Aquinas on the Unicity of Substantial form and Postmortem Bodily Continuity

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Abstract
This paper will examine the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas on the metaphysical question of the unicity of the substantial form of the body. That is, is the soul the body's sole substantial form or does that body have its own organizing principle or form? The reason this issue arises is the attempt to explain the continuity of identity between the person and the body upon death. This paper will attempt to re-claim the proper role of the body within Aquinas's understanding of human nature, which has not been fully understood by modern commentators. What is central to understand is that for Aquinas the full identity of the human person is not merely in his soul, but in the soul-body unity that is the complete expression of his nature. To elucidate the fullness of Aquinas's view, this paper will conclude with an explanation of some of the complexity of Aquinas's thinking on the body and bodily identity.

Thomas Aquinas performed his first postmortem miracle even before the Cistercians at Fossanova, the abbey where Aquinas had died on 7 March 1274, had managed to prepare his body for burial. John of Ferentino, the subprior at Fossanova, was cured of an eye ailment by touching his own eyes against those of Aquinas's corpse: so Aquinas's cult began.[1] Not long afterwards, scholars at Paris and Oxford universities began to passionately debate whether one of Aquinas's most innovative ideas had heretical implications, namely his theory that the soul is the human body's only substantial, or nature-determining form (that is, the theory of the unicity of substantial form).[2] At the crux of the debate, paradoxically, was the very problem of how to establish bodily continuity, or the continuing identity of a body, across death.[3]

[1] J.-P. TORRELL, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1., *The Person and his Work* (trans.) R. Royal (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1996), 296-7.

[2] A passage illustrating the theory is AQUINAS, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* (hereafter *DSC*), a. 3, response: "Set tunc dubium restat quid sit proprium subiectum anime, quod comparetur ad ipsam sicut materia ad formam. Circa hoc enim est duplex opinio: quidam enim dicunt quod sunt multe forme substantiales in eodem individuo... Alia opinio est quod in uno individuo non est nisi una forma substantialis: et secundum hoc oportet dicere quod per formam substantialem, quae est anima humana, habet hoc individuum non solum quod sit homo, sed quod sit animal, et quod sit vivum, et quod sit corpus, et substantia et ens... et hoc [the pluralist position] fuit proprium Platonicorum... et hoc [the position that the soul is the only substantial form in a human being] fuit proprium philosophe Aristotilis... et hec [the pluralist position] est positio Avicebron in libro Fontis vite... Set hec positio

With the significant addition of the secular master Henry of Ghent, those who criticised Aquinas's philosophy in late thirteenth century were Franciscan. The common contention of Aquinas's critics was that it followed from his thought that the dead body of Christ couldn't really have been the same thing as his living body, and that relics couldn't really have been continuous with the bodies of saints. With the notable exception of Robert Kilwardby, and the important addition of the Augustinian Giles of Rome, those who defended Aquinas's philosophy in the late thirteenth century were Dominican.[4] And if Aquinas had argued that there could only be one substantial form in a human being, and that that form was the soul, his critics were pluralists, arguing that there had to be at least one other form, a distinct bodily substantial form, to guarantee the body's continuity across the separation of the soul at death.[5]

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secundum vera philosophie principia que consideravit Aristotelis est impossibilis." *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 24, 2 (Rome and Paris: Commissio Leonina and Les éditions du Cerf, 2000), 39-42.

[3] The best guide to this debate is now A. BOUREAU, *Théologie, science et censure au XIIIe siècle: le cas de Jean Peckham* (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1999), replacing R. ZAVALLONI, *Richard de Mediavilla et la Controverse sur la Pluralité des Formes. Textes inédits et étude critique* (Louvain: Editions de L'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie, 1951).

[4] Kilwardby's *apologia* in response to the Dominican Archbishop of Corinth Peter of Conflans shortly after the Oxford censure of 18 March 1277 makes his position clear. It is edited in two parts: F. EHRLE, "Der Augustinismus und der Aristotelismus in der Scholastik gegen Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts", in *Archiv für Literatur-und Kirchengeschichte des Mittelalters*, (Freiburg: Herder, 1889), vol. V, 614-32, and A. BIRKENMAJER, *Vermischte Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie, Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, (Münster: Verlag der Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922), vol. XX, 60-4. From the period up to 1286, the texts defending Aquinas on the unicity of form are: GILES OF LESSINES, *De unitate formae*, M. de Wulf (ed.), *Les Philosophes de Moyen Âge*, (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université, 1902), vol. I; THOMAS OF SUTTON, "De pluralitate formarum", in Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia*, Roberto Busa (ed.) (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), vol. 7: *Aliorum Medii Aevi Auctorum Scripta*; RICHARD KNAPWELL, *Le Correctorium Corruptorii "Quare"*, P. Glorieux (ed.), *Les premières polémiques thomistes*, no. 1 (Kain: Le Saulchoir, 1927); RICHARD KNAPWELL, *Quaestio disputata de unitate formae*, F. E. Kelley (ed.) (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982); ROBERT OF ORFORD, *Le Correctorium Corruptorii "Sciendum"*, P. Glorieux (ed.), *Les premières polémiques thomistes*, no. 2 (Paris: Librarie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1956); JOHN OF PARIS, *Le correctorium corruptorii "Circa" de Jean Quidort de Paris*, J.-P. Müller (ed.), *Studia Anselmiana* 12-13 (Rome: Herder, 1941); Giles of Rome's *De gradibus* also circulated under the title *Contra gradus et pluralitates formarum* (there are several early modern editions).

