



## On the Human Soul

Thomas Aquinas

### Article 1: Whether the soul is a body?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the soul is a body. For the soul is the moving principle of the body. Nor does it move unless moved. First, because seemingly nothing can move unless it is itself moved, since nothing gives what it has not; for instance, what is not hot does not give heat. Secondly, because if there be anything that moves and is not moved, it must be the cause of eternal, unchanging movement, as we find proved Phys. viii, 6; and this does not appear to be the case in the movement of an animal, which is caused by the soul. Therefore the soul is a mover moved. But every mover moved is a body. Therefore the soul is a body.

**Objection 2:** Further, all knowledge is caused by means of a likeness. But there can be no likeness of a body to an incorporeal thing. If, therefore, the soul were not a body, it could not have knowledge of corporeal things.

**Objection 3:** Further, between the mover and the moved there must be contact. But contact is only between bodies. Since, therefore, the soul moves the body, it seems that the soul must be a body.

**On the contrary,** Augustine says (De Trin. vi, 6) that the soul “is simple in comparison with the body, inasmuch as it does not occupy space by its bulk.”

**I answer that,** To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life of those things which live: for we call living things “animate,” [\*i.e. having a soul], and those things which have no life, “inanimate.” Now life is shown principally by two actions, knowledge and movement. The philosophers of old, not being able to rise above their imagination, supposed that the principle of these actions was something corporeal: for they asserted that only bodies were real things; and that what is not corporeal is nothing: hence they maintained that the soul is something corporeal. This opinion can be proved to be false in many ways; but we shall make use of only one proof, based on universal and certain principles, which shows clearly that the soul is not a body.

It is manifest that not every principle of vital action is a soul, for then the eye would be a soul, as it is a principle of vision; and the same might be applied to the other instruments of the soul: but it is the “first” principle of life, which we call the soul. Now, though a body may be a principle of life, or to be a living thing, as the heart is a principle of life in an animal, yet nothing corporeal can be the first principle of life. For it is clear that to be a principle of life, or to be a living thing, does not belong to a body as such; since, if that were the case, every body would be a living thing, or a principle of life. Therefore a body is competent to be a living thing or even a principle of life, as “such” a body. Now that it is actually such a body, it owes to some principle which is called its act. Therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body; thus heat, which is

the principle of calefaction, is not a body, but an act of a body.

**Reply to Objection 1:** As everything which is in motion must be moved by something else, a process which cannot be prolonged indefinitely, we must allow that not every mover is moved. For, since to be moved is to pass from potentiality to actuality, the mover gives what it has to the thing moved, inasmuch as it causes it to be in act. But, as is shown in Phys. viii, 6, there is a mover which is altogether immovable, and not moved either essentially, or accidentally; and such a mover can cause an invariable movement. There is, however, another kind of mover, which, though not moved essentially, is moved accidentally; and for this reason it does not cause an invariable movement; such a mover, is the soul. There is, again, another mover, which is moved essentially---namely, the body. And because the philosophers of old believed that nothing existed but bodies, they maintained that every mover is moved; and that the soul is moved directly, and is a body.

**Reply to Objection 2:** The likeness of a thing known is not of necessity actually in the nature of the knower; but given a thing which knows potentially, and afterwards knows actually, the likeness of the thing known must be in the nature of the knower, not actually, but only potentially; thus color is not actually in the pupil of the eye, but only potentially. Hence it is necessary, not that the likeness of corporeal things should be actually in the nature of the soul, but that there be a potentiality in the soul for such a likeness. But the ancient philosophers omitted to distinguish between actuality and potentiality; and so they held that the soul must be a body in order to have knowledge of a body; and that it must be composed of the principles of which all bodies are formed in order to know all bodies.

**Reply to Objection 3:** There are two kinds of contact; of “quantity,” and of “power.” By the former a body can be touched only by a body; by the latter a body can be touched by an incorporeal thing, which moves that body.

