

Olivi on the Metaphysics of Soul

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The centerpiece of Aristotle's *De anima* is his account of the soul-body relationship in terms of form: the soul is "the form of a natural body that potentially has life" (II 1, 412a20–21). Recent evaluations of this doctrine have varied widely, from effusive to dismissive. Kathleen Wilkes parallels Aristotle's hylomorphism with "the most promising form" of contemporary functionalism; his theory, she holds, is one to which philosophers and scientists should be returning, and in fact are returning.¹ Jonathan Barnes, in contrast, writes that the *De anima* analysis "makes so broad a use of 'form' and 'matter' that their analytical powers are entirely lost."²

One interesting way to explore the ramifications of Aristotle's proposal is to look at how that proposal was developed and criticized during the later Middle Ages. Beginning with Averroes's *Commentarium magnum de anima* (1190) and Johannes Blund's *Tractatus de anima* (c. 1200), Western philosophers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries devoted immense effort to developing Aristotle's thinking about the soul. Never before (and I suspect never again) has any individual's philosophical program received such detailed and sustained attention. There was, moreover, the greatest variety of competing ideas and interpretations, particularly with regard to theories of the soul. The menu of choices here is practically endless, at present limited primarily by the progress that scholars have made in editing texts from manuscripts. We might, then, view the later medieval period as one great extended laboratory for the testing and development of an Aristotelian philosophy.

Within that laboratory, no one was more original and controversial than the Franciscan Peter John Olivi (1247/8–1298), a Paris-trained theologian from the south of France.³ Olivi tests many aspects of Aristotle's philosophy, and rejects

I have received helpful comments on this paper from Norman Kretzmann, from audiences at the University of Toronto and the Boston Colloquium in Medieval Philosophy, and from a reader for *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*.

1. "P ψ ch \acute{e} versus the Mind," in *Essays on Aristotle's De anima*, ed. M. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 122, 125.

2. "Metaphysics" in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 98.

3. For basic biographical details, see David Burr, "The Persecution of Peter Olivi," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 66 (1976): 3–98; and *Olivi and Franciscan Poverty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

Anne Davenport has impressed on me the importance, in the present context, of Olivi's roots in the south of France. The Languedoc region where Olivi spent much of his life was a center for the Cathari, a Manichean heresy that stressed the dual nature of human

much of it as incoherent or unworkable. In general, Olivi was far less impressed than many of his peers with the value of Aristotle's authority. In the face of an argument from his authority, Olivi characteristically replies that "I don't care what he meant here or elsewhere. For his authority and that of any infidel and idolater is nothing to me—especially in matters that belong or are very near to the Christian faith."⁴ This hostility is expressed throughout Olivi's work, in philosophical debates over matter, cognition, and, above all, the soul.

Olivi calls into question a central strand of Aristotelianhylomorphism, arguing that it is "not only contrary to reason but also dangerous to the faith" to hold that "the [soul's] intellective and free part is the form of the body per se and considered as such" (q. 51; II 104). He was by no means alone in questioning the extent to which soul and body could be analyzed in terms of form and matter. Albert the Great wrote that the soul "is better spoken of as an actuality or perfection, rather than a form. . . . A form, strictly speaking, according to natural philosophy, is that which has existence in matter and does not exist without it."⁵ Earlier still, William of Auvergne wrote that the claim that the soul is the body's *actuality* should be understood as meaning that it is its *perfection*.⁶ Some thirty years after Olivi, Peter Aureol contended that neither reason nor the authority of the saints could be used to demonstrate that the soul is related to the body as form to matter, when the form-matter relationship is understood in anything like its standard sense.⁷

Olivi, however, goes farther than any of these thinkers; he explicitly denies that one part of the soul, the rational part, can be understood as the form of the body. As a consequence, he was condemned by the Council of Vienna in 1312. Pope Clement V, in the bull *Fidei catholicae fundamento*, declared it a heresy to

beings. The Cathari were brutally suppressed during the thirteenth century, with Dominicans playing a leading role in the Inquisition. It is unclear, however, what effect such controversies actually had on Olivi. On the Cathari, see Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947); H. J. Warner, *The Albigensian Heresy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967).

4. *Quaestiones in Secundum Librum Sententiarum* [= *II Sent.*] (*Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica* vols. 4–6), ed. Bernard Jansen (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1922–1926), q. 16 *ad* 6 (I, 337). For further discussion of Olivi's general attitude toward Aristotle, see David Burr, "Peter John Olivi and the Philosophers," *Franciscan Studies* 31 (1971): 41–71.

5. *Summa de creaturis*, ed. Borgnet, *Opera Omnia* vol. 35 (Paris: Vivès, 1886), p. II, tr.1, q. 4, a.1 *ad* 6 (p. 35).

6. *Tractatus de anima*, in *Opera Omnia* (Paris, 1674) [repr. Frankfurt a.M., 1963], Ch.V, pt. 4 (p. 118a).

7. *In quatuor libros Sententiarum* Bk. II d.16 q. 1 a.2 (Rome, 1605), pp. 223–26. Unfortunately, this part of Aureol's *Sentences* commentary is not widely available. For second-hand accounts see E. Gilson, *A History of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 477–78; A. Baldissera, "La Decisione Del Concilio di Vienne," *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica* 34 (1942): 212–32; R. Dreiling, *Der Konzeptualismus in der Universalienlehre des Franziskanererbischofs Petrus Aureoli* (*Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 11,6), (Münster, 1913), pp. 40–43.

hold that “the rational or intellective soul is not *per se* and essentially the form of the human body.”⁸ (This was neither the first nor the last time that Olivi’s views would be condemned, a large part of the reason his influence has been more limited than he perhaps deserves.) One might have supposed the Church would have had enough on its hands during those years without taking up such unmistakably philosophical questions. Yet, one should not imagine that only the medieval Church had conceits about solving problems in the philosophy of mind. Indeed, 201 years later, the Fifth Lateran Council expressly reaffirmed the Council of Vienna, using exactly the same words. Early modern philosophers such as Descartes and Leibniz were well aware of that Council’s ruling, but it does not seem to have constrained their thinking.⁹ The same cannot be said for the effect that the Council of Vienna had on fourteenth-century philosophy. Peter Aureol said that he accepted the doctrine of soul as the body’s form “specifically” (*specialiter*) because of the Council’s declaration; John Buridan would later say much the same thing.¹⁰ As a result, what Olivi started would not be taken any farther for several centuries.

What did Olivi start? His project was to rethink the prospects for unifying soul and body. On the Aristotelian approach, soul and body are unified in virtue of the soul’s being the form of the body. Because he reinterprets that claim, Olivi has to develop his own account of the relationship between soul and body. As we will see, this account cannot be caricatured as an anticipation of any prominent modern line of thought. The proposal he makes is, to my knowledge, uniquely his, and it is, on its own terms, perhaps too entwined with scholastic metaphysics to look very attractive today. Although Olivi does not present a theory that can be directly plugged into current controversies over mind and body, he does shed a great deal of light on the metaphysical assumptions on which the medieval debate rests.

I

Olivi rejects the claim that “the [soul’s] intellective and free part is the form of the body *per se* and considered as such” (q. 51; II 104).¹¹ It is easy to misunderstand what is being denied. First, Olivi is not denying that the rational part of the soul

8. “. . . quod anima rationalis seu intellectiva non sit forma corporis humani *per se* et essentialiter . . .” (*Enchiridion Symbolorum*, ed. H. Denzinger [Herder: Freiburg, 1965], 902).

