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## Incarnate Spirit

### *Proper Thomistic Definition of the Human Being or Merely a Description of the Human Soul?*



What a creature is man! He is spirit and matter together. He is not an imprisoned angel; he is by nature an incarnate spirit. This is the fact to explain—without changing it and without explaining it away. But the more we are true to the fact of man as an incarnate spirit, to the fact of a subsistent and spiritual soul which is yet by nature a part of man, the more we are driven to ask the why of such a being. And we are equally driven to exclude as impossible all explanations of man which render the facts impossible. What is, is possible; and man is. And because man is an observable reality, he poses the problem of the unity of his being and of his nature.<sup>1</sup>

As the great Thomistic philosopher Anton C. Pegis gives poetic testimony to in the above quotation, the nature of the human being is an awe inspiring mystery. Unlike the brute animals, human beings have a soul which subsists in its own right after death. The soul is indeed a spirit. However, outside of anthropological poetry and hyperbolic rhetoric, is it justifiable to call the *whole human being* a spirit, or even to define it as an Incarnate Spirit? Furthermore, is it justifiable to claim that St. Thomas Aquinas held to the defensibility of such a predication?

In the following account, I hope to show that the answers to both questions are resoundingly in the negative. Nevertheless, there are those philosophers, even Thomists, who maintain, to the contrary, that though St.

1. Anton Pegis, *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), xxii–xxiii.



Thomas never explicitly used such a definition, his principles make clear that *Incarinate Spirit* is the proper philosophical definition of the human being. Two accounts of such kind which I will address at great length are that of James Lehrberger, in his 1998 article “The Anthropology of Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*,”<sup>2</sup> and that of Pegis, in his 1963 work, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man*.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, after examining the arguments from these authors, I hope to show how their predication of *Incarinate Spirit* as the proper definition of *human being* rests squarely upon the consideration of *human being* as convertible with *human soul*, or in other words, upon a consideration of human being as essentially its soul, rather than essentially a composite of both body *and* soul. Once this has been shown through a careful examination of the example arguments of Lehrberger and Pegis, I hope to demonstrate, based upon St. Thomas’ own texts, that his thought could not be further from holding such a doctrine—precisely because the doctrine is patently false. Lastly, I will also briefly endeavor to conclude with a consideration of definitions of human being which would, in fact, not fall into the same error as that of *Incarinate Spirit*, but which also might serve to present the uniqueness and mystery of human nature in a way both true and understandable to the postmodern mind.<sup>4</sup>

### I. An Examination of Lehrberger’s “The Anthropology of Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*”

Lehrberger begins his treatment of St. Thomas’ account of the human being by an explication of the anthropological notions found in *De ente et essentia*, chapters 2 and 3. As he devotes himself primarily in this portion to

2. James Lehrberger, “The Anthropology of Aquinas’s *De ente et essentia*,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 51, no. 4 (1998): 829–46.

3. Anton Pegis, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963).

4. The term *postmodern* is indeed a rather loose and subjective one, which is rather fitting for how I am using it here. Broadly speaking, *postmodern* refers to the fact that we are living in an age where the *Cartesian-Modern Project* has thoroughly failed. When I write of the *postmodern mind* here, I am referring to those who see and accept this fact—and those whose thought is deeply influenced by this fact whether they realize it or not—but who still even in going beyond the Moderns have a world view and a vocabulary flowing from the Moderns, both of which are completely at odds with those of the Thomistic-Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition. To have a profitable philosophical conversation about the human being with such thinkers is indeed a difficult task because often we are not speaking the same language.



reiterating Thomas' own words, one finds this section of the article quite helpful for understanding St. Thomas' thoughts on the proper definition for human being. Yet, Lehrberger claims that this earlier treatment in *De ente* is but a stage in the development of St. Thomas' treatment of human nature:

At first, Thomas appears simply to reiterate Aristotle's definition of man as a "rational animal." In doing so Aquinas would seem to restrict himself to a definition worked out in the terms of classical naturalism. Yet in light of the very metaphysical revolution that the *De ente et essentia* itself initiates, it would be surprising if this definition of man is his final word. In fact a careful reading reveals that all the "rational animal" passages cluster in chapters 2 and 3. This definition is nowhere found, explicitly or implicitly, in chapters 4 or 5.<sup>5</sup>

Lehrberger will conclude that this failure to speak of "rational animal" in chapters 4 and 5 is due to a metaphysical turn, of sorts, which will give rise to a metaphysical definition of human being, which for Thomas, he claims, is Incarnate Spirit:

In this paper I hope to show that Aquinas's adoption of Aristotle's "rational animal" understanding of man is partial and limited. Thomas understands that it is not his last word on the subject but his first word. "Rational animal" is the definition proper to physics; Thomas's fuller anthropology is rooted in his metaphysics. I will argue that, in the larger perspective of metaphysics, he understands man to be an "incarnate (difference) spirit (genus)."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, his stated goal is to show that, as St. Thomas proceeds from treating of "Essence as Found in Composite Substances" to a treatment of "Essence as Found in Separate Substances," he will invoke a different treatment of the human being. In the first, "physical" consideration, the human being is properly called "rational animal"; but in the latter, "metaphysical" treatment, the human being is properly called "incarnate spirit." However, Lehrberger has one very important obstacle to overcome: St. Thomas never utters such a phrase as "incarnate spirit," whether in defining the human being or in any other context. How will he be able to overcome such a great obstacle?<sup>7</sup> Let us proceed to follow his argument, step by step.

5. Lehrberger, "Anthropology," 830.

6. *Ibid.*, 831.

7. In and of itself, such an obstacle is not insurmountable. A philosopher who aims to transmit a living Thomism to the contemporary world should not be restricted to repeating only the *conclusions* that St. Thomas explicitly uttered. Yet, if one is to be faithful to Thomas' thought, the



Lehrberger begins the main section of his article with an examination of Thomas' "physical" treatment of human nature, and in doing so summarizes, to our own benefit, several key passages from the *De ente* in which St. Thomas explains the nature of a proper definition. In one such example, Lehrberger explains the very key relationship of whole and part within St. Thomas' treatment of the essence of composite substances:

*Essentia* signifies the whole composite, neither its matter nor form alone. . . . The relation of matter and form gives rise to that of genus and difference, though the two relations are by no means identical: they are alike in that both genus and matter are potential respectively to the act of difference and form; they are unlike in that matter and form refer to the parts of the whole, while genus and difference signify not the parts but the indetermination or determination of the whole.<sup>8</sup>

Note at this point a very important aspect of definition to which, unfortunately, Lehrberger does not give due consideration as he proceeds to his ultimate conclusions: genus and species alike must refer to the whole *essentia* which is being defined, not just to part. While Lehrberger accepts this in the "physical" treatment of human nature, I believe later on he passes over the fullness of its implications in his so-called "metaphysical" treatment.<sup>9</sup> Commenting upon this relationship of parts to whole and of genus and species in relation to the whole within the "physical" description of human nature, Lehrberger states,

Man is not defined in the way that he is composed: "Whence [we do not say that man] is a composition of animal and rational as we say that he is a composition

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new conclusions reached ought to proceed, either directly or indirectly, from premises which the Angelic Doctor really held. Consequently, the question which is of paramount importance for this treatment is as follows: Are the *premises* which are necessary for arriving at a definition of human being as an Incarnate Spirit truly faithful to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas? This is what we shall examine in the following pages.