## **Article 2: Whether the human soul is something subsistent?**

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the human soul is not something subsistent. For that which subsists is said to be “this particular thing.” Now “this particular thing” is said not of the soul, but of that which is composed of soul and body. Therefore the soul is not something subsistent.

**Objection 2:** Further, everything subsistent operates. But the soul does not operate; for, as the Philosopher says (De Anima i, 4), “to say that the soul feels or understands is like saying that the soul weaves or builds.” Therefore the soul is not subsistent.

**Objection 3:** Further, if the soul were subsistent, it would have some operation apart from the body. But it has no operation apart from the body, not even that of understanding: for the act of understanding does not take place without a phantasm, which cannot exist apart from the body. Therefore the human soul is not something subsistent.

**On the contrary,** Augustine says (De Trin. x, 7): “Who understands that the nature of the soul is that of a substance and not that of a body, will see that those who maintain the corporeal nature of the soul, are led astray through associating with the soul those things without which they are unable to think of any nature---i.e. imaginary pictures of corporeal things.” Therefore the nature of the human intellect is not only incorporeal, but it is also a substance, that is, something subsistent.

**I answer that,** It must necessarily be allowed that the principle of intellectual operation which we call the soul, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent. For it is clear that

by means of the intellect man can have knowledge of all corporeal things. Now whatever knows certain things cannot have any of them in its own nature; because that which is in it naturally would impede the knowledge of anything else. Thus we observe that a sick man's tongue being vitiated by a feverish and bitter humor, is insensible to anything sweet, and everything seems bitter to it. Therefore, if the intellectual principle contained the nature of a body it would be unable to know all bodies. Now every body has its own determinate nature. Therefore it is impossible for the intellectual principle to be a body. It is likewise impossible for it to understand by means of a bodily organ; since the determinate nature of that organ would impede knowledge of all bodies; as when a certain determinate color is not only in the pupil of the eye, but also in a glass vase, the liquid in the vase seems to be of that same color.

Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation "per se" apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation "per se." For nothing can operate but what is actual: for which reason we do not say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat. We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.

**Reply to Objection 1:** "This particular thing" can be taken in two senses. Firstly, for anything subsistent; secondly, for that which subsists, and is complete in a specific nature. The former sense excludes the inherence of an accident or of a material form; the latter excludes also the imperfection of the part, so that a hand can be called "this particular thing" in the first sense, but not in the second. Therefore, as the human soul is a part of human nature, it can indeed be called "this particular thing," in the first sense, as being something subsistent; but not in the second, for in this sense, what is composed of body and soul is said to be "this particular thing."

**Reply to Objection 2:** Aristotle wrote those words as expressing not his own opinion, but the opinion of those who said that to understand is to be moved, as is clear from the context. Or we may reply that to operate "per se" belongs to what exists "per se." But for a thing to exist "per se," it suffices sometimes that it be not inherent, as an accident or a material form; even though it be part of something. Nevertheless, that is rightly said to subsist "per se," which is neither inherent in the above sense, nor part of anything else. In this sense, the eye or the hand cannot be said to subsist "per se"; nor can it for that reason be said to operate "per se." Hence the operation of the parts is through each part attributed to the whole. For we say that man sees with the eye, and feels with the hand, and not in the same sense as when we say that what is hot gives heat by its heat; for heat, strictly speaking, does not give heat. We may therefore say that the soul understands, as the eye sees; but it is more correct to say that man understands through the soul.

**Reply to Objection 3:** The body is necessary for the action of the intellect, not as its origin of action, but on the part of the object; for the phantasm is to the intellect what color is to the sight. Neither does such a dependence on the body prove the intellect to be non-subsistent; otherwise it would follow that an animal is non-subsistent, since it requires external objects of the senses in order to perform its act of perception. . . .

#### **Article 4: Whether the soul is man?**

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the soul is man. For it is written: "Though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." But that which is within man is the soul. Therefore the soul is the inward man.

