

Good News, Your Soul Hasn't Died Quite Yet

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Abstract: In this paper, I observe that Hobbesian physicalism on the one side, and Cartesian dualism on the other, have had a widespread cultural influence on the way we regard ourselves and on the way we behave toward one another. I argue that what we now need is a conceptual space within which we might forge a metaphysical alternative, an alternative that will give us some hope of overcoming the deleterious intellectual, moral, and social consequences of both physicalism and dualism.

I. Introduction

My title is inspired by Tom Wolfe's celebrated essay, "Sorry, But Your Soul Just Died," originally published in 1996.¹ Fascinated by the eager horde of young scientists currently devoting themselves to research on the human brain, Wolfe reports how these enthusiasts have been convinced by technological advances that the human 'mind' involves nothing over and beyond the brain and that, in addition, the well springs of human behavior are to a hitherto unimagined extent the result of genetic hard-wiring and not of environmental factors such as, among other things, 'free will'—where 'mind' and 'free will', along with other venerable philosophical terms such as 'the self' and 'the soul' are all surrounded by what Wolfe aptly calls "skeptical quotation marks." (Those of us in the know will immediately recognize these terms as hallmarks of what eliminative materialists derisively label 'folk psychology'.) Even though Wolfe takes care to chronicle the cultural resistance to these

claims, in the end he envisions a future Nietzsche announcing, not this time the death of God, but instead the death of the soul, and with it any lingering belief in freedom or immortality. God, freedom, and immortality—all jettisoned by Nietzsche and his imminent successor. So much for metaphysics as we have known it.

Below I will urge that the defective philosophical problematic at stake here has not essentially changed since it was set by Hobbesian physicalism (or materialism) on the one side and Cartesian dualism on the other. But this point, while valid enough, does not do justice to the gravity of our current predicament. For in this case philosophical assumptions, flawed though they be, have had a widespread cultural influence on the way we regard ourselves and on the way we behave toward one another. As Wolfe points out, in announcing the death of God Nietzsche was not so much proclaiming his own atheism as delivering the news that the educated elite no longer believed in God. So, too, the new Nietzsche will be announcing that the educated elite no longer believe in the soul or the self as conceived of by traditional Western philosophy, religion, and popular culture. Still, Nietzsche had warned that disbelief in God would come at a price much steeper than its champions commonly recognized—a monition sufficiently borne out by the unprecedented human carnage of the twentieth century. Likewise, if the only alternative to a physicalist disbelief in the soul is Cartesian dualism, then it is arguable that no matter which of the two sides we line up on, we will be unable to articulate the metaphysical underpinnings of a philosophical anthropology that does justice both to our obvious dignity and distinctiveness as human beings and to our equally obvious continuity with other animals and, indeed, with the rest of the physical universe. Instead, we are likely to find ourselves oscillating incongruously between the poles of the “angelism-bestialism” syndrome described so powerfully (and so entertainingly) by Walker Percy.² Dualism denies our essential embodiedness and animality, while physicalism cannot account for the self that tries to study itself. In both cases, the human self is isolated from its physical surroundings and can very easily come to see itself as the sole source of whatever value and significance is had by an otherwise meaningless corporeal reality. In short, the last four centuries, despite the splendor of their scientific achievements, seem to have left many in confusion about just what human beings are and about just what value to assign to human

life and action—a confusion that contemporary political liberalism simply (but not coincidentally) takes for granted, and the results of which are being played out in what Pope John Paul II has called the “culture of death.”³ In light of these developments, it is no surprise that the Holy Father should have begun his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by invoking once again the Delphic prescription, “Know thyself,” and that he should have gone on to urge Catholic thinkers to undertake with renewed vigor the project of philosophical anthropology.⁴

We might note in passing that this project is intimately tied to the thesis that knowledge is unified—a thesis that lies at the heart not only of *Fides et Ratio* but also of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, where the Holy Father puts the integration of all knowledge at the center of the ideal distinctiveness of Catholic higher education.⁵ At a time of increasing fragmentation of the academic disciplines and in the face of widespread skepticism about the very project of bringing them together into a unified framework, he notes that each of the disciplines in its own way studies the human animal, so that a comprehensive philosophical anthropology must draw from all of them. Consequently, nothing I say below should be taken to disparage the natural and human sciences. Still, we must separate the sciences themselves from the anti-supernaturalist ideologies evident in the writings of certain prominent scientists and ‘scientifically-minded’ philosophers.

What we need, then, is the conceptual space to forge a metaphysical alternative to physicalism and dualism that gives us some hope of overcoming the intellectual, moral, and social consequences of them both.

