Thomas Aquinas and the Complex Simplicity of the Rational Soul

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I. Introduction

According to Thomas Aquinas, the rational soul is both the substantial form of the body and a subsistent immaterial substance capable of existing and engaging in acts of intellect and will after its separation from the body at death.[1] In Aquinas's ontology, immaterial substances are pure forms, and are thus completely lacking in any kind of matter and any kind of quantitative parts. Created immaterial substances, however, are mereologically complex in other ways: they are said to be composed of their essence and their existence, as well as various "potential" or "accidental" parts related to their powers and acts of intellect and will. And so, as a subsistent, created, immaterial substance, the rational soul ought to be lacking in any kind of matter and any kind of quantitative parts while at the same time being mereologically complex in the aforementioned ways. And there are indeed several passages in Aquinas's texts that suggest that he does take the rational soul to be both mereologically simple and mereologically complex in the same way that angels are.

In this paper, I argue that Aquinas's account of the mereological complexity of the rational soul introduces several tensions with his understanding of the soul as the substantial form of the body and his larger ontology of the human person, many of which I do not think that

[1] For a general overview of Aquinas's views on the rational soul, see his "Treatise on Human Nature" (*ST*, I, Q. 75-76). In A. 1, A. 4, and A. 8 of Q. 76, Aquinas argues that the rational soul must be the substantial form of the body. In A. 2 of Q. 75, Aquinas argues that the rational soul must be understood to be subsistent, capable of existing and engaging in acts of intellect and will on its own after its separation from the body at death. And, in the prologue to the Treatise, Aquinas characterizes the rational soul as a "spiritual substance" (*spirituali substantia*). Aquinas is careful to point out in Q. 75, A. 2, Ad. 1 and Q. 75, A. 4, Ad. 2, however, that, while the soul can be considered a substance inasmuch as it is a subsistent being, it is not a complete substance possessing its own complete nature, and so is not a substance in the same sense in which a particular human being or a particular angel is a substance. All references to the works of Aquinas are to the Latin versions of the texts available at http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html. All English translations are my own.

Aquinas himself successfully resolves. In what follows, I first provide an overview of several key mereological notions in the thought of St. Thomas, including the notions of part, whole, and composition. After that, I provide an overview of the mereological simplicity and mereological complexity of immaterial substances in Aquinas's ontology, exploring the implications here for the simplicity and complexity of the rational soul. I then introduce several potential concerns for Aquinas's account, all of which might have been avoided had Aquinas instead understood the rational soul to be entirely mereologically simple – serving as the source and subject of, but bearing some other non-mereological relation to, the aforementioned parts. Though Aquinas does not pursue this simpler solution, I will argue that he already has built into his ontology the resources to make such a solution consistent with the rest of his thought.

II. *Pars*, *Totum*, and *Compositio*

For Aquinas, 'part' and 'whole' are correlative terms. Anything that has parts can be called a whole, and anything that can be called a whole has parts. Aquinas distinguishes between several different kinds of wholes and several different kinds of parts across several different texts.[2] Within these discussions, Aquinas recognizes at least four different types of wholes: universal wholes, quantitative wholes, essential wholes, and potential wholes.[3] And each type of whole is said to be composed of a different type of part. Universal wholes are said to be

[2] For some helpful overviews of the various kinds of parts and wholes in Aquinas's ontology, see, for example, (Stump, 2003: Ch. 1); (Brown 2005); (Svoboda, 2012); (Storck, 2014); (Brower, 2014); (Arlig, 2019); as well as the essays included in (Klima and Hall, 2018). The Stump, Brown, and Brower pieces focus mostly on essential parts and the various types of quantitative parts; the Svoboda and Storck pieces provide general overviews of all of the different types of parts and wholes before going on to discuss some particular type in more detail (the focus of the Storck article, for example, is on "integral parts", which include both essential and quantitative parts); the Arlig piece provides a general overview of each of these types of parts and wholes not only in Aquinas but in several other medieval authors as well. Readers interested in better understanding the broader history of these terms and how Aquinas came to have the views that he does on parts and wholes should consult the Arlig piece.

[3] Aquinas mentions quantitative wholes, essential wholes, and potential wholes at *ST*, I, Q. 76, A. 8, Co. and *QDSC*, Q. 1, A. 4, Co. He discusses quantitative wholes, universal wholes, and essential wholes at *In Met*., B. 5, L. 21, N. 1093-1097. And he mentions potential wholes, universal wholes, and integral wholes (which include both essential and quantitative wholes) at *ST*, I, Q. 77, A. 1, Ad. 1, *ST*, II-II, Q. 48, A. 1, Co.; *ST*, II-II, Q. 120, A. 2, Co.; and *ST*, II-II, Q. 128, A. 1, Co.

composed of "subjective parts". A genus, for example, is said to be composed of the species that belong to it. Quantitative wholes are said to be composed of "quantitative parts", and there are at least three types of quantitative parts: functional parts, elemental parts, and spatial parts.[4] Functional parts are those parts of a quantitative whole which can be distinguished according to their function. The organs and limbs of an animal, for example, would be among its functional parts. Elemental parts are the most basic materials of which a material thing is composed. Following Aristotle, Aquinas recognizes four kinds of elements: fire, wind, earth, and water. Each of these elements is such that, while it can be divided, it cannot be decomposed into anything other than itself (splitting water, for example, only ever results in more water, according to Aristotelian chemistry). Spatial parts are quantitative parts in the truest sense of the word: they are the parts of a quantitative whole that result from a division within that whole with respect to quantity. My left-side and my top-half are purely quantitative parts, not serving a particular function and not corresponding to any of the four elements. Anything that possesses matter will possess at least spatial and elemental quantitative parts. As a result, the category of quantitative whole includes every kind of material object: every material substance and every material artifact. Essential wholes are said to be composed of "logical" or "essential" parts. Genus and difference, for example, are said to be the logical parts of a definition. And matter and form are said to be the essential parts of a material substance. A potential whole is said to be composed of powers. As we will see, Aquinas places all created, immaterial substances in the category of potential whole. He also recognizes certain virtues as potential wholes.[5]

[4] Aquinas never enumerates the types of quantitative parts in quite this way, but when discussing the quantitative parts of material substances in various places, these seem to be the three main types that most often come up.
[5] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 48, A. 1, Co.; Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, Q. 120, A. 2, Co.; and Aquinas, *ST,* II-II, Q. 128, A. 1, Co. See also (Lofy, 1959).

The relationship between any whole and its parts is said to be one of composition. The parts are said to compose the whole and the whole is said to be composed of its parts. But Aquinas also seems to recognize certain modes of composition which do not entail the existence of parts. For example, as we will see, Aquinas speaks of all created substances as composed of essence and existence, but he never goes so far as to say that the essence or existence of a thing is a part of that thing.[6] In at least one other context, Aquinas also speaks of the incarnate Christ as composed of two natures while also stipulating that the divine nature cannot properly be called a part.[7] And so it seems that, for Aquinas, while all parts can be said to compose the wholes of which they are parts, there are some things which can be said to compose other things which are nonetheless not parts of those things. Since Aquinas seems to intentionally refrain from using the language of part in describing these cases, in what follows I will use the more neutral term "component" to refer to anything of which something can be composed. According to this usage, all parts are components, but not all components should be considered parts.[8]

In what follows, when I speak of something in Aquinas's ontology as being "mereologically complex" all I mean to say is that that thing possesses some kind of component. And when I speak of something as being "mereologically simple" all I mean to say is that that thing does not possess the kind of component in question. Because there are several different

[6] On the other hand, there are some commentators who think that essence and existence really are best understood as parts of a substance, even if Aquinas himself never explicitly refers to them as such (see, for example, (De Haan, 2014); (Svoboda, 2012: p. 276).

[7] Aquinas, *In. Sent*., B. 3, D. 6, Q. 2, A. 3, Ad 4. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing me to this text.)