**Objection 2:** Further, the human soul is a substance. But it is not a universal substance. Therefore it is a particular substance. Therefore it is a “hypostasis” or a person; and it can only be a human person. Therefore the soul is man; for a human person is a man.

**On the contrary,** Augustine (De Civ. Dei xix, 3) commends Varro as holding “that man is not a mere soul, nor a mere body; but both soul and body.”

**I answer that,** The assertion “the soul is man,” can be taken in two senses. First, that man is a soul; though this particular man, Socrates, for instance, is not a soul, but composed of soul and body. I say this, forasmuch as some held that the form alone belongs to the species; while matter is part of the individual, and not the species. This cannot be true; for to the nature of the species belongs what the definition signifies; and in natural things the definition does not signify the form only, but the form and the matter. Hence in natural things the matter is part of the species; not, indeed, signate matter, which is the principle of individuality; but the common matter. For as it belongs to the notion of this particular man to be composed of this soul, of this flesh, and of these bones; so it belongs to the notion of man to be composed of soul, flesh, and bones; for whatever belongs in common to the substance of all the individuals contained under a given species, must belong to the substance of the species.

It may also be understood in this sense, that this soul is this man; and this could be held if it were supposed that the operation of the sensitive soul were proper to it, apart from the body; because in that case all the operations which are attributed to man would belong to the soul only; and whatever performs the operations proper to a thing, is that thing; wherefore that which performs the operations of a man is man. But it has been shown above that sensation is not the operation of the soul only. Since, then, sensation is an operation of man, but not proper to him, it is clear that man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body. Plato, through supposing that sensation was proper to the soul, could maintain man to be a soul making use of the body.

**Reply to Objection 1:** According to the Philosopher (Ethic. ix, 8), a thing seems to be chiefly what is principle in it; thus what the governor of a state does, the state is said to do. In this way sometimes what is principle in man is said to be man; sometimes, indeed, the intellectual part which, in accordance with truth, is called the “inward” man; and sometimes the sensitive part with the body is called man in the opinion of those whose observation does not go beyond the senses. And this is called the “outward” man.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Not every particular substance is a hypostasis or a person, but that which has the complete nature of its species. Hence a hand, or a foot, is not called a hypostasis, or a person; nor, likewise, is the soul alone so called, since it is a part of the human species.

## **Article 5: Whether the soul is composed of matter and form?**

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the soul is composed of matter and form. For potentiality is opposed to actuality. Now, whatsoever things are in actuality participate of the First Act, which is God; by participation of Whom, all things are good, are beings, and are living things, as is clear from the teaching of Dionysius (Div. Nom. v). Therefore whatsoever things are in potentiality participate of the first potentiality. But the first potentiality is primary matter. Therefore, since the human soul is, after a manner, in potentiality; which appears from the fact that sometimes a man is potentially understanding; it seems that the

human soul must participate of primary matter, as part of itself.

**Objection 2:** Further, wherever the properties of matter are found, there matter is. But the properties of matter are found in the soul---namely, to be a subject, and to be changed, for it is a subject to science, and virtue; and it changes from ignorance to knowledge and from vice to virtue. Therefore matter is in the soul.

**Objection 3:** Further, things which have no matter, have no cause of their existence, as the Philosopher says *Metaph. viii* (*Did. vii, 6*). But the soul has a cause of its existence, since it is created by God. Therefore the soul has matter.

**Objection 4:** Further, what has no matter, and is a form only, is a pure act, and is infinite. But this belongs to God alone. Therefore the soul has matter.

**On the contrary,** Augustine (*Gen. ad lit. vii, 7,8,9*) proves that the soul was made neither of corporeal matter, nor of spiritual matter.

**I answer that,** The soul has no matter. We may consider this question in two ways. First, from the notion of a soul in general; for it belongs to the notion of a soul to be the form of a body. Now, either it is a form by virtue of itself, in its entirety, or by virtue of some part of itself. If by virtue of itself in its entirety, then it is impossible that any part of it should be matter, if by matter we understand something purely potential: for a form, as such, is an act; and that which is purely potentiality cannot be part of an act, since potentiality is repugnant to actuality as being opposite thereto. If, however, it be a form by virtue of a part of itself, then we call that part the soul: and that matter, which it actualizes first, we call the “primary animate.”