8. Lehrberger, "Anthropology," 832. Emphasis added. Cf. *De ente et essentia* 2, lines 67–84, 195–201, and 211–22. Line numbering in the following *De ente* texts refers to Lehrberger's reference to the Leonine edition. While I have included those line numbers, I have used the Busa edition of the *De ente* for the accompanying Latin texts instead of the Leonine. Also, I have used Lehrberger's own translations of the *De ente* texts found in his article, unless otherwise noted. Cf. *S. Aquinatis Opera Omnia ut sunt in indice thomistico*, edited by Roberto Busa, 7 vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980). *De ente et essentia*, in Busa ed., vol. 2, 583–87.

9. I contend that if Lehrberger regards Incarnate Spirit to be a valid definition with regards to the human being, he must hold "spirit" to signify the whole human being even if indeterminately; for were it only a part of the whole, "spirit" could not be the genus. While this is essential for the validity of his argument, he seems to assume its truth without ever addressing the question directly.



of soul and body.”<sup>10</sup> Body and soul are the integral parts constitutive of a human being who is neither the one nor the other. “Rational” and “animal,” however, signify the whole human *essentia* which at once is both the one and the other. For genus “animal” refers to the entire *essentia* as undetermined in species through the animating form. The difference “rational,” on the other hand, precisely signifies the determination of the whole *essentia* through the perfection of its specific form. Accordingly, the species whose *essentia* is expressed in the definition “rational animal” arises from the indetermination of the genus and the determination of the difference.<sup>11</sup>

So, let us make this perfectly clear. Within a proper philosophical definition, genus refers to the whole *essentia* (which for human beings includes both matter and form) but *indeterminately*, while the difference refers to the whole *determinately* by means of that key perfection of form, which distinguishes that species from all other species of that genus. While *essentia* can be signified either as a whole or as a part, it is only when signified as a whole that it can be predicated as a definition of singulars. As Lehrberger admits,

When signified as a whole, the human *essentia* stands to each individual like the genus does to the species. Thus the *essentia* is predicable of the individual. In this way, “Socrates is a man.” When signified as a part, however, *essentia* stands to individuals as form does to matter. No more than one part is predicable of another is the *essentia* so abstracted predicable of the *ens*—“Socrates is humanity” is false. Socrates is composed of humanity (*forma totius*) and his own flesh, blood, and bones (*materia designata*). Only when *essentia* is taken as a whole can it be signified by definition through genus and species.<sup>12</sup>

Based upon the fact that it does refer to the *essentia* of the whole human being, both *indeterminately* and *determinately*, rather than merely referring to its parts, Lehrberger maintains then that “rational animal,” from the perspective of natural philosophy, is a perfectly valid definition of human being:

The definition includes all human beings and only human beings while excluding every species of angel and brute. Second, this definition applies to the whole essence as a unity: the parts of the definition are taken from and proportional to, but not identical with, the matter and form of the *definiendum*. “Animal” and “rational”

10. *De ente et essentia* 2, lines 202–204. (Busa edition: Unde dicimus hominem esse animal rationale et non ex animali et rationali, sicut dicimus eum esse ex anima et corpore.)

11. Lehrberger, “Anthropology,” 832–33. Cf. *De ente et essentia* 2, lines 159–73.

12. *Ibid.*, 833. Cf. *De ente et essentia* 2, lines 274–90.



are not separate items added to each other, but parts of a definition referring to the whole as indeterminate or determinate.<sup>13</sup>

Seemingly, these are words of high praise for “rational animal” as a proper definition for human being. Yet, Lehrberger is still not satisfied, for such a definition, he says, “is a purely physical definition which takes no account of the riches discovered by the *esse-essentia* analysis of the *human soul*.”<sup>14</sup> However, one is abruptly led to ask: How can an analysis of the *human soul*, which is a *part* only, lead to a definition of the *whole human being*? Lehrberger will answer this question through his detailed analysis of chapters 4 and 5 of *De ente*.