[8] What, then, is the difference between a part and a non-part component? What is it that belongs to the notion of 'part' which prevents certain components from satisfying the conditions for parthood? To my knowledge, Aquinas never spells this out for us. And so it is hard to say how much weight this distinction is intended to bear. Fortunately, I do not think that this distinction makes much of a difference for my purposes. And here is why. Aquinas often lists part and non-part components side by side when describing the composition of material substances (see, for example, my discussion of form, matter, existence, and essence in material substance below). And so while part and non-part components must be, in some way, different kinds of components, they seem to bear the same general relation to those things which they compose. Moreover, as we will see, in his discussion of Divine simplicity, Aquinas makes sure to exclude from God not only parts but also non-part components, which indicates that he takes the possession of a non-part component to be a sufficient condition for mereological complexity.

kinds of components, there are several different ways in which something can be mereologically complex, and several different ways in which something can be mereologically simple. Something can possess one kind of component and so be complex in one way but fail to possess another kind of component and so be simple in another way.

Because Aquinas recognizes several different kinds of components, he also recognizes several different ways of enumerating a thing's parts. Aquinas is, in contemporary terminology, a "compositional pluralist", in that he holds that things can have more than one kind of part, and can thus be decomposed in different ways depending on which parts are being considered.[9] Many of these different ways of enumerating a thing's parts are intended to be both exhaustive and exclusive within their domain. So, for example, we can give an exhaustive list of my parts by citing all of my functional parts (my arms, legs, neck, head, torso, etc.) or by citing all of the elements of which I am composed (a certain number of molecules of water, and a certain number of molecules of earth, etc.), or by citing my prime matter, my substantial form, and my various accidental forms. It would be inaccurate, however, to compile a list of my components by citing parts from more than one kind (by citing my arms, my legs, my neck, a dozen of my water molecules, and my substantial form, for example). And so it is important when we speak of the parts of a thing to properly determine which kind of part we are dealing with and to make sure that we are listing that part alongside the right sort of other parts. In what follows, when I intend to refer to two different components of a thing as components of the same kind and so as jointly composing the whole in question, I will refer to each component as the "complement" of the other. And, when necessary, I will also specify whether a component and its complement

[9] See (Brower, 2014: p. 10) and (Arlig, 2018b: pp. 3-4) for more on this. For more on compositional pluralism in contemporary metaphysics, see, for example: (McDaniel, 2010). Compare also to David Armstrong's distinction between mereological and non-mereological composition (see, for example: (Armstrong, 1997: pp. 37, 117, 122, 126, 187)).

exhaustively compose the whole in question or whether there are further complements beyond them.

One final point worth mentioning here pertains to the priority relations that can be said to hold between parts and wholes in Aquinas's ontology. In particular, I would like to focus briefly on relations of ontological priority or "priority in being".[10] To say that x is ontologically prior to y, or, as Aquinas would say, "prior in being" to y, is to say that while y depends for its existence on x, x does not depend for its existence on y. In such case, x can exist without y, but y cannot without x. How, then, does ontological priority work in the case of parts and wholes? There are certain passages in which Aquinas seems to assert that in all composite wholes, relations of ontologically priority always run from part to whole.[11] And, indeed, this claim serves as important premise in one of his key arguments for Divine simplicity.[12] But elsewhere Aquinas explains that there are some kinds of wholes and some kinds of parts to which this does not apply. According to Aquinas, while composite wholes are indeed ontologically posterior to some of their parts, some composite wholes are also ontologically prior to at least some of their parts. For example, complex material artifacts, material artifacts composed of two or more substances, depend for their existence on the particular material substances of which they are composed, and so cannot exist without them.[13] Material substances, on the other hand, do not depend for their existence on the particular functional, elemental, or spatial parts of which they are composed, and so can survive the loss or replacement of those particular parts. Looked at from the

[10] The central text here is Aquinas's *In Met*., B. V, L. 13, but see also: Aquinas, *DPN*, Ch. 4; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. VII, L. 1, Aquinas, *In Met*., B. VII, L. 9; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. VII, L. 10; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. VII, L. 13; Aquinas, *In Phys*., B. VIII, L. 14, N. 1090.
[11] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 3, A. 7, Co.; Aquinas, *SCG*, B. I, Ch. 18, N. 3; Aquinas, *In Sent*. B. I, D. 8, Q. 4, A. 1, s.c.; Aquinas, *CT*, B. I, Ch. 9; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. VII, L. 9, N. 1464.
[12] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 3, A. 7, Co.
[13] This is principally because the form on which an artifact depends for its existence is an accidental form, and an accidental form depends for its existence on the substance in which it inheres. For discussion, see (Brown, 2005: pp. 130-138).

perspective of the parts, in a complex material artifact, the particular substances of which the artifact is composed are such that their existence in no way depends on the existence of the whole, and so they can survive without it. Indeed, for most artifacts, the particular substances of which they are composed are there before the artifact even comes to be, and so are also "temporally prior". In a material substance, however, the particular functional, elemental, and spatial parts of which that material substance is composed actually depend for their existence on the particular wholes to which they belong and so cannot exist apart from those wholes. For example, following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that an eye or a hand separated from the body is no longer an eye or a hand, except equivocally.[14] What this shows is that while it may be true that all wholes are ontologically posterior to at least some of their parts (and I think that this is precisely what Aquinas is getting at in the passages cited above), not all wholes are ontologically posterior to all of their parts. Indeed, the very same whole can be ontologically posterior to some of its parts while also being ontologically prior to others. So, for example, according to Aquinas, a material substance depends for its existence on its essential parts (its form and its matter), but, as we have seen, the material parts of that material substance depend for their existence on it.[15]

Having given a basic overview of several key mereological notions in the thought of St. Thomas, we are now in a position to begin our assessment of his mereology of the rational soul. But before turning to that discussion, let us first consider his account of the mereological complexity of other created, immaterial substances.

III. The Complexity of Angelic Substances

Unlike some of his philosophical predecessors, and even several of his philosophical contemporaries, Aquinas denies that any spiritual substance can be said to include any kind of

[14] See, for example, Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 2, L. 1, N. 226; Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 2, L. 2, N. 239; Aquinas, *QDA*, A. 1, Co.; Aquinas, *QDSC*, Q. 1, A. 2, co. Aquinas, *ST*, III, Q. 5, A. 3, Co., among many other places.
[15] See, for example, Aquinas, *In BT*, Q. 5, A. 3, Co.

matter within its composition.[16] He takes both God and angels to be pure forms, with the result that they are completely lacking in any kind of quantitative parts: no functional parts, no elemental parts, and no spatial parts. He does, however, think that angels are, unlike God, mereologically complex in other ways. According to Aquinas, in any created substance, there is a "real distinction" between the essence of that thing and the existence of that thing.[17] The essence or nature of a thing is the "what-it-is" of that thing, it is that by which a thing is the kind of thing that it is. The existence of that thing is the "that-it-is" of that thing, it is that by which a thing actually exists.[18] Aquinas's motivation for making this distinction is to provide an ontological foundation for the fact that, with the exception of God, no description of what a thing is entails the existence of that thing. As Aquinas explains in his *De Ente et Essentia*, while the distinction between a thing's essence and a thing's existence can be captured conceptually, he does not think that this distinction can be merely a conceptual distinction. For Aquinas, nothing other than God can be identical to its own essence. For every other thing, something more must be present within that thing beyond its essence in order to account for its actual existence.[19]

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[16] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, Q. 50, A. 2; Aquinas, *QDSC*, Q. 1, A. 1; Aquinas, *QQ*, 9, Q. 4, A. 1, Co. The main author that Aquinas associates with the view that spiritual substances are composed of both form and matter is Avicebron (citing his *Fons Vitae* as the source-text for this view). Aquinas's contemporary, St. Bonaventure, also held such a view (see, for example, Bonaventure, *In Sent*., B 2, D. 15, A. 1, Q. 1-3). For an excellent overview of this debate see (Wippel, 2012).

