is to be the first actuality of the body – that which gives the body life and existence: 'the soul, in terms of its essence, is an actuality;' 'the soul, in terms of its essence, is the form of the body.'²⁵ Because of this conception of what the soul essentially is, Aquinas can argue that the intellect is not part of the soul's essence because the intellect's *operation* is not essential to a human being's very existence.²⁶

If the soul's powers are not identical with its essence, then those powers must be accidents. This is true, at least, when accidents are understood along the lines inspired by the *Categories*. In this sense, everything must be either a substance or else an accident: these two classes are both mutually exclusive and jointly ex-

²⁴ Among Renaissance authors, Suárez and many others followed Aquinas's lead. But during the Middle Ages, the most prominent figure to take Aquinas's side was Godfrey of Fontaines, and he did so rather tentatively (see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, 314–347). For early Thomistic defenders of the doctrine, see F.J. Roensch, *Early Thomistic School*, Dubuque (IA), chapters 5 & 6. More generally, see R. Zavalloni, *Richard de Mediavilla et la controverse sur la pluralité des formes*. Textes inédits et étude critique, Leuven 1951 (Philosophes médiévaux, 2). I discuss Aquinas's views more fully in R. Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa theologiae 1a*, 75–89, Cambridge, New York 2002, chapter 5, which overlaps with some of the discussion here.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 77, a. 1, Roma 1889 (Opera omnia, 5), 236b: 'Nam anima secundum suam essentiam est actus;' q. 76, a. 1, 210b: 'Anima secundum suam essentiam sit corporis forma.'

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 79 a. 1, 258a–b: 'Respondeo dicendum quod necesse est dicere secundum praemissa quod intellectus sit aliqua potentia animae, et non ipsa animae essentia. Tunc enim solum immediatum principium operationis est ipsa essentia rei operantis, quando ipsa operatio est eius esse; sicut enim potentia se habet ad operationem ut ad suum actum, ita se habet essentia ad esse. In solo Deo autem idem est intelligere quod suum esse. Unde in solo Deo intellectus est eius essentia, in aliis autem creaturis intellectualibus intellectus est quaedam potentia intelligentis.'

haustive. The soul's powers, on this account, are therefore accidents, and they fall into the category of quality.²⁷ In another sense, however, the soul's powers are not accidents. This is so when one thinks of accidents along the lines proposed by the *Topics* (I 5, 102a18–30), where Aristotle distinguishes species, genus, differentia, proprium, and accident. In these terms, the soul's powers should be described not as accidents, but as propria: 'a proprium is not part of the essence of a thing, but it is caused by the essential principles of the species.'²⁸ It will sound less odd to speak of the soul's various powers as accidents – intellect an *accident* of the soul?! – once one realizes that these accidents are caused by the soul's essence.

The position Aquinas takes rests on a rather subtle distinction. On the one hand, a human being is not always actually engaged in intellectual or sensory operations, and so these operations are not part of the *esse* of human beings and do not come directly from the soul's essence. On the other hand, the possession of these powers is a prerequisite for being human, and so the powers themselves do stem directly from the soul's essence. This latter point is the explicit conclusion of *Summa theologiae* I, question 77, article 6: 'all the soul's powers ... flow from the essence of the soul as their basis.'²⁹ The fact that having an intellect and senses is *essential* to being human (as we might put it) does not show, for Aquinas, that the intellect and senses are part of the essence of a human being. For that to be the case, the *operations* of intellect and sense would have to be essential, and clearly they are not. So the most Aquinas can conclude is that the powers for intellectual and sensory cognition are based on the soul's essence. These powers, as he conceives them, are positioned midway between the soul's essence and its operations.³⁰ Only this midway status can explain why we sometimes make use of these powers and sometimes leave them unactualized.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 77, a. 1, 237b: 'Si accidens accipiatur secundum quod dividitur contra substantiam, sic nihil potest esse medium inter substantiam et accidens, quia dividuntur secundum affirmationem et negationem, scilicet secundum esse in subiecto et non esse in subiecto. Et hoc modo, cum potentia animae non sit eius essentia, oportet quod sit accidens; et est in secunda specie qualitatis.' See also *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11, ed. J. Cos, Roma, Paris 2000 (Opera omnia, 24/2), 114–123.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 77, a. 1, 237b: 'Si vero accipiatur accidens secundum quod ponitur unum quinqué universalium, sic aliquid est medium inter substantiam et accidens. Quia ad substantiam pertinet quidquid est essentialia rei, non autem quidquid est extra essentialiam, potest sic dici accidens, sed solum id quod non causatur ex principiis essentialibus speciei. Proprium enim non est de essentia rei, sed ex principiis essentialibus speciei causatur; unde medium est inter essentialiam et accidens sic dictum. Et hoc modo potentiae animae possunt dici mediae inter substantiam et accidens, quasi proprietates animae naturales.'