For Lehrberger, the key to this “metaphysical” treatment of human nature lies in St. Thomas’ inclusion of human soul within his discussion of *Essentia in Separated*<sup>15</sup> *Substances*, “namely, in the (human) soul, the intelligences, and the first cause.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, he says that Thomas *must* include the soul in this account because it is a special kind of form:

The soul must be included among the separated substances because “it is necessary that in every intelligent substance there be complete immunity from matter, so that it neither has matter as part of itself nor is it a form impressed on matter as are material forms.”<sup>17</sup> In whatever way the soul is form, it is not form as a material form is. Aquinas is suggesting that the soul may be called ‘form’ only analogously.<sup>18</sup>

This analogous sense of form is rooted in the fact that the human soul has *esse per se*. Though soul and body form the composite human being, the act of being of the composite is through the soul.<sup>19</sup> Commenting upon this, Lehrberger quite correctly explains that, “In the soul’s case the body participates in the soul’s *esse*: the soul imparts its own proper *esse* to matter. This does not result in two beings—an intelligence and an animal. . . . Rath-

13. *Ibid.*, 835.

14. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

15. While technically “separated” refers exclusively to human souls and “separate” refers to angelic substances, Lehrberger will translate the Latin *separatis* with the English “separated”, applying it to both kinds of beings. Despite the confusion of language, he is trying to prove that separated souls do in fact properly belong within a consideration of *substantiae separatae*.

16. Lehrberger, “Anthropology,” 836. Cf. *De ente et essentia* 4, lines 1–3.

17. *De ente et essentia* 4, lines 18–22. (Busa edition: Unde oportet quod in qualibet substantia intelligente sit omnino immunitas a materia, ita quod neque habeat materiam partem sui neque etiam sit sicut forma impressa in materia, ut est de formis materialibus.)

18. Lehrberger, “Anthropology,” 838.

19. Cf. *De ente et essentia* 4, lines 185–92.



er there is *unum esse in uno composito*; because there is one act of the soul's existence in which matter partakes, there is one being—man—composed of body through soul.”<sup>20</sup> Though having *esse per se*, the soul, as created, is still composed even when considering it apart from matter, as it is in potency to receive that *esse*: “Like all intelligences, however, the rational soul is a receptive potency determining and limiting *esse* as its received act; the human soul, then, receives *esse per se*. Not just Socrates but Socrates' soul subsists; indeed Socrates in his flesh and bones receives existence from his soul, rather than the other way around.”<sup>21</sup> As spiritual substances—separated human souls included—are composed of act and potency with regard to *esse* and *essentia*, this composition will be the basis for Lehrberger's method of “metaphysical” definition, as such substances do not have the composition of matter and form (at least when considered in themselves, as in the case of the separated human soul):

In metaphysical species, there is no matter and form but there is potency and act, *essentia* and *esse*. Genus and difference, accordingly, must be taken from them as referring to the whole in an indeterminate or determinate way: the determinate as potential to many possible determinations, the determining as specific actualization of the indeterminate. The potential element in spiritual substances, however, is the intellectual *essentia*. The actual element is its finite existence in this or that grade of perfection. Hence the genus of the separated substance must be taken from intellectuality or spirituality. Similarly, the difference must be taken from its finite existence in this or that grade of perfection.<sup>22</sup>

Such a claim as Lehrberger's seems in fact to be quite plausible. As St. Thomas had said earlier in the text, the relation of matter and form gives rise to that of genus and difference. So, in spiritual substances without matter yet still composed of potency and act, the relation of genus and difference could very well be based upon that relation of potency and act within the substance. Quite plausible indeed, but watch what Lehrberger does with it in the following text while attempting to provide a proper definition for the *human soul as a separated, spiritual substance*:

Hence, in the potency of *essentia* to *esse*, the soul is an intelligence. In the finite *esse* of this or that grade of perfection, the soul is “incarnate,” that is, the actuality of the human body. In other words, taking the genus as the whole open to many possible grades of perfection, the soul is intelligence or spirit. Taking the difference as

20. Lehrberger, “Anthropology,” 839.

21. *Ibid.*, 840.