[17] Key passages include: Aquinas, *DPN*, Ch. 4; Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 4; Aquinas, *In BDH*, Ch. 2; Aquinas, *In BT*, Q. 5, A. 4, Ad. 4; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 50, A. 2, Ad. 3; I, Q. 75, A. 5, Ad. 4; Aquinas, *SCG*, II, 52, 1; II, 52, 2; II, 53, 2; II, 54, 8; II, 54, 9; Aquinas, *QDA*, A. 6, Co.; Aquinas, *QDSC*, Q. 1, A. 1, Ad. 8; Aquinas, *QQ*, 9, Q. 4, A. 1, co.; Aquinas, *In Sent*., B. I, D. VIII, Q. V, A. 2, Co.; Aquinas, *DSS*, Ch. 8, 44. The real distinction between the essence of a thing and its existence is typically introduced as a means of distinguishing the ultimate simplicity of God with the immaterial complexity of created immaterial substances, but as several passages attest (*QDA*, Q. 1, A. 6, Co.; *ST*, I, Q. 50, A. 2, Ad. 3; *SCG*, II, 54, 9; *DSS*, Ch. 8, 44.), the distinction is meant to apply to all created substances. For some helpful overviews of the essence-existence composition of created beings in Aquinas, see, for example, (Wippel, 2000: pp. 132-176); (Kerr, 2015: Part 1).

[18] What exactly is this existence of which Aquinas speaks? Is it simply the fact that the thing exists, or is it something else within the thing that explains its actual existence? For a helpful overview of the long-running debate among commentators of Aquinas on this issue, see (White, 2014). In what follows, I take the "act" side of this debate, at least inasmuch as I read Aquinas as taking the existence of a thing to be some kind of further component of that thing beyond its essence.

[19] See Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 4. For discussion, see MacDonald, 1984); (Kerr, 2015).

On Aquinas's account, each angel is composed of a unique, simple essence as well as its own existence (*esse*) or, as it is sometimes called, its "act of existence" (*actus essendi*).[20] In material substances, essences are composite: they include both the form of the thing and its matter.[21] In immaterial substances, however, essences are simple. The essence of an angel just is its substantial form. Once again, there is no matter of any kind, not even "spiritual matter", within the composition of an angel. As a result, an angelic essence is entirely mereologically simple, that is, not composed of any further parts or components. Now, it is also interesting to note here that, on Aquinas's view, while each angelic essence is mereologically simple, it is also true that the essence of each angel is internally distinguishable and intrinsically distinct from every other. No two angelic essences are the same in kind. In material substances, every member of a particular species possesses an essence which is intrinsically indistinguishable from the essence of every other member, but which is made numerically distinct by the matter of each substance and by the individual accidents that it possesses.[22] In the case of angels, however, each angel possesses its own internally distinguishable, and intrinsically distinct, essence. As a result, each angel is the one and only member of its species.[23]

That angels are mereologically complex, in that they are composed of essence and existence, is mostly uncontroversial. Even a cursory glance at Aquinas's account of divine

[20] See, for example, the texts cited in fn. x above.
[21] See, for example, Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 2 and Ch. 6; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 29, A. 2, Ad. 3; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 50, A. 2, Ad. 3; Aquinas, *QDPD*, Q. 9, A. 1, Ad. 6. The matter that is found within the essence of a material substance is said to be its "common matter" as opposed to its "designated matter". What exactly the relationship is between this so-called "common matter" and the prime matter that every material substance is said to possess is, I think, a complex and interesting question, though it is not one that I have the space to consider here.
[22] What exactly the individuating principles of such essences amount to on Aquinas's view is a matter of continuing scholarly debate (see, for example: (Wippel, 2000: pp. 351-375)). But given what Aquinas says in his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate* (Aquinas, *In BT*, Q. 4, A. 2 and A. 4), it seems clear that the "quantitative dimensions" occupied by a material substance at the very moment of its creation, which, importantly, are accidents, play an important role here. *Per impossibile*, if the substantial form or prime matter of a material substance had never been associated with any particular location in time or space, then they would never have composed an individual substance.
[23] See, for example, Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 4; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 50, A. 4, Co.; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 75, A. 7, Co.

simplicity reveals the importance of this claim.[24] More controversially, however, Aquinas also seems to hold that angels also have parts or components beyond their essence and their existence. For example, in his reply to objection three of question fifty, article six of the *Prima secundae*, Aquinas explains that "in angels there are no essential parts, but there are potential parts [*partes secundum potentiam*], inasmuch as the intellect of an angel is perfected by several intelligible species, and its will is related to several things."[25] What this passage tells us is that, according to Aquinas, angels do indeed have simple essences, but also that they are not to be identified with those essences. Angels have further "potential parts" related to their acts of intellect and the states of their wills, which also suggests that they are to be understood as potential wholes. An even clearer statement of the mereological complexity of angels is found in Aquinas's *Quodlibetal Questions*. In the second article of the second question of the second set of quodlibetal questions, Aquinas explains that

> For any thing to which anything can be accidental, which is not included in the account of its nature, in that thing the thing and that which is [*quod quid est*], or the *suppositum* and its nature, differ. For, in the signification of the nature is included only that which is included in the account of the species. But the *suppositum* possesses not only those things that pertain to the account of the species, but also other things which are accidental; and therefore the *suppositum* is signified as a whole. The nature or quiddity, however, is signified as a formal part.
>
> In God alone one does not find any accident over and above His essence, since His existence is His essence, as was said. And therefore in God the *suppositum* is altogether the same as His nature. In an angel, however, it is not altogether the same, since something can be accidental to an angel over and above that which is included in the account of its nature, since the very existence of an angel is over and above its essence or nature. And certain other things are accidental to it which altogether do pertain to the *suppositum*, but not to the nature.[26]

[24] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, Q. 3, A. 4.

[25] Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q. 50, A. 6, Ad. 3. It is worth nothing that the Latin phrase 'partes secundum potentiam', translated here as 'potential parts' can also be translated as 'parts pertaining to power'. As Aquinas is keen to point out elsewhere, powers are accidents (see, for example: Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 77, A. 1, Ad. 5), and so if the powers of an angel are parts of that angel, then angels can be said to possess at least some of their accidents as parts.

[26] Aquinas, *QQ*, 2, Q. 2, A. 2, Co. For recent discussions of this passage and what it means for how we understand the metaphysical composition of angels in the thought of Aquinas, see (Hughes, 1997: pp. 96-97); (Hughes, 2015: pp. 67-74); (Wippel, 2000: Ch. 8).

Here we see that, according to Aquinas, the immaterial "suppositum" or individual substance that is an angel is not identical to its nature or essence, nor is it identical to its nature or essence together with its act of existence. What we learn here is that an immaterial *suppositum* or individual substance includes among its components not only a certain unique nature and an act of existence, but also various "other things [which] are accidental to it". Only God has no accidental characteristics and so is entirely identical to His essence. These passages, then, seem to support an interpretation according to which, for Aquinas, angels are both mereologically simple in that they are completely lacking in any kind of quantitative parts and completely lacking in any kind of essential parts but also mereologically complex in at least two ways: they possess both an essence and an act of existence, and also various potential parts or accidental forms related to their powers and acts of intellect and will. In other words, for Aquinas, it seems that each angel is best understood as a composite entity, composed of three kinds of components: an essence, an act of existence, and various powers.

IV. The Complexity of Rational Souls

If rational souls are indeed, like angels, subsistent, created, immaterial substances, then we should expect that, on Aquinas's view, they too would be both mereologically simple and mereologically complex in the same ways. Like an angel, a rational soul ought to be completely lacking in any kind of matter, and thus any kind of quantitative parts, but also possess its own essence, an act of existence, and various potential and accidental parts. And there are indeed several passages in Aquinas's texts that support such a reading.