[5] From the period up to 1286: HENRY OF GHENT, *Quodlibet I*, R. Macken (ed.) (Leiden: Brill, 1979), I, q. 4 esp. *solutio*; WILLIAM DE LA MARE, "Correctorium Fratris Thomae", in *Le Correctorium Corruptorii "Quare"*, P. Glorieux (ed.), *Les premières polémiques thomistes*, no. 1 (Kain: Le Saulchoir, 1927); JOHN PECKHAM, *Quodlibet* IV, q. 11, *Quodlibeta Quatuor*, F. Delorme (ed.) (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1989); ROGER MARSTON, *Quodlibet* II, q. 22, *Quodlibet* IV, qq. 9, 11 and 27 *Quodlibeta Quatuor*, G. F. Etzkorn and I. C. Brady (eds.) (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1994); RICHARD DE MEDIAVILLA, *Richard de Mediavilla et la controverse sur la pluralité des formes*, Roberto Zavalloni (ed.) (Louvain: Éditions de l'Institut supérieur de philosophie, 1951); PETER JOHN OLIVI, *Quaestiones in secundum librum sententiarum*, qq. 50-51, B. Jansen (ed.) (Quaracchi: ex typographia collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1924), vol. II.

The plot line here is well-known. This esoteric metaphysical debate revolving around the number of substantial forms that coexisted within a human being had concrete political and theological consequences. Whether or not it was the intention of Bishop of Paris Stephen Tempier's assembled commission of theologians to make Aquinas, along with his pupil Giles of Rome, a direct target of the acts of censure and condemnation that took place at Paris in March 1277,[6] and whatever was Robert Kilwardby's exact intention in touching upon certain implications of the theory of the unicity of form in his list of articles in natural philosophy prohibited at Oxford in the same month,[7] it is clear at least that the ensuing dispute about the unicity or plurality of substantial form in humans lay behind both the open condemnation of the theory of the unicity of substantial form as heretical by the Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury John Peckham on 30 April 1286,[8] and the enactment of mendicant legislation in the 1280s intended to constrain Dominicans to defend and promote Aquinas's philosophy and Franciscans to criticise it.[9]

So what is there to say about any of this that's new? Part of this paper's argument is that a central plank of Aquinas's theory of human nature, namely the place of the body within it, has not been properly understood.[10] Modern commentators, navigating the complexity of the late thirteenth-debate about the unicity or plurality of substantial form, can appear to take posthumous Franciscan

[6] For this debate: R. WIELOCKX, "A Separate Process against Aquinas. A Response to John F. Wippel" in J. Hamesse (ed.), *Roma, magistra mundi: itineraria culturae medievalis: mélanges offerts au Père L.E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire* (Louvain-la-Neuve: F.I.D.E.M., Collège Mercier, 1998), 1009-30; R. WIELOCKX, "Procedures contre Gilles de Rome et Thomas d'Aquin" in *Revues de sciences philosophiques et theologiques* 83 (1999), 293-313; J. F. WIPPEL, "Bishop Stephen Tempier and Thomas Aquinas: A Separate Process Against Aquinas?", *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 44 (1997), 117-36; J. M. M. H. THIJSSEN, "1277 Revisited: A new Interpretation of the Doctrinal Investigations of Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome", *Vivarium*, 35 (1997), 72-101.

[7] For the full list of the 30 articles Kilwardby condemned *In Grammaticalibus*, *In Logicalibus* and *In Naturalibus*, see H. DENIFLE and A. CHATELAIN (eds.), *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, (Paris: Culture et Civilisation, 1964), vol. 1, n. 474, 558-9. Article 13 *In Naturalibus* touches on postmortem bodily continuity.

[8] For the articles condemned by Peckham, of which the eighth condemns the theory of the unicity of substantial form directly: C. T. MARTIN (ed.), *Registrum epistolarum fratris Johannis Peckham archiepiscopi cantuariensis* (hereafter *Registrum*), 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1882-5), vol. 3, 922-3.