9. Leibniz reminds Arnauld of the Council’s stand on the soul in his letter of 8 Dec. 1686. I have not found that Descartes ever explicitly notes the Council’s conclusion on this point, but he repeatedly refers to the Council in other contexts.

10. On Buridan, see Jack Zupko, “How Are Souls Related to Bodies? A Study of John Buridan,” *Review of Metaphysics* 46 (1993): 575–601.

11. “. . . Quod pars intellectiva et libera sit forma corporis *per se* et in quantum talis. . .”

is a form, or even that it is the form of a human being. He in fact believes that the rational part, intellect and will, is the form of a human being's spiritual matter; for that reason, he thinks it acceptable to speak of intellect as the form of a human being (see q. 51 app.; II 146). But he contrasts spiritual matter with corporeal matter, and, as a result, denies that the rational part is the form of the body.

Second, Olivi is not denying that the soul is the form of the body. What he denies is that the rational part of the soul ("the intellective and free part") is the form of the body. Another part of the soul, the sensory part, is the form of the body, and for that reason it is acceptable to say that the whole soul is the form of the body:

It is said that the whole rational soul, rather than the sensory part, is the form of the body, even though it is informed by the whole only insofar as it is informed by the soul's sensory and nutritive part. (q. 51 app.; II 146)

One should say that the whole soul is the form of the body, in much the same way one states that a *person* talks, not a tongue (II 144). But if attention is directed to the various parts of the soul, then it is wrong to say that the rational part, "*per se* and considered as such," is the form of the body. The soul is the form of the body only with respect to its sensory and nutritive part.

Olivi avoids speaking of living beings as having multiple souls: nutritive, sensory, and rational. As in the passages quoted already, he identifies these as parts of the soul. The soul itself is "the whole substance of the living spirit that is within a single animal or human being" (q. 51 app.; II 182). Parts of that whole spirit should be called parts or powers. Because Olivi thinks of the soul as the composite of these various powers, he is willing to agree that the rational soul is the form of the body. During his lifetime, in fact, he was censured by his own Franciscan order for having denied that "the rational soul, inasmuch as it is rational, is the form of the human body."¹² Olivi replies,

I accept this proposition with reference to the essence of the rational soul, but not with reference to its power. This is how I believe that the *magistri* understand the proposition, and I do not believe that I have said the contrary of this. If I have, I take it back.¹³

What Olivi is telling us, with these carefully calibrated words, is that the human soul *is* the form of the body—if by 'rational soul' one means the whole spiritual substance: rational, sensory, and nutritive parts included. However, Olivi is also

12. "Item anima rationalis secundum quod est rationalis, est forma corporis humani . . ." ("Littera septem sigillorum," ed. G. Fussenegger, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 47 (1954): 45–53).

13. "Hanc sententiam accepto ratione essentiae ipsius animae rationalis, non autem ratione potentiae" (Damascus Laberge, "Fr. Petri Ioannis Olivi, O. F. M., tria scripta sui ipsius apologetica annorum 1283 et 1285," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 28 [1935]: 128).

saying that the human soul is *not* the form of the body—if ‘rational soul’ is taken to refer to the soul only insofar as it is rational. Considered as rational, the soul is not the form of the body. Considered as a soul that just happens to be rational, it is the form of the body.

One might wonder whether this seemingly subtle distinction constitutes a satisfactory reply to both his critics and the later Council of Vienna.¹⁴ Certainly, the charge Olivi replies to is quite similar to the charge made by the Council of Vienna. The former uses the phrase “rational soul, inasmuch as (*secundum quod*) it is rational. . . .” The Council uses the phrase “rational soul . . . *per se* and essentially.”¹⁵ Olivi is convinced that he is in agreement with his opponents—“this is how I believe the *magistri* understand the proposition”—but it is hard to know whether those opponents would have been satisfied. David Burr takes this reply to demonstrate that the Council of Vienna was not accurately

14. There is a large body of literature on the Council of Vienna, and its relationship to Olivi. See, in particular, Bernard Jansen, “Die Seelenlehre Olivis und ihre Verurteilung auf dem Viennener Konzil,” *Franziskanische Studien* 21 (1934): 297–314; Ewald Müller, *Das Konzil von Vienne, 1311–1312: seine Quellen und seine Geschichte* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1934); Theodor Schneider, *Die Einheit des Menschen. Die anthropologische Formel ‘anima forma corporis’ im sogenannten Korrektoientstreit und bei Petrus Johannis Olivi. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte des Konzils von Vienne*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, NF 8, (Münster: Aschendorff, 1973).

15. Oddly, the three surviving manuscripts show that when Olivi restates the charges made against him by the “Littera septem sigillorum,” he uses this exact phrase of the Council of Vienna (Laberge, “Tria scripta,” p. 128). There are reasons to be suspicious of whether these were Olivi’s actual words. First, it seems highly unlikely that Olivi’s phrase coincides with the Council’s finding just by coincidence. But the alternative seems to be to suppose the Council patterned its finding on how Olivi himself put the charge. That too seems unlikely. Second, this is the *only place* where the manuscripts show Olivi to have deviated in any significant way from the precise wording of the original Letter. But why would he completely rephrase the Letter at this one crucial spot? Third, the reply Olivi goes on to make against the Letter is much better suited as a reply to the Letter’s actual words. Those words (“anima rationalis secundum quod est rationalis”) go right to the heart of Olivi’s position, and so require the careful distinction Olivi draws. In contrast, the way he is reported to have restated the Letter (“anima rationalis per se et essentialiter”) could easily have been accepted by insisting that the rational soul *is* the form of the body. This, indeed, is precisely how he does elsewhere reply to the charge “quod anima intellectualis non informat corpus.” He replies, “Scripsi quod anima rationalis vere informat corpus . . .” (*Epistola ad R. n. 7*, in Gratien de Paris, “Une lettre inédite de Pierre de Jean Olivi,” *Études franciscaines* 29 [1913]: 414–22). Fourth, Olivi’s later supporters would have had an obvious motive for tampering with the manuscripts so as to “clarify” Olivi’s reply: they would have wanted him to have explicitly embraced the Council’s language.

There is, however, a difficulty with this hypothesis. In a letter written in 1311, before the Council’s deliberations had been ratified by Clement V, Ubertino of Casale defends Olivi by quoting his reply just as the three extant manuscripts have it: as using the phrase “per se essentialiter.” (See F. Ehrle, “Zur Vorgeschichte des Concils von Vienne,” *Archiv für Literatur- und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters* II [1886]: 397.) So if someone tampered with Olivi’s words, he did so *before* Clement V issued his bull in 1312. Another possibility, then, is that our one surviving copy of the Letter of the Seven Seals is inaccurate at this one point.

describing a view that Olivi held.¹⁶ I am inclined to disagree, since I think that the words ‘*per se* and essentially’ should be taken as pointing back to ‘rational.’ On my reading, then, the proscribed view would be that the soul, considered precisely as rational, is not the form of the body.¹⁷ That is precisely Olivi’s position as I understand it. So, if I was sitting in judgment on Olivi, on behalf of the Council of Vienna, I would have to push for a conviction.

Happily, this is not a trial; one can put aside all questions of original intent on the part of the Council of Vienna and focus instead on the philosophical motives that lead Olivi to draw his subtle distinction. Countervailing forces are at work. He recognizes that everyone describes the soul as the form of the body, and he is not willing to go so far as to deny that identification; however, Olivi is also not willing to follow those who call the intellect the form of the body. So he must draw a careful distinction.

