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'ESSE' AND HUMAN INDIVIDUATION IN THE THOUGHT  
OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

by Linda Farmer

Thesis presented to the School of Graduate Studies  
and Research of the University of Ottawa in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy.



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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Preliminary Remarks:

In recent years, several articles have been written which bear upon the problem of human individuation. Most of this secondary literature, however, focuses primarily on the individuation of material substances and only secondarily on the specific problem of human individuation.

Assuming that human beings are individuated in the same manner as other corporeal substances, the question addressed by this secondary literature is not so much what accounts for the fact that each human being is individual or is an individual, but whether it is matter considered under 'terminate' dimensions or matter considered under 'interminate' dimensions which properly accounts for the individuation of corporeal substances, including human beings.<sup>1</sup>

From this secondary literature, it would appear that the central question has already been answered: prime matter is that principle intrinsic to human beings which accounts for *this* man being this *particular* man. What remains to be

answered is what kind of dimensions prime matter must be considered to have.

Yet, some authors disagree that the central question has been answered and deny that prime matter under dimensions of quantity is sufficient to account for the fact that *this* human being is this *particular* human being. In its lieu, they have advanced either the human substantial form or the act of being.<sup>2</sup>

Given that what is sought is an intrinsic principle, it is not surprising that there are as many possible answers to the problem of human individuation as there are constitutive principles of the human being. That each of these three principles (prime matter, substantial form, and *esse*) have been advanced as the principle of human individuation is, however, problematic. Which one properly accounts for human individuation?

That such different answers to the problem of human individuation can be advanced is certainly in part due to the fact that St. Thomas, among his uncontested writings<sup>3</sup>, does not devote a special treatise to individuation nor, specifically, to human individuation. It cannot be denied, either, that such different views on the problem are possible because each can *claim* textual support in the works of St. Thomas.

This fact has led some to put forward that St. Thomas' position on the question developed or changed over the course of his works.<sup>4</sup> Others have, however, disagreed.<sup>5</sup> A chronological analysis of St. Thomas' texts, although it may be a viable method, may not be the only method of resolving the problem, however.

It seemed to me, as I read the secondary literature more closely, that the different answers given to St. Thomas' position on human individuation depended more upon how the problem was *approached* than upon research restricted to a particular period of St. Thomas' writings. Two distinct approaches to the problem of human individuation appear to be adopted in the secondary literature: a logical approach and an ontological approach. If this is so, another method of resolving the problem would be to show that only one of these approaches should be adopted. What would, then, remain to be determined is what conclusions may be drawn from it concerning the problem of human individuation.

## 2. The Objective of the Present Work.

The primary objective of this thesis is to provide an answer to the question: What intrinsic principle in human beings accounts for his or her particularity, individuality?

In other words, what makes Carlos *this* particular human being and Linda *that* particular human being?

Rather than attempt to provide the answer to this question through a chronological analysis of St. Thomas' texts, we will undertake the alternative method just advanced, that is, determine which of the two approaches to the problem of human individuation in the secondary literature, the logical approach or the ontological approach, should be adopted and, through that approach, draw the appropriate conclusions concerning human individuation.

Taking as our point of departure the Categories of Aristotle and interpreting these as having primarily an ontological import, we will first attempt to show that a logical approach misconstrues the problem of human individuation and contravenes some of St. Thomas' basic tenets about human beings, such as the nature of the intellect and the immortality of the soul.

Second, approaching the problem ontologically, we will attempt to show that it is *esse*, the act of being, which in human beings accounts for their individuality and that neither this approach nor the conclusions drawn from it contravene St. Thomas' basic tenets about human beings.

In summary, then, this thesis addresses, in the context of St. Thomas' works, the problem of human individuation and

attempts to resolve this problem through the adoption of an ontological approach rather than a logical approach. It is not concerned with either angelic individuation or the individuation of corporeal substances other than human beings. Although mention is made of angels and non-human corporeal substances, these are mentioned solely to provide the reader with a comparison through which he or she may more readily grasp what is argued concerning the human being.

### 3. The Structure of the Thesis.

In the first chapter of this thesis, it is by no means our intention to provide a full exegesis of Aristotle's conception of substance, his hylomorphic theory, or his psychology. Rather, the aim of this chapter is merely to sketch Aristotle's views on these matters in order to, then, point out how St. Thomas departs from a strictly Aristotelian analysis when he advances that the human soul is subsistent.

In Chapter II, we attempt to sketch, as concisely as possible, how the problem of human individuation is addressed by those who adopt a logical approach. Emphasis is laid on how the problem is formulated, how substance,

matter, and form are conceived, and how the problem of human individuation is resolved.

In chapter III, we argue that a logical approach to the problem of human individuation should not be adopted because, on the one hand, its formulation of the problem belongs more within a Platonic context of discourse than an Aristotelian/Thomistic one and, on the other hand, because one or more of St. Thomas' tenets concerning human beings is contravened or, at least, cannot be accounted for when such an approach is adopted. In order to reach these conclusions, we draw upon what has been set out in Chapter I and, also, introduce some of St. Thomas' tenets concerning human beings: that the human soul is subsistent, that the separated human soul is individual, and that the human intellect is individually possessed.

Adopting an ontological approach in Chapter IV, we attempt to show that it is *esse*, the act of being, which accounts for *this* man being *this particular* man. In order to do so, we shall, first, discuss how St. Thomas' *esse* differs from Aristotle's 'being', what the distinction between *esse* and essence is of, and how *esse* is possessed by different creatures. Then, based on the Thomistic principle that act has priority over potency, we shall argue that *esse*, as that act which makes the human being to be, is the act which individuates human beings.

#### 4. A Note on Methodology.

Two remarks on terminology are in order. First, lest there be any misunderstanding, the term 'individuation' is not here used to refer to "the process by which an individual acquires the feature or features which make it the individual it is, i.e. the process by which the universal 'man' becomes a man."<sup>6</sup> By assuming the extra-mental existence of the universal 'man', such a definition, we believe, belongs more within a Platonic context than in an Aristotelian/Thomistic context. Rather, we take 'individuation' to refer to 'that intrinsic principle which is the source or basis of the particularity or individuality of an individual'. For example, the question 'what is the principle of human individuation?' is, for all intents and purposes, the same as 'what principle accounts for the particularity or individuality of this human being?'

Second, the term 'esse' is either italicized in the text to indicate that the Latin is preserved or translated as 'act of being'. Neither 'existence' or 'that it is' are utilized as translations of 'esse' because these merely point to a fact of existence and, hence, do not convey the import of *esse* as an act.

Although some words will be preserved in their original Latin, all quotations will be in English. There are two

reasons for this. First, I wish this thesis to be easily accessible to those readers who may have no Latin at all, and who neither have the time nor the patience to be constantly referring to translations. Second, I do not, as yet, possess the level of proficiency in the Latin which I believe should be possessed by those who cite exclusively in the Latin.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. Joseph Bobik seems to be an authority on this matter. See, e.g.: "The Individual Body," Readings in the Philosophy of Nature, (H.J. Koren, ed.), (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1964), pp. 327-340; "Dimensions in the Individuation of Bodily Substances," Philosophical Studies (Ireland), IV (December, 1954), pp. 60-79; "La Doctrine de saint Thomas sur l'Individuation des Substances Corporelles," La Revue Philosophique de Louvain, 51 (1953), pp. 5-41. Some others who address the problem in this way are Robert O'Donnell, "Individuation: An Example of the Development in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas," The New Scholasticism, 33 (January, 1959), pp. 49-67; Henry Renard, The Philosophy of Being, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1946); Joseph Owens, "Thomas Aquinas: Dimensive Quantity as Individuating Principle," Mediaeval Studies, 50 (1988), pp. 279-310.
2. Substantial form as the true basis for human individuality has been advanced, for example, by Montague Brown in his article "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Individuation of Persons," American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, LXV (Winter 1992), pp. 29-44; David Winiewicz, on the other hand, has argued that the ultimate origin of individuality is rooted in *esse* in his article "'Alteritas' and Numerical Diversity", Dialogue (Canadian Philosophical Review), XVI (1977, #4), pp. 693-707.
3. For questions concerning the authenticity and/or chronology of the works of St. Thomas, see J. A. Weisheipl, Friar Thomas d'Aquino. His Life, Thought, and Work, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, ), pp. 351-405.
4. See, e.g., M.-D. Roland-Gosselin in his Le 'De Ente et Essentia' de S. Thomas D'Aquin, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1948), chap. XI (especially p. 113).
5. See, e.g., Joseph Owens' article "Thomas Aquinas: Dimensive Quantity as Individuation Principle", Mediaeval Studies, 50 (1988), especially pp. 281 and 303.
6. Jorge J. E. Gracia, Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages, (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), p. 19.

## CHAPTER I

### THE CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

The aim of this chapter is to clarify some of the fundamental Aristotelian notions underlying the discussion of the problem of human individuation: substance and hylomorphism (matter and form). In order to achieve this aim we shall, first, delineate how these notions were understood by Aristotle and, then, discuss St. Thomas' departure from a strictly Aristotelian analysis of the human substantial form or soul.

#### 1. Aristotelian Background to the Problem.

What is, according to Aristotle, substance? Why is a hylomorphic composition introduced into substances? How are matter and form to be understood? It is by no means our intention to provide the reader with a definitive or even complete exegesis of Aristotle's thought concerning these questions. The aim of this section is merely to provide, as best we can, a general sketch of Aristotle's thought on these matters.

One assumption is made in this discussion which should be noted. We interpret the Categories of Aristotle as

having, *primarily*, an ontological import. Being aware that this is a much disputed point in the secondary literature on Aristotle and, yet not being able to provide a full justification for this assumption within the parameters of this thesis, we refer the reader to the Doctoral thesis of Geoffrey Lusignan<sup>1</sup> which helped form our opinion on this matter.

a) Substances.

For Aristotle, substances are, before anything else, individual things. Substance, he writes, "in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word, is that which is neither predicable of a subject nor present in a subject; for instance, the individual man or horse."<sup>2</sup>

Substances are 'things': plants, trees, dogs, horses, men. It is these which, for Aristotle, properly are for "...the question [...] what being is, is just the question, what is substance?"<sup>3</sup> Whatever properly is, then, is a substance. But substances are particular. What properly is is not 'man' in general or the universal 'horse' but *this* particular man, *this* particular horse for "...who understands 'being itself' to be anything but a particular substance?"<sup>4</sup>

Thus grounding reality in substances presented Aristotle with an important epistemological problem: how is it that we know universals, constitute universals, when what is is individual, is an individual substance? Although Aristotle advanced a theory of abstraction to resolve this difficulty, what is of primary interest to us here is not his theory of knowledge but that the point of departure of his metaphysics is that the principal category of being is substance and substances are, according to him, individual.

That St. Thomas also understood Aristotle to mean by substance individual things is quite clear: "It must be said that an entity in the proper sense of the term is an individual in the genus of substance. For the Philosopher says in the Categories<sup>5</sup> that by first substances we unqualifiedly mean entity..."<sup>6</sup>

To reiterate, substances are particular things: this dog, this horse, this man. Aristotle does, however, introduce a composition of matter and form into material substances. If it is substances which properly are, what sort of status do these constituents have?