[9] P. G. FUSSENEGGER (ed.), "Definitiones Capituli Generalis Argentinae, Celebrati anno 1282", in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 26 (1933), 127-40, 139, n.2. B. M. REICHERT (ed.) *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum*, vol. 1, *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum Historica*, 3 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1898), 235. See also M. BURBACH, "Early Dominican and Franciscan legislation regarding St. Thomas", in *Medieval Studies*, 4 (1942), 139-58.

[10] This argument is elaborated more fully in the present author's forthcoming monograph with Oxford University Press, currently titled *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity*.

criticism of Aquinas's theory of human nature at face value. Caroline Walker Bynum's excellent work on the resurrection of the body in medieval Christianity provides a good example of this kind of modern interpretation:

> What Aquinas's teaching actually threatens is *body*, since, in denying the plurality of forms, Aquinas must assert that the soul (our only form) is the form of our bodiliness <sic>, too, reducing what is left over to mere primary matter or potency… The body we have at the moment is… packed into the soul.[11]

The key interpretative point here is the contention that, for Aquinas, the human body in its own right is mere primary, or prime matter, and (to put the point simply), scholastic theologians understood prime matter to be the intrinsically featureless substratum of all natural change. (This does not appear to match Aristotle's understanding of *prote hyle*, translated into Latin as *materia prima* by William of Moerbeke, but that is another story[12]). A common thirteenth-century definition of prime matter is as follows:

> Prime matter is neither 'this', nor 'this much', nor 'this way', nor any of the other things by which being is determined.[13]

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[11] C. W. BYNUM, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in its Medieval and Modern Contexts" in C. W. BYNUM, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 255. A similar appraisal is found in C. W. BYNUM, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). For a radically opposed view, see D. TURNER, *Thomas Aquinas. A Portrait* (Yale: New Haven and London, 2013), *passim*., wherein Aquinas is described as a 'materialist'.

[12] This debate is rather old and yet not generally well understood by medievalists. It can be traced through the following articles: H. R. KING, "Aristotle without *Prima Materia*", in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17 (1956), 388-9; W. CHARLTON (trans.), *Aristotle's Physics, Books I and II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), Appendix: Did Aristotle Believe in Prime Matter?, 141-5; W. CHARLTON, 'Prime Matter: A Rejoinder', in *Phronesis*, 28 (1983), 197-211; F. SOLMSEN, "Aristotle and Prime Matter: A Reply to Hugh R. King", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 19 (1958), 243-52; A. R. LACEY, "The Eleatics and Aristotle on some Problems of Change", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 26 (1965), 451-68; H. M. ROBINSON, "Prime Matter in Aristotle", in *Phronesis*, 19 (1974), 168-88; B. JONES, "Aristotle's Introduction of Matter", in *The Philosophical Review*, 83 (1974), 474-500; R. DANCY, "On Some of Aristotle's Second Thoughts About Substances: Matter", in *The Philosophical Review*, 87 (1978), 372-413; C. J. F. WILLIAMS (trans.), *Aristotle's De generatione et corruptione* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), Appendix: Prime Matter in *De generatione et corruptione*, 211-9; D. W. GRAHAM, "The Paradox of Prime Matter", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 475-90; K. C. COOK, "The Underlying Thing, the Underlying Nature and Matter. Aristotle's Analogy in Phys. I.7", in *Apeiron*, 22 (1989), 105-19.

[13] "Materia prima nec est quid, nec est quantum, nec quale, nec aliquid aliorum quibus ens est determinatum." J. HAMESSE (ed.), *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis. Un Florège Médiéval: étude historique et édition critique, Philosophes Médiévaux*, 17 (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1974), 128 (161).

Yet the idea that the body, in distinction from the soul, is mere prime matter, does not appear to originate with Aquinas himself. It was the Franciscan William de la Mare, in his *Correctorium fratris Thomae*, composed in close connection with the events of March 1277, who was the first to claim that this idea was Aquinas's:

> If there had not been some other substantial form than the intellective soul belonging to the body of Christ, after the soul was separated, prime matter alone would have remained… It follows from this that it was not the same body in number [or exactly the same individual body] that died... and was buried... For if only matter remained, it was not a body... prime matter is not a body...[14]

de la Mare's point is that if all that bridges the divide between the living body and corpse is mere prime matter, then in fact there is no continuity or identity at all. This is precisely why a separate bodily form is apparently needed. The Franciscan Roger Marston put the point bluntly in a Quodlibetical debate of Lent 1284 at Oxford, saying of Christ's corpse:

> I don't see how it could have been the same body unless it had the same form.[15]

The suggestion then is that a reading of these Franciscan arguments may lead to the anachronistic view that, for Aquinas, the body, and thus everything that matters to the individuality and identity of the person, is packed into their soul. Actually, Aquinas's thinking on the body and bodily identity was considerably more complex. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to outlining Aquinas's thinking in these areas before suggesting certain ways in which it was profoundly influential on subsequent scholastic thought.