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 77, a. 6, 246b: 'Unde manifestum est quod omnes potentiae animae, sive subiectum earum sit anima sola sive compositum, fluunt ab essentia animae sicut a principio.'

³⁰ See Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 11, s.c. 4, 117b: 'Potentia est medium inter substantiam et operationem; set operatio differt a substantia anime; ergo potentia differt ab utroque, alioquin non esset medium, si esset idem cum extremo.'

This subtle distinction allows Aquinas to solve the problem of heterogeneity (and hence solve the mind–soul problem) while pursuing the way of inclusion. But one has to look closely to see how the solution goes, because Aquinas, as he so often does, conceals these difficulties beneath his seamless prose. So consider, first, *Summa theologiae* I, question 76, article 1, where he argues that ‘the intellect, which is the principle of intellectual operation, is the form of the human body.’ He poses the following objection to this sort of account:

Every form is determined by the nature of the matter whose form it is; otherwise *no* balance would be required between matter and form. Therefore if the intellect were united to the body as its form, then, since every body has a determinate nature, it would follow that the intellect would have a determinate nature. And then it would not be capable of cognizing all things, as is clear from earlier discussions [q. 75, a. 2], which is contrary to intellect’s nature. Therefore the intellect is not united to the body as its form.³¹

This is precisely the problem of heterogeneity: how can the intellect be the form of a *body* and at the same time be capable of immaterial thought? Aquinas replies that ‘it is enough for the intellectual power not to be the *actuality* of the body.’³² But this reply is initially puzzling, given the body of the article’s affirmation that the intellect is the form of the body. How can something be the form of *x* without actualizing *x*?

There may seem to be no good answer to that question, since to be a form just is to actualize a thing. Compare the *De unitate intellectus*:

Everything acts insofar as it is in actuality. But anything is in actuality through its form. Consequently that by which something first acts must be its form.³³

So it makes no sense to claim without qualification that the intellect is the form of the body, and at the same time to deny, without qualification, that it is the actuality of the body. But that is not Aquinas’s view. He wants to say that the

³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 76, a. 1, 208a: ‘Praeterea, omnis forma determinatur secundum naturam materiae cuius est forma: alioquin non requireretur proportio inter materiam et formam. Si ergo intellectus uniretur corpori ut forma, cum omne corpus habeat determinatam naturam, sequeretur quod intellectus haberet determinatam naturam. Et sic non esset omnium cognoscitivus, ut ex superioribus patet; quod est contra rationem intellectus. Non ergo intellectus unitur corpori ut forma.’

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 76, a. 1, 210b: ‘Sufficit enim ad hoc quod homo possit intelligere omnia per intellectum, et ad hoc quod intellectus intelligat immaterialia et universalialia, quod virtus intellectiva non est corporis actus.’

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus*, 3, Roma 1976 (*Opera omnia*, 43), 303a: ‘Unumquodque agit in quantum est actu; est autem unumquodque actu per formam; unde oportet illud quo primo aliquid agit esse formam.’

rational soul is the form of the body, in one respect, and not the form of the body, in another respect. As regards its essence, the soul precisely is the form or actuality of the body. But intellect, the soul's intellectual power, is neither the form nor the actuality of any body. Later in the *De unitate intellectus*, Aquinas states his case clearly:

We do not say that the human soul is the form of the body with respect to its intellectual power, which ... is not the actuality of any organ.³⁴

And if one returns to the *Summa theologiae* with this distinction in mind, one notices that Aquinas is usually careful to say that it is the *intellective principle*, rather than the intellect itself, that is the form and actuality of the body. This detail emerges only when one reads this text with a view toward resolving the mind–soul problem.³⁵

5. Conclusion

In this way, then, the soul can be the first actuality of the body, the intellect can be immaterial and not the actuality of a body, and the intellect can be within soul. But granted that this is Aquinas's objective, and granted that to this end he draws some very subtle distinctions, there is still a question of whether the view is ultimately coherent. A thorough answer to that question would require looking not just at

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus*, 3, 307a: 'Non enim dicimus animam humanam esse formam corporis secundum intellectivam potentiam, que secundum doctrinam Aristotelis nullius organi actus est.'