22. *Ibid.*, 842–43.



the specific determining grade of perfection, the soul is embodied. Metaphysically, *man* is an "incarnate (difference) spirit (genus)."<sup>23</sup>

Notice the shift in the discussion. He has been commenting upon the characteristics of the separated soul, seemingly preparing to conclude to a definition of *the human soul*, whether separated or not, as an Incarnate Spirit. Considering everything that Lehrberger had said thus far and the principles drawn from St. Thomas, that would have been, I think, a very plausible definition of the human soul with "spirit" referring to the whole *soul* indeterminately and "incarnate" to the whole *soul* determinately, but with the proviso that such a consideration is that of a *privated* being which is only a substance *in a qualified sense* (as I will show later on). However, almost seamlessly, Lehrberger concludes to define "man" as Incarnate Spirit. Though he does not say so explicitly, such a move must, I believe, be based upon a syllogism of this sort: (Major) A human soul is an Incarnate Spirit. (Minor) A human being is essentially its soul. (Conclusion) Therefore, a human being is essentially an Incarnate Spirit. A perfectly valid syllogism, but are the premises true? While the major premise might need further consideration in order to prove or disprove, it at least seems plausible enough to grant for the sake of argument. It is the minor premise for which I am most concerned. Furthermore, if this minor premise is not true, that is, if the spiritual soul is but a part of the whole human being, Lehrberger would be guilty of referring to a part (the soul) indeterminately (as spirit) rather than to the whole human being when predicating its genus, thus invalidating his definition in reference to the whole human being. Thus, to be valid, such a conclusion depends directly upon the convertibility of *human soul* and *human being* in the minor premise. But is that truly the case? Also, does Thomas hold that the human being is essentially its soul, as he must if, as Lehrberger maintains, Thomas subscribes to Incarnate Spirit as the proper metaphysical definition of human being? Before venturing an answer to these questions I would like to examine, though in a briefer fashion, a similar argument to that of Lehrberger's, which likewise defines the human being as an Incarnate Spirit based upon just such a convertibility.

23. Ibid., 843. Emphasis added.



II. An Explication of Anton Pegis'  
*At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man*

In this short work Anton C. Pegis endeavors to solve the great mystery of the unity of the human being, that is, of how the human being can be composed of both body and spiritual soul and yet, even within that composition, remain truly one. As Pegis explains,

Not only is [the human being] like other composite substances in nature, one through the unity of his substantial principle, but this principle—the soul—also happens to be a spiritual substance in its own right. The full strangeness of man, therefore, consists in this, that, as a composite reality including an organic body within his being, he exists wholly and radically in and through a spiritual principle.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, that the soul, which is a “spiritual substance in its own right,” can also inform a material body, which no other kind of spiritual substance can do, and in so doing impart existence for the composite—this is the core of the great mystery of the human being and of its unity. The soul is both “part” and yet in some sense (and I contend in a very qualified sense) a “whole.” And the unity of the human composite is rooted precisely in this mystery of being both “part” and “whole”:

With the aid of Aristotle, but on the premise of transcending his metaphysics, St. Thomas Aquinas decided that man could be one being in nature if soul and body were related to one another as co-parts, that is, as incomplete members of a whole that alone could verify and explain their meaning even as parts. The human soul, therefore, though a spiritual substance in itself, yet had the incomplete nature of a part; it was by nature both a substance and a substantial form, and therefore somehow truly both a whole and a part.<sup>25</sup>

Based upon our considerations of the *De ente* earlier in this paper, Pegis' interpretation to this point seems quite plausible. As neither the body nor the soul is the human being, they must be somehow co-parts if they are not distinct substances in their own right acting upon each other in some kind of contiguous symbiotic relationship with a *per accidens* unity, as Plato contended. As the *esse* of the composite is given through the soul which has

24. Anton Pegis, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 34.

25. *Ibid.*, 38.