Aquinas's work on bodily identity, and in particular the continuity of the body after death and subsequently at the resurrection, fits into a distinctively late-medieval pattern of western intellectual innovation. To paraphrase John Marenbon, theologians were the most innovative thinkers at the late-medieval universities, because the answers to the particular questions they asked couldn't be straightforwardly absorbed

[14] (My insertion). "si autem illius corporis Christi non fuisset alia forma substantialis quam intellectiva, postquam fuit separata, remansit prima materia sola... Si... remansit sola materia, non erat corpus... materia enim prima non est corpus..." WILLIAM DE LA MARE, *Correctorium Fratris*, a. 31, 129.

[15] "non video quomodo posset esse idem corpus nisi haberet eandem formam". ROGER MARSTON, *Quodlibet* IV, q. response, Etzkorn and Brady (eds.), 389.

from their pagan and Arab source material. It was precisely, then, the activity of spelling out the philosophical consequences of the articles of faith that routinely required new thinking, because it raised questions about the natural world that were often unanticipated by Aristotle and his Greek and Arabic commentators.[16]

How does this pattern apply in the particular case of Aquinas's thinking on resurrection and postmortem bodily continuity? Scholastic theologians' discussions of the general resurrection certainly generated some surprising lines of enquiry, including a preponderance of thought experiments that analyse the implications of various processes of bodily change, not only growth and nutrition, but also the implications of cannibalism. If Person B eats Person A, then who gets the shared flesh back at the resurrection, A or B? What if Person B eats person A, but person A's flesh becomes not a part of Person's B body but part of his semen. Then Person B generates a child, Person C, from that semen. Who will get back the shared flesh then, A or C? And so on.[17] A literal interpretation of the bodily resurrection underpinned this. Each person would be judged in the same flesh they had possessed in mortal life; each would be raised up to heaven, or not, with their own body.

Taking a step back from the detail, the doctrine of the bodily resurrection had two broader implications for the composition of human nature. The first of these was that the soul and matter were united intimately and essentially, and not incidentally or accidentally. One of the considerations shaping Aquinas's new theory that the soul was the body's only substantial form was the need to provide for the psychosomatic unity of the human being, particularly against Cathar dualists who taught reincarnation.[18] It was Aquinas's view that any intervening corporeal form would

[16] JOHN MARENBON, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150-1350). An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), see esp. 190. Cf. also P. L. REYNOLDS, *Food and the Body. Some Peculiar Questions in High Medieval Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 13-18.

[17] REYNOLDS, *Food and the Body*, see esp. 304-5 (on Albertus Magnus's treatment of the problem of cannibalism), 313-4, 343-4 (on Bonaventure) and 391-5 (on Aquinas).

[18] It makes no difference at all to the present argument whether or not the Cathars, along with their dualist theology, really existed or were the product of Catholic scholarly and inquisitorial imaginations in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For this latter view in the recent historiography, see in particular R. I. MOORE, *The War on Heresy* (London: Profile Books, 2012), and M. G. PEGG, *The Corruption of Angels. The Great Inquisition of 1245-1246* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Such arguments are difficult to sustain given the survival of non-Catholic sources for Cathar doctrine, such as the *Book of the Two Principles*. Aquinas thought that the Cathars were real. See for instance *Summa Contra Gentiles* II. c. 89, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 13 (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1918), 520.

compromise human unity, making the union of soul and matter accidental, or incidental, or relative (*secundum quid*), rather than essential, in a way that was compatible with reincarnation as opposed to bodily resurrection. [19] Second, resurrection implied that the body should nonetheless maintain a certain autonomy relative to the soul – matter, and indeed particular matter, had to make its own contribution to the individual person, or there would be no need for bodily resurrection, or the resurrection of the *same* body, at all.

As we saw above, for William de la Mare Aquinas couldn't have had it both ways: he ended up sacrificing bodily autonomy to substantial unity, and packing the body, and thus the whole person, into the soul. Aquinas himself wouldn't have agreed. In saying that the soul was the body's only substantial form, Aquinas meant that the soul fixed the nature of the body as human, gave it its existence, and served as the origin of its vital capacities and functions. None of that was to say, however, that the soul was a shape or a physical or organic structure. Instead, an accidental form, or property of the body, a quasi-mathematical structure that Aquinas called dimensive quantity (*quantitas dimensiva*), was responsible for the body's organic arrangement: the extension, relative positioning, and arrangement, of its parts. Aquinas summarises this view in *Summa Theologica* part III, q. 76, article 2, on transubstantiation. An objection states that Christ's body cannot be whole in each part of the Eucharist, for surely He has an organic body with parts spread out from one another in a certain way. Aquinas's reply argues that Christ's body is not in the Eucharist in such a way that its parts are in fact spread out, even though:

> the determinate distance of parts in an organic body [their relative proportions, in other words, and precise spatial arrangement] is founded on dimensive quantity.[20]

Furthermore, for Aquinas, a human body's dimensive quantity makes a crucial contribution to its individuality. A body's unique, quasi-mathematical structure

[19] "Quidam enim dicunt, quod sunt multae formae substantiales in eodem individuo... Sed haec positio... est impossibilis. Primo quidem, quia nullum individuum substantiae esset simpliciter unum. Non enim fit simpliciter unum ex duobus actibus, sed ex potentia et actu, in quantum id quod est potentia fit actu... Manifestum est ergo, quod si multiplicarentur multae formae substantiales in uno individuo substantiae, individuum substantiae non esset unum simpliciter, sed secundum quid, sicut homo albus." *DSC*, a. 3, response, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 24, 2, 39, 42-3.

[20] (My insertion) "determinata distantia partium in corpore organico fundatur super quantitatem dimensivam ipsius". *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *ST*) III, q. 76, a. 3, ad 2, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 12 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1906), 183.

individualises the matter belonging to it, rendering it the very material belonging to that body and no other:

> Only according to quantitative division is *this* matter said to be distinct from *that* matter.[21]

Aristotle had suggested in the *Physics* that such mathematical structures were immanent in natural bodies, but had never fully and consistently integrated this idea into his work on natural bodies. The Commentator Averroes did develop this line of thought on the subject of bodily structure, and, as will become clear below, influenced Aquinas..[22]

To summarise the argument so far, for Aquinas, it is the body's physical structure, its dimensive quantity, which preserves its autonomy relative to the soul. As Aquinas's critics understood, however, this account of bodily autonomy did not translate easily into an explanation for bodily continuity after death. In order to appreciate the difficulty, it will be necessarily to look closely at Aquinas's account of the general resurrection, which he developed by way of reconciling various statements on the subject of bodily identity that could be found in the works of St. Augustine and Aristotle.

Aristotle appeared straightforwardly to rule out the possibility of resurrection in *On Generation and Corruption* II.11. Once corrupted, Aristotle stated, a corruptible bodily substance such as a human body could return, or repeat, or reiterate, only in species or kind (as when a parent generates a child, or as water condenses to form clouds and falls again as rain), but not in number, or as exactly the same individual (as when a person is resurrected):

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[21] (My emphasis) "…nec poterit dici materia haec alia ab illa, nisi secundum divisionem quantitativam." *ST* I, q. 75, a. 7, response, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 5 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta, 1889), 207. Less condensed statements to the same effect can be found in Aquinas's two major discussions of the individuation of material things: his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, part 2, q. 4, a. 2, and *ST* III, q. 77, a. 2. For an introduction to Aquinas's work on the individuation of material substances, see J. F. WIPPEL,*The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D. C.: CUA Press, 2000), 351-75.

[22] ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, 193b21-194a12, *De Caelo*, 268a1ff. For comment on this point: R. SORABJI, *Matter, Space and Motion. Theories in Antiquity and Their Sequel* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 16. On Averroes' Physics in general: R. GLASNER, *Averroes Physics: A Turning Point in Medieval Natural Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

> Those things… whose substance is corruptible, can return or repeat (*reiterare*) in species, but not in number. [23]

This Aristotelian axiom formed a standard objection in many thirteenth-century accounts of the general resurrection, and it was generally accepted as applying to the normal course of nature. Nonetheless, the raising of the dead would happen by divine power, and would involve the reintegration of human beings from parts which had not been annihilated, but had persisted somehow. The soul survived because it was immortal. The whole difficulty then was in explaining how body parts which had disintegrated and dispersed, and perhaps been eaten, lay in wait for resurrection.

St. Augustine had discussed this problem in chapter 23 of his *Enchiridion*. Peter Lombard copied this passage into his *Sentences*, and every bachelor of Theology in the mid-thirteenth century would have been familiar with it:

> For God, the earthly matter from which the flesh of mortal things is created, does not vanish; but whatever dust or ash it might be dissolved into, whatever vapours or winds it might be dispersed into, whether it should be converted into the substance of any other body or into the elements, whether it be changed into the food or flesh of any other animals, even other humans, in an instant it will be returned to the souls that originally animated it.[24]

For Aquinas, however, the explanation for the persistence of body parts after death and their reintegration at the resurrection could not be so straightforward. Plato's atomist physics was behind St. Augustine's account of postmortem material continuity, while Aquinas took his basic conception of matter from Aristotle. Targeting Democritus, Aristotle had rejected the idea that matter was made up of atoms or corpuscles in favour of the idea matter was a continuum in which various