2. Methodological Preliminaries

In this case, old news is good news. And by ‘good news’ here I do not primarily mean Aristotelianism, though in my opinion some version of it has a crucial role to play. I mean rather the Good News of the Gospel. As *Gaudium et Spes* puts it in a passage cited again and again by the present Pontiff, “only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”⁶ And the “mystery of man” involves not only the story of our salvation, but our very nature as human beings, a topic that the Church has repeatedly addressed in her official teaching. In *Fides et Ratio* the Holy Father cites one recent example:

For its part, the Second Vatican Council offers a rich and fertile teaching concerning philosophy. We cannot forget, especially given the topics considered in this Encyclical Letter, that one whole chapter of the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* is a sort of compendium of biblical anthropology and serves as a source of understanding for philosophy as well. These pages speak of the value of the human person created in the image of God, explain his dignity and preeminence over other creatures, and highlight the transcendent capacity of his reason.⁷

The Holy Father had noted earlier that while many pronouncements of the Church's Magisterium on philosophical matters have been aimed at forestalling the damaging effects on the faithful of mistaken philosophical claims and theories, these pronouncements "are intended above all to challenge, promote, and stimulate philosophical investigations."⁸ The passage just quoted from *Fides et Ratio* is a clear invitation to Catholic thinkers to construct philosophical anthropologies consonant with the Church's teaching.

But how shall we proceed? In another place I have argued that far from being bound by the hoary distinction between philosophers and theologians, Catholic philosophers ought to see themselves first and foremost as architects of comprehensive systems of wisdom that take revealed truths as first principles.⁹ To be sure, mainstream Catholic thought has always maintained a qualified optimism about the power of natural reason to establish some important metaphysical and moral truths with a high degree of certitude, and one traditional task of Catholic philosophers has been to engage intellectuals who for one reason or another do not accept Christian revelation.¹⁰ In *Fides et Ratio*, for example, "the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth, and goodness" is itself counted as part of the "core of philosophical insight" that has been arrived at without the help of revelation.¹¹ Nonetheless, this optimism about natural reason is qualified precisely because for various reasons—some cognitive and some affective—what should be evident or plausible to natural reason is not always recognized as such without the gift of divine revelation.

Just such a situation exists, I submit, with regard to the metaphysical dimensions of contemporary analytic 'philosophy of mind'.

The field is exhaustively divided between a handful of Cartesian dualists on the one hand and numerous physicalists (or materialists) of various stripes on the other, and for several decades the main action has been occurring in the intramural debates among the physicalists. Remarkably, some Christian philosophers, perhaps wary of the embarrassment of being labeled as dualists and thereby excluded from conversations with most non-believing philosophers and scientists, have suggested that Christians themselves should simply dispense with the soul altogether—or at least with talk of the soul. This, I am told by a reliable source, was the advice given to bishops by certain consultants at a recent meeting of the Committee on Science and Human Values of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Acknowledging, in response to the pastoral concerns expressed by some of the bishops, that the designation ‘materialist’ might sound disconcerting to ordinary lay people, these thinkers suggested that Catholics call themselves “non-reductive physicalists” instead, all the while maintaining a discreet silence about the soul itself and about its immateriality and immortality. And all this, the bishops were assured, is consonant with the Catholic Faith. After all, the story goes, what Catholics *really* believe in is not the immortality of the soul—a vestige of Hellenism that St. Augustine and St. Thomas, unlike we ourselves, were prevented from spotting as counterfeit by culturally-induced blindness—but rather the resurrection of the body. And this latter doctrine is (well, to be honest, *may be*) compatible with physicalism.¹²

It is precisely episodes of this sort that lead me to insist that Catholic intellectuals should begin their inquiry into philosophical anthropology by carefully studying the teachings of the Church and allowing those teachings to play a normative role along with natural reason and experience. In fact, appeals to the teachings of the Church should in theory have preeminence, even if we grant that reason and experience must play a significant role in the interpretation of the sources of revelation. One danger here, characteristic of the excessively rationalistic tendencies endemic to certain strains of Catholic thought over the last two centuries, is that appeals to reason and experience will be allowed to trump the plain sense of authoritative biblical and ecclesiastical pronouncements. In other words, appeals to reason and experience are freely allowed to serve as checks on the interpretation of the sources of revelation, but the sources of revelation are not accorded the same power to check claims putatively founded on reason and

experience. Instead, much too early in the game revealed doctrines are either abandoned or subjected to debilitating interpretations that empty them of their power to inspire and challenge young people and to fortify Christian witness. A second danger, closely linked with the first, is that philosophical problematics as defined by current intellectual elites will themselves fill the vacuum and come to provide indefeasible norms for inquiry. Once this happens, judgments of plausibility are altered in subtle ways that can lead us to make unwarranted concessions. In short, we run the risk of letting the current problematics shape and revise our own agenda even when, as in the case at hand, it is precisely the current problematic that stands in need of radical revision from a Catholic perspective.

We will be able to make intelligent assessments of faulty problematics and to offer credible suggestions for revising them only to the extent that our own first principles, including revealed first principles, are clearly understood and systematically elaborated.¹³ This is simply an application to philosophy of the claim that it is theories as wholes that are the proper units of assessment in scientific inquiry. For aside from considerations of mere logical validity, the acceptability of central theoretical arguments depends almost entirely on those judgments of plausibility—what Newman called “antecedent probabilities” and what many analytic philosophers call “our intuitions”—that we bring to the assessment of key premises. But such judgments depend heavily on first principles. Perhaps much of any authentically Catholic anthropology can be argued for persuasively without recourse to revelation; perhaps not. But in order to find out, we first have to develop such a theory systematically in light of revealed principles. What’s more, this procedure has the added advantage of forcing each of us to clarify with precision and to defend our interpretations of the deliverances of faith, instead of hiding behind ambiguity.¹⁴

In what follows I will examine the teachings of the Church on the human soul and comment briefly on certain key elements in the contemporary problematic in philosophy of mind.