Despite his anti-Aristotelian invective, Olivi might plausibly be said to be agreeing with Aristotle, who explicitly leaves room for parts of the soul that “are the actuality of no body” (*De an.* II 1, 413a7). Presumably, Aristotle is thinking of the intellect; however, it is not at all obvious how that remark should be interpreted. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, holds without qualification, that “the intellect . . . is the form of the human body.”¹⁸ So what is it that compels Olivi to drop intellect from the hylomorphic scheme? He says that to identify the rational part—“*per se* and considered as such”—as the form of the body is “not only contrary to reason but also dangerous to the faith” (as above). More specifically, as he writes in a letter defending his views, he believes that the claim holds “the danger of destroying the soul’s immortality, its liberty, and its intellectual nature” (*Epistola ad R.* n. 7). Each of these three consequences is based on one overarching assumption: that to make the soul’s rational part the form of the body is

16. Burr, *The Persecution*, p. 80. Burr accepts at face value the text of Olivi’s reply (see n. 15 above), and so he holds that Olivi explicitly subscribes to the Council’s words. Ivo Tonna, “La pars intellectiva dell’anima razionale non e’ la forma del corpo,” *Antoninum* 65 (1990): 288, denies even that Olivi was condemned by the Council of Vienna. As he and others have noted, Olivi is not mentioned by name. Still, there can be no doubt that Olivi’s views were the *intended* target of the Council’s statement, given how closely the language of the bull matches the words Olivi uses, and given also that the bull condemns two other theological positions that Olivi plainly did hold. Schneider, *Die Einheit des Menschen*, underscores this point in his careful, balanced treatment of these issues (p. 252).

17. Here I am disagreeing with Carter Partee, “Peter John Olivi: historical and doctrinal study,” *Franciscan Studies* 20 (1960): 215–60, who holds that the Council does not “say that the *anima intellectiva* is united to the body *as such*” (p. 249). Notice that if Olivi did reply to the “*Littera septem sigillorum*” by turning “*anima rationalis secundum quod est rationalis*” into “*anima rationalis per se et essentialiter*” (see n. 15 above), then this presumably means that he takes the phrases to be equivalent, and therefore *would* have taken the Council of Vienna to be making a claim about the rational soul considered as such.

18. *Summa theologiae* [=ST] 1a 76.1c. Quotations from ST are drawn from my translation in progress of the Treatise on Human Nature (ST 1a qq. 75–89).

to attribute to the body the distinctive capacities of the rational soul. Here is how Olivi puts that claim:

If the intellective part is the form of the body then, since all matter is actualized by its form, it follows that just as a human body is truly sensory and living through the sensory soul, so that body will be truly intellective and free through the intellective part. (q. 51; II 104–5)

If the intellect is the form of the body, then the body must have the capacities for intellectual thought and free decision. Olivi is of course going to reject this as absurd. Notice the form of this argument. First, Olivi asserts that to be the form of something is to impart actuality to that thing. This seems uncontroversial. Second, Olivi argues by analogy. Just as the sensory soul actualizes a body by giving it life and the capacity for sensation, so the intellective part—if it is the form of the body—should actualize the body by making it intellective and free. Here too, Olivi's claim seems plausible. If one accepts the first step of the argument, that to be the form of something is to impart actuality to that thing, then the rational part must be giving *something* to the body. Olivi says, “every form imparts to its matter some operation, and some power for operating” (q. 51; II 109). So, if the rational part does not give the body the capacity for intellective thought, we have to provide some sort of account of what the rational part does give the body. But what else could the rational part of the soul do for the body, if not endow it with the power to be rational?

One might view this argument as posing a dilemma. If the rational part is the form of the body, then one must either understand this formal relationship in the ordinary way, in terms of actualizing the body, or one must concede that the rational part is not the form of the body in any ordinary sense. The first horn of the dilemma leads in the direction of materialism, because it forces one to claim that the powers of the rational soul are instantiated in the body. The second horn of the dilemma leads one toward retracting the original assertion: that the rational part, the intellect, is the form of the body. The meaning of this assertion is not at all clear if intellect is not in any way actualizing the body. At this point one might recall Jonathan Barnes's criticism of Aristotle: in the context of soul he “makes so broad a use of ‘form’ and ‘matter’ that their analytical powers are entirely lost.” Olivi is making a related complaint against those who would make the soul's intellect the form of the body. Either Olivi's claim uses the term ‘form’ in an entirely peculiar sense, or it forces one in the direction of materialism.

That one might be forced in the direction of materialism is not, in all circles, something to be feared. If this is one of the horns of Olivi's dilemma, it is a horn that many today would gladly grab hold of. Here one might think of Kathleen Wilkes's enthusiasm for the *De anima* as a clarion call to functionalism.¹⁹ Olivi,

19. One should not take too seriously this parallel between Olivi's dilemma and Barnes's and Wilkes's contrasting conclusions. Barnes and Wilkes are not referring specifically to the place of intellect in Aristotle's scheme. Barnes objects even to an analysis of

in contrast, thinks that this line of thought would lead to the destruction of the soul's intellectual nature and freedom. The arguments he makes for these conclusions are worth considering because they illuminate some of the more general contours of his philosophical thinking.

If the intellect's operation involved the body, then the intellect would be limited to cognitive operations of the mechanical sort that one associates with the senses—a familiar claim. Indeed, it almost amounts to a scholastic truism that material cognitive powers are limited to apprehending material, particular things. Olivi argues for this claim in his own distinctive way, however, beginning with this general principle:

A power cannot apprehend its object unless it is directed to it in advance. But a power cannot be directed without the virtual application and aiming of its matter toward that to which it is directed. (q. 51; II 112)

All cognition requires what Olivi refers to as a “virtual attention” (*aspectus virtualis*) toward the object. Olivi is never very clear about the exact nature of this *aspectus*, although it seems to involve something more than merely concentrating on the object. The crucial point, for present purposes, is that “it is impossible for the direction and attention of a body to be related to anything other than to things that are in bodies” (II 112). This is something that he says one experiences in all bodily senses. The five external senses have as their objects particular bodies that are at an appropriate distance. The common sense focuses on the five external sense organs. Even memory and imagination involve attending to particular images. So if the intellect were to operate through a material organ, then it too would be limited to apprehending particular, material things:

It could not understand anything separate from its body; nor could it understand universals and intellectual objects, which do not actually exist externally in particular bodies. (II 112)

Intellect, then, would lose its intellectual nature.²⁰

As well as having universals as its object, Olivi believes that the intellect has the further characteristic of being immediately aware of itself. This was *not* a medieval truism; it is something that Aquinas, for instance, denied. For Aquinas,

the sensory and nutritive parts as the form of the body, whereas Aristotle's treatment of intellect is a considerable embarrassment for Wilkes. (She bluntly remarks, about *De anima* III 5, “I wish he had never written this chapter.” [“Psuchê,” p. 125]) Olivi, in contrast, is focused entirely on how the intellect fits into the *De anima*'s hylomorphic account. Viewed in the tradition of Aristotelian commentary, then, Olivi might be viewed as making the familiar point that the intellect doesn't seem to fit within the broader theory of the *De anima*.