Secondly, we may proceed from the specific notion of the human soul inasmuch as it is intellectual. For it is clear that whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the recipient. Now a thing is known in as far as its form is in the knower. But the intellectual soul knows a thing in its nature absolutely: for instance, it knows a stone absolutely as a stone; and therefore the form of a stone absolutely, as to its proper formal idea, is in the intellectual soul. Therefore the intellectual soul itself is an absolute form, and not something composed of matter and form. For if the intellectual soul were composed of matter and form, the forms of things would be received into it as individuals, and so it would only know the individual: just as it happens with the sensitive powers which receive forms in a corporeal organ; since matter is the principle by which forms are individualized. It follows, therefore, that the intellectual soul, and every intellectual substance which has knowledge of forms absolutely, is exempt from composition of matter and form.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The First Act is the universal principle of all acts; because It is infinite, virtually “precontaining all things,” as Dionysius says (*Div. Nom. v*). Wherefore things participate of It not as a part of themselves, but by diffusion of Its processions. Now as potentiality is receptive of act, it must be proportionate to act. But the acts received which proceed from the First Infinite Act, and are participations thereof, are diverse, so that there cannot be one potentiality which receives all acts, as there is one act, from which all participated acts are derived; for then the receptive potentiality would equal the active potentiality of the First Act. Now the receptive potentiality in the intellectual soul is other than the receptive potentiality of first matter, as appears from the diversity of the things received by each. For primary matter receives individual forms; whereas the intelligence receives absolute forms. Hence the existence of such a potentiality in the intellectual soul does not prove that the soul is composed of matter and form.

**Reply to Objection 2:** To be a subject and to be changed belong to matter by reason of its being in potentiality. As, therefore, the potentiality of the intelligence is one thing and

the potentiality of primary matter another, so in each is there a different reason of subjection and change. For the intelligence is subject to knowledge, and is changed from ignorance to knowledge, by reason of its being in potentiality with regard to the intelligible species.

**Reply to Objection 3:** The form causes matter to be, and so does the agent; wherefore the agent causes matter to be, so far as it actualizes it by transmuting it to the act of a form. A subsistent form, however, does not owe its existence to some formal principle, nor has it a cause transmuting it from potentiality to act. So after the words quoted above, the Philosopher concludes, that in things composed of matter and form “there is no other cause but that which moves from potentiality to act; while whatsoever things have no matter are simply beings at once.”

**Reply to Objection 4:** Everything participated is compared to the participator as its act. But whatever created form be supposed to subsist “per se,” must have existence by participation; for “even life,” or anything of that sort, “is a participator of existence,” as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. v). Now participated existence is limited by the capacity of the participator; so that God alone, Who is His own existence, is pure act and infinite. But in intellectual substances there is composition of actuality and potentiality, not, indeed, of matter and form, but of form and participated existence. Wherefore some say that they are composed of that “whereby they are” and that “which they are”; for existence itself is that by which a thing is.

## **Article 6: Whether the human soul is incorruptible?**

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the human soul is corruptible. For those things that have a like beginning and process seemingly have a like end. But the beginning, by generation, of men is like that of animals, for they are made from the earth. And the process of life is alike in both; because “all things breathe alike, and man hath nothing more than the beast,” as it is written. Therefore, as the same text concludes, “the death of man and beast is one, and the condition of both is equal.” But the souls of brute animals are corruptible. Therefore, also, the human soul is corruptible.

**Objection 2:** Further, whatever is out of nothing can return to nothingness; because the end should correspond to the beginning. But as it is written, “We are born of nothing”; which is true, not only of the body, but also of the soul. Therefore, as is concluded in the same passage, “After this we shall be as if we had not been,” even as to our soul.

