

# On Animals, Men, & Robots

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January 11, 2011

A.M.D.G.

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O Creator ineffable, who of the riches of Thy wisdom didst appoint three hierarchies of Angels and didst set them in wondrous order over the highest heavens, and who didst apportion the elements of the world most wisely: do Thou, who art in truth the fountain of light and wisdom, deign to shed upon the darkness of my understanding the rays of Thine infinite brightness, and remove far from me the twofold darkness in which I was born, namely, sin and ignorance. Do Thou, who givest speech to the tongues of little children, instruct my tongue and pour into my lips the grace of Thy benediction. Give me keenness of apprehension, capacity for remembering, method and ease in learning, insight in interpretation, and copious eloquence in speech. Instruct my beginning, direct my progress, and set Thy seal upon the finished work, Thou, who art true God and true Man, who livest and reignest world without end. Amen.

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## Living vs. Non-Living Bodies

- Bodies are divided into two classes:
  - some are living,
    - Can move themselves
  - others without life.
- *Summa Theologiæ*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 18 a. 1 c. (“Whether to live belongs to all natural things?”): “[A]n animal begins to live when it begins to move of itself.”
- Corollary (against panpsychism): Because not everything moves itself, there are somethings that are not alive.

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## Living vs. Non-Living Bodies

- In living bodies, in order to have intrinsically a moving part and a moved part in the same subject, the substantial form, called the **soul**, requires an organic disposition, or heterogeneous parts.
- Argument of *Summa Theologiæ*, I<sup>a</sup> q. 75 a. 1 (“Whether the soul is a body?”) in syllogistic or scholastic form:
  - **Major**: The first principle or formal cause of life of those things which live cannot be corporeal.
  - **Minor**: The soul (*anima*) is the first principle of life of those things which live.
  - **Conclusion**: Therefore, the soul is not corporeal.

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## Vegetative & Sensitive Souls

- They do not subsist;
- are not produced;
  - in the sense of *creatio ex nihilo*
- are a principle whereby the living thing exists and lives;
- depend entirely on matter.
  - They are indirectly destroyed at the dissolution of the compound.

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## Human Souls

- Human soul = “intellect” / “mind” / “rational soul”
- The human soul subsists by itself;
  - independent of material conditions for some of its operations
    - One such operation is intellection.
      - Only humans can understand universal concepts.
- is created by God when it can be infused into a sufficiently disposed subject;
- and is incorruptible and immortal by nature.

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## Substantial Form of a Human

- The rational soul is so united to the body as to be its *single* substantial form.
- Opposed to Cartesian dualism: the body (a *res extensa*) as distinct from the soul (a *res cogitans*)
  - Interestingly, the quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg wrote that the “concept of the soul for instance in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas was more natural and less forced than the Cartesian concept of 'res cogitans,' even if we are convinced that the laws of physics and chemistry are strictly valid in living organisms.” (*Physics & Philosophy* p. 80).

## Substantial Form of a Human

- By the rational soul, man is a:
  - Man,
  - Animal,
    - Medieval definition of man: “Man is a *rational animal*.”
  - Living,
  - Body,
  - Substance,
  - and being.
- Soul gives man every essential degree of perfection.
- It communicates to the body the act of existence whereby itself exists.

## Faculties of the Human Soul

- Faculties (accidents) that naturally spring from the human soul:
  - Organic
    - Subject organic faculties is compound (body + soul).
    - Senses
      - Five exterior senses: touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing
      - Four interior senses: *sensus communis*, memory, imagination, cogitative sense
  - Inorganic
    - Subject of inorganic faculties is soul alone.
    - The intellect (*intellectus*) is an inorganic faculty.
      - Consequently, it is intrinsically independent of any organ.

## Intellectuality & Immateriality

- Intellectuality necessarily follows immateriality.
  - Intellectuality means ability to reproduce in oneself the forms of the objects known, *without any injury to the proper form*.
  - No form can be known except as abstracted from matter.
- The adequate object of intellection is being as such.
- The proper object of the human intellect, in the present state of union, is restricted to the essences abstracted from material conditions.

## How Humans Receive Knowledge

- Humans receive their knowledge from sensible things.
  - *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu*.
- No sensible thing—besides the intellect, which is properly intelligible—is actually intelligible.
  - Because these things are individual
- Therefore the soul must have an **active power** which abstracts the intelligible forms from the **phantasms**.
  - Phantasms are “mental images”.