20. Olivi makes much the same argument at q. 59 (II 538) and q. 67 (II 617–18). For further discussion of Olivi's theory of cognitive attention, see my *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 5.

human self-knowledge is possible only indirectly: one works backwards, from the object of cognition, to the act of cognition, to the cognitive power itself (*ST* 1a 87). Olivi, in contrast, believes that the intellect has a non-inferential awareness of itself. Naturally, he explains this in terms of a conversion or attention, and he denies that any bodily power could have such a capacity:

It is impossible that corporeal matter be immediately directed to anything that is not outside of itself—outside not only in terms of essence, but also in terms of position and location. As a result, a bodily part cannot be directed immediately to itself, but only to another part adjacent to it. (II 112)

A material thing, therefore, does not have the capacity to know itself. Since the rational soul has such a capacity, it is not material, and not the form of the body.²¹

The rational part of the soul is usually conceived as having a cognitive and an appetitive component. Olivi's arguments with respect to the appetitive component, the will, are similar to those he advanced in connection with the cognitive component. Here, again, he reaches a familiar conclusion, but in his own distinctive manner. Olivi believes that human freedom requires that a person be able, at the same time at which one chooses something, to choose instead the opposite of that thing. Elsewhere, he explains this as meaning that "someone does one thing in such a way that at the same time he could have done the other while ceasing from the first—and vice versa" (q. 57 *ad* 4; II 341). This is the loftiest of all capacities: "to be capable of opposites, and to be capable of moving oneself freely, is to be capable of the highest capacity that can be conceived" (q. 51; II 115). No material power could bring this about: bodies receive a form according to determinate dimensions and shape. Actions consequently occur "according to the laws of this dimension" (II 116). In other words, the actions of corporeal powers take place according to determinate laws. The result is that "every action or corporeal power is necessarily determined to one thing" (q. 59; II 538). If the soul's rational part was the form of a body, it could not have the sort of libertarian freedom that Olivi describes.²²

II

I fear that, so far, Olivi's argument will not have seemed very satisfactory. Materialists will not be satisfied, of course, because at too many points Olivi simply assumes that nothing material could have abstract knowledge, self-knowl-

21. See also q. 67 *ad* 6 (II 624). For further discussion of Olivi's interesting account of self-knowledge, see François-Xavier Putallaz, *La Connaissance de Soi au XIII siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991), chap. 2.

22. Olivi makes this argument at q. 51 (II 115–16), q. 57 (II 538), and q. 67 (II 618). For a general discussion of Olivi's theory of will and freedom, see Stephen Dumont, "The Origin of Scotus's Theory of Synchronic Contingency," *Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995): 149–67, and also the comments that follow by Scott MacDonald.

edge, or free will. I suspect that there will be as much dissatisfaction among those whose thinking about these issues has been shaped by Thomas Aquinas. It is this second source of dissatisfaction on which I will focus. Depending on how generously one is disposed toward Olivi, one of two things may seem to be the case. First, one may suppose that Olivi has entirely misunderstood what it means to say that the intellect is the form of the body; alternatively, one may feel that Olivi is in full agreement with Aquinas on these matters.²³ In the second case, he is saying nothing new. In either case, one would have cause for being dissatisfied.

These two contrasting attitudes toward Olivi have at root just one line of thought. This thought might best be introduced by noticing that Aquinas sometimes makes claims that look to be virtually the same as Olivi's: Aquinas states, for instance, that "the human soul is not the form of the body with respect to its intellectual power."²⁴ What he means by this seems to fit very well with the claims Olivi makes. First, like Olivi and the scholastics in general, Aquinas believes that a human being has just one soul, which intellect is a part of.²⁵ Second, Aquinas takes that soul to be the form, and hence the actuality, of the body. Again, this is consistent with Olivi's position. Third, Aquinas is in agreement with Olivi that "the intellectual power is not the actuality of the body" (*ST* 1a 76.1 *ad* 2–3).²⁶ Intellect, therefore, is a part of the soul, but not a part that contributes to actualizing the body. With respect to its intellectual power, the soul is *not* the form of the body.

Viewed in this light, it becomes harder to see what is original in Olivi's position. Aquinas and Olivi seem to agree that intellect, considered as such, is not the form of the body. It may seem, then, that at best, Olivi is offering a useful clarification of what a non-materialist Aristotelian must say. Or, if one takes him to be proposing not a clarification but an alternative to the dominant Aristotelian

23. Efrem Bettoni makes this latter claim, in *Le dottrina filosofiche di Pier di Giovanni Olivi* (Milan: Società Editrice 'Vita e Pensiero', 1959), p. 376. He maintains that the difference between Olivi and Aquinas on this point is merely terminological, and that in reality their positions are identical. Ivo Tonna, "La 'pars intellectiva'", p. 288, takes an identical stand.

24. *De unitate intellectus* chap. 3, in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia*, vol. 43 (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1976). One might well wonder how Aquinas can make this claim, and at the same time claim, as quoted earlier, that "the intellect . . . is the form of the body." The crucial point is that when Aquinas makes the latter claim he is speaking of the intellect not in the sense of a power of the soul, but in the sense of the soul's very essence. (In *ST* 1a 77.1 he distinguishes the soul's essence from its powers.) That explains why Aquinas's official conclusion in *ST* 1a 76.1 is not that the *intellect* is the form of the body, but that the *intellective principle* is the form of the body. Notice, moreover, that Olivi draws precisely this distinction between essence and power in replying to the Letter of the Seven Seals (as quoted earlier): this gives one further reason to suspect that there is no fundamental difference in their positions.

25. On the scholastic consensus in this regard, see Roberto Zavalloni, *Richard de Mediavilla et la Controverse sur la Pluralité des Formes* (Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1951), p. 385.

26. Cf. *ST* 1a 76.1 *ad* 1: "intellectively cognizing is an actuality that cannot be exercised through a corporeal organ, in the way that vision is."

position, then it may seem that Olivi has simply misunderstood the nature of that dominant position. Regardless, Olivi's proposal would be much less original than appears at first glance.

The truth is more complex. Although we can find Aquinas and Olivi making similar-sounding claims, Aquinas is committed to a form of hylomorphism that Olivi believes unworkable. Olivi, in turn, proposes a theory of the soul-body relationship that Aquinas would find utterly unpalatable. As a start toward establishing these claims, one can return to a point made earlier: that Aquinas argues at great length that the intellect is united to the body as its form. (This is the thesis defended in *ST* 1a 76.1, the longest article in Aquinas's *Treatise on Human Nature* [qq. 75–89]). If Olivi's argument has done nothing else, it should at least raise in one's mind the question of why Aquinas should be so insistent on defending that thesis. Would it not be enough for him to show that the *soul* is united to the body as its form? Moreover, is it not rather misleading to speak of *intellect* as united to the body as its form? After all, the soul is the form of the body not in virtue of intellect, but in virtue of the soul's other parts. Indeed, given the intellect's acknowledged independence from the body, could one not make a good case for intellect as something entirely distinct from the other parts of the soul? The intellective part seems to sit quite uneasily within the soul as a whole; it is not even clear that the intellect belongs within the soul when the soul is described as the form of the body.

Why then does Aquinas insist that not just the soul as a whole, but even the intellective power of the soul is the body's form? One might suppose that this question is closely linked to the debate over the plurality of forms. One of Aquinas's most original and controversial claims was his assertion that human beings have only a single substantial form. No earlier scholastic had made this claim, and many later scholastics, including Olivi, would take issue with it.²⁷ Olivi calls the doctrine of the unicity of forms a "brutal error" (q. 71; II 637); he holds instead that "in the human body, there are other forms beyond the soul, differing from it in reality" (q. 50; II 35). Preeminent among these other forms is the form that gives the human body its physical qualities. He writes, "the organization and constitution associated with being human is truly the form of a human being, although it is not the form of the soul's spiritual matter . . ." (q. 51 app.; II 138). Despite these claims, Olivi does not, at least officially, identify the various parts of the soul as separate forms. Instead, he speaks of them as "formal levels" of the soul that "come together to make up one complete form" (q. 50; II 35). As far as the soul itself is concerned, Olivi and Aquinas are in general agreement that it is a single form, containing various powers or parts.