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[23] 'Quorum quidem igitur incorruptibilis substantia mota, manifestum quoniam et numero eadem erunt: motus enim sequitur quod movetur; quorum autem non, sed corruptibilis, necesse specie, numero autem non reiterare. Ideo aqua ex aere et aer ex aqua specie idem, non numero'. ARISTOTLE, *De generatione et corruptione* 338b14-18, *Translatio vetus*, J. JUDYCKA (ed.), *Aristoteles Latinus*, IX. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 81. Cf: 'Quorum substantia deperit, non redeunt eodem humero, sed specie'. HAMESSE (ed.), *Auctoritates Aristotelis*, 171 (50).

[24] "Non enim perit Deo terrena materies, de qua mortalium creatur caro; sed in quemlibet pulverem cineremve solvatur, in quoslibet halitus aurasque diffugiat, in quamcumque aliorum corporum substantiam vel in ipsa elementa vertatur, in quorumcumque animalium, etiam hominum, cibum carnemque mutetur, illi animae puncto temporis redit, quae illam primitus... animavit." PETER LOMBARD, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae* (hereafter *Sententiae*), IV, d. 44, chapter 2.1, Collegium S. Bonaventurae (ed.), 2 vols. (Grottaferrata: Collegium S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971-1981), vol. 2, 517. Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Enchiridion*, chapter 23.8, M. Evans (ed.), *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, 46 (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1969), 96-7.

forms manifested themselves. Furthermore, Aristotle's account of the corpse was unhelpful from the perspective of any theologian looking to give an account of postmortem bodily continuity. The Stagirite had emphasized formal difference, rather than material continuity, between living body and corpse. In his *De anima*, Aristotle had said that the eye of a corpse is called an 'eye' only in an equivocal or ambiguous way, in the same way that an eye in a painting is called an eye. The point was that the living eye and the dead eye were completely different in nature.[25]

Here, then, was a problem. One could hardly argue with Aristotle's observation that the body changed in a profound way in death. Yet the doctrine of the resurrection (including the supposition of the identity of Christ's body in the tomb) appeared to demand an account of the concrete continuity of the corpse and its remains. The pluralist solution to the problem of bodily continuity after death, as we saw, was to invoke a separate substantial form for the body. This form was conceived in a variety of ways, but, to crudely compress the argument, the bodily form was understood to exist in a diminished or less perfect, or incomplete way after the soul's departure. And yet, whereas this form might have sufficed for postmortem bodily continuity in the case of Christ's corpse, which was preserved from further corruption, in the case of any other body pluralist theory still had to explain what would happen in the temporal gap separating the decay and dispersal of bodily material from the future raising of the dead.[26]

Aquinas came up with a solution of his own, which took much more from Averroes' physics than Aristotle's. Averroes had started to move back in the direction of a corpuscular conception of matter, for purely philosophical reasons based on his own observations of natural change. More precisely, the Commentator had argued that matter had to be invested with a physical structure, or with dimensions, all of its own, which would give matter bodily qualities such as position, divisibility, and

[25] ARISTOTLE, *De anima*, 412b17-25.

[26] Aquinas's work on the general resurrection revolves around an attack on pluralist theory. If there are substantial forms other than the immortal soul in the body, these would appear to be annihilated after decay, and cannot return the same in the resurrected individual (following *De generatione et corruptione* II.11). Cf. AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Sentences*, bk. IV, d. 44, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1, esp. arg. 4 and ad 4, and qc. 2, esp. arg. 3 and ad. 3, *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, 80-81, *Compendium Theologiae*, I, c. 154.

extension. This argument was developed both in *De substantia Orbis* and in Averroes' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*:

> And when we consider the thing that carries each transmutation, we find that it is the same thing in number, and that it is a body that we can point to. For what we see is that the same body in the same place is changed from flesh to earth, and from earth to plant…
>
> And so it is necessary that the three dimensions that seem to be inseparable from it [i.e. the observed subject], and seem to be the same in number, the three dimensions which are called 'body', are accidents [or a property of matter]… and it is clear that this matter is never stripped of corporeity.[27]

In ascribing corporeal qualities to matter, Averroes was following in the footsteps of a series of distinguished Neo-Platonist thinkers,[28] but Averroes' particular quasi-corpuscular theory of matter, framed here as an observation of the disintegration of flesh into earth, was precisely what Aquinas was looking for. Aquinas tried to put the theory to use in his work on the resurrection, as the following