First, whether the souls of living things include within their composition some kind of matter, that is, whether the soul is itself a hylomorphic compound, composed of both form and matter, is a question that Aquinas carefully considers in several works. And across all of these

works, Aquinas consistently concludes, contrary to some of his contemporaries, that the soul must be understood to be entirely lacking in any kind of matter.[27] One important corollary to this conclusion is that, for Aquinas, the soul is not the substantial form of the body merely by virtue of possessing some part that plays that role. On the contrary, the soul *just is* the form of the body. As a result, the soul must be understood to be pure form.[28] One of the key arguments that Aquinas gives for thinking that the soul must be understood as lacking any kind of matter and thus any kind of quantitative parts is based on the soul's role as the primary principle of unity in the body, which role it has by virtue of its serving as the substantial form of that body. For example, in his *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas writes:

> Every body is divisible. Now, every divisible thing requires something holding it together and uniting its parts. If, therefore, the soul were a body, it will have something else holding it together and that would be the real soul. For we see that when the soul recedes, the body dissolves. And if this further thing is itself divisible, then either we must eventually come to something indivisible and incorporeal, which will be the soul, or we must proceed to infinity, which is impossible. Therefore, the soul is not a body.[29]

Likewise, in his *Commentary on Aristotle's* De anima, makes use of a similar sort of argument to reach a similar conclusion:

> Different things cannot be united into one thing unless they are united by something else. If therefore there were different souls in the body, it would follow that they would be held together and united by something else. But there is nothing that could unite them or hold them together. Therefore, there are not different souls in the body. That there would be nothing uniting them and holding them together is clear from the following. That which holds together and unifies the souls would be either the body or some other thing. But it is not the body that unites and holds together the soul. On the contrary, the soul holds the body together. For, we see that, with the soul having been separated from the body, the body passes away and falls apart. If, on the other hand, something else holds the souls together, then that thing will be the soul moreso, since it holds together and unites the other souls. And if that soul is the soul moreso, then again it is necessary to ask whether it is itself one or if it has many parts. And if it is said that it has many parts, again it will be asked, what unites that thing? And so on to infinity. If it is said that it is itself one, then

[27] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 75, A. 5; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 6; Aquinas, *QQ*, 3, Q. 8, A. 1.
[28] See citations in previous fn.
[29] Aquinas, *SCG*, II, C. 65, N. 4.

> why did they not say this from the start, that the soul is one? Therefore, the soul is not divisible into quantitative parts, as they said.[30]

As we see in both of these passages, Aquinas argues that the soul, the substantial form of a living body, must itself be unified, it must itself be one, if it is to unify the diverse quantitative parts of the body. Positing any kind of matter within the soul, Aquinas says, would undermine the soul's unity and thus prevent it from being able to unify the various quantitative parts of the body. For Aquinas, then, the rational soul, like other souls, must be mereologically simple in that it must not include within its composition any kind of matter or any kind of quantitative parts. Otherwise, it could not also be the substantial form of the body, for which it serves as the primary principle of unity.

Turning, then, to the rational soul's existence (that is, its *esse* or *actus essendi*), according to Aquinas, the rational soul of a human person is unique among the souls of living material substances in that the act of existence that the person enjoys belongs principally and primarily to her soul. All material substances, and, indeed, as we have seen, all created substances, possess their own act of existence, and this act of existence serves as the complement to the created substance's essence. My cat, Nico, for example, an individual living material substance, possesses an essence comprised of a certain kind of form (a feline soul) and a certain kind of matter, as well as an act of existence and various accidental features. Importantly, in such case, it is Nico, the composite whole, the individual substance or *suppositum*, that possesses the relevant act of existence. Now, like Nico, a human person, too, possesses an essence (in this case comprised of a rational soul and a certain kind of matter), and an act of existence, and various accidental features. For the human person, however, that to which the relevant act of existence belongs, principally and primarily, is the person's rational soul. Aquinas is very clear about this.

[30] Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 1, L. 14, N. 206.

The human person as a whole merely borrows or inherits the existence that it enjoys from his or her rational soul.[31] Indeed, as Aquinas explains in his discussion of the soul's incorruptibility in question seventy-five, article six of the *Prima pars*, it is only because the person's act of existence belongs principally and primarily to the rational soul that the rational soul is able to survive and engage in acts of intellect and will after its separation from the body at death.[32] Now, since the rational soul is the primary possessor of a person's act of existence, and since the rational soul is able to carry that act of existence with it into the afterlife, we might therefore conclude that that act of existence belongs to it as a further component beyond its essence, much like an angel's act of existence belongs to it as a further component beyond its essence. And, indeed, there are passages in which Aquinas seems to say precisely this. In the sixth article of his *Disputed Questions on the Soul*, for example, Aquinas explains:

> in all things other than God, existence and that which exists differ; or, as some say, that which exists and that by which it exists differ. For the existence of a thing is that by which a thing exists, just as running is that by which someone runs. Therefore, since the soul is a certain form subsisting through itself, it can be composed of potency and act, that is, of existence and that which exists, not, however, a composition of form and matter.[33]

And in his discussion of the simplicity of the soul is his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he says:

> the soul is not composed of other things such that those things are parts of its quiddity, nor is this true of any other form, but since the soul is an absolute form, not dependent on matter, which is due to its similarity and nearness to God, the soul has existence in or through itself, which other corporeal forms do not. Hence, in the soul there is found a composition of existence and that which exists which is not found in other forms, since with other corporeal forms the existence in question is not, strictly speaking, the existence of those forms, but the existence of the composites to which they belong.[34]

[31] See for example, Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 76, A. 1, Ad. 5.
[32] Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 75, A. 6.
[33] Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 6, Co.
[34] Aquinas, *In Sent*, B. I, D. 8, Q. 5, A. 2, Ad. 1.

As the passage from question fifty of the *Prima secundae* above suggests, Aquinas thinks that, beyond their simple essences and their numerically distinct acts of existence, created immaterial substances also possess various "potential parts", various powers possessed by those immaterial substances, as well as various accidents related to their acts of intellect and will. Lending support to the claim that, like other created immaterial substances, the rational soul is mereologically complex, Aquinas also describes the rational soul as a "potential whole" possessing "potential parts".[35] What are these "potential parts" of the rational soul? The potential parts of the rational soul are its powers, its capacities, its faculties. As Aquinas explains in his *Commentary on Aristotle's* De anima, "The soul does not have parts unless its powers are called parts of it, in the way that each of the capacities of something having various powers can be called a part of it. And so, to mark out the parts of the soul is to mark out each of its powers."[36] According to Aquinas, a rational soul has several different powers or faculties.[37] He characterizes the powers of the rational soul as including the rational powers (the intellect and the will), the sensitive powers (the external senses, the internal senses, and the sensitive appetite), and the nutritive powers (those pertaining to self-nutrition, growth, reproduction, etc.). According to Aquinas, these powers of the soul (or at least some subset of them) comprise its "potential parts".

One surprising feature of Aquinas's account of the powers of the soul is that he also holds that each of these powers is itself an accident, an accidental form. He says this explicitly in his treatment of the powers of the soul in question seventy-seven of the *Prima pars*, for example:

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[35] See, for example: Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 1, L. 14, 205; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 19, Ad. 4; Aquinas, *QQ*, 10, Q. 3, A. 1; Aquinas, *In Sent*., B. I, D. 8, Q. 5, A. 3, Co.; Aquinas, *In Sent*., B. I, D. 3, Q. 4, A. 2, Co.; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 12, Ad. 15. For some recent discussions on the rational soul as a potential whole in the thought of Aquinas see, for example, (Pasnau, 2002): pp. 144-145); (Wood, 2011); (Svoboda, 2012); (Storck, 2014); (Perler, 2015); (Kahm, 2017); (Kahm, 2019: Part 1); (Arlig, 2018a); (Arlig, 2018b); (Arlig, 2019).
[36] Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 2, L. 5, N. 279.
[37] See, for example: Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 77, A. 2-4. For a more comprehensive list of the soul's powers see (Kahm, 2019: p. 24).