27. Aquinas's originality is assessed in detail by Zavalloni, *Richard de Mediavilla*. More recently, Richard Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) remarks that "with regard to the unity (or plurality) of substantial form, one should realize that the question does not seem to have been considered central before Aquinas. All authors subscribed to some version of what, in retrospect, we may designate as a theory of plurality of substantial form, at least if one considers a compound form, even though unified, to be 'plural'" (p. 2).

Given that the soul is a single form, one can begin to see some of the attractiveness of Aquinas's position. On Aquinas's account, the soul in all its parts is the form of the body. Indeed, the soul as a whole informs the whole body (*ST* 1a 76.8). These claims seem sensible: if the soul is a single form, then how can one say, as Olivi does, that part of that soul informs the body, whereas another part does not? Does such a claim not entail that the soul is, in fact, composed of distinct forms? Olivi owes an answer to these questions because, on his view, the soul seems to divide into discrete metaphysical entities, only one part of which is united to the body as form to matter. It is perhaps because he feels this pressure that Olivi routinely refers to the soul's parts as forms.²⁸ Moreover, he concedes that his account has to introduce a certain complexity into the soul:

I acknowledge that if the soul were one nature and one simple essence in which powers subsist as branches rising out of their root . . . , then one would necessarily have to hold, I believe, that the soul informs the body in terms of its whole essence. (*Epistola ad R.* n. 7)

Olivi's soul, in contrast, is composed of powers that are "constitutive parts of the soul: they differ from it as parts from the whole, and they are the same as it just like parts with their whole" (q. 54; II 256). Claims about the soul as a whole, he says elsewhere, should be made "collectively, not distributively—in the way that all the apostles number twelve" (q. 51 app.; II 176). This helps to make sense of how the soul can partly be the form of the body, partly not. But it raises the question of what gives the soul its unity, of why we should even speak of the soul.

Olivi faces a further problem about unity, this time the unity of the whole human being, body and soul. When Aquinas puts forward his claim that the intellect is united to the body as its form (*ST* 1a 76.1), he does so because he sees no other way of explaining how the unity of the human person is to be maintained:

If someone wants to say that the intellectual soul is *not* the form of the body, then it is incumbent on that person to find a way in which the action of intellectually cognizing is the action of a particular human being. For each one of us experiences that it is oneself who intellectually cognizes. (76.1c)

If the intellectual soul is not the form of the body, then some other account needs to be given of what makes an episode of intellectual cognition *mine* or *yours*. An account needs to be given, in short, of what unites each of us with our intellects. The leading premise here is that each one of us does engage in intellectual cognition. Each of us "experiences" that such cognition is something we do. In the *De anima* commentary Aquinas writes,

28. See, for instance, q. 51 (II 117), q. 51 app. (II 138, 175–76), and in particular q. 59 (II 539), quoted below at p. 123. Officially, however, Olivi holds that "'form,' used unconditionally, signifies the entire form rather than a part of it" (q. 51 app.; II 144).

it is clear that an individual human being has intellectual cognition. If *that* is denied, then the person maintaining this view has no intellectual cognition of anything and is not to be listened to. (*InDA* III. 7. 281–84)

The tone of the second sentence is derisive, but it makes a serious point. No one who did not engage in intellectual cognition would be worth listening to—such a “person” could not even participate in the discussion.

So some account must be given of what unites my intellect with the rest of me. Without any such account, *I* cannot be said to think or understand. Aquinas considers several candidates, but concludes that the only successful reply is the one he finds in Aristotle:

The only way that is left, then, is the way that Aristotle proposes: that this particular human being intellectually cognizes because the intellectual principle is this person’s form. (76.1c)

Here I wish to assess neither the faults of the accounts that Aquinas rejects, nor the merits of his own Aristotelian proposal.²⁹ But it is not hard to see how Olivi would react to that proposal. Aquinas is following Aristotle, who held that “it is not necessary to ask whether the soul and its body are one, just as we do not ask about wax and its shape . . .” (*De an.* II 1, 412b6–7). Aquinas recognizes, of course, that the wax-shape analogy has its limits as an explanation of soul and body. But Olivi believes the analogy breaks down entirely at the level of intellect; he believes there is no sense in which the intellectual part of the soul can be made to fit the model of the wax and its shape. And if the account does not work for intellect, then Aquinas has entirely failed to solve the mind-body problem, as we now define it. At most Aquinas would have explained the relationship of the body to the sensory powers; the higher operations of mind would remain entirely separated from the body.

Aquinas identifies intellect as the form of the body, then, because he sees no other solution to the mind-body problem. Olivi argues that Aquinas’s own hylomorphic solution fails, a claim that of course puts the burden on Olivi to produce his own solution. Perhaps the most interesting element of Olivi’s work on these issues is his attempt to work out such a solution. In the following section, then, I turn to Olivi’s non-Aristotelian account of how the intellect can be united to the rest of the soul, and to the body.

III

Olivi feels the need to explain both what unifies intellect with the body and also what unifies intellect with the rest of the soul. Like Aquinas, he puts that need in

29. These topics are discussed in more detail in my work in progress, *Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of “Summa theologiae” I*. 75–89. Many of the claims I make about Aquinas in this paper are developed in much more detail there.

terms of the evident fact that we as individuals engage in all the operations associated with soul and body:

We sense within ourselves, through our most intimate and certain experience, that the sensory part is restrained, ruled, and directed by the superior [intellective] part as something intimately rooted in its nature. The fact of its being rooted in the ground of our superior part is sensed to such an extent that . . . the superior part itself intimately senses and declares that the acts of the sensory part are its own. Thus it says: It is I who understand, see, eat. (q. 51; II 122)

We are immediately aware, and reflect our awareness in our language, that the operations of the body, the senses, and the mind, are operations of a single human being.

By stressing this point, Olivi distinguishes himself from the so-called Radical Aristotelians, some of whom also deny that the intellect is the form of the body. Siger of Brabant, for example, had anticipated Olivi's claim that the intellect is not the substantial form of the body. But Siger argues on that basis for the unicity of intellect: that is, that there is just one intellect shared by all human beings.³⁰ Boethius of Dacia, writing in the early 1270s, not long after Siger (and before Olivi), similarly denies that the intellect is the substantial form of the body.³¹ Boethius is willing to concede that it follows from this that an individual human being does not understand. Incredibly, Boethius simply grants that conclusion:

You will say that "I experience and perceive that I understand." I say that this is false: rather, it is the intellect naturally united to you as the mover and governor of your body that experiences this. (Bk. II, q. 4, p. 76)

In the face of Aquinas's and Olivi's appeal to what one manifestly experiences, Boethius insists that we are misinterpreting the experience. Intellect is not united to the body, and so its operations are not our operations.

No doubt, Olivi found these conclusions appalling, further evidence of the invidious influence of non-Christian philosophy. But to evade such consequences he needs an account of how intellect is united to the body. In an earlier analysis,

30. See *Quaestiones in tertium de anima*, ed. B. Bazán (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1972), q. 7 (pp. 22–24), where Siger argues that intellect perfects the body in terms of power, not substance, and q. 9 (pp. 41–44), where he argues that there can be only one intellect, precisely because intellect perfects the body merely in terms of power, not substance. I am by no means the first to notice that there is at least a superficial point of analogy between Olivi and the Averroists: see Schneider, *Die Einheit des Menschen*, pp. 243–44.