#### b) Hylomorphism.

Because substances are particular, any analysis relative to them will be an analysis relative to already

individual substances. The ontological structure of matter and form is no exception. As an analysis relative to material substances, it is an analysis relative to already individual material things.

This structure, elaborated by Aristotle in his Physics, cannot, then, answer to the problem of individuation. If the problem is not how to account for the particularity of substances, what problem is hylomorphism an answer to?

By advancing that reality is grounded in substances, Aristotle was not only faced the aforementioned epistemological problem but the problem of becoming, of change. As Francois Nuyens points out, it is as an answer to this problem that Aristotle introduces the structure of matter and form: "En ces notions [matter and form] se trouve la contribution fournie par Aristote (contribution qui paraît bien être une solution définitive), à l'explication du monde du devenir [...]"<sup>7</sup>

Having refuted the opinion of Parmenides that change and movement are impossible in an early section of his Physics<sup>8</sup>, Aristotle advances three principles of becoming, the first two of which properly compose substances: the substrate (matter), form, and privation.<sup>9</sup> Immediately following that explanation he writes:

We will now proceed to show that the difficulty of the early thinkers, as well as our own, is solved in this way alone. "

The first of those who studied science were misled in their search for truth and the nature of things by their inexperience, which as it were thrust them into another path. So they say that none of the things that are either comes to be or passes out of existence, because what comes to be must do so either from what is or from what is not, both of which are impossible. For what is cannot come to be (because it is already), and from what is not nothing could have come to be (because something must be present as a substratum). So too they exaggerated the consequence of this, maintaining that only Being itself is.<sup>10</sup>

That Aristotle believed that the structure of matter and form was an answer to the problem of change is quite clear from this passage. This is not to deny that forms do not play a role in his theory of knowledge. Although we cannot address the issue properly within the scope of this thesis, one remark should be made concerning their role in the acquisition of knowledge. That forms are integral to the acquisition of knowledge is, no doubt, true. Universals are constituted through a synthesis of individual forms represented as the images of particulars.<sup>11</sup> Although it is also true that all universals are forms, forms are not in re universals. That would imply that Aristotle believed that universals have an existence outside of the mind in things. Universals, qua universals, are not present in things<sup>12</sup>, are not the forms of the things themselves, but are constituted from particular forms.

What is still unclear is how Aristotle understood the components, matter and form, of this structure. As intrinsic

principles of substances, can they also be substances themselves? If so, Aristotle falls prey to dualism. If not, in what way can they be said to be when it is substances which properly are?

According to Prof. Nuyens, Aristotle denies to both matter, the principle of potency, and form (entelechy) the status of substance, their 'being' being dependent on the concrete, individual substance:

L'entéléchie est, en effet, une cause intrinsèque de l'être (ou de la substance); elle ne peut, à son tour, être dite un 'être', sinon dans un sens affaibli, analogique. L'entéléchie (et de même la puissance) n'existe pas en elle-même, mais seulement en fonction de la substance.<sup>13</sup>

To summarize, what are are particular substances. Neither matter nor form exist of themselves but are ontological constituents of particular substances which, along with privation, account for becoming in the material universe. Furthermore, although the forms of entities, of substances, play an important role in the acquisition of knowledge, they are not in re universals.

Aristotle applied this ontological structure to human beings in his De Anima. Is it applied to humans without reservation? Is the human soul, human substantial form, also denied the status of substance? How does the intellect 'fit' into the hylomorphic 'schema'?

c) De Anima

The application of hylomorphism to human beings in De Anima marks the ultimate term of the evolution of Aristotle's psychology.<sup>14</sup> Prior to this work, Aristotle had not attempted to apply his theory of hylomorphism to human beings but had toyed with different substantial conceptions of the human soul.<sup>15</sup>

Applying the ontological structure of matter and form to human beings in this work, Aristotle rejects the conception of soul as substance. It is not a substance in the strict sense but a substance only in the sense of form "which is that precisely in virtue of which a thing is called 'a this'".<sup>16</sup> "Hence the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it."<sup>17</sup>

As such, the soul must be described as "the first grade of actuality of a natural organized body."<sup>18</sup> Its nature of first act implies that it is the principle of the being and the action of the living being (that "by or with which primarily we live, perceive, and think"<sup>19</sup>).

Hence, the human soul, is not a substance in the sense of a subsisting subject. It is a 'substance' only in the sense of a *principle* of substance, as substantial form. The soul is the determining principle, the first perfection

which, joined to the determinable principle (matter), constitutes the actual existing being, the substance in the strict sense of the term.

Hence, matter and form are correlative ontological principles which constitute the human being. As such, neither is, in the proper sense of the term, a substance. Since it is only *this* or *that* particular human being, and not his or her soul or body, which can enjoy the status of primary substance, matter and form are constitutive principles of *particular* men and not 'man' in general.

Moreover, and we emphasize, they are constitutive principles of already individual substances for they are the constituents of an analysis which is relative to substances and, as we saw, substances are entities, that is, concrete individual things.

Denying the status of substance to the human soul, or substantial form, does, however, pose a certain problem. If the entire soul is the form of the body, then the intellect, the 'nous', also belongs to the domain of physics. That would deny, though, that the intellect is a purely immaterial faculty. Francois Nuyens expresses this problem in the following manner:

D'une part le Stagirite est convaincu de la nécessité d'avoir une définition de l'âme qui vaille pour toute espèce d'âmes: âme végétale, animale, humaine. Une telle définition peut comporter uniquement que l'âme soit la forme substantielle de l'être vivant. Aristote est convaincu que cette définition convient aussi à

l'homme qui a toutes les fonctions vitales propres aux autres êtres vivants. [...] D'autre part, il n'est pas moins convaincu de l'existence, dans l'homme, d'une activité qui s'oppose à cette définition. La faculté intellectuelle, le 'nous', est un principe immatériel qui ne peut pas être rabaissé au rang de la forme substantielle d'un être matériel. D'un côté, donc, une nécessité de considérer l'âme humaine, elle aussi, comme une forme substantielle; de l'autre, la nécessité non moins impérieuse de faire exception en faveur du 'nous'.<sup>20</sup>

This dilemma, of how the human substantial form can both be the form of a material substance and possess an immaterial faculty, however, was never resolved by Aristotle.<sup>21</sup> While St. Thomas, like Aristotle, asserted that the human soul is not a substance, he also proposed a solution to this noetic problem with the claim that the human substantial form is subsistent.

This departure or expansion upon the Aristotelian analysis of the human soul, we believe, is important to the question at hand (the problem of human individuation) and, hence, before turning to our evaluation of the logical approach to the problem of human individuation, we shall pause to elucidate upon it somewhat.

## 2. The Subsistence of the Human Soul.

St. Thomas also followed Aristotle in asserting that the human soul is not a substance but that its true ontological status is that of a substantial form, a part of

the essence of the true existing subject that is the complete human being, the composite of matter and form: "A human soul is not an entity in the sense of being a complete substance which possesses its specific nature but rather in the sense of being part of a being which has a complete specific nature..."<sup>22</sup>

St. Thomas' hylomorphism, however, departs from a strictly Aristotelian hylomorphism when it comes to the human being. For the human soul, while being a substantial form, is not completely submerged in matter, as is the case of the other forms which are educed from the potency of matter by the action of natural agents,<sup>23</sup> but is a *subsistent* substantial form.

For St. Thomas the human soul must be subsistent because an analysis of the intellectual operations of the soul reveal an operative independence which can only be explained by a correlative independence in the order of being:

Therefore the intellectual principle, which we call the mind or the intellect, has essentially an operation in which the body does not share. Now only that which subsists in itself can have an operation in itself. For nothing can operate but what is actual, and so a thing operates according as it is [...] We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called intellect or mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.<sup>24</sup>

That the human soul is a *subsisting* substantial form means that, unlike other substantial forms of material composites which subsist through the act of being belonging to the composite, it is itself the subject of the act of being and the composite of which it is one of the essential constitutive principles subsists only by the act of being which belongs to it:

The form, therefore, which has an operation according to some potency or power of its own apart from being joined with its matter, is that which itself has being, nor does it exist only through the being of the composite, like other forms, but rather the composite exists through its [the form's] being. <sup>25</sup>

That the human soul enjoys this special status does not, however, alter the fact that it is not a substance: "Although the human soul is able to subsist *per se*, still it does not *per se* possess a complete specific nature..." and "[...] to be an individual in the genus of substance does not simply mean to be that which can subsist *per se* but also to be complete in a given species and genus of substance."<sup>26</sup>

St. Thomas' position concerning the human soul can, thus, be seen to depart from a strictly Aristotelian hylomorphism. Although St. Thomas goes further still in denying that the substantial form is the last principle of actuality of the substance, we shall reserve the discussion of this departure from a strictly Aristotelian analysis and

its consequences for St. Thomas' position on the problem of human individuation for Chapter IV.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. Geoffrey Lusignan, A Proposal to Extend the Methodological Function of Aristotle's Categories, (Ottawa: thesis in the department of philosophy of the University of Ottawa, July 1984), pp. i-255.

Mr. Lusignan provides a quick summary of this point in his introduction (pp. v-vi): "We may conclude generally that the Categories contains in chapter two the ontological entities which are signified by the list of signifiers in chapter four. On this basis, we may say that the Categories deals with both 'ontology' and 'logic', but that ultimately the emphasis is on ontology because of the utter dependence of all other types of entity upon primary substance. The same point would also hold for the 'signifiers' since, without a concrete referent to give rise, through induction, to the concept which gives the 'signifiers' its meaning, the 'signifier' would be empty of content and therefore meaningless." (Emphasis his)

2. Aristotle, Categories, 5, 2a11-18. All works by Aristotle are cited from Basic Works of Aristotle, Richard McKeon, ed., New York: Random House, 1941.

3. *ibid.*, Metaphysics, Z (VII), 1, 1028b2-4.

4. *ibid.*, Physics, I, 3, 187a9 (emphasis mine).

5. *ibid.*, Categories, 5, 3b10-23.

6. St. Thomas, Quaestiones de Anima, (James H. Robb, tr.), (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984), q.1, response.

7. Francois Nuyens, L'Évolution de la Psychologie d'Aristote, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin), p. 60.

8. Aristotle, Physics, I, chapter 3.

9. *ibid.*, chapter 7.

10. *ibid.*, chapter 8, 191a22-32 (emphasis ours).

11. Geoffrey Lusignan, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

12. Aristotle, Metaphysics, Z., chapters 13 and 14.

13. Nuyens, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.
14. *ibid.*. Although the entire work argues this point, a statement to this effect may be found on p. 58.
15. *ibid.*, chapters II-IV. An explicit statement of this point may be found on p. 72.
16. Aristotle, De Anima, II, ch. 1, 412a10.
17. *ibid.*, 412a20.
18. *ibid.*, 412b5.
19. *ibid.*, ch. 2, 414a13.
20. Nuyens, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
21. *ibid.*, ch. VII; p. 59; 73; 312.
22. Quaestiones de Anima, q. 1 , reply 3.
23. St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, in Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, (Anton C. Pegis, ed.), (New York: Random House, 1945), I, q. 90, art. 2, reply 2; q. 118, art. 2, response; q. 75, art. 6, reply 1.
24. *ibid.*, I, 75, art. 2, response.
25. St. Thomas, On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists, (Beatrice H. Zeller, tr.), (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), ch. 1, sec. 38.
26. Quaestiones de Anima, q. 1, response.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LOGICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

Why is *this* individual man *this* individual man? If no human being is the species 'man' and, yet, each shares in the species 'man', what makes each individual human being an incommunicable separate entity while yet preserving their agreement in species? In other words, what makes Carlos *this* particular human being, Linda *that* particular human being, and each distinct from each other while agreeing in 'man'?