³⁵ It seems to me that failure to understand these issues has led a number of recent scholars astray. One notorious example is E.-H. Wéber, *La controverse de 1270 à l'Université de Paris et son retentissement sur la pensée de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris 1970 (Bibliothèque thomiste, 40). Wéber (p. 124) argues that there is a 'violent contrast' between q. 76, a. 1, and q. 77, which leads him to the bizarre suggestion that Aquinas, after writing the Treatise on Human Nature (qq. 75–89), came to reject the distinction between the soul and its powers and then revised certain passages to reflect his new view. In fact, a grasp of the subtle way in which Aquinas reconciles these different claims leads to a greater appreciation for just how carefully and harmoniously constructed the Treatise is. – Another case is that of F.-X. Putallaz, *Le sens de la réflexion chez Thomas d'Aquin*, Paris 1991 (Etudes de philosophie médiévale, 66). Putallaz argues that Aquinas's account suffers from a failure to distinguish between knowledge of one's own soul and knowledge of one's own intellect: he speaks of Aquinas's 'sliding' ('glissement') from one issue to the other (p. 76; see pp. 293–294). But once the relationship between the two is understood, I think the problem disappears. Knowledge of the soul itself would be tantamount to knowledge of the soul's essence. It is Aquinas's general view that we can never directly apprehend the essence of a thing; we always work our way toward a thing's essence through its accidental properties. So if we have no direct knowledge of our own intellect, then for Aquinas it follows *a fortiori* that we have no direct knowledge of the soul itself. In many contexts, therefore, he is entitled to slide back and forth between the two cases.

Aquinas's extensive remarks, but also at the even more extensive remarks of later critics such as Scotus and Ockham.³⁶ For now let me remark only that Aquinas's position here is by no means an *ad hoc* remedy to the puzzles we have considered regarding the relationship of mind and soul. On the contrary, Aquinas holds in general that the various actualities that comprise any substance always flow from the essence of that substance. A thing's essence is distinct from its various properties, but those properties supervene (as we might put it) on the thing's essence. In a fascinating question from *De veritate*, Aquinas explains that this holds true at two degrees. At the first, general degree, 'an intellect cognizing the essence of a species comprehends through that essence all of the per se accidents belonging to the species.' The same principle holds true at a second, individual degree: 'once the proper essence of a singular is cognized, all of its singular accidents are cognized.'³⁷ Aquinas hastens to add that human beings cannot possibly attain this second degree of comprehension. But from the deepest metaphysical perspective, all of my various properties, necessary and accidental, supervene on my own distinctive essence. Looking ahead to the modern period, we can contrast the Cartesian orientation of Scotus and Ockham with this almost Leibnizian orientation of Aquinas. (Of course, Aquinas does not go so far as to hold the Leibnizian view that a substance has a complete notion that 'contains all of its predicates, past, present, and future.'³⁸ Much of what happens to me depends on events outside of my control, and Aquinas does not mean to suggest that this can be read off of my essence.)

Aquinas has little to say about his metaphysics at this deep level, presumably because he thinks there is little we can say. Our knowledge of essences is limited, and so our working methodology must be to put the real essences of things to one side, in favor of those superficial features that point us in the direction of essences. Hence we approach the soul indirectly, through first its objects, then its operations, and then its powers. The mind-soul problem arises for us because of this limited epistemic perspective. We grasp the mind before we grasp the soul, and so we are tempted to tear the two apart (Scotus and Ockham), or deny the reality of soul apart from mind (Descartes), or even locate the mind outside the

³⁶ For Scotus, see *Reportata Parisiensia* II, d. 16, and *Ordinatio* II, q. 16, Lyon 1639, repr. Hildesheim 1969 (*Opera omnia*, 6/2), 758–781 (the authenticity of the latter is unclear). For Ockham, see *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, q. 20, and *Quaestiones in librum tertium Sententiarum* (*Reportatio*), q. 4, ed. F.E. Kelley & G.I. Etzkorn, St. Bonaventure (NY) 1982, (*Opera theologica*, 6), 130–148.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 2, a. 7, Roma 1970 (*Opera omnia*, 22, 1/2), 68a: 'Intellectus autem cognoscens essentiam speciei per eam comprehendit omnia per se accidentia speciei illius ... unde et cognita propria essentia alicuius singularis, cognoscerentur omnia accidentia singularis illius.'

³⁸ G. W. Leibniz, *Primary Truths*, in: Id., *Philosophical Essays*, transl. R. Ariew & D. Garber, Indianapolis 1989, 32.

human being entirely (Siger of Brabant). But if we accept Aquinas's basic metaphysical framework, then all of this will look quite misguided. On that framework what is fundamental is the unity of a human being, as growing out of the essence of a single substantial form.