31. It is not perfectly clear that Boethius of Dacia is the author of this treatise, edited by Maurice Giele in *Trois commentaires anonymes sur le traité de l'âme d'Aristote*, *Philosophes médiévaux* 11 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1971), pp. 13–120. In the absence of any better hypothesis, I am following Richard Dales's attribution, in *The Problem of the Rational Soul*, pp. 154–59.

offered in a different context, Olivi had laid down three ways in which a single entity can be said to be made up of more than one part:

Distinct parts cannot make up one thing unless (1) one is the form of the other; or (2) both are informed by one form; or (3) they come together in the same matter. . . . There are no other ways in which multiple parts can be united so as to make up one thing.³² (q. 16; I 323)

The first method naturally applies to the union of form and matter, the second to distinct material parts, and the third to distinct forms. Olivi draws from this analysis the conclusion that every composition of parts must involve both matter and form (q. 16; I 323). But it is hard to see how, on this account, Olivi can explain the unity of soul, or of the whole human composite. Since the intellect is not the form of the body, it cannot be united to that body via (1), nor is it obvious how it can be united to the other parts of the soul.

In fact, however, Olivi thinks he is able to satisfy this analysis. Here is his most straightforward presentation of his account, beginning with what he says about the union of the sensory part to the body.

The sensory part is the substantial form of the human body—or, rather, the rational soul is, through the sensory part—and consequently they are substantially united to one another as form and matter. (q. 59; II 539)

This is the easy part of the account, as it fits neatly into the first of the three described cases (in q. 16, above). Notice his revealing rhetorical move: first calling the sensory part a form, and then retracting that claim. This should remind us of Olivi's tenuous position with regard to the soul's unity. And here is what he immediately goes on to say about the way the soul's sensory and intellectual parts are united:

The intellectual and sensory parts are united as two formal natures in one matter (or in one supposit) and in the soul's one substance. Consequently they are consubstantial with one another, as substantial parts of the soul's one substantial form (q. 59; II 539).

In part this begs the question we are focusing on, inasmuch as it simply announces that sense and intellect are found in "the soul's one substance." What we want is an explanation of that claim. The explanation comes, however, when he writes that the intellectual and sensory parts are united "in one matter." This locates the manner of union within the third of the above possible cases. But what matter do these two "formal natures" inform? We know that it cannot be the body, since the intellectual part is not the form of the body. Olivi instead invokes the controversial notion of spiritual matter.

32. The same three possibilities are listed at q. 20 (I 373).

If the intellective and sensory parts are not claimed to be united to one another in one spiritual matter, . . . then I do not see how the intellective part could be said to be substantially united with the body or with its sensory part. (q. 59; II 540)

Spiritual matter is what unifies the various parts of the soul. It is also what entitles Olivi to treat the soul as a single complete form. In reply to Vital du Four's objection that Olivi's account makes it impossible to make a single form out of intellect and the soul's other parts,³³ Olivi replies heatedly:

This is too ridiculous, and it comes down, much too quickly, to the same ridiculous point. For to make up a single form, it is sufficient, that all the formal parts of the soul inform the same spiritual matter, with the result that one whole form of that [matter] is made from all of them. (q. 51 app.; II 184)

Along these lines, Olivi thinks he can have it both ways. On the one hand, he can deny that the soul is entirely simple and unified, and he can treat the soul's several parts as themselves discrete forms. At the same time he can insist that, strictly speaking, these parts come together as a single complete form, the human soul.

We now need to complete the picture by looking at how Olivi explains the intellect's unity with the body. First, he stresses the intimate union between the soul's sensory and intellective parts, describing how these parts are "as closely related to one another as possible (*sibi intimissima*)" and are "wholly and mutually inclined to one other" (q. 59; II 540). At this point, Olivi makes an appeal to a principle of transitivity. He argues that because

(a) the sensory part is unified with the body,

and

(b) the intellective part is unified with the sensory part,

it must follow that

(c) The intellective part is unified with the body.

He writes,

It is impossible that the sensory part be united to something as closely as possible . . . without the intellective part's being united to that same thing as closely as possible. . . . Whatever is closely inclined to the sensory part, is by that very fact closely inclined to whatever the sensory part essentially adheres

33. Vital makes this charge in his *De rerum principio* q. 11 a.2, edited in John Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia* vol. IV (Paris: Vivès, 1891), pp. 463–64. In q. 9 a.2 he gives a detailed exposition (pp. 400–405) and then refutation (pp. 412–19, 429–33) of Olivi's position.

to. . . . And so by the very fact that the intellective part and the body are said to be united and inclined with this sensory part, they are consequently held to be inclined and united with one other. (q. 59; II 541)

Olivi acknowledges that, on this account, the relationship between the intellect and the body is not direct and unmediated. Instead, the two are held together by the intervening sensory part, which is on one side bound to the intellective part of the soul, and on the other side the form of the body.³⁴ Described in this way, intellect and body can be said to be unified in the second of the ways described earlier. They are unified by each being connected to some one form. (Notice, however, that the precise terms of that second case need to be stretched a bit, since the intellective part cannot be said to be “informed” by the sensory part, as that passage would have it.)

IV

I offer this account of Olivi’s theory with some misgivings, because I recognize how open it is to the charge of being a metaphysical fairy tale, entirely remote from the concrete realities of mind and matter as we know them. If there is anything to Barnes’s charge that Aristotle’s hylomorphism entirely loses its “analytical powers” in the context of the *De anima*, then how much more might one criticize Olivi for speaking of a sensory form that gives unity on one hand to the intellect, and on the other to the body? I do not say that Olivi’s account is entirely a metaphysical fantasy, but I would be the first to concede that for good sense to be made of this story, one would have to work long and patiently, and find oneself a sympathetic audience.

In the remainder of this paper I will look at the metaphysical underpinnings of Olivi’s account. Ironically, by focusing the discussion at an even more abstract and metaphysical level, one can begin to see some of the attractiveness of Olivi’s theory of the soul. Let me start by saying something about the use his account makes of spiritual matter, and what this can show us about his general theory of matter. Although the phrase ‘spiritual matter’ may strike us today as an oxymoron, the notion was widely accepted in the thirteenth century. Eminent Franciscans such as Roger Bacon, Bonaventure, and John Peckham all accepted that the human soul contains not just a formal component (actuality), but a material component (potentiality). To distinguish this material component from extended corporeal bodies, these thinkers described it as spiritual matter.³⁵

34. “Et sic verum est quod unio eorum est intima, non tamen immediata, quoniam mediante sensitiva ad se invicem inclinatur et sibi invicem uniuntur . . .” (q. 59; II 541). For very similar descriptions of this transitive account, see q. 51 *ad* 11 (II 134); q. 51 *app.* (II 175–76).

35. On this subject see Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul*, *passim*. For the early-thirteenth-century background, see O. Lottin, “La composition hylémorphique des

Although Olivi is not noteworthy simply in appealing to this special sort of matter, he does put it to an interesting use. For Olivi, spiritual matter, like all matter, is required to serve as the substratum of substances. This point emerges as he sets out his rationale for why such matter “is necessary to the composition of beings” (q. 16; I 311). Beings that are complex in the sense of having more than one attribute or perfection require some sort of receptive potentiality as that which unifies them. Either these attributes are related as matter to form, or “they simultaneously come together in some third thing in which they are received” (I 312). This passive potentiality is the underlying matter that makes it possible for the parts of substances to be unified in some way other than in the matter-form relationship. An entity’s various forms are unified, therefore, by informing the same stuff, the same matter: “the only way that two forms can come together in one thing is by being received in the same matter” (q. 12; I 222).³⁶ This holds for physical entities just as much as it does for spiritual ones, such as our soul. It also holds for the cognitive powers within our soul: “every act and disposition of an apprehensive power is received in the matter of that power: for otherwise they could not be in it” (q. 51; II 113). This is true even at the intellectual level: “species³⁷ and intellectual acts . . . must have some matter or some recipient that they inform” (q. 16 *ad* 19; I 352).³⁸

Olivi describes matter in a way that makes it well suited to serve as a kind of substratum. First, Olivi rejects the well-known notion of prime matter as pure potentiality. On his view, matter essentially possesses a degree of actuality. Such actuality is not a form; prime or pure matter is by definition stripped of all form. But Olivi thinks that even pure matter could not be pure potentiality; pure potentiality could not be described as matter at all, or as anything at all. For pure matter to be matter, to play the role of matter, it must have the appropriate nature: “it does not seem that pure potentiality could be called a substance, nor one of the principal

substances spirituelles.” *Revue neo-scholastique de philosophie* 34 (1932): 21–41. The notion that all beings other than God are composed of form and matter (universal hylomorphism) goes back to the *Fons vitae*, a work by the eleventh-century Jewish philosopher, Avicbron.