That we are individual is certainly not at issue. For St. Thomas, that is simply a fact of experience and we are not here concerned with disputing that assumption. Nor are we concerned with how we are able to discern individuals, albeit an interesting epistemic problem. What we are concerned with is the metaphysical problem of what intrinsic principle in human beings accounts for his or her individuation, individuality.

What makes this problem interesting in the works of St. Thomas is that there appears to be more than one possible answer. Just as St. Thomas held that there are three ontological constituents of human beings, viz. prime matter,

substantial form, and esse, so each of these has been advanced, by different scholars, as that principle intrinsic to the human being which accounts for his or her particularity.<sup>1</sup>

That such different answers to the problem of human individuation may be given is certainly in part due to the fact that St. Thomas, among his uncontested writings, does not devote a special treatise to individuation nor, specifically, to human individuality.<sup>2</sup> It cannot be denied, either, that such different views on the problem are possible because each can claim textual support in the works of St. Thomas.

This diversity of opinion has led some authors to advance that the position of St. Thomas on the issue developed or changed over the course of his works.<sup>3</sup> Not everyone agrees, however.<sup>4</sup> Although a chronological analysis of St. Thomas' texts may be a viable method of resolving the problem, we believe that the problem may be resolved in yet another way.

It is our view that the different answers given to St. Thomas' position on human individuation depend more upon how the problem is approached than upon research restricted to a particular period of St. Thomas' writings. I could distinguish two distinct approaches to the problem of human individuation in the secondary literature: a logical

approach and an ontological approach. The question then became whether one of these approaches should be adopted rather than the other and, if so, what conclusions necessarily followed from this approach concerning human individuation.

The aim of this chapter is to delineate in what a logical approach to the problem of human individuation consists. In order to achieve this aim we shall, first, discuss what characterizes an approach as 'logical' and, second, distinguish and discuss the two solutions to the problem of human individuation advanced within that approach.

#### 1. Formulation of the Problem.

Jorge J. E. Gracia, in his Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages, formulates the problem of human individuation as how and through what intrinsic principle the universal 'man' becomes a man or this man.<sup>5</sup> Although many authors adopt this formulation, few express it as clearly as Prof. Gracia. As we shall see, it is at the basis of some of the authors' views in this chapter.

The central characteristic of the logical approach to the problem of human individuation is that prime matter,

substantial form, and, if it is at all discussed, *esse* are commonly treated as being in themselves 'general' or 'universal'. The question posed by this approach, then, is how an individual human being may be constituted from principles which are, in themselves, general.

A second characteristic of this approach is that it does not treat human individuation as a separate problem from that of the individuation of all other corporeal substances. There are, however, considerable differences between human beings and other corporeal substances. Human beings, unlike other corporeal substances, possess an immaterial intellect and their souls (substantial forms) enjoy an individual existence after the corruption of the composite. Although these differences do not mitigate a separate treatment of the problem of human individuation from that of the individuation of corporeal substances in general, an attempt is made to account for them. Just how this is done will be discussed shortly.<sup>6</sup>

Those are the two main characteristics of the logical approach to the problem of human individuation. Within this same approach, however, there is disagreement as to what intrinsic principle may properly be said to account for human individuation. Some authors advance that it is prime matter under dimensions of quantity, *materia signata*, others that it is the substantial form.

We shall now look at these different solutions in turn, providing a brief sketch of each, beginning with the most prevalent in the secondary literature: *materia signata*.

## 2. 'Materia Signata'.

Joseph Bobik appears to be the most outspoken defender of the thesis that it is prime matter under dimensions of quantity which accounts for human individuation.<sup>7</sup> In his article "The Individual Body", he offers the following description of the problem:

The problem here arises out of an obvious fact: numerical plurality of specifically identical substances. Why is it that Fido and Rover, though equally dog, can be distinct or divided from each other, thus giving rise to plurality? Why can Peter and you and I, though equally man, be distinct or divided from one another, again giving rise to plurality? The obvious answer: "I can be distinct from you because I was born of my parents and you were born of yours" - though valid as far as it goes, is not immediately relevant. The problem is not: what extrinsic cause or causes were able to produce these numerically distinct individuals? It is rather: what causes or principles intrinsic to these individuals made it possible for the extrinsic cause to produce them?<sup>8</sup>

The two intrinsic principles to individual material substances identified by Prof. Bobik are prime matter and substantial form.<sup>9</sup> Substantial form cannot be the principle of individuation for, "if there are to be many individual substances of a same specific nature, they can not be

divided from each other by a formal division. They are formally or specifically the same. They must, therefore, be divided by a material division; they must be divided from one another by a division of prime matter [...]"<sup>10</sup>

Prime matter is, according to Prof. Bobik, "that without which, *primarily* that without which, a plurality of specifically identical individual substances would be impossible - *primarily*, in the sense in which substance and substantial principles are prior to accidental principles."<sup>11</sup>

That which has the character of first subject, that is, which is the ultimate principle of potency, in either the material or angelic order, is that in virtue of which individuals can be many.<sup>12</sup> In the angelic order, angels or forms themselves have the character of first subject and, hence, they are multiplied in virtue of themselves.<sup>13</sup> In the material order, however, the ultimate principle of potency is not substantial form but prime matter.<sup>14</sup> The multiplicity of human beings within the same species, then, is primarily due to prime matter.

Prime matter alone, however, cannot fully account for the possibility of many individual substances of the same specific nature.<sup>15</sup> Considered in itself, prime matter is devoid of every actual perfection and, hence, profoundly indivisible.<sup>16</sup> "If, therefore, prime matter is to receive a

plurality of specifically identical substantial forms, it must be rendered divisible, and this *per aliud*, i.e., by something other which is a principle of divisibility *per se*."17

This principle of divisibility can only be dimensive quantity:

Only if three-dimensional quantity renders prime matter spread out in virtue of its (dimensive quantity's) mutually excluding (i.e., diversely situated) contiguous, designable or divisible parts, can prime matter receive a plurality of specifically identical substantial forms, a diverse form in each of its mutually excluding or diversely situated parts. Without dimensive quantity, prime matter remains ever indivisible, and a plurality of material individuals of a same specific nature remains ever impossible.<sup>18</sup>

The accident of quantity alone cannot be the principle of individuation, of plurality, because plurality presupposes division, division presupposes unity, and unity cannot be caused by an accidental principle.<sup>19</sup> The principle of individuation, then, according to Prof. Bobik, is neither matter alone nor quantity alone, but '*matter, precisely as dimensionally quantified*'.<sup>20</sup>

Joseph Owens, in his article "Thomas Aquinas: Dimensive Quantity as Individuating Principle"<sup>21</sup>, enlarges upon this analysis of individuation by introducing existence into the problematic and by providing a larger context to the problem of individuation through a distinction between, what he

calls, 'the viewpoint of notion' and 'the viewpoint of being':

From the viewpoint of notion, consequently, the role of dimensive quantity in the individuation of material things is basic. From that viewpoint, none of the other factors originates the individuation. Matter, common just of itself, requires quantity for individual distinction. Form, because specifically common, has to be received into particularized matter if it is to be individuated. Existence, because most common of all, needs a limiting essence if it is to be distinguished from existence elsewhere. But from the viewpoint of being, the sequence runs in opposite direction. Existence is the basic actuality of the material thing. Its bestowal outside subsistent existence (God) takes place in a formally limiting essence, the potentiality limiting the actuality. [...] Further, the actuality that gives formal determination to a material thing, namely, its substantial form, has by its nature the requirement to actuate particularized matter if it is to exist in reality. Still further, determinate quantities and all the other accidents are in matter in accord with the 'exigency' of the form, and accordingly follow upon matter and form as effect upon cause. The result is that in the order of being, existence is basic. Form comes next, then matter, then the accident of quantity.<sup>22</sup>

This distinction between 'the viewpoint of notion' and 'the viewpoint of being', between how things must be conceived and how things actually are<sup>23</sup>, can also be seen as a general outline of what is involved in the problem of individuation when it is approached logically ('viewpoint of notion') and when it is approached ontologically ('viewpoint of being'). It also, we believe, points to the confusion of an epistemological consideration into an ontological

problem. We will have the opportunity to discuss this in more detail in the next chapter, however.

Although Prof. Owens, in distinguishing these two 'viewpoints' and their distinct solutions, does not discredit 'the viewpoint of being', it would appear as though he holds a preference for the solution of 'the viewpoint of notion'. Discussing the difficulties some commentators have brought forward in regard to individuation by 'interminate' dimensions, matter under dimensions of quantity which are undefined, he writes:

But the undefined (*interminatae*) dimensions are also 'designated' and 'determined' in generic fashion, and thereby meet the requirement for individuating. Exclusion of that requirement by the notion of 'undefined' (*interminatae*) is not felt in the texts of Aquinas when read in their own setting. His doctrine of non-precise abstraction is usually not brought to bear upon them when they are read today. Yet it is crucial for understanding them, and for appreciating a conception of individuality that still retains full validity.<sup>24</sup>

Human individuation<sup>25</sup> by matter under dimensions, whether 'terminate' or 'interminate', however, poses two problems. First, how is the human intellect, which is immaterial, individuated? Second, how can the human soul continue to exist *as individual* after death?

Neither of these two problems are addressed, as far as we are aware, by either Prof. Owens or Prof. Bobik. It may be that these questions are not posed simply because the

issue under discussion is not specifically *human* individuation. Yet, one must wonder just how *materia quantita signata* could answer these questions. If human soul or substantial form is individuated by matter under dimensions of quantity, then how can its intellect be individuated when it cannot be multiplied by a division of matter? Moreover, how can the soul exist as individual after death when, in that state, it is separated from material conditions?

This last problem, how the soul remains individuated after death, is raised by Sandra Edwards, in her "Aquinas on Individuals and Their Essences"<sup>26</sup>, without, however, being resolved:

Aquinas is very emphatic that in some way the matter of a thing is essential to that thing as an individual. Socrates does not just have to be human throughout the time he exists in order to be Socrates. He has to be and remain *this* human and that means he has to be and remain a human soul individuated by *this* body. Aquinas has unfortunately fallen short in his explanation of what being *this* body or *this* designated matter entails. But he nonetheless has the belief that matter is part of an individual essence and that this individual essence can in some cases survive even the destruction of the spatio-temporal continuity of the body.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Substantial Form.