3. The *analogia fidei*

I know from unpleasant experience that one who defends the plain sense of the Church’s teaching on the human soul may expect to meet with fierce resistance from certain Catholic quarters.¹⁵ Apparently, in

the eyes of some it is permissible for the philosophically and theologically unsophisticated faithful to use "soul-language" in liturgical contexts and even within more straightforwardly doctrinal contexts, as long as they do not take such language with metaphysical seriousness. One is reminded of Averroes's attitude toward the miracle stories in the Quran: "Those stories are necessary for edifying the unlearned masses and fortifying their religious and moral practice, but we philosophers, who need no such props, know better, of course." I can imagine someone characterizing, say, the Feast of All Souls in just such a condescending way. (In fact, I don't have to imagine it; I've actually heard it.)

Special scorn seems to be reserved for Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis*, which insists on the direct creation of the human soul by God and cautions that monogenism provides the only metaphysical background clearly consonant with the Church's teaching about the nature and transmission of original sin.¹⁶ The scorn notwithstanding, these points should remind us of the tight interconnectedness among central Catholic doctrines, the so-called *analogia fidei*. Consequently, we should anticipate that a denial of the immateriality and immortality of the soul will have wide-reaching consequences for the rest of Catholic doctrine.

This expectation is borne out by a perusal of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and of those many official creeds, conciliar statements, and papal teachings the Catechism draws from.¹⁷ While none of these documents, including the Catechism, is meant to be a work of philosophy, together they are meant to lay out the first principles of the Catholic Faith in such a way as to make them both accessible to the ordinary faithful and also amenable to further unification and systematization by intellectually sophisticated believers. To be sure, a careful interpretation of Scripture and Tradition will require us to distinguish various degrees of theological certitude and to respect the freedom of intellectuals to speculate where the Church has not spoken definitively.¹⁸ Still, we must exercise even greater care not to split the Faith into two Faiths, one for the vulgar and one for the learned, to use Berkeley's terms. There is just one Faith, and in the first place it is the Faith of the martyrs. We should keep this in mind as we explore the teachings of the Church on the soul.

4. Church Teaching and the Soul: Direct Creation

Let's start at the beginning. The Catechism traces the special dignity of human beings to the soul and its distinctive operations:

With his openness to truth and beauty, his sense of moral goodness, his freedom and the voice of his conscience, with his longings for the infinite and for happiness, man questions himself about God's existence. In all this he discerns signs of his spiritual soul. The soul, the "seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material," can have its origin only in God.¹⁹

According to this statement, what is distinctive about the human soul is that it "can have its origin only in God" and that it is "irreducible to the merely material." These properties are enunciated more explicitly later on: "The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not 'produced' by the parents—and also that it is immortal; it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection."²⁰

Before I comment on these two teachings separately, I want to point out that openness to truth and beauty, along with the other distinctive characteristics mentioned above, are said to be *signs* of the spiritual soul; it is clear that they are not exhaustive of its metaphysical reality. The soul itself is what confers human dignity, both because of its nature and powers and because of its origin, even when its characteristic operations are impeded by physical abnormalities or ailments—as, for instance, in the case of the severely mentally handicapped like my affable next-door neighbor Jack Spillner, a 56-year-old mongoloid who should have died forty years ago and celebrates his longevity by smoking prodigiously (and oftentimes my cigarettes, I might add). That it is the soul itself, given its origins, that confers human dignity is confirmed by the passage that inaugurates the discussion of the fifth commandment:

Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone

is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.²¹

Contrary to a suggestion once made to me in conversation, the teaching that the human soul is created directly or immediately by God means more than simply that God produces each human being as an singular entity *qua* singular—that is, in such a way that he intends to produce just that individual. In the Catholic intellectual tradition, it has been almost a truism that God produces *every* entity, including every effect of created or secondary causes, in just this way. In fact, Suarez cites God's unique ability to intend singular effects *qua* singular as an argument for the doctrine, which itself follows from the doctrines of creation and conservation, that God is an immediate concurring cause of every effect produced by secondary causes.²² But neither can the teaching in question be taken to mean simply that God is a general concurring cause of each human soul. As just noted, this interpretation would once again not distinguish the human soul from any other of God's effects according to Catholic teaching; what's more, it is ruled out by the Catechism's explicit assertion that the parents, who are efficient causes of their child, do not produce the soul of their child. Rather, the teaching can mean only that some aspect of the organism effected by the parents—namely, his or her 'spiritual soul'—is not itself something that they directly produce. (Of course, the parents do not produce the ultimate particles that go into the constitution of their child, either. I assume that even Catholic 'non-reductive physicalists' would attribute the original creation of such particles directly to God.)