36. Cf. q. 51 (II 117): “Plures enim formae in una materia concurrentes non per aliud ad se invicem substantialiter uniuntur et inclinantur nisi per hoc quod in una materia concurrunt ad quam substantialiter inclinantur.”

37. Olivi rejects the existence of sensible and intelligible species. But he does recognize memory species, and that must be what he is referring to here. See my *Theories of Cognition*, chap. 5.

38. By invoking a material substratum at the intellectual level, Olivi takes us quite a distance from Aquinas’s thinking about cognition. For Aquinas, cognition requires immateriality: at the intellectual level, the immateriality must be complete (*ST* 1a 14.1c; for discussion see my *Theories of Cognition*, chap. 1). Species received in matter, on Aquinas’s view, would be entirely unintelligible: that is to say, they would be unable to represent the universal features of reality. Olivi elsewhere rejects Aquinas’s linkage between the immateriality of intellect, and the immateriality of the things intellect thinks about (rightly so, as I argue in an unpublished paper, “Aquinas and the Content Fallacy”). But it is Olivi’s more general metaphysical theory of matter that drives him to postulate a material substratum for these cognitive acts and dispositions.

parts constitutive of substance, nor . . . the foundation of all the things that are in a substance” (q. 16; I 307). Matter must have some nature, some actuality.³⁹

The nature of pure matter is indeterminate, which is why pure matter cannot exist apart from form (see q. 19). (Analogously, a color cannot exist unless it is some determinate color.) Indeed, it is the very nature of matter to be indeterminate: whereas the actuality associated with form is “essentially determinate . . . and not determinable by another,” the actuality of matter “is essentially indeterminate and determinable” (q. 16; I 308).⁴⁰ He offers the analogy of a piece of wax, which “is something actual and nevertheless, considered as such, has no determinate quantity, nor any determinate shape or quality” (I 308–9). The example is merely analogous, of course, because the wax is determinately *wax*. But the notable changeability of the wax makes it an attractive model for understanding the more obscure nature of pure matter.

Because matter has a degree of actuality, it admits of distinction into discrete parts. A pool of matter has a certain intrinsic unity that distinguishes it from a different pool of matter. This is something that Aquinas, for instance, could not allow. On Aquinas’s view, “prime matter is numerically one, across all things.”⁴¹ Matter becomes individuated, on Aquinas’s account, only when informed. On this picture, prime matter is not suited to individuate objects. But Olivi needs matter to explain the unity of substances, and so he has to describe matter as essentially discrete, prior to any form that it might receive. Thus he holds, “in any given thing, the matter is numerically distinct, essentially, from the matter that is in a different thing” (q. 21; I 386).

These remarks should give some sense of how Olivi conceives of matter, and how this matter is suited to play the role of a substratum. But now something needs to be said about why Olivi thinks such a substratum is needed to unify substances: why, as he puts it above, matter “is necessary to the composition of beings.” I think that good sense can be made of Olivi’s account at this point. In fact, reflection on Olivi’s position reveals him to have an ontology that is in some respects more satisfying than Aquinas’s, in that it makes it easier to explain our pretheoretical intuitions about individuating objects.

First, a few words about Aquinas’s ontology are in order. He distinguishes genuine substances from mere aggregates by employing the notion of being one thing unconditionally (*unum simpliciter*). To be *unum simpliciter* is contrasted

39. See q. 16 (I 304–11), where Olivi gives his own account and argues against the account of prime matter found, for instance, in Aquinas. Olivi’s criticisms would later be taken up by Scotus and Ockham. Marilyn McCord Adams gives a good discussion of this later debate in chap. 15 of *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

40. This is how Olivi tries to keep the notion of matter from collapsing into the notion of form. Once he severs the link between matter and potentiality, form and actuality, by allowing that matter itself has a share of actuality, he needs some justification for maintaining the form-matter distinction. His solution is to distinguish two sorts of actuality: the indeterminate kind associated with matter and the determinate kind associated with form.

41. *De principiis naturae* chap. 2, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 43.

with being one thing in some respect (*unum secundum quid*). Aquinas cites with approval a remark by pseudo-Dionysius that any given group of things is one in some respect or other;⁴² Aquinas imposes strict criteria, however, on what can be *unum simpliciter*. First, merely being assembled or even joined together is not enough (*SCG* I.18.141). This rules out, for instance, a pile of stones.⁴³ Second, it is also not enough to be assembled in some functional order. Aquinas denies that a house is *unum simpliciter*, for instance; it is one merely “by aggregation or composition” (*QDA* 10c).

How are non-substances like houses and stone piles distinguished from genuine, unified substances? According to Aquinas, substances are unified by having a substantial form, whereas mere aggregates are joined together by some accidental ordering. This way of drawing the distinction raises an immediate question about how substantial and accidental forms are to be distinguished. What makes the form of the house an accidental form, the form of a horse a substantial form? Aquinas has an answer:

A substantial form perfects not only the whole, but each part. For since the whole is made up of its parts, a form of the whole that does not give existence to the individual parts of the body is a form that is a composition and ordering (the form of a house, for example), and such a form is accidental. (*ST* 1a 76.8c)

In general, forms perfect things, or give existence to things. When building materials are put into a certain form, a house comes into existence. What makes substantial forms different is that they give existence not just to the whole, but to each of the parts of the substance. The human soul, for instance, gives existence to each part of the body. Separate a part of the body, like a hand, from the living substance, and that part becomes something different. It is no longer a hand, except homonymously.⁴⁴ This is not the case for mere aggregates such as houses and stone piles. When one piles stones, or builds a house, one has not given existence to any of the individual parts. Changing the position of the stones, or making walls out of bricks, brings into existence a new whole, but leaves the parts unchanged.

On Aquinas’s criterion, then, neither houses nor heaps of stone involve the imposition of a substantial form. Each provides merely “a composition and ordering.” This is unity of a weaker sort, in that the parts of such a unity are divisible.⁴⁵

42. *De divinis nominibus*, chap. XIII sec. 2, in Thomas Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio* (Rome: Marietti, 1950), chap. XIII lec. 2. See *ST* 1a2ae 17.4c.

43. Cf. *ST* 1a2ae 17.4c; *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio* [= *InMET*] (Rome: Marietti, 1971) VIII.3.1725.

44. The doctrine is of course Aristotle’s. See *De meteora* IV 12, 389b31–390a19; *De an.* II 1, 412b19–22; *Met.* VII 10, 1035b24–25. Aquinas discusses it quite often. See, in particular, *ST* 1a 76.8c.