Robert O'Donnell, in his article "Individuation: An Example of the Development in the Thought of St. Thomas

Aquinas"<sup>28</sup>, without denying the role of 'materia signata' in 34  
human individuation believes that St. Thomas' doctrine on  
human individuation is "expressed with greater clarity and  
precision when we say that the individuation of material  
composites is rooted in the substantial form."<sup>29</sup> For,

The unity of a material composite, like its very being,  
is rooted primarily in its form. Matter contributes no  
more to the individuation of a material composite,  
than it contributes to the being of a material  
composite. In both cases it is the material principle  
only. It is the form of the material composite, in the  
case of man the human soul, which is the formal  
principle of both the being and the individuation of  
that composite.<sup>30</sup>

Although 'matter contributes no more to the  
individuation of a material composite than it contributes to  
the being of a material composite', "St. Thomas reasons that  
since it is by the form or the soul that all men are placed  
within the human species, since it is by the soul that all  
men are thus alike, the individuation of their numerically  
distinct natures must be explained with reference to the  
material principle in that nature."<sup>31</sup>

For Prof. O'Donnell, the human soul is individuated by  
virtue of its being, by its very nature, essentially  
correlative to a particular material principle.<sup>32</sup> It is this  
essential relation of the soul to a particular body which  
also accounts for the separated soul's individuality:

Now quantity is an accidental form of the human  
composite which takes its very being from the

composite's substantial form, the rational soul. When a human soul exists in union with matter, that accidental form becomes actualized and produces three terminate dimensions. When these three terminate dimensions disappear at death, the accidental form of quantity continues to exist virtually in the subsistent human soul. This virtual presence of three material dimensions, traditionally referred to as interminate dimensions, is sufficient to individuate the separated human soul.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up, then, it would seem that what Prof. O'Donnell is arguing is that the soul is the true source of human individuation because it is related to a body particularized by dimensions of quantity, which dimensions inhere in the soul. Moreover, the soul remains individual after death because these dimensions virtually remain in it.

Montague Brown's article "Aquinas and the Individuation of Persons"<sup>34</sup> echoes to some extent Prof. O'Donnell's analysis. For Prof. Brown, like Prof. O'Donnell, holds that "in a real sense, we are individuated by matter *because* our souls demand it."<sup>35</sup>

Unlike Prof. O'Donnell, however, Prof. Brown argues that human beings are also individuated by their intellectuality and by their *esse*:

As the matrix between the material and the immaterial, we are individuated in the ways appropriate to both. Like material things, we are individuated by matter. Like immaterial things, we are individuated by our intellectuality. And like all created things, we are individuated by our existence (*esse*).<sup>36</sup>

Our individuality, however, "rests in the first place on our souls."<sup>37</sup> In fact, human beings are individuated by themselves to the extent that they are intellectual and, hence, are 'in a way' multiple species.<sup>38</sup>

Prof. Brown's begins his argument by asserting that the human soul is a substance in its own right.<sup>39</sup> Because the operation of its intellect is immaterial and only an immaterial thing can have an immaterial operation, the soul is immaterial and, hence, not limited to a bodily existence.<sup>40</sup> Like angels, we are intellectual substances and intellectual beings, as intellectual, are individuated by themselves. However,

[...] we are not angels. Aquinas insists that the rational soul is the form of the body, and therefore is tied up with particular matter. What is more, if one speaks of human souls as individuated by themselves, what is to happen to the commonality of humanity? Is there no human species?<sup>41</sup>

Prof. Brown attempts to resolve this difficulty by arguing that the soul is individuated according to the body:

[...] the body is not the *cause* of the individuation. Rather, the soul is individuated *according* to the body; that is, each human soul is unique in that it is a subsisting form which demands a particular body to inform. [...] Each soul subsists in such a way as to require some particular formation of flesh and bones for its perfection.<sup>42</sup>

And, according to him,

The fact that each human being is, through his or her soul, individuated by itself does not spell the destruction of all commonality among human beings. Each

human soul agrees with every other human soul in the fact that it needs a particular kind of body for its very intellectuality to flourish.<sup>43</sup>

Before turning to our critique of the logical approach to the problem of human individuation, it should be noted that Prof. Brown's analysis, whether or not it succeeds in preserving our agreement in species, safeguards both the possession of an individual intellectual operation and the individual existence of the separated soul.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Prime matter has been advanced as the first principle of individuation by J. Bobik (see his article "The Individual Body" cited in footnote 1 of our introduction); substantial form as the true basis for individuality has been advanced by Montague Brown (see his article "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Individuation of Persons" cited in footnote 2 of our introduction); *esse* as cause of individuality has been advanced by David Winiewicz (see his article " 'Alteritas' and Numerical Diversity" cited in footnote 2 of our introduction).
2. One treatise, doubtfully authentic, pertains directly to the question: "De principio individuationis" in Opuscula philosophica, ed. R.M. Spiazzi, pp. 149-151. For a chronology of the works of St. Thomas, see J.A. Weisheipl, Friar Thomas d'Aquino. His Life, Thought, and Work (cited in footnote 3 of our introduction).
3. e.g. M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, Le 'De Ente et Essentia de S. Thomas D'Aquin, chapter XI, especially p.113 (cited in footnote 4 of our introduction).
4. See, e.g., Joseph Owens' article "Thomas Aquinas: Dimensive Quantity as Individuating Principle", (cited in footnote 5 of our introduction) especially pp. 281 and 303.
5. Jorge J.E. Gracia speaks of individuation in this manner in his Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages (cited in footnote 6 of our introduction), pp. 18-20, but it also appears to be a basic assumption whenever the problem of individuation is treated logically.
6. See parts (a) and (b) of this section.
7. See his articles: "Dimensions in the Individuation of Bodily Substances, Philosophical Studies (Ireland), IV (December 1954); "La Doctrine de saint Thomas sur l'Individuation des Substances Corporelles", La Revue Philosophique de Louvain, 51 (1953); and "The Individual Body", in Readings in the Philosophy of Nature (ed. by H. J. Koren, Westminster: The Newman Press, 1964).

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His work is referred to by many authors including Sandra Edwards in her "Aquinas on Individuals and Their Essences", Philosophical Topics, 13, #2 (Spring 1985); Joseph Owens in his "Thomas Aquinas: Dimensive Quantity as Individuating Principle", Mediaeval Studies, 50 (1988); and Robert A. O'Donnell in his "Individuation: An Example of the Development in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas", New Scholasticism, XXXIII (January 1959).

Some authors who support this position are Henry Renard in The Philosophy of Being (cited in footnote 1 of our introduction), Robert O'Donnell in the article mentioned above, and, although he allows for a different solution as well, Joseph Owens in the article aforementioned.

8. Bobik, "The Individual Body", p. 328. A similar description can also be found in his "La Doctrine de Saint Thomas sur l'Individuation des Substances Corporelles", pp. 5-6.

9. *ibid.*, "The Individual Body". p. 328.

10. *ibid.*

11. *ibid.*, pp. 328-329 (emphasis his).

12. *ibid.*, p. 329.

13. *ibid.*

14. *ibid.*

15. *ibid.*, p. 330.

16. *ibid.*, p. 332.

17. *ibid.*

18. *ibid.*

19. *ibid.*, p. 334.

20. *ibid.*

21. Owens, "Thomas Aquinas: Dimensive Quantity as Individuating Principle", pp. 279-310.

22. *ibid.*, p. 295.

23. That this is the import of the distinction may be gleaned from the following two excerpts: "The perspective is

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that of consideration. The matter is first *considered* as stripped of every form. It can never be that way in reality" (p. 284, emphasis his) and "That is how individuation has to be explained in the notion (ratio) it presents. Yet in actuality, in being, the form is a *this*. As something universal, the form has its existence only in the mind. In reality, it is received in matter only insofar as it is this individual form, e.g. the soul of Peter or the soul of Paul" (p. 293, italics his).

24. *ibid.*, p. 310 (emphasis mine).

25. Our sole concern is with human individuation and not the individuation of other corporeal substances. Although both Prof. Owens and Prof. Bobik address this later problem and not, specifically, human individuation, their analyses of the problem of the individuation of material substances include human beings for both cite these within their analyses.

26. Edwards, "Aquinas on Individuals and Their Essences", pp. 155-163 (See footnote 7 for full reference).

It should be noted that Prof. Edwards does not argue in this article that the principle of human individuation is 'materia signata', but rather that human beings are individual because they have individual essences. Neither matter (under dimensions of quantity) alone nor form alone accounts for human individuation but only the two taken in conjunction. We include her at the end of this section because she provides a bridge between those who emphasize matter (under dimension of quantity) in the individuation of human beings and those who emphasize form in human individuation.

27. *ibid.*, p.162.

28. O'Donnell, "Individuation: An Example of the Development in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas", pp. 49-67 (See footnote 7 for full reference).

29. *ibid.*, p. 67.

30. *ibid.*, p. 63.

31. *ibid.*, p. 65.

32. *ibid.*, p. 66.

33. *ibid.*, p. 62.

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34. Brown, "Aquinas and the Individuation of Persons", pp. 29-44 (See footnote 2 of our introduction for full reference).

35. *ibid.*, p. 35 (italics his).

36. *ibid.*, p. 41.

37. *ibid.*

38. *ibid.*, p. 40. To characterize to humans as 'in a way' multiple species is, however, is very confusing. How are we species unto ourselves and how are we not? Is it even possible to be both at the same time?

39. *ibid.*, p. 32.

40. *ibid.*

41. *ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

42. *ibid.*, p. 34.

43. *ibid.*

## CHAPTER III

### CRITIQUE OF THE LOGICAL APPROACH

The aim of this chapter, as the title suggests, is to show that a logical approach should not be adopted to the problem of human individuation in the works of St. Thomas. This approach should not be adopted, we claim, because it misconstrues the problem of human individuation and is inconsistent with one or more of St. Thomas' tenets concerning human beings.

Discussing each author in turn, we shall first assess whether the notions at the basis of that author's formulation of the problem of human individuation is at variance with those of Aristotle and St. Thomas. When these notions are found to be at variance with those of Aristotle and St. Thomas, we argue that the problem of human individuation is, hence, misconstrued.

Next, we shall assess whether that author's solution, if one is advanced, contravenes one or more of the following tenets of St. Thomas concerning human beings: that every human being possesses his or her own intellect, that the human soul is subsistent but not, properly speaking, a substance, and that our souls exist as individual after

death. Where this solution is inconsistent with at least one of these, we shall argue that it is an improper solution to the problem of human individuation.

### 1. Jorge J. E. Gracia's Formulation of the Problem

As we saw in Chapter II<sup>1</sup>, Prof. Gracia formulates the problem of human individuation as how or through what process the universal 'man' becomes a man. The universal 'man', however, does not properly speaking exist - it is men, individual human beings, who exist. The general concept or universal 'man' is a product of abstraction by the intellect. It is not an in re form, does not exist in human beings as universal or general but only as particular. What is is this *particular* human being with his or her *particular* soul.

Hence, it is not the case, as Prof. Gracia would have it, that you and I *become* human beings out of the universal 'man'. Universals, as products of abstraction, do not need to be 'individuated'. To 'become', furthermore, implies a temporal process whereby a *priorly existing* universal, in this case 'man', is individuated (or, more aptly, instantiated) through some intervening, posterior principle.