The teaching that God immediately creates the human soul embarrasses some scientifically-minded Catholic philosophers. The first thing to point out is that this does not distinguish it from many other Catholic doctrines, including the virgin birth, the miracles of Christ, his resurrection from the dead, and his real and substantial presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. And, in truth, the advance of scientific knowledge has less to do with it than does ideological naturalism and anti-supernaturalism of the sort that one can see in the most engaging popular presentations of current science—for instance, by Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, and Stephen Jay Gould—and that has spilled over even to Christian thinkers in some cases.

From such a perspective, the direct creation of the human soul by God is a leftover from an earlier era in which Darwinian evolution was unheard of and the complexity of the brain was not fully appreciated. In such times, so the story goes, the immaterial soul was postulated merely to fill in the gaps of woefully inadequate scientific theories—a ‘soul of the gaps’ to go along with the more famous ‘god of the gaps’ who was invoked to compensate for failures of explanation within the order of secondary causes.

In this connection, it is worth noting that while some early modern philosophers may have been guilty of making use of a ‘god of the gaps’, scholastic thinkers did not attribute the actions of creation, conservation, and general concurrence to God in order to make up for the deficiencies of their scientific explanations. Rather, they were spelling out—from above, as it were—the metaphysical implications of God’s role as the Creator and First Cause of all being. Similarly, in the case of the soul, God’s direct creation of the human soul is necessary on the assumption that the soul is both immaterial and non-eternal, since immaterial beings can come into existence only through creation *ex nihilo*.²³ Hence, the direct creation of the human soul is not posited to fill a gap in any biological or neurophysiological theory. Rather, it is a demand of the dignity and singular ontological status of the human animal. What’s more, nothing we know about the nature of the brain or the evolution of the human organism rules out the direct creation of the human soul by God. Neuroscience may help us to understand various aspects of cognition and affection, but it can hardly be said to have explained how higher intellectual functions are so much as possible. More importantly, as the Catechism passage quoted above adumbrates, the doctrine of the direct creation of the soul may well be the only metaphysical foundation that has a chance of enabling Christians to sustain within modern Western cultures a firm and abiding respect for the sacredness of the lives of the unborn, the mentally handicapped, the elderly feeble-minded, the terminally ill, and other ‘unproductive’ and ‘inconvenient’ human beings.

5. Church Teaching on the Soul: Immateriality

What of the claim that the ‘spiritual soul’ is irreducible to the merely material? As is clear from the full context of Catholic teaching, this must be stronger than the sort of irreducibility of so-called

'mental properties' to physical properties that is typically posited by the 'non-reductive' version of physicalism known as 'property dualism'.²⁴ I will have a bit more to say about this theory below, since some contemporary Catholic philosophers have adopted it as an attractive alternative to belief in an immaterial soul. For present purposes it is sufficient to note that according to property dualism human beings have no immaterial aspect or component that might survive in the interim between death and the general resurrection.²⁵ But this conflicts with a number of important Catholic doctrines that have intimate connections with the immateriality of the soul.

The most obvious of these doctrines are, of course, the immortality of the soul, enunciated clearly by the Catechism in a one of the passages quoted above, and the doctrine that God creates the human soul directly. But this is merely the tip of the iceberg, since the immortality of the human soul is itself presupposed by a number of other important doctrines. Among them are the particular judgment of "each man in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death";²⁶ the existence of purgatory and, with it, the "piety and wholesomeness" of prayer for the holy souls in purgatory;²⁷ the intercession of the saints and their presence even now in the heavenly worship we participate in through the Mass;²⁸ the singularity of the privilege accorded to the Mother of God in being assumed body and soul into heaven;²⁹ the pre-risen Christ's descent into hell to liberate the souls of the patriarchs and other pre-Christian saints,³⁰ and even the very characterization of death as the separation of the soul from the body.³¹ What's more, liturgical practice presupposes, reinforces, and invokes all these doctrines in one way or another. And I have not even touched on the many moral doctrines, especially those regarding the nature of grace and sin, that take for granted the higher powers of the soul that, as we saw above, the Church takes to be signs of its immateriality.

I suppose there are ways to alter the plain sense of such doctrines so as to make them compatible with disbelief in the human soul and in its immateriality and immortality. It is, as our political leaders are wont to remind us these days, a free country. But what would be the point of such an exercise? If there were a deep tension here between the apparent deliverances of reason and the apparent deliverances of faith, then there might be some excuse. But when we examine the quasi-philosophical ruminations of writers such as Dawkins and Gould, it is hard not to notice the extremely tenuous

connection between their premises, which are usually drawn from the sciences, and their conclusions, which reflect an unmistakable drift in the direction of, as Dawkins puts it, an “intellectually fulfilling atheism” that has the deflation of Christian ideals and aspirations as one of its primary goals. And why should we buy into that? In short, finding out about the wondrous workings of the human brain or the intricacies of human genetics does not seem to create a conflict with faith unless the discoveries are combined with a strong physicalist ideology. Indeed, current scientific theories do not by themselves undermine even a carefully formulated Cartesian dualism, not to mention the Catholic Church’s view of the soul. What’s more, even though the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul entails that our higher cognitive and appetitive operations are not themselves operations of the brain, the anti-dualistic nature of the Catholic view of the human animal, to be spelled out below, should antecedently prepare us to expect that such higher operations will depend heavily on the normal functioning of the brain and central nervous system. So the fact that they are thus dependent and the discovery of the precise ways in which they are dependent are hardly an embarrassment for the Catholic perspective.