that *esse per se*, the soul is somehow a “whole” considered in itself (though again in a very qualified sense, which I will address in a moment). However, similar to Lehrberger’s own syllogizing, Pegis will go on, likewise, to call the human being an Incarnate Spirit based upon the same purported convertibility of that quasi-substance, known as soul, with the whole human being. In his own words, Pegis contends:

*Man answers to the soul as whole to whole because man is the total reality prefigured in the substance of the soul. And if this means that the soul is by nature destined to be a part of man, it also means that in the unity and concreteness of his being, man is no more than the soul in the fullness of its nature—an incarnated spirit, whose unity is that he is wholly spirit but spirit involved in a discursive intellectual life on the horizon of matter; in rational motion within matter, and in a progressive approach to intellectual formation and spiritual unification.*<sup>26</sup>

Thus, it seems as if Lehrberger and Pegis are of one mind on this issue: as the composite human being has *esse* through its soul (which has *esse per se*) informing the body, the human being is essentially its soul (whole answering to whole). As this spiritual soul is a whole that is convertible with the human being, “spirit” is predicable of the whole human being indeterminately, and also “incarnate” as the specific difference of that whole. Also, in both cases, each philosopher claims to have unearthed the true philosophical anthropology of St. Thomas. Returning then to the questions which we posed at the end of our treatment of Fr. Lehrberger’s article, we must ask, are the *human soul* and the *human being* truly convertible? In other words, is the soul truly an unqualified whole, such that a term (in this case “spirit”) which indeterminately signifies its genus could also indeterminately signify the genus of the whole human being? Does St. Thomas really maintain an affirmative answer to these questions? I contend, and hope to show in the following pages, that the answer to all of the above queries is resoundingly in the negative. In the process of doing so, I hope to show that, in fact, Incarnate Spirit is not in any way a proper definition of the human being, even if a perfectly valid description when considering the soul in itself.

26. *Ibid.*, 45–46. Emphasis added, with the exception of ‘man’ and the first instance of ‘soul’ in the first sentence.



### III. St. Thomas Aquinas and the Incompleteness of the Human Soul

Against those who attest to the convertibility of *human being* and *human soul*, Jason Eberl counters by emphasizing the importance of considering the human being's sensitive capacities along with its rationality. Quoting St. Thomas in his defense, he says:

In addition to being rational, a human being is a sensitive, living, and corporeal substance. Human beings have a material nature: "It belongs *per se* to a human being that there be found in him a rational soul and a body composed of the four elements. So without these parts a human being cannot be understood, and they must be placed in the definition of a human being; so they are parts of the species and form."<sup>27</sup>

A consideration of the human being which overemphasizes its rationality without giving due treatment to its materiality would seem then to be bound to run astray, as the human being is not properly understood without considering both its material and its spiritual dimensions. Truly, these two dimensions are not separately existing substances but rather are co-principles of one composite human substance. As Eberl writes, while again also quoting St. Thomas in support:

A human soul and the material body of which it is the substantial form are not two separately existing substances. A substantial form is the actualization of a material body. Aquinas asserts, "Body and soul are not two actually existing substances, but from these two is made one actually existing substance. For a human being's body is not actually the same in the soul's presence and absence; but the soul makes it exist actually."<sup>28</sup>

A human being's substantiality is *proprie loquendo* as a composite, and cannot be regarded as merely rooted in either the body alone or the soul alone, for neither body nor soul can be regarded properly as an unqualified substance. As Eberl says:

27. Jason Eberl, "Aquinas on the Nature of Human Beings," *The Review of Metaphysics* 58, no. 2 (2004): 334, quoting *Super Boetium de Trinitate* q. 5, a. 3c (Eberl translation). (*Super Boetium de Trinitate*, in Busa ed., vol. 4, 520–39: Similiter etiam per se competit homini quod inveniatur in eo anima rationalis et corpus compositum ex quattuor elementis, unde sine his partibus homo intelligi non potest, sed haec oportet poni in diffinitione eius; unde sunt partes speciei et formae.)