St. Thomas, moreover, explicitly denies just such a Platonic formulation of the problem:

For through the power of the agent intellect we abstract universals from particular conditions; but it is not necessary that universals should subsist outside the particulars as their exemplars.<sup>2</sup>

Creation does not mean the production of a composite thing from pre-existing principles; but the composite is so said to be created that it is brought into being with all its component principles.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. 'Materia Signata': Joseph Bobik & Joseph Owens.

### a) Joseph Bobik.

Joseph Bobik, as we saw earlier<sup>4</sup>, avoids characterizing the problem in this way. The problem, for him, is not how the universal 'man' becomes a 'man' but, rather, how it is possible to have a plurality of specifically identical individuals. This formulation, however, is not quite as different from that of Prof. Gracia's as it may seem.

What does being "formally or specifically the same"<sup>5</sup> mean? Does it mean that there is a 'general' or 'common' human form which is particularized by matter under dimensions of quantity to form this individual and that individual? That both you and I have the same form except that mine informs this body and yours that body, or that mine informs this *particular* body and yours that *particular* body?

If this is the case, there is no reason to believe there is more than one human being. Why should a form, general or no, inform more than one dimensionally quantified parcel of matter? Furthermore, this cannot be the case because, according to St. Thomas, "it is impossible for many distinct individuals to have one form, just as it is impossible for them to have one being. For the form is the principle of being."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps what is argued is not that we all have the same form but, rather, that your soul and my soul are different because each is *immediately* individuated when received by dimensionally quantified matter. This implies, however, that prior to its individuation the soul is not particular but 'general'. But St. Thomas, himself, states that prime matter does not receive a 'general' or 'common' form but "primary matter receives individual forms".<sup>7</sup>

This position would still be problematic even if it were granted that human substantial forms were received by prime matter *as individual*, rather than as first 'general', because of the accident of quantity and *not* because they were already individual. For, this would mean that our individuality depends upon an accident and, hence, is accidental. This, however, clearly has theological consequences which would be unacceptable to St. Thomas.

Although Prof. Bobik is certainly not arguing that there is, in actuality, one form for all human beings, he certainly seems to be advancing that we possess forms which are merely *numerically* diverse and in every other aspect the same. Even without Platonic connotations of 'instantiation', numerical diversity seems an improper or, at least, inadequate formulation of the problem of human individuation. Although it may be that tables and trees and such like are merely numerically diverse, is this the case for human beings? If so, should not we all be the same in every other respect?

In treating the individuation of human beings in the same manner as that of other material substances, an important difference is overlooked. The human soul, unlike the forms of other material substances, is not corrupted with the composite but is immortal. The separated soul, moreover, exists as *individual* in this state of separation.

Can 'materia signata' account for the individual existence of the separated human soul? It is because the soul itself possesses the act of being rather than the composite that the soul is subsistent. Without treating of this unique sort of possession of the act of being, how could this analysis account for the soul's immortality, let alone its individual immortality?

Another difference which also appears to be overlooked is that the human substantial form, unlike the forms of other corporeal substances, is not educed from the potency of matter but created directly by God. It cannot be educed from the potentialities of matter because it would then be corruptible but, also, because it possesses an immaterial faculty - the intellect. We each have, moreover, such a faculty.

'Materia signata' cannot, however, account for this fact. The human intellect cannot be individuated by prime matter under dimensions of quantity because it is immaterial and what is immaterial cannot be multiplied according to the division of matter. Is it then the case that there is one intellect for all human beings? This may be the position of Averroes but it is certainly not that of St. Thomas, who explicitly and fervently rejected this view.<sup>8</sup>

b) Joseph Owens.

Joseph Owens, as was mentioned earlier<sup>9</sup>, is quick to point out that the way in which forms are *conceived*, that is, as 'general', does not correspond to the way they actually are, i.e, particular. Any approach to the problem of human individuation which conceives the human substantial form as general will not, then, be an analysis of the actual

individuation of the human being, but how it is possible to account for individual substances while our knowledge is of universals.

This latter is, at base, an epistemological problem. If our knowledge is of universals, in this case the universal 'man', what makes it possible for us to predicate this universal of all human beings while each is individual and distinct? Matter under dimensive quantity certainly resolves this problem.

The human substantial form is never 'general' and yet, because it is *conceived* that way, it *requires* matter under dimensions of quantity to individuate it. This requirement, however, is only a requirement for *this manner of conceiving it* and should not be, then, advanced as a requirement of the actual form.

Although Prof. Owens appears more interested in the epistemological problem and its solution, he does distinguish this 'viewpoint' on the problem from the 'viewpoint of being', the ontological problem. What is not clear, however, is that matter under dimensive quantity is not taken to be a solution to the ontological problem by authors who, like Prof. Bobik, do not make this distinction. For, matter under dimensive quantity is said, without qualification, to individuate human beings.

3. Substantial Form: Robert O'Donnell &  
Montague Brown.

a) Robert O'Donnell

Prof. O'Donnell, as we saw<sup>10</sup>, advances that the individuation of human beings is rooted in the substantial form. The human substantial form is again, however, conceived as 'general' for, the soul, according to Prof. O'Donnell, is that by which all human beings are alike. And, like the other authors discussed so far, a material principle is introduced to explain the *numerical* distinctness of this same nature conferred by the substantial form:

Since man is a substantial composite of soul and matter, *and of no third element*, matter must be, by a simple process of elimination, the principle according to which men differ numerically from one another.<sup>11</sup>

Prof. O'Donnell seems to forget, here, that human beings are constituted not only by matter and form but, also, by *esse*. It may be that he believes *esse* cannot perform this function, that he considers *esse* in the same manner as he considers form, that is, as 'general'. No like views are stated by him, however, and by simply ignoring or omitting this constituent, the conclusion he draws from his 'process of elimination' does not necessarily follow.

Nevertheless, what individuates the human substantial form (note, not the human being but one of its ontological principles, the soul), according to Prof. O'Donnell, is its essential relation to a particular body rather than, simply, matter under dimensions of quantity. Although souls do not differ except numerically<sup>12</sup>, the multiplication of bodies is not the cause of the multiplication of souls.<sup>13</sup> Rather, the diversity and plurality of souls must be understood according to their relations to the different quantities of matter to which they are united.<sup>14</sup> "Consequently, if there are different bodies, it is necessary that they have different souls united to them."<sup>15</sup>

This individuation of the soul through its relation to its quantified body, and its retention of its individuation after death, is explained thus:

Now quantity is an accidental form of the human composite which takes its very being from the composite's substantial form, the rational soul. When a human soul exists in union with matter, that accidental form becomes actualized and produces three terminate dimensions. When these three terminate dimensions disappear at death, the accidental form of quantity continues to exist virtually in the subsistent human soul.<sup>16</sup>

This does not account, however, for the individual existence of the separated soul because dimensions of quantity cannot inhere, virtually or no, in the separated soul. The accident of quantity, like other accidents,

follows upon and inheres in substances and the soul, albeit subsistent, is not a substance. At best, the separated soul is only virtually or potentially individual, but actually not.

Mere numerical distinction, moreover, fails to show why human beings have a dimension of individuality not attributed to fish, rocks, and trees. Although it may be perfectly correct to say that this rock differs from that rock because its three-dimensional matter is not that of the other, it is inappropriate in the case of human beings, at least within the Thomistic context of *personal* relationship with the Creator, *personal* immortality, and moral responsibility.

Furthermore, although the relation of the soul to quantified matter is said to be 'essential', this does not mitigate the fact that its individuation depends, finally, upon the accident of quantity. It is true that to be human requires a particular type of body, a human body. That fact alone does not, however, make this human being *this* human being and no other. For this human being to be this particular human being, in this analysis at least, the soul must be related, not to 'body' or 'matter', but to matter particularized by quantity. Hence, the individuation of, not only matter, but the soul depends on the accident of quantity.

Furthermore, the soul's relation to quantified matter fails to individuate the human intellect for, as we have mentioned before, the intellect cannot be multiplied according to the division of matter.

b) Montague Brown.

Montague Brown, as we saw earlier<sup>17</sup>, avoids this particular difficulty by arguing that human beings are individuated by themselves to the extent that they are intellectual. Intellectual substances (angels) are individuated by themselves and are their own species. Human souls are also intellectual substances and, hence, must be individuated by themselves and 'in a way' their own species.

Clearly, there is no problem individuating the human intellect here - it is a faculty of a substance which is individual in itself. Neither is there any difficulty accounting for the individual existence of a separated soul which is individual in itself. Is, however, the soul a substance?

The human soul is certainly not a substance in its own right. On this, St. Thomas insists.<sup>18</sup> Although Prof. Brown does, however, use this terminology<sup>19</sup> it is not clear how he is defining substance:

St. Thomas's solution to this enigma of what he calls two substances in one is to say that the being (*esse*)

of the soul as subsistent is the being (*esse*) of the composite. "It is necessary that some substance be the form of the human body." A substance exists on its own. And a composite exists through its form, which in the case of the human being is also a substance. Thus although the doctrine might seem to suggest two substances in one, there is only one act of being, specifying one substance. [...] The soul shares its act of being with the body because it is the kind of intellectual substance which requires a body for its perfection.<sup>20</sup>

Does this mean the soul is a substance in the sense of an entity or is called a substance because it can exist on its own? It seems as though Prof. Brown means both. But if the soul is a substance in the sense of entity, its essence would need to be complete - which it is not. Also, in what sense is the *composite* of the soul and matter an entity or substance if the soul itself is an entity or substance?

It is surprising that Prof. Brown should introduce into his analysis the manner in which the act of being (*esse*) is possessed by the human soul in order to explain its unique status as both substance and substantial form. For, earlier on in his article, he says that "while it is correct to say that *esse* individuates us (as it does all things), this does not tell us much about individuation of persons as distinguished from individuation of other animals, plants, and inanimate things."<sup>21</sup>

It would seem, however, at least from the last citation, that the manner in which *esse* is possessed does have something important to tell us about the individuation

of human beings. Having noted some of the inconsistencies and/or inadequacies of the analyses which approach the problem of human individuation logically<sup>22</sup>, we will now approach this problem ontologically and see what *esse* has to say about the individuation of human beings.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER III

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1. See, p. 25.
  2. Summa Theologica, I, q.44, a.3, reply 3.
  3. *ibid.*, q.45, a.4, reply 2.
  4. See, pp. 27-29.
  5. Joseph Bobik, "The Individual Body", p.328.
  6. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, a.2, respondio.
  7. *ibid.*, I, q. 75, a.5, reply 1.
  8. See, e.g., On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists, especially chaps. I, III, IV.
  9. See, pp. 29-32.
  10. See, pp. 32-34.
  11. O'Donnell, "Individuation: An Example of the Development in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas", pp. 56-57.
  12. *ibid.*, p. 56.
  13. *ibid.*, p. 58.
  14. *ibid.*, p. 56.
  15. *ibid.*
  16. *ibid.*, p. 62. Although there are many texts which would appear to support this thesis, we feel Prof. O'Donnell does not adequately explain in what sense the accident of quantity is 'virtually' present in the separated soul. At one point in his article (p. 57), he briefly makes mention of the soul possessing a 'habitus' to a particular quantified body. This 'habitus', according to him, is a relation - but, if so, it is an accident and, once again, human individuation would depend upon an accident, would be accidental.