There is one last point about immateriality that is worth pondering. Some philosophers have insisted that it is no easier to understand how an immaterial subject can think than it is to understand how a material subject can think. Peter van Inwagen puts the point in a particularly forceful way:

[I]t is the thinking itself that is the source of the mystery of a thinking physical thing. The notion of a non-physical thing that thinks is, I would argue, equally mysterious. How any sort of thing could think is a mystery. It is just that it is a bit easier to see that thinking is a mystery when we suppose that the thing that does the thinking is physical, for we can form mental images of the operations of a physical thing and we can see that the physical interactions that are represented in these images—that are the only interactions that *can* be represented in these images—have no connection with thought or sensation, or none that we are able to imagine, conceive, or articulate. The only reason that we do not readily find the notion of a non-physical thing that thinks equally

mysterious is that we have no clear procedure for forming mental images of non-physical things.”³²

The traditional philosophical argument for the immateriality of higher intellective operations, usually attributed in its canonical form to Aristotle and recently resurrected in striking fashion by James Ross,³³ begins by pointing out the limitations of material representation. Aristotle, for instance, argues that the material construction of the human sensory organs accounts for the fact that each of those organs has an object limited both in kind and in extent, whereas higher intellective operations have an unlimited object. Ross, on the other hand, argues for the immateriality of intellective operations from our ability to understand what we mean despite the fact that material representations of our abstract thoughts do not disambiguate them from meanings distinct from, but closely related to, the ones we intend. In general, then, the argument is that, because of their peculiar nature, the indisputably distinctive human operations of theoretical and practical reason cannot have a material organ or medium and so, it would seem, require an immaterial medium instead—whereas this is not the case with sensation, imagination, feeling, memory, and the other cognitive and affective operations we share in common with animals that lack rationality. So because, in addition to its vegetative and sentient functions, the human soul has these higher intellective and volitional operations, it must be immaterial.

So the beginning of an answer to van Inwagen's contention is that higher cognitive and affective operations have a certain limitlessness and lucidity that bespeak immateriality. One is reminded of Ockham's assertion that mental acts signify naturally what spoken and written terms signify by convention through their subordination to mental acts. Within the Catholic intellectual tradition this point can be elaborated more fully by comparing human intellection with angelic (or intuitive) intellection, an exercise that anyone can engage in—witness Kant—but that is done better when one takes the existence of angelic beings and their roles in our lives as a metaphysical given.

I have spent this long on the existence, immateriality, and immortality of the human soul because nowadays physicalism seems to be a more tempting option to many Catholic thinkers than dualism is. But from a Catholic perspective dualism is just as wrongheaded

and, in the end, just as pernicious as physicalism. Dualism treats body and soul as two separate substances or, at the very least, two antecedently constituted integral parts of an entity whose unity is *per accidens*; and it identifies the human self with just the immaterial soul. In this it runs afoul of the Catholic teaching that the soul is the form of the body and that the human body and the human soul are so intimately linked that they derive their identity from one another. Perhaps more precisely, the soul is the form of the human organism as a whole and, as such, makes it to be the sort of living substance it is. Thus, the human body and human soul are not two antecedently constituted integral parts, but rather (to use the scholastic phrase) complementary ‘essential parts’ of an organism whose unity is *per se*. The Catechism puts it this way:

The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘form’ of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.³⁴

Some profess themselves unable to understand how it can be that a single organism or substance has both material and immaterial components, and as a consequence they treat the Church’s account of the human being as a type of dualism. To be sure, the truth of this account depends on the acceptability of Aristotelianhylomorphism or at least something very close to it. I will not attempt to exhibit the philosophical virtues ofhylomorphism, though I have argued elsewhere that it is no less viable today than ever as a philosophy of nature, notwithstanding mechanistic and reductionistic misunderstandings (and propaganda) to the contrary.³⁵ But it is important to remember that Aristotle treats the forms of living things at length precisely because living things exhibit the most impressive type of unity known to us in nature. And it is through the powers, tendencies, and operations of living things that we comprehend this unity and the principle (or form) that underlies it—regardless of whether we can form a clear image of this principle or of the unity of the organism. Given the coherence and plausibility ofhylomorphism—at least in broad outline—the argument for immateriality is an

eminently plausible, even if not absolutely compelling, line of reasoning. It does not, to be sure, solve every problem or illuminate every mystery surrounding the idea of an animal constituted as human by an immaterial form. But, then, as the copious recent literature in philosophy of mind attests, both dualism and physicalism are saddled with problems and mysteries of their own.