**Objection 3:** Further, nothing is without its own proper operation. But the operation proper to the soul, which is to understand through a phantasm, cannot be without the body. For the soul understands nothing without a phantasm; and there is no phantasm without the body as the Philosopher says (De Anima i, 1). Therefore the soul cannot survive the dissolution of the body.

**On the contrary,** Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv) that human souls owe to Divine goodness that they are “intellectual,” and that they have “an incorruptible substantial life.”

**I answer that,** We must assert that the intellectual principle which we call the human soul is incorruptible. For a thing may be corrupted in two ways---”per se,” and accidentally. Now it is impossible for any substance to be generated or corrupted accidentally, that is, by the generation or corruption of something else. For generation and corruption belong

to a thing, just as existence belongs to it, which is acquired by generation and lost by corruption. Therefore, whatever has existence “per se” cannot be generated or corrupted except ‘per se’; while things which do not subsist, such as accidents and material forms, acquire existence or lost it through the generation or corruption of composite things. Now it was shown above that the souls of brutes are not self-subsistent, whereas the human soul is; so that the souls of brutes are corrupted, when their bodies are corrupted; while the human soul could not be corrupted unless it were corrupted “per se.” This, indeed, is impossible, not only as regards the human soul, but also as regards anything subsistent that is a form alone. For it is clear that what belongs to a thing by virtue of itself is inseparable from it; but existence belongs to a form, which is an act, by virtue of itself. Wherefore matter acquires actual existence as it acquires the form; while it is corrupted so far as the form is separated from it. But it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself; and therefore it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist.

Granted even that the soul is composed of matter and form, as some pretend, we should nevertheless have to maintain that it is incorruptible. For corruption is found only where there is contrariety; since generation and corruption are from contraries and into contraries. Wherefore the heavenly bodies, since they have no matter subject to contrariety, are incorruptible. Now there can be no contrariety in the intellectual soul; for it receives according to the manner of its existence, and those things which it receives are without contrariety; for the notions even of contraries are not themselves contrary, since contraries belong to the same knowledge. Therefore it is impossible for the intellectual soul to be corruptible. Moreover we may take a sign of this from the fact that everything naturally aspires to existence after its own manner. Now, in things that have knowledge, desire ensues upon knowledge. The senses indeed do not know existence, except under the conditions of “here” and “now,” whereas the intellect apprehends existence absolutely, and for all time; so that everything that has an intellect naturally desires always to exist. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore every intellectual substance is incorruptible.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Solomon reasons thus in the person of the foolish, as expressed in the words of Wisdom 2. Therefore the saying that man and animals have a like beginning in generation is true of the body; for all animals alike are made of earth. But it is not true of the soul. For the souls of brutes are produced by some power of the body; whereas the human soul is produced by God. To signify this it is written as to other animals: “Let the earth bring forth the living soul”: while of man it is written that “He breathed into his face the breath of life.” And so in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes (12:7) it is concluded: “(Before) the dust return into its earth from whence it was; and the spirit return to God Who gave it.” Again the process of life is alike as to the body, concerning which it is written: “All things breathe alike,” and, “The breath in our nostrils is smoke.” But the process is not alike of the soul; for man is intelligent, whereas animals are not. Hence it is false to say: “Man has nothing more than beasts.” Thus death comes to both alike as to the body, by not as to the soul.

**Reply to Objection 2:** As a thing can be created by reason, not of a passive potentiality, but only of the active potentiality of the Creator, Who can produce something out of nothing, so when we say that a thing can be reduced to nothing, we do not imply in the creature a potentiality to non-existence, but in the Creator the power of ceasing to sustain existence. But a thing is said to be corruptible because there is in it a potentiality to non-existence.

**Reply to Objection 3:** To understand through a phantasm is the proper operation of the

soul by virtue of its union with the body. After separation from the body it will have another mode of understanding, similar to other substances separated from bodies...

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Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* I, Q.75. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1920.

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