> If 'accident' is taken to mean that which it divided against substance, then there can be nothing between substance and accident, because they are divided according to affirmation and negation, namely as existing in a subject and as not existing in a subject. In this sense, then, since the powers of the soul are not its essence, they must be accidents, and are included in the second species of quality.[38]

According to Aquinas, then, the powers of the soul are actually accidents in the category of quality. Importantly, however, as he goes on to say, these "qualities" are to be understood as *proper* accidents, accidents which "flow" from the essence of the soul, and are thus inseparable from it.[39] Nonetheless, if we take seriously Aquinas's descriptions of those powers as parts of the soul, then he seems to be committed to the claim that the rational soul is itself composed in part of certain accidental forms, as we have seen angels are.

On the other hand, Aquinas is resolute in his conviction that the rational soul is not to be identified with any particular power or even all of its powers taken together.[40] Though he often refers to these various powers as parts of the soul, he is careful to point out that these are not "essential parts" or "parts of the essence" of the soul. Aquinas seems to hold that the soul has, in addition to its powers, some sort of "essence", much like angels. And the "essence" of the soul, like the essence of an angel, is itself simple, which is to say that the soul has no essential parts. As Aquinas explains in his *Disputed Questions on the Soul*, "The powers of the soul are not

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[38] Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 77, A. 1, Ad. 5. See also: Aquinas, *QDSC*, Q. 1, A. 11, Co.

[39] *Ibid.* The language of "flow" here is best understood, I think, in terms of efficient causality. To say that the powers of the soul "flow" from its essence, then, is to say that the essence of the soul is the efficient cause of those powers (see (Wippel, 2000: pp. 266-275) for more on this). It might be argued that it is precisely because the soul is the efficient cause of its powers that those powers cannot be among its parts. For to say that the soul is their cause is to say that those powers depend for their existence on the soul but that the soul does not depend for its existence on those powers. And since wholes depend for their existence on the parts of which they are composed, the soul's powers cannot be parts of the soul. (I thank an anonymous referee for this suggestion.) As we have seen, however, Aquinas recognizes that some wholes can be ontologically prior to some of their parts. (We have even seen that some wholes can be ontologically prior to some of their parts and ontologically posterior to others.) And so the fact that the soul does not depend for its existence on its powers does not by itself prevent the soul from being composed of them. We would just have to understand those powers as dependent parts, like the material parts of a material substance.

[40] See, for example: Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 76, A. 1; Aquinas, *QDSC*, Q. 1, A. 11, Co.; Aquinas, *QQ*, 10, Q. 3, A. 1, Co.; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 12, Co.; Aquinas, *In Sent*., B. I, D. 3, Q. 4, A. 2, Co.

essential parts of the soul as if constituting its essence, but potential parts".[41] Elsewhere Aquinas speaks of the soul as being "one and simple in essence" and yet "manifold in power" or "many by its powers".[42] From these remarks, we can I think conclude that, on Aquinas's account, the rational soul is indeed, like other created, immaterial substances, mereologically simple in that it is completely lacking in any kind of matter and any kind of quantitative parts and completely lacking in any kind of essential parts, but also mereologically complex in the same way: it is composed of a mereologically simple essence, its own act of existence, as well as various powers or faculties that fall under the genus of accident.

Before moving on to discuss some potential concerns for Aquinas's account of the complexity of the rational soul, I would like to briefly reflect on some particular features of this account, especially the implications that this account may have for how we understand the composition of the human person. Based on the texts above, it seems that, on Aquinas's account, a human person's rational soul is composed of a simple, partless essence, along with an act of existence and various powers. Elsewhere we learn that, in the human person, the rational soul, inasmuch as it is the human person's substantial form, is complemented by the person's "common matter" to compose the person's essence.[43] The person's composite essence is then complemented by the person's act of existence (which as we have seen is the very same act of existence that is possessed by the soul), and her various accidents to compose the complete, individual material substance or *suppositum* that is the human person.[44]

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[41] Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 12, Ad. 15.

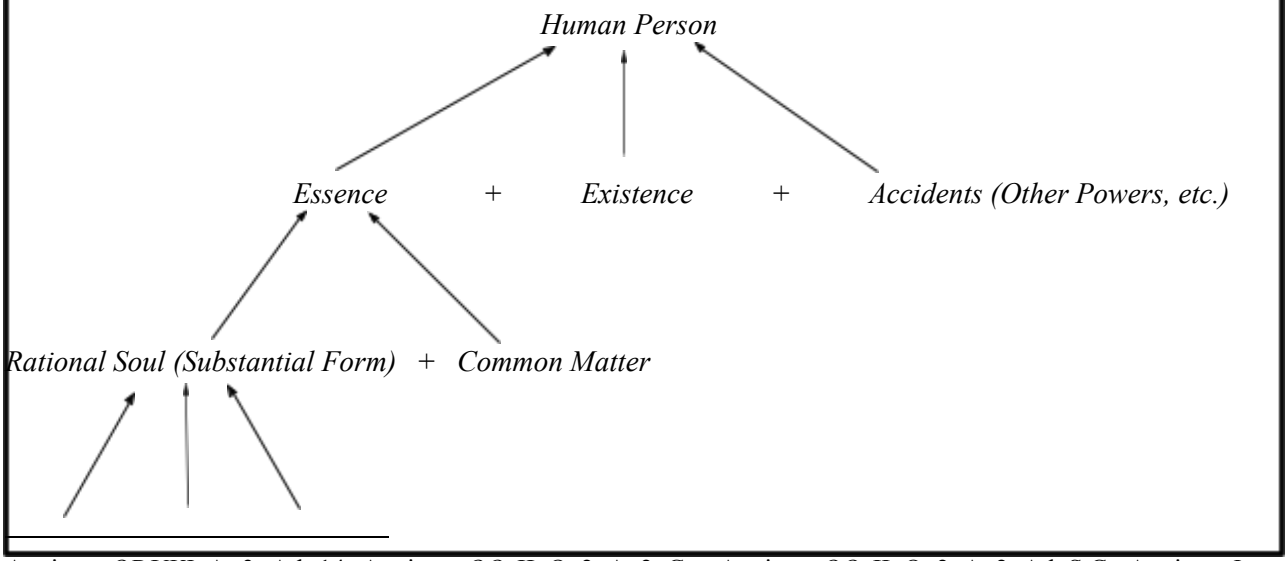
[42] See, for example: Aquinas, *In Sent*., B. I, D. 8, Q. 5, A. 3, Ad. 2; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 8, Ad. 14; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 10, Ad. 17; Aquinas, *QDA*, A. 10, Ad. 2; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 12, Ad. 17; Aquinas, *QDA*, A. 9, Ad. 14.

[43] See, once again, Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 2 and Ch. 6; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 29, A. 2, Ad. 3; Aquinas, *QDPD*, Q. 9, A. 1, Ad. 6.

[44] That a human person's accidents should be construed as further parts of the person outside of her essence and existence is evidenced in several passages across several of Aquinas's works (see, for example, Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 2; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 3, A. 3, Co.; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. 7, L. 5, 1379; Aquinas, *ST*, III, Q. 2, A. 2, Co.; Aquinas, *QDPD*, Q. 9, A. 1, Co.; Aquinas, *QDPD*, Q. 7, A. 4, Co.; Aquinas, *QDUVI*, A. 1, Co.; Aquinas, *QDUVI*, A. 3, Co.;

Right away we can see some interesting implications of this account of the complexity of the rational soul for understanding the composition of the human person. First, on this account, we seem to have two essential layers to the human person. The essence of a human person includes her rational soul, her substantial form, and the person's rational soul includes an essence of its own. And so the person has a sort of essence within her essence. Second, we see that, for Aquinas, the act of existence seems to serve two roles in the mereological structure of the human person, and so that same act of existence is actually found in two different places within that structure. At the lower level, that act of existence serves as the complement to the soul's essence and so is found within the mereological structure of the soul. At the higher level, that same act of existence also serves as the complement to the person's essence, which includes the soul, and so is found within the larger mereological structure of the person. Putting all of these features of Aquinas's account together, we seem to arrive at the following mereological structure of the human person:

Figure 1: The Metaphysical Composition of the Human Person



Aquinas, *QDUVI*, A. 3, Ad. 14; Aquinas, *QQ*, II, Q. 2, A. 2, Co.; Aquinas, *QQ*, II, Q. 2, A. 2, Ad. S.C.; Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 3, L. 8, 706; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. 7, L. 11, 1521-1522; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. 7, L. 12, 1535-1536; Aquinas, *In Met*., B. 8, L. 3, 1710; Aquinas, *QDA*, Q. 1, A. 17, Ad. 10; Aquinas, *In Sent*., B. 1, D. 23, Q. 1, A. 1. That these passages should be seen as supporting such a view would need some explanation. Unfortunately, I do not have the space to enter into this discussion here. See (Skrzypek, 2019) for a defense of this interpretation.