[27] 'Et, cum consideraverunt illud, quod defert utraque transmutationem, inveniunt ipsum idem numero, & est corpus demonstratum… Videmus enim idem corpus in idem loco transferri de carneitate in terrestreitatem, & de terrestreitate in vegetabilitatem… Et est necesse etiam ut tres dimensiones, quae videntur inseparabiles ab ipso, & eadem numero, quae dicuntur corpus, sint accidentia… Et manifestum est quod ista materia non denudatur a corporeitate'. AVERROES, *Long Commentary on Aristotle's Physics*, in *Aristotelis de Physico Auditu, libri octo, cum Averrois Cordubensis variis in eosdem Commentariis, Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, vol. IV (ed.) Venetiis apud Junctas 1562-74 (repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1962), Book I, comment 63, f. 38r, A-D. Cf. chapter 1 of AVERROES, *De substantia Orbis*, in English translation in A. Hyman, *Averroes' De Substantia Orbis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1986). The Latin translation of this work describes the corporeal structure belonging to matter as 'indeterminate' (*dimensiones interminatae* or *non terminatae*). A useful summary of Averroes' general position on the structure of matter is S. DONATI, 'The Notion of Dimensiones Indeterminatae in the CommentaryTradition of the Physics in the Thirteenth and in the Early Fourteenth Century', in C. Leijenhorst, C.Lüthy, and J. M. M. H. Thijssen (eds.) *The Dynamics of Aristotelian Natural Philosophy from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 189-223, at 190-1.

[28] See F. A. J. DE HAAS, *John Philoponus' New Definition of Prime Matter. Aspects of its Background in Neoplatonism and the Ancient Commentary Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); F. A. J. DE HAAS, "Aristotle's fourteenth aporia and the three dimensions in later Neoplatonism", in J. J. Cleary (ed.), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 347-68; H. A. WOLFSON *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), 579-81; A. HYMAN, "Aristotle's 'First Matter' and Avicenna's and Averroes' 'Corporeal Form'", in *Harry A. Wolfson Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1965), 385-406; A. D. STONE, "Simplicius and Avicenna on the Essential Corporeity of Material Substance", in R. Wisnovsky (ed.), *Aspects of Avicenna* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2001), 73-130.

passages, respectively from the *Compendium Theologiae* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, indicate:[29]

> Since all things, even the smallest things, fall under divine providence, it is clear that the matter belonging to a particular human body, whatever form it might receive after death, escapes neither divine power nor divine knowledge. This matter remains the same in number, inasmuch as it is understood to exist under dimensions, according to which it can be called *this* matter.[30]
>
> The matter which was subject to such a form [i.e. the immortal soul] remains, under the same dimensions from which it had the property of being individual matter.[31]

The second passage, from the *Summa contra Gentiles*, suggests that the dimensions or structural features that mark out the matter belonging to a particular body are in some sense the same thing as the structure that that body had when it was alive. The argument appears to be that these dimensions survive somehow as traces of the decomposed structure of that body.

There is yet more to say, however, because this argument doesn't quite work within Aquinas's metaphsyical apparatus. Aquinas held that the living body's structural form was an accidental form, or property of the bodily substance. As a property of the body, the structural form depended on the living body for its existence, so was not supposed to be able to survive corruption and decay at all. If a substance corrupts in the ordinary course of nature, its accidents should go too. Whatever its advantages over pluralist theory might have been, Aquinas's argument was not perfectly consistent.

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[29] This is not the moment to introduce an extended discussion of Aquinas's earlier *Sentences* commentary (see bk. IV, d. 44, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1, ad 3), and its use of precise technical language from Averroes' *De substantia Orbis* which described the material structure remaining in matter as 'indeterminate'. As I explain below, any use of Averroes' theory of matter in this area, however framed or qualified, remains problematic for Aquinas.

[30] (My emphasis) "Cum enim supra ostensum sit quod omnia, etiam minima, sub divina providentia continentur, manifestum est quod materia huius humani corporis, quamcumque formam post mortem hominis accipiat, non effugit neque virtutem neque cognitionem divinam: quae quidem materia eadem numero manet, inquantum intelligitur sub dimensionibus existens, secundum quas haec materia dici potest." AQUINAS, *Compendium Theologiae*, c. 154, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 42 (Rome: Editori de San Tommaso, 1979), 140.

[31] "materia etiam manet, quae tali formae fuit subiecta, sub dimensionibus eisdem ex quibus habebat ut esset individualis materia." AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, 81, *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII*, 15 (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1930), 252.