28. Ibid., 335, quoting *Summa contra Gentiles* (SCG) II, chap. 69, no. 2 (Eberl translation). (*Summa contra gentiles*, in Busa ed., vol. 2, 1–152: Non enim corpus et anima sunt duae substantiae actu existentes, sed ex eis duobus fit una substantia actu existens: corpus enim hominis non est idem actu praesente anima, et absente; sed anima facit ipsum actu esse.)



To summarize, neither a human soul nor the matter it informs alone is a substance. Rather, the two together compose a substance—a human being. A human being is not identical to his soul or his informed material body. Rather, a human being is composed of his informed material body: “A human being is said to be from soul and body just as from two things a third is constituted that is neither of the two, for a human being is neither soul nor body.”<sup>29</sup>

But some, agreeing with the positions of Lehrberger and Pegis, might counter that St. Thomas does in fact at times treat the soul as a substance, as we saw with chapters 4 and 5 of *De ente*. How can these two positions be reconciled, namely, the positions that the soul is somehow both a substance and also *not* a substance? It is at this juncture where I think the Lehrberger/Pegis camp makes an especially pronounced disservice to the understanding of St. Thomas’ philosophical anthropology, because, despite their selective reading of the texts, St. Thomas is very clear on the fact that the separated soul can only be considered a substance *in a qualified way*, and never *simpliciter*. Eberl comments upon this, focusing upon the key text of the *Summa theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 1, where Thomas explicates different ways in which something can be called a substance, or, as he says, a “hoc aliquid”:

In his early works, Aquinas took the term “substance” to refer to anything that had *esse*: substance equaled subsistence. In the later works, Aquinas makes a distinction between mere subsistence and subsistence as a substance (*hypostasis* or *suppositum*): “‘This something’ (*hoc aliquid*) can be taken in two ways: one way, for any subsistent thing; the other way, for what subsists in its complete specific nature. The first way excludes the inherence of an accident or material form. The second way excludes also the imperfection of a part. . . . Therefore, since a human soul is part of the human species, it can be called ‘this something’ in the first way, as subsistent, but not in the second—for in this way the composite of soul and body is called ‘this something.’”<sup>30</sup>

29. *Ibid.*, 337, quoting *De ente et essentia* 2 (Eberl translation). (Busa edition: Ex anima enim et corpore dicitur esse homo, sicut ex duabus rebus quaedam res tertia constituta, quae neutra illarum est. Homo enim neque est anima neque corpus.)

30. *Ibid.*, 346, quoting ST I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 1 (Eberl translation). (*Summa theologiae*, in Busa ed., vol. 2, 184–926: Ad primum ergo dicendum quod hoc aliquid potest accipi dupliciter, uno modo, pro quocumque subsistente, alio modo, pro subsistente completo in natura alicuius speciei. Primo modo, excludit inhaerentiam accidentis et formae materialis, secundo modo, excludit etiam imperfectionem partis. Unde manus posset dici hoc aliquid primo modo, sed non secundo modo. Sic igitur, cum anima humana sit pars speciei humanae, potest dici hoc aliquid primo modo, quasi subsistens, sed non secundo modo, sic enim compositum ex anima et corpore dicitur hoc aliquid.)



As the separated soul is a substance only in that first *qualified* way as something which merely subsists, it cannot be regarded as a substance *simpliciter*, as it is incomplete in its specific nature apart from the body, having its proper perfection and completeness only within the body that it informs:

A soul alone is not identical to a human being, nor has it a complete human nature: "No part has its natural perfection separate from the whole. Hence the soul, since it is part of human nature, does not have its natural perfection unless it is in union with the body. . . . Hence the soul, though it can exist and understand separated from the body, does not have its natural perfection when it is separate from the body."<sup>31</sup>