Essence + Existence + Powers (Accidents)

V. Three Concerns for Aquinas's Account

Having completed an overview of various mereological notions in the thought of St. Thomas, an overview of Aquinas's account of the simplicity and complexity of the rational soul, and an overview of the implications of this account for how we are to understand the mereological composition of the human person, I would now like to introduce three concerns for that account, all of which arise precisely because Aquinas takes the rational soul to be complex in the ways described above. Along the way, I will also consider a possible strategy for dealing with these concerns, arguing that this strategy is not wholly successful in resolving them.

My first concern for Aquinas's account of the mereological complexity of the soul is what I will refer to as the "Unity Problem".[45] The concern here is that Aquinas's account of the mereological complexity of the soul would seem to run into tension with the soul's role as the primary principle of unity in the person whose soul it is. As Aquinas explains in the key passage from his *Commentary on Aristotle's* De Anima included above, the soul is able to unify the various quantitative parts of a material substance precisely because it is itself entirely lacking in such parts.[46] Moreover, Aquinas also expresses in that passage that if there were several souls in the body, or, importantly, if a single soul were to have several parts, then there would need to be some further principle of unity to unify those several souls or those several parts of the same soul. Since everything having a diversity of parts requires some explanation for its unity, a mereologically complex soul would appear to lead to an infinite regress, as Aquinas himself argues in the passage in question:

> If... something else holds the souls together, then that thing will be the soul moreso, since it holds together and unites the other souls. And if that soul is the soul moreso, then again it is necessary to ask whether it is itself one or if it has many parts. And if it is said that it

[45] See also (Arlig, 2018b: pp. 6-8); (Arlig, 2018a: pp. 200-201); (Kahm, 2019: pp. 29-30).
[46] Aquinas, *In DA*, B. 1, L. XIV, N. 206.

> has many parts, again it will be asked, what unites that thing? And so on to infinity. If it is said that it is itself one, then why did they not say this from the start, that the soul is one?[47]

The real force of this Aristotelian mode of argumentation, a mode of argumentation that Aquinas himself clearly accepts, may be that it pushes not only quantitative parts outside of its composition, but also the powers of the soul and its act of existence. It might be seen as precluding the possibility of any kind of complexity in the rational soul.

My next concern for Aquinas's account of the complexity of the soul is actually a set of concerns, all pertaining to the relationship between the soul's own components and the other components of the human person.[48] My general concern in this domain is that the sort of mereological complexity that Aquinas seems to admit in the rational soul would also seem to introduce several complications, perhaps even inconsistencies, for his mereology of the human person. First, on Aquinas's account, the rational soul is the substantial form of the body and the substantial form of the human person whose soul it is. But, on Aquinas's account, the rational soul contains within its composition various powers, capacities, or faculties, which, as we have seen, are accidental forms. And so, on this account, it seems that Aquinas is committed to saying that there is at least one kind of substantial form, the substantial form of a human person, that is itself composed in part of accidental forms. This would be a rather significant implication of his view, since according to the traditional Aristotelian categories, substantial forms are said to belong to the category of substance, not to any of the nine categories of accidents.[49] To say that a substantial form includes within its composition various accidental forms, then, would seem to

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[47] *Ibid.*

[48] See Figure 1 above for an illustration of what the metaphysical composition of the human person might look like in light of the mereological complexity of the rational soul. The points that I make in this paragraph should be a bit easier to follow with that same illustration in view.

[49] See, for example, Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 6; *QDA*, A. 1, Ad. 13; *QDA*, A. 2, Ad. 10; *QDV*, Q. 27, A. 1, Ad. 8. Here Aquinas says that both matter and form belong under the category of substance "by reduction", as the essential parts of substances.

necessitate a rather significant revision to these Aristotelian categories.[50] The other accidental forms of the human person beyond the powers of the soul, it should be noted, are found "higher up" in the person's mereological structure, complementing the person's composite essence. And so the person's various accidental forms are not even located in the same place within this structure.

Second, on Aquinas's account, the rational soul contains within its composition the act of existence which it shares with the person whose soul it is. But the rational soul, as the substantial form of the body, is also a part of the human person's composite essence (the other part being common matter).[51] And so, on this account, it seems that Aquinas is committed to saying that at least one kind of essence, the essence of a human person, is itself composed in part of the person's act of existence. This would also be a rather significant implication of his view, since it seemed that the categories of essence and existence were meant to be exclusive categories. It seemed that nothing could belong to both. Notice, finally, that, at the higher level, the person's act of existence is said to complement her essence. But, on the lower level, the person's act of existence is a component of her rational soul, which, as the substantial form of the body, is in turn a component of her essence. On Aquinas's account, then, the person's act of existence is both a complement to the person's essence and also a part of that essence. This is a curious result.[52]

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[50] Tim Pawl raises a similar concern for any view that recognizes the existence of accidental compounds or accidental unities in his (Pawl, 2012). Importantly, an accidental compound or accidental unity, which is a hylomorphic compound consisting of at least one substance and at least one accident, is precisely the sort of thing that the rational soul would have to be on this interpretation.

[51] See, once again, Aquinas, *DEE*, Ch. 2 and Ch. 6; Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 29, A. 2, Ad. 3; Aquinas, *QDPD*, Q. 9, A. 1, Ad. 6.

[52] To be clear, the point is not that there appear to be two acts of existence in the person. Rather, the point is that one act of existence seems to be serving two roles in the person and so is to be found in two different places within the person's mereological structure. Perhaps an analogy will help. It is a bit like saying that one player will serve as both the quarterback and the center. As the center, that player ought to line up on the line of scrimmage and snap the ball to the quarterback behind him. And, as the quarterback, he ought to line up behind the center and receive the snap from the center. So when the player lines up for the next play, where should he stand? Behind the offensive line

Before moving on to discuss my final concern for Aquinas's account of the complexity of the rational soul, I would like to consider one possible strategy for resolving several of the concerns just introduced. Many of the concerns just introduced arise as a result of the identification of the rational soul with the person's substantial form. If the rational soul *just is* the substantial form of the body, and if the rational soul possesses all of the aforementioned parts, then the substantial form of the body possesses all of the aforementioned parts. And, as I have tried to show, introducing mereological complexity into a person's substantial form clashes with many of the things that Aquinas himself says about substantial forms, both concerning their nature and their explanatory roles. One way to get around several of these concerns, then, would be to deny the strict identification of the rational soul with the person's substantial form. One way of doing this would be to understand "substantial form" as a particular role that the rational soul occupies during its embodiment. Another option would be to understand the substantial form as only a part or component of the totality that is the rational soul. Later on, in Section V, I will consider a version of the first strategy. Here I would like to consider the second.[53]

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which already includes himself? And to whom should he snap the ball if he already possesses it at the start of the play?