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17. See, pp. 34-36.
18. Quaestiones de Anima, q.1, response.
19. Brown, "Aquinas...", p. 32.
20. *ibid.*, p. 38. The soul, however, as we have often repeated, is not, properly speaking, a substance. See Chapter I, sec. 2. See, also, B. Carlos Bazan's "La Corporalité selon S. Thomas": "...pour Thomas, l'âme n'est pas substance et n'est pas composée de matière et forme. Son véritable statut ontologique est celui d'une forme substantielle, partie de l'essence du véritable sujet existant qui est l'homme tout entier, le composé de matière et de forme." (p. 386); "...ce qui existe comme substance complète, c'est l'homme tout entier, et c'est à lui que revient la propriété d'être substance au sens propre du terme." (p. 380); "Ni l'âme ni le corps ne sont des substances au sens premier du mot, seul l'est le composé..." (p. 381); "...la subsistence dont jouit l'âme lui permet d'être exclue de l'ordre des formes matérielles (et, bien entendu, des accidents), mais ne lui suffit pas pour être incluse dans l'ordre des substances proprement dites." (pp. 382-383).
21. *ibid.*, p. 32.
22. Prof. Brown's analysis, although included under the general heading of 'the logical approach', does not truly bear the characteristics common to such an approach. We included his analysis (and treated it last) because it provides for a smoother transition from analyses of the other authors and the analysis which will appear in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### 'ESSE' AND HUMAN INDIVIDUATION

It is our contention, in this Chapter, that it is *esse*, the act of being, which is the source or basis of human individuation, human individuality. Adopting an ontological approach to the problem of human individuation, we shall begin our analysis with a discussion of how St. Thomas' '*esse*' differs from the 'being' of Aristotle to then focus, more specifically, on the import of *esse* as an act rather than a mere fact of existence through a discussion of its composition with essence, how it is possessed by different creatures, and, finally, why the individuation of human beings rests, primarily, upon this act.

#### 1. Aristotle's 'Being' and St. Thomas' '*Esse*'.

What is being? According to Aristotle, as we saw, this question "is just the question, what is substance?"<sup>1</sup> Reality is always, for him, a particular and actually existing substance: this man, this horse, this tree. The being which is attributed, in the existential sense, to substances does

not, for him, signify anything outside of the categories.<sup>2</sup> It is a simple predicate, indeed the most universal of all predicates<sup>3</sup>, which expresses a fact: there is. For Aristotle, existence, that something is, is a given.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, the true question for Aristotle "n'est pas pourquoi les choses *sont* (cela est de l'ordre du donné), mais pourquoi elles sont *ce* quelles sont."<sup>5</sup> But, if the question of being is a question of essence, then it is, in the last analysis, a question of form. For, substantial form, as the principle of actuality of substance, is the act whereby a substance is *what it is*.<sup>6</sup> It would appear, then, that,

L'équivalence entre 'être', 'essence' et 'forme' est ainsi achevée. Dans l'unité intelligible de la forme et de la définition qui expriment *ce* que les choses 'sont' s'épuise la recherche, car dans cette essence on a trouvé la détermination immuable, objet propre de la pensée (*Met.K*, 6, 1063 a 10-15). Penser est toujours penser un être déterminé: on ne sort de l'imprécision du simple prédicat 'être' que lorsqu'on se situe au plan de l'essence et de la forme qui lui confèrent un *sense défini*.<sup>7</sup>

But *esse*, in the metaphysics of St. Thomas, effects, according to Etienne Gilson, no less than a revolution with respect to the metaphysics of Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> Whereas Aristotle equated being with essence and reduced the significance of existence to that of a simple predicate which expresses the fact of being-there, St. Thomas links being to an act (*esse*) which is, in composition with essence, a composing principle

of the entity. The act of being of St. Thomas should not, then, be reduced to the Aristotelian conception of being although,

[...] there is always for his readers a temptation to reduce him to Aristotle. Texts without number could be quoted in support of such an interpretation, and there is no need to distort them in order to support it. All there is to do is to leave out all the other texts, a process, which, in fact, has never ceased among generation after generation of interpreters.<sup>9</sup>

That St. Thomas' '*esse*' is not a simple predicate which expresses a fact of existence, of being-there, but a constitutive co-principle of substances appears clearly in chapter four of his De Ente et Essentia<sup>10</sup>, where what is at issue is whether intellectual substances are composed or simple. Whereas Aristotle would have held, in the context of his metaphysics of form, that these substances are simple, St. Thomas holds that they are composed of form and *esse*.<sup>11</sup> This composition, moreover, is held to be a composition of act and potency where *esse* is the principle of actuality and form the principle of potency.<sup>12</sup>

In advancing *esse* as the act of the angelic form or essence, St. Thomas certainly insured the unity of that composite but, also, denied the Aristotelian principle according to which form is the last actuality of substance:

The distinctive character of a truly Aristotelian metaphysics of being - and one might feel tempted to call it its specific form - lies in the fact that it knows of no act superior to the form, not even

existence. There is nothing above being; in being, there is nothing above the form, and this means that the form of a given being is an act of which there is no act.<sup>13</sup>

Yet this is precisely what is denied by St. Thomas. For, according to him, there is an act, namely *esse*, which is the act of form. Moreover, it is this act, not form, which is the principle of being. Although essence expresses *what* a thing is, it is *esse* which is the principle *by which* a thing subsists.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, because *esse* is related to essence, to form, as act is to potency, form can no longer be considered the efficient cause of the *esse* which is its act:

But all that belongs to anything is either caused from principles of its nature, as for instance risibility in man, or accrues to it through some extrinsic principle, as for instance light in air from the influence of the sun. But it cannot be that existence itself should be caused by the form or quiddity of the thing, caused, I say, as by means of an efficient cause, because thus something would be the cause of itself and would bring its very self into existence, which is impossible. Therefore it follows that everything such that its existence is other than its nature has existence from another (*ab alio*).<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, then, St. Thomas' '*esse*' is not equivalent to, nor interchangeable with, 'being' as it is understood by Aristotle. *Esse* is a constitutive co-principle of substance, not merely a simple predicate which denotes existence as a fact. In composition with essence, it is the act *by which* the thing is, *by which* it subsists. Form, moreover, is no

longer the principle of being but, in relation to *esse*, a principle of potency which determines the act of being (*esse*).

## 2. The Distinction between Esse and Essence: Some Clarifications.

St. Thomas held that the distinction between *esse* and essence is an objective distinction between two metaphysical principles which constitute the whole being of the created thing, *esse* standing to essence as act to potency. It is not, then, a physical distinction. Essence and *esse* are not two *things* which can be separated from one another. No substantial dualism arises here because neither *esse* nor essence is a substance, is an entity. They are, rather, the constitutive co-principles of substances. The unity of their composition, moreover, is insured by their act/potency relation. Hence, the distinction between *esse* and essence is metaphysical, not physical.

*Esse* and essence, furthermore, are concreated co-principles. There is no essence without *esse* and no *esse* without essence:

Creation does not mean the production of a composite thing from pre-existing principles; but the composite is so said to be created that it is brought into being along with all its component principles.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, just as accidents and forms and other non-subsisting things are to be said to co-exist, so they ought to be called *concreated* rather than *created* things. But properly speaking, it is subsisting beings which are created.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, neither *esse* nor essence 'pre-exists' their composition. It would be a contradiction in terms for essence to 'pre-exist' its act of being for, it would *be* before receiving *to be*. The 'pre-existence' of *esse* to its composition with essence is no less problematic. For, *esse*, the act of being, would not be an act of anything, would not be an act at all. *Esse* is not a kind of 'neutral' existence which, when composed with essence, is then 'turned into' an active principle.

If, then, *esse* and essence are concreated, constitutive co-principles of substances, how can it be asserted that being is *accidental* to creatures? In what way can *esse* be 'accidental' if essence is not already constituted as a substance prior to its (*esse*'s) reception? The use of the term 'accidental' is here misleading because, properly speaking, accidents adhere in substances and what it, in this context, is used to express is the fact that in creatures *esse* is efficiently produced by something other than itself:

Being in creatures is neither just accidental nor just essential. It is both. It has to be viewed from both standpoints, if the doctrine of St. Thomas is to be understood. Created essence is of its own nature an order to being, and so far as it itself is concerned

being is essential to it. But "as far as it itself is concerned" is not enough. In order to be, it also has to be produced efficiently by something other than itself, and from that viewpoint its being is accidental to it.<sup>18</sup>

St. Thomas, however, is careful to say that being is not, *properly speaking*, an accident in creatures, as the following text cited by Joseph Owens, in his article "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being"<sup>19</sup>, clearly shows:

Et sic dico quod esse substantiale rei non est accidens, sed actualitas cuiuslibet formae existentis, [...] et sic proprie loquendo, non est accidens. Et quod Hilarius dicit, dico quod accidens dicitur large omne quod non est pars essentiae; et sic est esse in rebus creatis...(Quodl., XII, 5)<sup>20</sup>

This is not to say that Joseph Owens is careless in his use of the term 'accident' - he clearly states the sense in which being is 'accidental' to creatures. Yet, preserving this terminology when St. Thomas himself recognizes that its use is improper in this context, can lead to certain misunderstandings. The most evident of which would be to understand being, in creatures, to be a predicamental accident.

Another, perhaps less evident, confusion this may give rise to is to understand, by this, that the being of all creatures is contingent. This is not so. St. Thomas affirms that some creatures, even though they are *caused*, are nevertheless *necessary* beings:

Although all things depend on the will of God as the first cause, who is subject to no necessity in His operation except on the supposition of His intention, nevertheless absolute necessity is not on this account excluded from things, so as to compel us to say that all things are contingent. (One might infer this from the fact that things have with no absolute necessity proceeded from their cause, for usually, in things, an effect is contingent which does not proceed from its cause necessarily.) On the contrary, there are some things in the universe whose being is simply and absolutely necessary.<sup>21</sup>

That the being of some creatures is necessary is not, moreover, incompatible with the notion of being created:

But, to be simply necessary is not incompatible with the notion of created being; for nothing prevents a thing being necessary whose necessity nevertheless has a cause, as in the case of the conclusions of demonstrations. Hence, nothing prevents certain things being produced by God in such fashion that they exist in a simply necessary way; indeed, this is a proof of God's perfection.<sup>22</sup>

St. Thomas defined the simple necessity that is found in certain creatures as an absence of all potency not to be in the nature of the creature:

Now, some things are so created by God that there is in their nature a potentiality to non-being; and this results from the fact that the matter present in them is in potentiality with respect to another form. On the other hand, neither immaterial things, nor things whose matter is not receptive of another form, have potentiality to non-being, so that their being is absolutely and simply necessary.<sup>23</sup>

St. Thomas uses this definition of necessity to argue that there must, in fact, be some absolutely necessary creatures in the universe in order for the hierarchical order of the universe to be complete:

The more distant a thing is from that which is a being by virtue of itself, namely, God, the nearer it is to non-being; so that the closer a thing is to God, the further is it removed from non-being. Now, things which presently exist are near to non-being through having potentiality to non-being. Therefore, that the order of things be complete, those nearest to God, and hence the most remote from non-being, must be totally devoid of potentiality to non-being; and such things are necessary absolutely.<sup>24</sup>

Although the production of creatures, when considered as deriving from their first principle, is dependent on God's will, it is found to have absolute necessity when considered in relation to their proximate principles.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, that the being of creatures is efficiently caused by God does not entail that none of these creatures are necessary beings. What this does entail, however, is that the being of creatures is finite, whereas the being of God is infinite. Perhaps, then, to avoid any misunderstanding, the term 'finite' rather than 'accidental' should be employed to express the fact that creatures receive their act of being, that their *esse* is efficiently produced by God.