45. Cf. *InMET* X.3.1974: “a being is said to be one thing when it is indivisible or undivided.”

If the house is destroyed, the bricks continue to exist. If a human being is destroyed, none of the parts continue to exist: “not only does the animal not remain, but also no part of the animal remains” (*InGC* I.15.108). Notice that Aquinas conceives of indivisibility from the perspective of the parts, not from the perspective of the whole. This makes a crucial difference. If one looks at a human being and asks whether the body is separable from the whole person, it appears that the answer is yes. One can lose legs, arms, organs, and tissue without the person’s being destroyed. Moreover, one loses and gains cells on a constant basis: liver cells, for instance, are replaced in five days.⁴⁶ From this perspective, it looks as if the body is eminently separable from the whole person. Aquinas takes the opposite perspective. Rather than focusing on whether the whole survives without some part, he asks whether the parts can survive without the whole. In the case of a living substance, they cannot. Even the cells of the liver cease to exist when they pass out of the body. From the perspective of the parts, then, the substance is an indivisible whole.

Olivi is committed to a very different ontology. Because he accepts that substances can have multiple substantial forms, he cannot explain the unity of substances in the terms Aquinas proposes. Animals, for instance, are informed not just by the sensory and nutritive parts of the soul, but also by the form that provides for the body’s organization and constitution (see above). Olivi thus faces a problem about what unifies the various substantial forms of a substance. His answer, as we have seen, is matter. Olivi writes, “it characterizes first substance to subsist under accidents; it characterizes matter to subsist, or to be able to subsist, under all forms” (*Quodlibet* III q. 3; 20v). Matter is the underlying substratum that unifies the substance as a whole. Human beings are a special case, however, because here we must speak of two different sorts of matter, spiritual and corporeal. These two pools of matter are unified in virtue of the sensory part of the soul, which has a foot in each pool, so to speak, informing both spiritual and corporeal matter. Olivi argues that this sort of unity is unproblematic: “just as two matters can be substantially united in one form, and two forms in one matter, so the spiritual and corporeal matter of a human being can be united in the one sensory form” (q. 51 *ad* 11; II 134). Olivi thus has a far more generous account of substantial unity. Whereas Aquinas thinks that a substance is *unum simpliciter* only when it has a single substantial form giving existence to each of its parts, Olivi allows for three ways in which the parts of a thing may be substantially united. Either one is the form of the other, or they are both the matter for some single form, or they are both the form for some single matter.

Olivi believes that such flexibility is necessary for an ontology that jibes with our ordinary view of the world. Using examples like a fire and a stone, Olivi argues that a narrow hylomorphic account could not explain how the parts of a substance acquire their unity.

46. See Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 94.

For any two things to be said to be substantially united to one another, it is sufficient that they coexist substantially in something sensory,⁴⁷ or in a single supposit, or that they are parts of the same substantial being. This is clear in the case of two parts of one fire or one stone, or of things like that. These are not united with one another as matter and form, because each has part of the matter of the fire and part of its form. (q. 59; II 539–40)

Taken alone, this passage will hardly seem to pose much of a difficulty for Aquinas's ontology. Of course the parts of a stone need not be related as form to matter. Rather, the parts of a stone would be united by a single substantial form, and that would be what makes a stone *unum simpliciter*. But when Olivi continues, breaking down his claim into its two different cases, it becomes clearer where the difficulty for Aquinas lies.

[A] This claim is certainly clear enough⁴⁸ for all *material* parts that are united to one another substantially in a single form or supposit—whether they are homogeneous, like the parts of the matter of water, or heterogeneous, like the eye and the nose.

[B] And this same claim is clear in respect of all the parts of extended *forms*, whether they are substantial or accidental: like the parts of whiteness or the parts of the form of fire. (q. 59; II 540)

The case of material parts is not controversial. Olivi recognizes that the eye and the nose, for example, can be said to be unified because they share a single form. The trouble comes when Olivi considers [B] formal parts: extended forms that can themselves be divided into parts. Olivi holds that a fire or a stone has a substantial form that is simply the aggregate of many smaller forms of the same kind. (That is the force of calling such forms “extended.”) What unifies these formal parts? There is no further form in such cases that informs this aggregate of forms. Instead, these forms simply add up to make something larger. Why, then, do we speak of one fire, or one stone? Olivi's answer is that this aggregate is united by being part of a single supposit, which here can mean only that the fire or the stone is united by having the same material substrate. Olivi is claiming, then, that any ontology that is to include things like one fire, or one stone, must allow that such substances are unified by their matter.

Aquinas might rightly have criticized this account for failing to give an entirely reductive explanation of substantial unity. In the end, Olivi seems to take for granted the unity of the material substrate, without offering any criteria for when that substrate will itself count as unified. Aquinas's account in this respect goes deeper, but the price Aquinas must pay is to deny that things like a fire or a

47. Here, Olivi must have in mind the special case of a human being, unified in virtue of the soul's sensory part.

48. Following a variant reading, from the best manuscript.

stone can be substances at all. Aquinas explicitly denies that the discrete parts of a fire add up to make a single unified substance. And in the course of making that point, Aquinas seems to commit himself to the claim that the only ordinary, tangible objects that are substances are living substances. This discussion comes in the course of his *De anima* commentary, when he explains why only living beings can be said to take nourishment, strictly speaking. That is not an obvious truth for Aquinas, because he holds that a thing is nourished when it “receives in its very self something that serves to maintain it” (II.9. 135–36). On this criterion, it might seem that fire is nourished: one feeds a fire, after all, by adding more wood. Aquinas maintains that this is not a genuine case of feeding or nutrition, because strictly speaking the criterion is not satisfied. The original fire is not maintained when more wood is added, because the additional wood starts up a different fire. Fire, in other words, does not have the requisite unity to satisfy the criterion:

the whole fire that comes from many lit fires gathered together is not one fire *simpliciter*, but seems to be one, due to aggregation, in the way that a heap of stones is one heap. (145–48)

This is not a surprising conclusion in the case of fire. Of Olivi’s examples, fire was surely the weaker case. But Aquinas goes on to maintain that only living things have the requisite unity. Only in their case is “life maintained through food in the *same* part in which it was before. . . . [E]ach one of their parts is both nourished and grows” (150–54). In contrast:

This does not happen in things without souls; they seem to expand through addition. For it is not the case that what was there before expands, but that a different, greater whole gets established through the addition of something else. (154–57)

Things without souls do not meet the criterion for nutrition because the stuff that is added does not form a part of the original substance. Genuine nutrition does involve the addition of new material, food, but this food becomes part of the original substance. When fire is added to fire, in contrast, there is mere assembly without true unity. The original substance is not maintained, but instead “a different, greater whole gets established” (as above). Aquinas believes that this is true for all nonliving things, and so he concludes that “only ensouled things truly grow” (152–53). Only they grow, because only they possess the requisite unity.

On reflection, it should not be surprising that Aquinas cannot count a fire or a stone as a substance. In neither case is his test for substantial forms met. If one breaks off a piece of a stone, that piece remains in existence, and remains a (smaller) stone. The same is true for fire. This shows that the forms of stone, or fire, are not substantial forms—except perhaps at the microlevel, where one might come to a stone so small that it is indivisible. At that point, Olivi’s line of argument would have no force, because one would not have an extended form.

Aquinas's ontology of substances, then, includes only living beings and the smallest material objects. Houses and chairs will be excluded, and so will natural, nonliving objects like stones, diamonds in the rough, and gold nuggets. If this is an unpalatable result, then we have identified something attractive about Olivi's account. His method of unifying the human body and soul, although perhaps implausible on its own terms, rests on more general metaphysical claims that have some plausibility.