[53] Though his treatment of these issues is perhaps the most thorough and sophisticated treatment in recent memory, it is unclear to me exactly which of these two proposals Kahn advocates. So, on the one hand, in his earlier (Kahn, 2017), he says the following: "Thus, there are two ways of understanding what the soul is. As the form of the body (or the *essentia animae*) and the principle of substance, the powers of the soul are excluded from our understanding of the soul. But as the soul is a mover or potential whole, however, the powers of the soul are included in our understanding of soul. But it is the same soul that is a principle in two different ways, that is, as the formal principle of material substance and as the principle of powers and operations" (p. 119). And this sounds a bit like the first proposal. But on the other hand, in his more recent book, (Kahn, 2019), he states: "For Aquinas, the powers of the soul are called its parts, not as parts of the essence of the soul, but as parts of its total power (*totalis virtutis eius*)—as it might be said that the power of the bailiff is part of the total power of the royal court. When Aquinas calls the powers parts of the soul, he does not mean that these are parts of the soul itself. The word 'soul' is used in a different sense here than it is used when distinguishing the essence of the soul from its powers, that is, when substance is divided from accidents. When Aquinas uses the term 'essence of the soul' (*essentia animae*) he is almost always distinguishing between the soul and its powers. However, when the powers are the soul's parts, the word 'soul' includes the powers, its inseparable accidents. Here the whole soul signifies the soul's total power. The image is that of an entire court in which the power of all of its various members add up to some kind of total force" (pp. 44-45). And this sounds a bit more like the second proposal. So I am not quite sure how to classify his interpretation. Perhaps what he means to say is that the term 'soul' is itself ambiguous, sometimes referring to just the substantial form and other times referring to that form and its powers. In that case we ought to determine which use of the term is the primary sense of the term and which is a permissible though non-literal sense of the term. If it

The proposal under consideration is that the substantial form is only part of the rational soul. On this proposal, the rational soul is understood as a composite entity, composed of the substantial form of the body together with an act of existence and various powers (principally, intellect and will, since these are the powers that it can actualize in separation). On this view the substantial form of the body is identified not with the whole soul but with the essence of the soul. The rational soul is essentially the form of the body, but that is not all that there is to the rational soul. The rational soul is also a subsistent spiritual substance, with an act of existence and powers of intellect and will. Call this the "Formal-Core Model".[54] Notice how identifying the substantial form with the essence of the rational soul would allow Aquinas to avoid several of the concerns raised above. Because the essence of the rational soul is entirely mereologically simple, completely lacking in any kind of parts or components, it can serve as the primary principle of unity for the various parts of the human person without introducing an infinite regress. Because the essence of the rational soul excludes its various powers, Aquinas need not admit that the person's substantial form is in part composed of accidental forms. And because the essence of the rational soul excludes its act of existence, Aquinas need not admit any kind of *esse* within the person's composite *essentia*.

Despite the clear advantages of understanding the relationship between the person's substantial form and her rational soul in this way, I think that there are also at least two reasons for rejecting this model as an interpretation of Aquinas. First, it conflicts with what Aquinas himself says about the relationship between the person's substantial form and her rational soul. As we saw in his discussion of whether the soul includes any kind of matter within its composition, one of the reasons that Aquinas gives for rejecting this view is that it would mean

is the former, then it looks like Kahn is actually advocating something like the simple model that I articulate below. If it is the latter, then that is the view that is the target of my objections.

[54] This seems to be the way that Perler interprets Aquinas (see his (Perler, 2015: pp. 105-114)).

that the soul is not the form of the body, but that only that one part of it is. Now, in these contexts it is clear that Aquinas intends to reject the claim that the soul is composed of form and matter, not form, existence, and power. But, importantly, his rejection of any hylomorphic composition within the soul is a result of a more general principle, that the soul must be wholly the form of the body. And this more general principle would seem to exclude the possibility that it have anything at all within it beyond that form.

The second reason for rejecting this Formal-Core interpretation is that it still does not completely resolve the unity problem. For, on this interpretation, the rational soul is still mereological complex and so still requires some cause, some explanation for its robust internal unity. Let us return once more to the key passage: *In DA*, B. 1, L. 14, N. 206. Here Aquinas explains that if the soul were not entirely mereologically simple, that is, if it were to possess parts, then there would need to be something that unites those parts. And, importantly, he says, following Aristotle, that whatever it is that unites those parts, *that* thing is really the soul ("*magis"* or "*maxime anima"*). What we learn here, then, is that, according to Aquinas, whatever it is that lies at the center of the human person uniting all of its other components, precisely by lacking such components, *that* is the person's substantial form, *that* is the person's soul. As a result, while the Formal-Core Model does have some clear interpretive advantages, it is not clear to me that it does wholly resolve the above concerns or accurately capture the views of Aquinas.

Returning, then, to my concerns for Aquinas's account of the complexity of the rational soul, my final concern is what I will refer to as the "Homunculus Problem".[55] According to Aquinas's account, a human person's rational soul includes within its composition its own simple, partless essence, its own act of existence, and several of its own powers or capacities,

[55] See also (Kenny, 1971). Kenny's target is any view that reifies the will or some other faculty of the mind in such a way that it can be said to act on behalf of the human person in which it resides. My concern here is not with any faculty of the soul but with the soul itself.

which include the faculties of intellect and will. A creeping worry for this proposal is that this would seem to give the rational soul too much autonomy, too much of its own agency. On this model, it seems that the rational soul has just about everything that it needs in order to count as a person in its own right. It has its own essence or nature, it can exist on its own, and it has the necessary hardware to engage in acts of intellect and will. Based on our earlier discussion of the mereological composition of created, immaterial substances above, we can now see that the rational soul possesses all of the same components that such autonomous creatures do. It is almost as if each of us has a minor angel within us.

Now, Aquinas does say that the rational soul is, strictly speaking, not a person in its own right, at least in the metaphysical sense, and is to be carefully distinguished from other created, immaterial substances in that it is not complete in its species.[56] But even if the rational soul does not meet all of the conditions for strict, metaphysical personhood, it is still the case that whatever existence the human person enjoys, and whatever powers of intellect and will it possesses, it receives all of these from its rational soul. And so it seems that, on Aquinas's account, the human person possesses her act of existence and performs acts of intellect and will, in a merely derivative sense. It seems that it is the soul that possesses that act of existence and performs those acts of intellect and will in the strict, primary sense, and we can say that the human person does so merely because it possesses as its substantial form a rational soul which actually does so.[57] Even if the rational soul is not, strictly speaking, a person in its own right, on this account, it is still, in some sense, an agent: it is the source and subject of all acts of understanding and volition. The human person who possess a rational soul seems, on this account, to be no more than a sort of automaton, driven by, and owing its existence to, something operating within it.

[56] See, for example, Aquinas, *ST*, Q. 75, A. 2, Ad. 1 and Q. 75, A. 4, Ad. 2.
[57] See (Carl, 2019) for more on this.

And thus the human person's own personhood seems in a way threatened by the subsistent, immaterial substance acting within it.

VI. Simpler Souls?

There are, then, several potential concerns for Aquinas's account of the complexity of the rational soul, concerns which arise precisely because of the way in which Aquinas understands that complexity. Notice that if Aquinas were to instead hold that the rational soul, as the substantial form of the human person, were entirely mereologically simple, possessing no parts of its own but bearing some other non-mereological relation to the sorts of parts discussed above, then this would almost immediately help him to avoid the concerns that I have raised here. If the rational soul were not mereologically complex in the ways outlined above, then it would not require anything outside of itself to unify it, it would not be composed of its own essence or act of existence in addition to the essence and act of existence possessed by the composite human person of which it is a part, and it would not be composed of its own faculties of intellect and will (even if it could still be said to be in some sense responsible for those faculties possessed by the human person). On such a view, these sorts of complexities would be present in the composite human person, in that larger individual substance or *suppositum* of which the soul is a part, but not in the soul. In such case, the act of existence and the powers of the soul might bear some intimate relationship to the soul (it may still be said to be both their source and subject), but those things would be, strictly speaking, components of the larger whole that is the human person, not the soul itself.