For present purposes, the important point is that the Aristotelian argument for immateriality cannot be turned into an argument for Cartesian dualism. First of all, this argument does not apply to merely sentient operations, whereas strict Cartesian dualism holds that all mental properties—sentient as well as intellective—must necessarily have an immaterial subject. Second, and more fundamentally, the Aristotelian argument is precisely that the higher and distinctive sort of unity exhibited by the human organism demands the immateriality of the form of that organism, whereas dualism destroys the unity of the human organism, positing an accidental composition of body and soul, neither of which draws its identity from the other. In the end, the Catholic position is that our higher intellective and affective operations, like their sentient and vegetative counterparts, are operations of the whole animal organism—and not of a quasi-angelic entity accidentally connected to a body, in the manner of the archangel Raphael in the book of Tobit.

What's more, the dualistic identification of the self with the soul is not only metaphysically implausible, but has the dire moral consequence of leaving the body bereft of more than merely external or instrumental moral significance, and this flies in the face of some of the most penetrating recent philosophical and literary work, including the work of Pope John Paul II, on the phenomenology and theology of the body.³⁶

The upshot of the Church's position, then, is that neither dualism nor physicalism in any of its myriad forms is true. In this case, *tertium datur*. Human beings are unified substances with an immaterial formal principle. We are both continuous with other animals, because we share sentience with them, and distinctive among animals because of our higher intellective and affective powers. Neither angels nor beasts, but animals of a high order, and, if the Catholic faith is to be believed, animals specially honored by God in part, amazingly, because we have dishonored ourselves. Such are the first principles of the Church's teaching on the soul and the human being.

6. The Contemporary Problematic: The Lure of Property Dualism

Yet when we turn to contemporary philosophical discussions in mainstream analytic philosophy of mind, we find no room at the inn for an account of the human being compatible with these first principles. I take as a representative summary of the current debate the treatment afforded it in Peter van Inwagen's *Metaphysics*, a book meant to introduce undergraduate philosophy majors or more mature general readers to its subject matter.³⁷ (In other words, it is the sort of book that, say, Tom Wolfe should have no trouble following.) Despite its introductory nature, however, van Inwagen's book is full of subtlety and sophistication, and is thus a good place to get a general sense of the contemporary problematic.

As van Inwagen sees it, the basic taxonomy of answers to the question "What *kind* of thing are we human beings?" contains just two contenders:

The possible answers to the question we are trying to understand (at least the possible answers that are taken at all seriously today) are all forms of either dualism or physicalism.³⁸

After explaining that 'physical' things are those made entirely of elementary particles, van Inwagen goes on to say:

Let us call a 'non-physical' thing anything that has no parts that are physical things. The two classifications 'physical' and 'non-physical' are not exhaustive: an object composed of both physical things and non-physical things would be neither. We could call such an object 'composite'. I shall generally ignore the possibility of composites."³⁹

Van Inwagen goes on to characterize dualism as the position according to which a human being is essentially a non-physical object though connected with a bodily 'organism', whereas physicalism is the position according to which a human being is an organism composed just of physical things. Notice here that what van Inwagen says about composites makes it clear that he is talking about *integral* parts; he does not even entertain the possibility that a human being might have complementary *essential* parts, one of which is a corporeal principle

and the other incorporeal. In essence, he is simply accepting Descartes's own assessment of the situation—we are either essentially immaterial beings or essentially beings composed of just physical or corporeal parts. The debate then focuses, as it did in the seventeenth century, on the question of whether something composed of just physical things can be capable of thought, where 'thought' includes the whole gamut of sentient and intellective operations. Descartes concluded that such a thing is incapable of thought so understood, whereas van Inwagen joins the likes of Hobbes in disagreeing: "If human persons and human organisms are one and the same, then, since human organisms are obviously physical things, it follows that human persons are physical things."⁴⁰

Notice the assumption here that human organisms are 'physical things', presumably in the sense defined—a sense that rules out the possibility that some organism might be constituted as an organism by complementary physical and immaterial principles.

This same assumption plays a central role in what van Inwagen tells us is the strongest argument for physicalism—namely, what he calls the "duplication argument." Imagine an elaborate science-fiction machine consisting of two chambers. When a physical object, defined as above, is put into one chamber, a duplicate is manufactured, quark for quark and state for state, in the second chamber. Now suppose we put a human organism into the first chamber. What would we find in the second chamber? A human organism, but without an immaterial soul, says van Inwagen. After all, the machine is capable only of duplicating objects that are physical through and through. Yet it is eminently plausible to believe that the duplicate would not only look and behave exactly like the original, but that it would have exactly similar mental states as well. Since the duplicate *ex hypothesi* lacks an immaterial soul, it follows that the original lacks a soul, too.

But, of course, even if this argument worked against dualism, it would not work against a view according to which there cannot be a human organism without an immaterial soul. On this view, if God intends to produce a human organism—whether directly or along with secondary causes like the duplicating machine—he creates an immaterial soul as its form.