Accounting for the finitude of creatures, moreover, seems to have been a motivating concern behind St. Thomas'

distinction between *esse* and essence. Although all creatures are composed of *esse* and essence, this composition seems to be especially important in the case of angels who, not being hylomorphically composed, require a principle of potency other than matter to distinguish them from the pure act of God:

Therefore, if there be no matter, and given that the form itself subsists without matter, there nevertheless still remains the relation of the form to its very being, as of potentiality to act. [...] For *what is* is the form itself subsisting, and the being itself is that whereby the substance is; as the running is whereby the runner runs. But in God *being* and *what is* are not different, as was explained above. Hence God alone is pure act.<sup>26</sup>

Without this composition, the *esse* of angels would be infinite as is that of God, whose essence is to be.<sup>27</sup> The composition of *esse* and essence seems to address, then, not the problem of motion, as does the composition of matter and form, but a completely different problem: finitude. For, the *esse* of creatures must be limited by a principle of potency, must be possessed in a determined way, in order for that creature to be distinct from God.

### 3. The Possession of *Esse*.

Although all creatures are composed of *esse* and essence, different creatures possess the act of being in

different manners. Because we advance that the manner in which *esse* is possessed by humans is significant to the question of their individuation, what we propose to do is, first, delineate how it is possessed by angels, material or corporeal substances other than human beings, and human beings, contrast how *esse* is possessed by human beings with how it is possessed by these other creatures, to then discuss the significance of the manner in which *esse* is possessed by human beings.

a) Angels.

The *esse* of the intellectual substances that are angels is possessed by them in virtue of their form: "Now, being is consequent upon form through itself; for by *through itself* we mean according as *that thing is such*; and each and every thing has being according as it has form."<sup>28</sup>

Because *esse* belongs to an angel through its form, i.e. through the angel itself, it (*esse*) "is necessarily in it always and inseparably".<sup>29</sup> Hence, once created, these substances can never be deprived of their act of being: "substances which are not themselves forms can be deprived of being, so far as they lose form [...] But substances which are themselves forms can never be deprived of being [...]"<sup>30</sup>

If, then, "Everything has unity in the same way that it has being, and consequently we must judge of the multiplicity of a thing as we judge of its being"<sup>31</sup>, it is clear that angels, given that they are but forms and they possess *esse* according to their forms, are individuated of themselves: "[...] in such forms the essence of the form is the self-subsistent individual itself [...]"<sup>32</sup>

#### b) Material Substances.

Whereas angels are composed of form and *esse*, three principles constitute material substances: matter, form, and *esse*.<sup>33</sup> These three principles are ordered according to a double relation of act and potency. Matter is in potency in relation to form (essential composition) and the essence, composed of matter and form, is, in turn, in potency in relation to the act of being (constitutive composition).<sup>34</sup> As St. Thomas, himself, puts it:

Hence in composite objects there are two kinds of act and two kinds of potency to consider. For first of all, matter is as potency which reference to form, and the form is its act. And secondly, if the nature is constituted of matter and form, the matter is as potency with reference to existence itself, insofar as it is able to receive this. Accordingly, when the foundation of matter is removed, if any form of a determinate nature remains which subsists of itself but not in matter, it will still be related to its own existence as potency is to act. But I do not say, as that potency which is separable from its act, but as a potency which is always accompanied by its act.<sup>35</sup>

Although it is *by* the form that material composites exist, it is the *composite* of matter and form which is the subject of the act of being:

[...] since each thing operates insofar as it is a being, to operate belongs to each thing in the same way as to be belongs to it. The forms, therefore, which have no operation without being joined with their matter, do not themselves operate, but it is the composite that operates through the form. Whence indeed, forms of this kind do not themselves, properly speaking exist, but by means of them something exists.<sup>36</sup>

As possessed by the composite of matter and form, *esse* is corrupted along with it: "And, therefore, when the composite is destroyed, there is destroyed that form which exists through the being of the composite [...]"<sup>37</sup>

Hence, if, again, "we must judge of the multiplicity of a thing as we judge of its being"<sup>38</sup>, material substances cannot be individuated of themselves, as is the case for angels, because their *esse* is of the composite and not of form alone. Rather, it must be the case that they are individuated by the composite of matter and form. Consequently, there is room to discuss, in the case of material substances, the role of matter in individuation.

## c) Human Beings.

Unlike other corporeal substances, the human composite of matter and form is not the subject of the act of being. As we discussed in chapter 1<sup>39</sup>, human beings possess an intellectual operation in which the body does not share. This operative independence of thinking, to repeat, can only be explained by a correlative independence of its principle in the order of being:

Thus it is necessary that an intellective soul operate *per se*, inasmuch as it possesses an essential operation in which the body does not share. And because each being acts insofar as it is actual, it is necessary that an intellective soul possess an independent *per se* act of existing which is not dependent on its body.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, it is the human soul which is the subject of the act of being for, otherwise, it could not possess an immaterial, intellectual operation. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 1<sup>41</sup>, the soul's subsistence depends upon its, rather than the composite's, possession of the act of being.

Yet, human beings are composites of matter and form, not forms alone like angels. If, then, the human soul, alone, is the subject of the act of being, are there, then, two acts of being for the human composite? Is the unity of the human being lost? How can the soul, itself, possess *esse* if "It is necessary, if a soul is the form of a body, that

there be common to both one act of existing which is the act of existing of the composite."742

If the human soul is the subject of the act of being, that is, subsistent, but is a form united to matter, and there can be only one act of being for that composite, it must be that the human soul communicates or confers its act of being to the composite:

[...]it is clear that that by which the body lives is its soul. Now to live is the 'to be' of living things. Therefore the soul is that by which a human body actually exists; but to confer being is a characteristic of a form. Therefore, a human soul is the form of its body.43

Although *esse* is shared with the body, it is, yet, properly possessed by the soul for, after the corruption of the body, the soul continues to possess it:

Although a soul and its body unite to achieve a single act of existence of a human being, still that act of existence accrues to the body from the soul, so that a human soul communicates to its body the soul's own existence by which it subsists, as we have shown in earlier questions. Consequently, when its body is taken away, a soul continues to exist.44

Hence, it is the human soul which properly possesses *esse*. The unity of the human composite of form and matter is not, however, lost because only one act of being is present: that of the form. The body shares in the act of being possessed by the soul but does not, itself, possess that act.45

If, once again, "we must judge of the multiplicity of a thing as we judge of its being"<sup>46</sup> and the human soul has its being independent from matter, then its individuation cannot depend on matter. Moreover, if matter is not the principle of human individuation, neither can human beings be said to be individuated by *materia quantita signata*, matter under dimensions of quantity. In order to be said to individuate human beings, these dimensions would have to be conferred by that which has being, would have to be a substantial perfection granted by the soul. But, dimensions (extension) are "only an accidental determination linked to quantity, and certainly not the direct effect of the substantial form."<sup>47</sup>

Hence, given that human beings are constituted by matter, form, and *esse*, and matter cannot be the principle of human individuation, it must either be the case that human beings are individuated by their form (soul) or that they are individuated by their *esse*.

It would appear, however, to be the former rather than the latter, for, it is the soul which has being and multiplicity must be judged according as an entity has being. If so, the individuation of human beings would resemble that of angels - who are individuated of themselves. However, human beings are not, like angels, substances in their own right: "A soul, although it can

exist of itself, does not of itself possess a specific nature, since it is part of the specific nature"<sup>48</sup> and to be complete in a given species is precisely what is required in order to be a substance: "[...] to be an individual in the genus of substance does not simply mean to be that which can subsist *per se* but also to be complete in a given species and genus of substance."<sup>49</sup>

If human beings are not individuated of themselves because they are not solely forms (as are angels) but composites of form and matter (like other corporeal substances), and, yet, are not individuated by matter, how are they individuated? Before proceeding to resolve this dilemma, we shall first take into consideration an important Thomistic principle: that act has priority over potency.

#### 4. The Priority of Act over Potency.

As we have just seen, individuation must be judged according as a thing has being. Humans have being according to their forms, that is, it is their forms which possess the act of being and, consequently, matter cannot individuate human beings. In fact, it would appear to be the soul which individuates prime matter:

Since the form is not for the matter, but rather the matter for the form, we must gather from the form the

reason why the matter is such as it is; and not conversely.<sup>50</sup>

Another way of saying that 'form is not for matter but rather the matter for the form', however, is that form, as an act, has priority over the principle of potency which is prime matter: that act has priority over potency<sup>51</sup>. If, then, we must gather *from* the act the reason why the potency is *such as it is*, individuation is directly linked to an act. Hence, it cannot be the case, as Joseph Bobik would have it<sup>52</sup>, that it must be the ultimate principle of potency which individuates human beings.

Both matter and form (in relation to *esse*) are, however, principles of potency in the metaphysics of St. Thomas. Although, as we saw at the beginning of this Chapter<sup>53</sup>, Aristotle's analysis of being terminated in an analysis of form, where form is the last principle of actuality of the substance and is that which makes a thing to be what it is, we also saw<sup>54</sup> that, for St. Thomas, form is a principle of potency in relation to the act of being (*esse*) and it is this act, not form, which makes the substance *to be*.

According to St. Thomas, "the first among all acts is being."<sup>55</sup> But, if being comes first in reality, then the act which causes it should come first among the constituent acts of the concrete reality.<sup>56</sup> And this, Prof. Gilson points

out, is simply to state the primacy of *esse* in the order of being, for which St. Thomas has a manifold of formulas:

"*To be* is the act of the subsisting forms: *Ipsum esse est actus formae subsistentis.*" Again: "*To be* is the actuality of all acts, and that is why it is the perfection of all perfections: *esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum.*" And again: "*To be* is the actuality of all things, and even of forms themselves: *ipsum esse est actualitas omnium rerum et etiam formarum.*"<sup>57</sup>

If, then, act has priority over potency<sup>58</sup>, *esse* has priority over form, for form is, in relation to this act, a principle of potency. Since individuation is linked to act and not potency, form cannot be that by which human beings are individuated. Hence, it is not the case, as Joseph B. Wall would have it<sup>59</sup>, that the problem of human individuation must be posed at the level of essence:

[St. Thomas' distinction between *esse* and essence] should be understood as the properly Thomistic answer to the classic problem of universals. The question was: "How can the essence of the species be both one in itself and many in the plurality of individuals?" And philosophers had vainly looked at the essence of the species for an answer. What is new in Thomas Aquinas' answer is that he finds the answer in the order of existence.<sup>60</sup>

To sum up, a thing is individual insofar as it has being. The human soul has being independent from matter and, hence, matter cannot be the principle by which humans are individual. Act, moreover, has priority over potency and,

hence, 'we must gather *from* the act the reason why the potency is *such as it is*'. Form cannot, then, be the principle by which human beings are individuated because, in relation to *esse*, it is a principle of potency.