One concern for this solution is that it would seem to undermine Aquinas's own arguments for the uniqueness and subsistence of the rational soul. If the rational soul does not possess within its composition its own act of existence and its own powers of intellect and will,

in what way is it to be distinguished from the souls of other creatures, and by what means could the soul possibly survive the death of the body? One way in which we might preserve the uniqueness of the rational soul, both in this life and in the next, and explain how it is that the soul can exist after the death of the body, all while holding that the rational soul, as substantial form, includes no complexity within its composition, is to suggest that the rational soul might be entirely mereologically simple *only while it is serving as the substantial form of the body*. The proposal is as follows. The human person's act of existence and its powers of intellect and will belong primarily and in the first place to the rational soul as their source and subject. While it is serving as the substantial form of the body, and of the human person whose soul it is, the rational soul might be said to "empty" itself of these components, passing them on to the human person in such a way that they become parts of the larger composite.[58] We might understand the act of existence and the powers of intellect and will as, in a way, "flowing up" from the soul and into the human person. Upon the separation of the soul from the body at death, however, the act of existence and the powers of intellect and will might at that point be said to "retract back" into the soul, establishing the separated soul as a mereologically complex immaterial substance, composed of its own (incomplete) essence, as well as the act of existence and powers of intellect and will that were "on loan" to the human person during its embodiment. When the soul is reacquainted with the body at the resurrection, the soul's act of existence and powers of intellect and might then be said to once again "flow up" into the human person of which the soul is once more a part. We might call such a model of the rational soul's embodiment, and the "mereological flux" that it entails, the "Kenotic Model".[59] Is the Kenotic Model philosophically

[58] Despite the potentially misleading turn of phrase here, I do not intend to imply that the soul must somehow pre-exist the body on this view. The soul might be said to "empty" itself right from the very first moment of its existence.

[59] What I am proposing is, in a way, the reverse of what Marco Stango proposes in his (Stango, 2020). Stango suggests that the soul empties itself of some part of its being at death, whereas I am proposing that the soul, in a way, empties itself during its embodiment.

plausible? Could Aquinas have held such a view? I think that this is a view worth considering further. Though I do not have the space here to give the view full consideration, I would like to close by considering one further objection that might be raised to the proposal.

Perhaps the most significant concern that one might have about the proposal that Aquinas might have held the rational soul to be entirely mereologically simple while serving as the substantial form of the body is that it would seem to impinge upon God's own absolute simplicity. For, on such a proposal, it would appear that the rational soul is equal to God in its simplicity in such a state; neither the embodied rational soul nor God has any parts whatsoever. But surely no created thing could ever be equal to God in its simplicity!

While Aquinas himself is never required to consider such an objection, since he himself seems to regards the rational soul as, unlike God, mereologically complex in the ways outlined above, I would like to suggest that Aquinas does have the resources within his own ontology for reconciling such a proposal with the rest of his thought, and in particular, with God's unique simplicity. I would like to begin by pointing the reader to the place where Aquinas himself discusses the simplicity of God most clearly: question three of the *Prima pars*.[60] A peculiar feature of this question of the *Summa*, the main question in which Aquinas investigates the nature of divine simplicity, is that it does not end with the conclusion that God is absolutely simple in every way. This certainly is the conclusion of the seventh article of question three. But there are eight articles included in this question. In question three, Aquinas includes an additional article (article eight), which comes after he has already concluded that God must be absolutely simple in article seven. Article eight, which Aquinas deliberately includes in his discussion of divine simplicity, addresses the issue of whether God, Who has already been shown to be absolutely simple in the seven preceding articles, enters into the composition of any other thing.

[60] Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 3.

Why is this issue raised here? I think it is significant that Aquinas considers in this article whether God is a *formal* part of any other thing. This suggests that one of the main purposes of the article is to distinguish God from other forms, and, in particular, from substantial forms. On the Kenotic Model that I have proposed, substantial forms are just as simple as God in all of the ways outlined in articles one through seven of question three. And so Aquinas must establish some other way in which substantial forms can be distinguished from God. And the way in which they are so distinguished is that substantial forms are essential parts of individual substances, whereas God is no part of anything else. Notably, if substantial forms were complex in any of the ways outlined in the earlier articles, Aquinas would not need to introduce this way of distinguishing substantial forms from God in article eight. The larger lesson here, I think, is that, even though some forms, the substantial forms of created substances, are equal to God in their simplicity, they do not impinge upon His uniqueness. What Aquinas is telling us in article eight is that only if there were complete substances, subsistent entities that are also complete in themselves, and so are in no way parts of larger wholes, that were mereologically simple would this pose a threat to the uniqueness of God. For, any substance, or any form, that is not complete in its own species, as Aquinas clearly says of the rational soul,[61] in some way depends upon the other parts with which it is associated and the composite whole of which it is a part. And this sort of dependence is in no way to be found in God.

In support of this interpretation of Aquinas's discussion of divine simplicity in question three, consider the following passage from Aquinas's earlier *Commentary on the Sentences*:

> everything that proceeds from God in a diversity of essence falls short of His simplicity. But from the fact that it falls short of His simplicity, it need not be the case that that thing falls into composition; just as from the fact that something falls short of the highest goodness, it need not be the case that it falls into evil. Therefore, I say that there are two sorts of created things. For there are some

[61] See citations in fn. 1 above.

> created things that have complete existence in themselves, such as human beings and other things of that sort, and such creatures fall short of divine simplicity in such a way that they fall into composition. For, since in God alone is His existence His quiddity, in any creature, corporeal or spiritual, it is necessary that there be found in it both the quiddity or nature of the thing and its existence, which it acquires from God, Whose essence is His existence; and every such creature is composed of existence or that by which it is and that which is. There are also other creatures which do not have existence in themselves, but only in other things, like prime matter, like any form, or like a universal; for it is not the existence of anything other than a particular subsisting in a nature, and such creatures do not fall short of simplicity in such a way that they are composite. For if it is said that such a creature is composed out of its own nature and the relationships by which it is related to God or to that with which it is composed, again it is asked concerning those relationships: are they things or not? And if they are not things, they do not make a composition; but if they are things, they themselves are not related by means of other relationships but by themselves: since a relation is that which refers to something through itself not through another relation. Hence, one will have to arrive at something which is not composite, but yet which falls short of the simplicity of the First Cause: and this defect is accounted for in two ways: either because the thing in question is divisible in potency or by accident, like prime matter, a form, or a universal; or because it is able to enter into composition with another thing, which divine simplicity does not permit.[62]

Here Aquinas explains that something can altogether lack parts but still fall short of the simplicity of God. And as one of the key examples of entities in his ontology for which this is true, he cites "any form". He then goes on to give an argument for why there must be entities that altogether lack parts but still fall short of God's simplicity. As Aquinas explains, if every part of a composite substance were itself composite, this would introduce an infinite regress. At the very end of the passage, Aquinas also explains that one of the main ways in which those entities that are altogether lacking in parts still fall short of God's simplicity is that such entities enter into, or can enter into, the composition of other things. This would seem to confirm my interpretation of article eight of question three of the *Prima pars* above.

What we learn from the passages above, then, is that, according to Aquinas himself, it is possible (and indeed necessary) for some substantial forms to be entirely mereologically simple,

[62] Aquinas, *In Sent*. B. I, D. 8, Q. 5, A. 1, Co.

composed of no parts of their own, without the simplicity of those forms impinging in any way upon the unique simplicity of God. As a result, it looks like Aquinas has the resources already in his ontology to reconcile the mereological simplicity of the rational soul, the substantial form of the human person, with the unique simplicity of God. Divine simplicity need not stand in the way of holding that the rational soul, while it serves as the substantial form of the body, is entirely mereologically simple, composed of no further parts or components of its own. If the potential concerns for Aquinas's account of the complexity of the rational soul that I have introduced above have any kind of force, then the larger lesson here may be that even though the simpler solution to those concerns is not one that Aquinas himself ever pursues, perhaps what my arguments have shown is that, based on metaphysical principles that he himself accepts, it ought to have been.[63]

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