I do not mean to suggest by these comments or by anything I have said above that there are no philosophical puzzles or mysteries

that attend the metaphysical project of delineating with precision an account of the metaphysical status of the immaterial human soul that is consonant with Church teaching—though we can certainly use St. Thomas as our guide here. But as I noted above, every other theory in this area, be it physicalist or dualist, has problems that are just as intransigent and, I would argue, more so. I want to conclude by making a few comments about property dualism, the sort of ‘non-reductive physicalism’ that has attracted some Catholics.

First of all, it is easy enough to see why, given the contemporary problematic, Catholic thinkers bound by that problematic might adopt property dualism. According to property dualism, a human being is a single unified substance with both physical and psychological properties, and the psychological properties are neither identical with nor reducible to the physical properties. So one who holds, in accord with Church teaching, that a human being is a single unified rational organism whose higher intellectual properties are irreducible to physical properties, will find property dualism to be the only game in town. At any rate, it is the most benign form of physicalism, the place to which would-be Aristotelians operating within the grips of the standard picture will naturally gravitate.

But what exactly is the relation between physical and psychological properties according to the property dualist? Very often the psychological properties are said to ‘supervene on’ or ‘weakly supervene on’ the physical properties, where the (weak) supervenience of one property on another is said to differ both from identity and from the reducibility of the one to the other. The truth, of course, is that there are many competing accounts of reducibility and many competing accounts of supervenience, and so property dualism is perhaps best thought of as a cluster of positions, differing from one another according to differences in how they understand reducibility and supervenience. So the first thing to say about property dualism is that any proponent of it owes us a precise account of both reduction and supervenience.

But many questions still remain. Even if each psychological *property* is distinct from its correlated physical properties, does it follow that any given psychological *event* is distinct from every physical event? If correlated psychological and physical events are not identical with one another, do they bear causal relations to one another? If not, then exactly how are they related? What about the causal relations

between psychological events and the physical events in general? Do physical events cause just other physical events, or can they cause psychological events as well? What about the other way around? Or are there two causally independent realms of events, the one physical and the other psychological? If so, are psychological events simply epiphenomenal? Finally, does exactly the same general account hold for both sentient and intellective psychological operations, or are they distinct from one another in some fundamental and characterizable way that captures the distinctiveness of human psychology in comparison with that of other animals endowed only with sentience?

Someone might retort that all theories, including ones consonant with the plain sense of Church teaching, have similar questions to answer, and that it is at least not obvious that property dualism will fare any worse than the others. Fair enough. My point, in the end, is not that property dualism has its problems. That is beyond dispute. Rather, I am simply wondering aloud why any Catholic philosopher would favor it over any and every theory that is consonant with the plain sense of Church teaching. If divine revelation is a great gift to us—a cognitive as well as an affective gift—and if the Holy Spirit has guided the Church in the determinations she has made on these matters, and if, further, there is no compelling intellectual (not to mention spiritual) advantage in abandoning the plain sense of the Church's teaching, then why do it?

In the meantime, the good news is that your soul is not dead.

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Notes

1. The essay is reprinted in Tom Wolfe, *Hooking Up* (New York: Picador USA, 2000), 89–109.

2. See, for example, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book* (New York: Picador, 2000, originally published in 1983), section entitled “A Space Odyssey (II),” 225–262. Here is a representative passage:

The modern objective consciousness will go to any length to prove that it is not unique in the Cosmos, and by this very effort establishes its own uniqueness. Name another entity in the Cosmos which tries to prove it is not unique.

The earth self seeks to understand the Cosmos overtly according to scientific principles while covertly exempting itself from the same understanding. The end of this enterprise is that the self understands the mechanism of the Cosmos but by the same motion places itself outside the Cosmos, an alien, a ghost, outside a vast machinery to which it is denied entry. (254)

3. For a defense of liberalism based on this sort of skepticism, see Gary Gutting, *Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

4. See *Fides et Ratio* (1998), no. 1.

5. See *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), Part I, "Identity and Mission," no. 16. Unfortunately, American commentators on all sides have largely ignored Part I, which lays out in instructive and inspiring fashion the ideal of Catholic higher education, and concentrated instead on the legal requirements laid out in Part II.

6. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

7. *Fides et Ratio*, no. 60 (my translation from the Latin).

8. *Fides et Ratio*, no. 51 (my translation from the Latin).

9. See "Two Roles for Catholic Philosophers," 229–253 in John P. O'Callaghan and Thomas S. Hibbs, eds., *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph McInerny* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

10. I have explored in some depth the Holy Father's own attitude toward natural reason in "*Fides et Ratio*: A 'Radical' Vision of Intellectual Inquiry," in Alice Ramos and Marie George, eds., *Faith, Scholarship and Culture in the 21st Century* (American Maritain Association, 2000) (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, forthcoming).

11. *Fides et Ratio*, no. 4.