## Sense vs. Intellectual Knowledge

- Through these species (phantasms) we directly know the universal;
  - The agent intellect abstracts the intelligible species from the phantasm.
    - This is also known as induction:
      - particular → universal knowledge
- the singular we know by the senses, and also by the intellect through a conversion to the phantasms;
- we rise by analogy to the knowledge of the spiritual.

## The Will's Relation to the Intellect

- The will follows, does not precede, the intellect;
  - The intellect, in presenting to the will some apprehended good, moves it as to the specification of its act.
- The object of the will is the good.
  - it necessarily desires that which is offered to it as a good which entirely satisfies the appetite;
- it freely chooses among several good things that are proposed as desirable by the wavering judgment.
- Election, then, follows the last practical judgment;
- it is the will which determines it to be the last.

## Are Intelligent ETs possible?

- In other words:
  - Can “any intellectual substance [be] united to any other [non-human] body as its form”?
  - Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 90
    - “That an intellectual substance is united only to a human body as its form”

### *Aquinas on Intelligent Extra-Terrestrial Life*

Marie I. George (St. John's University, Jamaica, New York)  
*The Thomist*, 65, 2, April 2001, 239-258.

“Aquinas took an interest in the question of whether there were intelligent material beings other than humans in the universe, both as a philosopher and as a theologian. As a philosopher he sought to understand the order of the universe and this entails ascertaining what beings are in the universe. As a theologian he sought knowledge of created beings insofar as it leads to a greater understanding, admiration, and love of the creator, and also insofar as it frees one from superstitious beliefs which pose an obstacle to faith in God. Although Aquinas was unable to approach the question of the existence of intelligent extra-terrestrial life from the scientific perspective of our day, he does raise some generally overlooked philosophical questions regarding the status of such beings. His theological reflections are helpful for addressing the frequently voiced claim that the discovery of intelligent extraterrestrial life would spell the end of Christianity. Aquinas's position is that it is possible that ETs of a certain sort exist, but improbable that they do.

“Aquinas calls to our attention that one sort of ET that could exist is a separated intelligence joined to body as its mover. He himself thinks that there are intelligences of this sort which move the heavenly bodies. As for the other sort of ET which would consist of a separated substance united to a body as its form, Aquinas points that it is extremely unlikely that a pure intelligence be united to a body as its form, since the pure intelligence in no way profits from its union to the body. However, an intellectual substance of the rational sort is suitably united to a body since an intelligence of this sort can only acquire its ideas through sense experience.

“Aquinas points out that the sort of body the composite being must have is specified to some extent by the requirements of the intellectual substance that is united to it. The body cannot be a simple body such as air or iron, because sense organs require a balance of elements, and indeed, a most subtle blend of elements; otherwise the being will lack a good sense of touch and well-functioning internal senses that provide reason with the starting points it needs for forming ideas. Aquinas further points out that rational beings need not have fingers, hands, and feet as humans do; he holds that even humans would still be human without them.

“Aquinas does not favor the idea that other human-type beings exist because he thinks that the human soul represents the very lowest type of intelligence, whereas the human body represents the very highest material body. However, he does remain open to the possibility.

“From a theological standpoint, Aquinas explains that there is no reason for concern here because it is not the task of Scripture to classify the beings in the universe. Since Aquinas does not think that there in fact are other human-type beings, he has little reason to investigate any apparent conflicts between their existence and scriptural statements. His examination of whether many Incarnations are possible is useful for theological discussions of ET existence.

“Aquinas explicitly denies that it is probable that other human-type bodies exist, for the reason noted above. There are two other probable arguments that can be drawn from Aquinas, one against and one in favor of the existence of other human-like creatures. On the one hand, the human species would reflect God's goodness in a special way by being unique, while on the other hand, it is befitting to God's goodness that he create more of better creatures. Aquinas leans in the direction of the former view, but realizes that the latter could in fact be the case. And by doing so, he gives us an example of the circumspection that this matter demands.”

## References

- *24 Thomistic Theses with Commentary* by Fr. Lumbreras, O.P., S.T.Lr., Ph.D.
  - Theses 13 – 21 are on psychology.
- Relevant passages of St. Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiæ* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*
- *Science before Science* by Dr. Anthony Rizzi
  - Chapter 5: “On animals, men and robots”