#### 5. Human Individuation.

There are but three constitutive principles of human beings: matter, form, and *esse*. If neither matter nor form can be said to individuate human beings, it must, then, be the case that it is *esse* which individuates us and, hence, that *esse* does not only make the human being *to be*, but *to be individual*.

If a thing is individual insofar as it has being and if, as St. Thomas states in his Quaestiones de Anima, each individual thing is both one and a being on the same basis<sup>61</sup>, this conclusion is inevitable. For, in St. Thomas' metaphysics, it is *esse*, not form, which makes the human being to be<sup>62</sup>, it is *esse* which makes the human being to be both one and a being. Moreover, *esse* must be that which individuates human beings because *esse* is none other than our 'being' and 'we must judge of the multiplicity of a thing as we judge of its being'.<sup>63</sup>

Montague Brown claims that *esse* fails to specify why it is that personal individuality differs from that of other

things.<sup>64</sup> But, it is precisely *esse* which can and does specify why you and I are not only different from other corporeal substances (*esse* is possessed by our souls, whereas it is their composite which possesses *esse*) but also different from angels (our *esse* is shared with a body, theirs is not), as well as each other: we each possess our own unique act of being:

St. Thomas continually emphasizes the fact that each individual existent is so-named from the incommunicable act-of-existing which it peculiarly possesses. [...] This primal ground of uniqueness, *esse*, is an act which discloses and manifests a determinate and intelligible actuality which is wholly unique in each instance.<sup>65</sup>

Saints, philosophers, scientists, artists, craftsmen - no two men are the same, because even the humblest among them ultimately is his own 'to be'.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, Prof. Brown's search for what, intrinsic to human beings, accounts for their dignity<sup>67</sup> is answered by *esse*. Our *esse*, we must remember, is efficiently caused by God. God does not, however, create out of necessity but gratuitously (out of love). Our very being, hence, depends upon an act of love of God. And therein lies our dignity for, unlike other corporeal substances, God directly creates each and every one of us. At the very basis of our individuality lies an individual act of love. It is not 'human being' which is created by God, but 'Carlos', 'Joseph', and 'Linda'.

Lest any misunderstandings arise, we are not arguing that the roots of human individuation are God's act. Although God's act is at the basis of our being, that which individuates us must be one of our constituents, must be intrinsic to us. God's act, however, is an extrinsic cause of our being. The roots of our individuation are not His act, but, as we have argued, *esse*.

We do not, moreover, believe that, in advancing *esse* as that act whereby human beings are individuated, we thereby diminish the value of the human body. When God creates the human soul along with its *esse*, He yet creates it as a substantial form essentially related to matter. Although the soul is immortal because it itself possesses *esse* and not the composite, without its body it "remains an essentially incomplete reality that could not be considered a substance or person."<sup>68</sup> In fact, the soul is united to the body in order *to be* and *to operate* according to its nature and, hence, "to be separated from the body is beyond the conditions of the soul's nature (*praeter naturam*)".<sup>69</sup>

This is not to say that we are individuated by our bodies ("it must be said that *as the body is related to the soul's actual being, so it is to its individuation*"<sup>70</sup>) but that the body which our soul makes to be a body<sup>71</sup> is necessary for our perfection.

The value and importance of the body is not diminished simply because it is *esse* which individuates us. All that this denies is that matter individuates us. Neither is it diminished because it is the soul, rather than the composite, which possesses this act. For, the soul is not a substance but a subsistent substantial form which not only makes the body to be a body, but requires its body for its perfection. As Prof. Bazan puts it: "Thus God has made a strange creature whose nature seems to allow the separation of its constituents at the same time that it is clamoring for their union."<sup>72</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Aristotle, Metaphysics, Z (VII), 1, 1028 b 2-4.
2. *ibid.*, X, 2, 1054 a 10-19.
3. *ibid.*, 1053 b 16-21.
4. *ibid.*, Z (VII), 17, 1041 b 4.
5. B. Carlos Bazan, "Etre: Finitude et Infini", De Ortu Grammaticae: Studies in the History of the Language Sciences, 43 (1990), p. 53.
6. *ibid.*, p. 52-53; Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), p. 47.
7. Bazan, "Etre...", pp. 53-54.
8. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
9. *ibid.*, p.158.
10. M.-D. Roland-Gosselin, *op. cit.*; Concerning Being and Essence, (George G. Leckie, tr.), (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1937).
11. Concerning Being and Essence, chap. IV; Summa Contra Gentiles, (James F. Anderson, tr.), (New York: Image Books, 1956), I, chap. 22; Summa Theologica, Q.50, art. 1 & art. 2; Quaestiones De Anima, q. 6.
12. *ibid.*
13. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
14. Concerning Being and Essence, chap. 4.
15. *ibid.*
16. Summa Theologica, I, q. 45, art. 4, reply 2.
17. *ibid.*, response.
18. Joseph Owens, "The Accidental and Essential Character of Being," St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The

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- collected papers of Joseph Owens, (John R. Catan, ed.), (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980), p. 95.
19. *ibid.*
  20. *ibid.*, p. 64.
  21. Summa contra Gentiles, II, chap. 30, 1.
  22. *ibid.*, chap. 30, 5.
  23. *ibid.*, chap. 30, 2.
  24. *ibid.*, chap. 30, 6. We should note, however, that this text is strongly influenced by neoplatonic emanationism.
  25. *ibid.*, chap. 30, 7.
  26. Summa Theologica, I, q. 50, art. 2, reply 3 (square brackets indicate an omission).
  27. Treatise on Separate Substances, (Francis J. Lescoe, tr.), (West Hartford, Connecticut: Saint Joseph College, 1963), chap. 8, no. 45.
  28. Summa contra Gentiles, II, chap. 55, 3.
  29. *ibid.*
  30. *ibid.*
  31. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 2, reply 2.
  32. On Spiritual Creatures, (Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth, trs.), (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), art. V, reply 9 (square brackets indicate omission).
  33. Quaestiones De Anima, q. 6, response.
  34. Bernardo C. Bazan, "La corporalite selon S. Thomas," La Revue Philosophique de Louvain, 81 (#15, 1981), pp. 386-387.
  35. On Spiritual Creatures, art. 1, response.
  36. On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists, chap. 1, #37.
  37. *ibid.*, #38.
  38. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 2, reply 2.

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39. See, pp. 17-19 of this thesis.
40. Quaestiones de Anima, q. 1, response. See, also, Summa Theologica, I, q. 75, art. 2, response.
41. See, pp.
42. *ibid.*, q. 1, reply 13.
43. On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists, chap. 1, #38; Summa Contra Gentiles, II, chap. 68, 3 and chap. 87, 3. See, also, Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 1, reply 5: "The soul communicates that being in which it subsists to the corporeal matter, out of which and the intellectual soul there results one beings; so that the being of the whole composite is also the being of the soul. This is not the case with other non-subsistent forms. For this reason the human soul retains its own being after the dissolution of the body; whereas it is not so with other forms."
44. Quaestiones De Anima, q. 14, reply 11.
45. See, for example, Quaestiones De Anima, q. 1, reply 18.
46. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 2, reply 2.
47. Bernardo Carlos Bazan, "The Highest Encomium of Human Body," Littera Sensus Sententia: Studi in onore del Prof. Clemente J. Vansteenkiste O.P., (Studia Universitatis S. Thomae in Urbe, 33), (Milan 1991), p. 104.
48. Quaestiones De Anima, q. 14, reply 21. See, also, q. 1, response.
49. Quaestiones De Anima, q. 1, response (Square brackets indicate omission).
50. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 5, response.
51. *ibid.* See also, On Spiritual Creatures, chap. IV, reply 3; chap. X, reply 3; Summa Theologica, I, q. 85, art. 3, reply 1.
52. Bobik, "The Individual Body", p. 329.
53. See, section 1.
54. *ibid.*

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55. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 6, response.
56. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
57. *ibid.* (the references given by Prof. Gilson are, in order, the following: Qu. disp. de Anima, art. 6, Resp; *ibid.*, q. 7, art. 2, ad 9<sup>m</sup>; and Sum. Theol., I, 4, 2, reply 3).
58. *ibid.* See also, On Spiritual Creatures, chap. IV, reply 3; chap. X, reply 3; Summa Theologica, I, q. 85, art. 3, reply 1.
59. Joseph B. Wall, "The Mind of St. Thomas on the Principle of Individuation," The Modern Schoolman, XVIII no. 3 (March 1941), p. 43.
60. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 171 (Square brackets indicate omission; text in brackets added but contained in Gilson's own text).
61. Quaestiones de Anima, q. 1, reply 2: "unumquodque secundum idem habet esse et individuationem".
62. See, pp. 57-60.
63. Summa Theologica, I, q. 76, art. 2, reply 2.
64. Montague Brown, "St. Thomas Aquinas and the Individuation of Persons," American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, LXV (Winter 1991), pp. 29; 31-32.
65. David Winiewicz, "A Note on 'Alteritas' and Numerical Diversity in St. Thomas Aquinas," Dialogue (Canada), (December 1977), pp. 697-698.
66. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 186.
67. Brown, "St. Thomas...", pp. 31-32.
68. Bazan, "The Highest Encomium...", p. 108.
69. *ibid.*, pp. 108-109.
70. On Spiritual Creatures, chap. IX, reply 3 (emphasis mine).
71. Quaestiones de Anima, q. 1, reply 15.

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72. Bazan, "The Highest Encomium...", p. 109.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Given that this thesis is not lengthy, it does not seem appropriate to recapitulate its content. Rather than do so, we shall devote this section to a brief discussion of, what we perceive to be, some of its shortcomings, as well as some of the new avenues of research opened by it.

One of the shortcomings of this thesis is that it does not, nor could (given its limitations of time and space, as well as theme) adequately treat of human body's value in the thought of St. Thomas. Although we argued that the human body is not devalued in any way by our thesis, we neither clearly developed in what its value consists nor what sorts of ontological, ethical, and social implications elevating the status of the body may have. We refer the reader to B. Carlos Bazan's article "The Highest Encomium of Human Body" (cited in our last Chapter) for a more developed discussion of the body's value in St. Thomas' thought.

Another, related, shortcoming of this thesis is that it does not adequately discuss nor treat of the soul's inclination or 'habitus' to a particular body. Is it a relation? A potency? To what question is it an answer? These and other questions could serve as the basis of a doctoral

thesis dissertation and we are considering pursuing these questions to that end.

Certainly one of the avenues of research opened by our thesis is the historical debate over what individuates human beings. Another, more appealing to us, is how human individuation occurs at the biological level. How does St. Thomas reconcile direct creation with human procreation? How does this affect human individuation?

Yet another avenue of research opened by our thesis would be to develop the implications human individuation by *esse* has for the individuation of other corporeal substances. Does matter play a role in their individuation? If so, what? Are corporeal substances only accidentally individual? Lastly, although touched upon briefly in our conclusion, the implications this thesis has for ethics could be pursued and substantially developed.

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