12. For an expression of this perspective by a Christian who is not a Roman Catholic, see Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 177–178. Van Inwagen is careful to assert only that physicalism *may be* compatible with the doctrine of the resurrection. This is prudent, since the arguments for this compatibility are far from compelling in light of worries about the continuity of personal identity.

13. Moral theory in general, and the theory of virtue in particular, is another salient context in which the very same principles of inquiry should apply.

14. To forestall one easy objection, I am not suggesting that the development of a Christian philosophical anthropology ought to proceed either without recourse to philosophical theories that have been developed without the aid of Christian revelation or in ignorance of contemporary debates. My point is rather the positive one that revealed truths should themselves play a central role in the full development of any authentically Catholic philosophical anthropology.

15. On the plain sense of texts, see Edward T. Oakes, S.J., "Stanley Fish's Milton," *First Things*, no. 117, November 2001, 23–34, in which Oakes reviews Fish's *How Milton Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). On Milton's view, nicely brought out by Fish, polysemy and ambiguity are among the consequences of original sin and the tools Satan uses to induce confusion in us.

16. Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (1950), esp. nos. 36–37. In no. 36 the Holy Father states explicitly, "The Catholic faith obliges us to hold that [human] souls are immediately created by God." In no. 37 he says of polygenism: "The faithful cannot embrace that opinion which maintains that either after Adam there existed on this earth true men who did not take their origin through natural generation from him as from the first parent of all, or that Adam represents a certain number of first parents. It is in no way apparent how such an opinion can be reconciled with that which the sources of revealed truth and the documents of the Teaching Authority of the Church propose with regard to original sin, which proceeds from a sin actually committed by an individual Adam and which, through generation, is passed on to all and is in everyone as his own."

17. In what follows I will cite only the Catechism without the footnotes that refer to countless authoritative statements of the past. A fuller treatment of these issues than I am able to give here would delve into those statements and their historical contexts.

18. Even though the nature and application of the so-called "notes of theological certitude" are to some extent a matter of dispute, the *analogia fidei* itself, along with liturgical practice and the recognizable and recognized historical witness of the saints, serves as a strong constraint on novel interpretations of established doctrines. This is as it should be. Philosophical and theological speculation on the part of Catholics does not take place in a logical and historical vacuum, but is at the service of a community with both a history and a tradition. This explains in part why claims to recovery of neglected doctrine and practice will in general be taken more seriously than claims to originality.

19. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 33. The internal quote is from *Gaudium et Spes* no. 18.

20. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 366.

21. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2258.

22. Francisco Suarez, S.J., *Disputationes Metaphysicae* 22, 1, 12.

23. I suppose that one could claim that an immaterial human soul somehow 'emerges' from a potentially human body, even though it is difficult to see exactly how this would work. In any case, any Catholic who posits an immaterial soul in the first place should not balk at its being directly created by God. Presumably, the real sticking point for one who balks at the direct creation of the soul is its very immateriality.

24. Actually, the title "property dualism" could, strictly speaking, apply to *any* theory that holds that a single human substance has both physical and irreducibly psychological properties—including theories consonant with Church teaching. But in fact the term is used just to describe a position according to which the human substance is composed just of physical things, with no immaterial aspect.

25. One popular move to avoid positing an immaterial soul is simply to eliminate the interim between death and resurrection by claiming that death and personal resurrection are simultaneous, thus ascribing to all the blessed (and to the non-blessed as well) what, according to the plain sense of Catholic teaching, is a singular privilege of the Mother of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 966). But there seems to be little basis in either faith or reason for such a move. A very different reason for eliminating the interim is to quell worries about the coherence of the immaterial soul's existing on its own without any matter to inform. See James F. Ross, "... Together with the Body that I Love...", in Michael Baur, ed., *Person, Soul, and Immortality: Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* (New York: American Catholic Philosophical Association, 2002). However, it seems to me that Ross does not offer a strong enough argument for abandoning the more traditional belief that the soul exists in the interim without any matter to inform.

26. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1022.

27. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 958 and 1030–1032.

28. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 956–957, 1090, 1136–1139, 2683.

29. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 966.

30. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 631–635.

31. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 624, 997, 1005.

32. *Metaphysics*, 159–160.

33. See James F. Ross, "Immaterial Aspects of Thought," *The Journal of Philosophy* 89 (1992): 136–150.

34. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 365.

35. See Alfred J. Freddoso, "Suarez on Metaphysical Inquiry, Efficient Causality, and Divine Action," in Francisco Suarez, *On Creation, Conservation and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20, 21, and 22* (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2002), 1–118. For a spirited defense of hylomorphism against certain recent philosophical tendencies, see James F. Ross, "The Fate of the Analysts: Aristotle's Revenge," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1990), 51–74.

36. The area of sexual morality is one important place where the moral danger of dualism is especially evident. To the extent that I dissociate my "real" self and intentions from the movements of my body, I am prone to believe that my bodily movements, including sexual acts, have just the meaning I invest them with and no intrinsic meaning of their own.

37. *Metaphysics*, chaps. 9 and 10, 149–183.

38. *Metaphysics*, 150.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Metaphysics*, 151.