Some modern commentators have been prone to write off Aquinas's Averroan argument for postmortem bodily continuity,[32] but there does not appear to be any textually grounded reason for doing so: although problematic, it is not an argument he retracted in his extant writings. If anything, the fact that the pure process of logic is not the only element involved in Aquinas's thought here makes these passages all the more worthy of being given attention. They show how creative thinking is ultimately limited by the concepts that serve as its basis. What we can say is that Aquinas was pushed towards a position similar to Averroes' on matter, but he wasn't quite able to make the break that was necessary from his standard conceptual apparatus in order to make his thinking transparent. Aquinas never integrated this argument with his work on Christ's corpse, for instance. Of Aquinas's early Dominican interpreters, Richard Knapwell would be the one to take up this task, in his *Quaestio disputata de unitate formae* (1285)—the same disputed question that would, in April 1286, lead to Knapwell's excommunication by Peckham, end his career as a theologian, and provoke the Archbishop's outright condemnation of the theory of the unicity of substantial form. Knapwell made the advantages of Aquinas's theory of material continuity over pluralist theory clearer still, through a serious and direct attempt to integrate Averroes' ideas into an account of resurrection and matter.[33]

The broader significance of this paper's re-reading of Aquinas's work on bodily identity and postmortem bodily continuity is twofold. It allows for a more accurate appraisal of the debate over the unicity or plurality of substantial forms in humans, the most heated scholastic debate of the thirteenth century. Though his account of postmortem bodily identity was underdetermined, there was no inherent

[32] See, for instance, M.-D. ROLAND-GOSSELIN, *Le "De Ente et Essentia" de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), pp. 109-13; ZAVALLONI, *Richard de Mediavilla et la Controverse sur la Pluralité des Formes*, 263.

[33] Knapwell's *Quaestio disputata de unitate formae* is usually read as an attempt at compromise between the two sides in the debate over the unicity of form and postmortem bodily continuity. See the editor's introduction to RICHARD KNAPWELL, *Quaestio disputata de unitate formae,* F. E. Kelley (ed.) (Paris: J. Vrin, 1982), 34; D. A. CALLUS, "The Problem of the Unity of Form and Richard Knapwell", in *Mélanges offerts a Étienne Gilson* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1959), 140, 147-9. In his *Théologie, science et censure* Boureau moves between detecting 'la construction de zones intermédiaires de compromis', on the one hand, and 'quelque tromperie dans le compromis de Knapwell', on the other hand, at 213, 322. In a forthcoming article on the early reception of Aquinas's work in Oxford, I will argue that, read closely, Knapwell's *Disputed Question on the Unity of Form* is framed precisely so as to pull the rug from beneath the pluralist position (which revolves around the basic assertion that bodily form is necessary for bodily continuity) by pointing out that, given bodily decay, continuity of form cannot be sufficient to guarantee postmortem bodily continuity across death and resurrection, and that therefore an Averroan particularising material structure is needed.

threat to the body embedded within Aquinas's theory of human nature. More broadly, this paper's argument has implications for our assessment of the influence of Aquinas's philosophy upon the next generation of scholastic theologians.

The most detailed recent treatment of the development of scholastic theories of matter is Robert Pasnau's *Metaphysical Themes 1274-1671*, which charts the decline of scholasticism as the dominant paradigm in western philosophy, whereby the scholastics' substance-based ontology, which revolved around the idea that ordinary substances (dogs, cats, and stones) were composed of metaphysical parts (matter and form), gave way in the seventeenth century to various corpuscularian theories, which rejected metaphysical parts in favour of the view that the natural world could be explained just in terms of its composition from integral parts, atoms or corpuscles.

Pasnau's argument is that corpuscularianism grew "naturally out of trends that date back to the beginning of the fourteenth century",[34] when Aquinas's pluralist critics began the theoretical fragmentation of substance by positing more than one substantial form in an individual being. In the thought of John Duns Scotus and William Ockham, furthermore, matter took on its own existence, extension, and substantial parts. Meanwhile Averroes' *De substantia Orbis*, which introduced the Commentator's theory of matter, became the most important text for discussions of matter in the late scholastic period.[35]

The account of Aquinas on bodily identity proposed here would place an even stronger emphasis than Pasnau's on Aquinas's intellectual influence. It looks as if, ironically, Aquinas was much more of a corpuscularian, and much less of an Aristotelian, than his pluralist critics: while Aquinas's critics relied on substantial *form* to explain bodily autonomy and identity, Aquinas took up a quasi-corpuscularian idea from Averroes. For Aquinas, as we've seen, the element of individuality in each person which explained their bodily identity over time was the mathematical structure dimensive quantity. Aquinas backed off from using this idea transparently in his work on the resurrection, but he was still the first scholastic theologian, at least as far as I

[34] R. PASNAU, *Metaphysical Themes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), *passim*, but esp. 6-11 and 50-52; quotation from 11.

[35] Ibid., 51-2, 62.

can see, to fully illuminate the significance of Averroes' work on matter in connection with a major theological problem. It was because of, and not in spite, of, his ambiguous use of Averroes that Aquinas invited subsequent thinkers to explore the hypothesis that matter possessed an actual corpuscular structure of its own.