Due to this incompleteness of nature, the soul can in no way be identical with the human being, and especially not with human person: "Not every particular substance is a *hypostasis* or person, but what has its complete specific nature. Hence a hand or foot cannot be called a *hypostasis* or person; and similarly neither can the soul, since it is part of the human species."<sup>32</sup> This position will lead St. Thomas to conclude, and rightfully so based upon these principles, that "*The soul, since it is part of the human body, is not the whole human being. My soul is not I. So even if the soul were to achieve salvation in another life, it would not be I or any human being.*"<sup>33</sup> Here I shall pause just for a moment to spell out the implications of this for the Lehrberger/Pegis position. Clearly, for St. Thomas, the soul is *not* the whole human being, but is merely a part. Thus, to predicate spirit

31. Ibid., 345, quoting *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* a. 2, ad 5 (Eberl translation). (*Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, in Busa ed. vol. 3, 352–68: Ad quintum dicendum quod nulla pars habet perfectionem naturae separata a toto. Unde anima, cum sit pars humanae naturae, non habet perfectionem suae naturae nisi in unione ad corpus. Quod patet ex hoc quod in virtute ipsius animae est quod fluant ab ea quaedam potentiae quae non sunt actus organorum corporalium, secundum quod excedit corporis proportionem; et iterum quod fluant ab ea potentiae quae sunt actus organorum, in quantum potest contingi a materia corporali. Non est autem aliquid perfectum in sua natura, nisi actu explicari possit quod in eo virtute continetur. Unde anima, licet possit esse et intelligere a corpore separata, tamen non habet perfectionem suae naturae cum est separata a corpore ut Augustinus dicit, XII super Genes. ad litteram.)

32. ST I, q. 75, a. 4, ad 2 (Eberl translation), quoted in Eberl, "Aquinas on the Nature," 346. (Busa edition: Ad secundum dicendum quod non quaelibet substantia particularis est hypostasis vel persona, sed quae habet completam naturam speciei. Unde manus vel pes non potest dici hypostasis vel persona. Et similiter nec anima, cum sit pars speciei humanae.)

33. *Super I ad Corinthios* 15, lect. 2 (Pasnau translation), quoted in Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 386. Emphasis added, except for the first two words. (*Super I ad Corinthios*, in Busa ed., vol. 6, 375–98: Anima autem cum sit pars corporis hominis, non est totus homo, et anima mea non est ego; unde licet anima consequatur salutem in alia vita, non tamen ego vel quilibet homo.)



of human being is not a valid genus for its definition, for it refers not to the whole human being indeterminately but again merely to the part. A human being has a spirit just as it has a body, but it is *proprie loquendo* neither considered separately. Contra Fr. Lehrberger, a “metaphysical” treatment of human nature as a consideration of the human being apart from matter, is not properly a treatment of the human being, for apart from matter there is no human being *proprie loquendo*, even if such a treatment does provide a greater understanding of the human being’s spiritual dimension and its place within the whole.

So, I say with confidence that, based upon numerous texts, St. Thomas can be seen to be quite opposed to the position that human being and human soul are convertible. But further textual evidence can be offered to understand his reasoning further still. Yes, he regards the separated soul as incomplete in nature; but the question remains: precisely how can the body it informs help to complete it within the composite? St. Thomas provides a helpful clue in ST I, q. 75, a. 4, where he in fact argues quite explicitly against the claim that the soul itself is the human being. What I would like to make note of is the second half of the *corpus*, where he continues to explain in what ways the soul might be called the human being, and also how, in this as in the other senses mentioned, it is still a false assertion:

It may also be understood in this sense, that this soul is this man; and this could be held if it were supposed that the operation of the sensitive soul were proper to it, apart from the body; because in that case all the operations which are attributed to man would belong to the soul only; and whatever performs the operations proper to a thing, is that thing; wherefore that which performs the operations of a man is man. But it has been shown above that sensation is not the operation of the soul only. Since, then, sensation is an operation of man, but not proper to him, it is clear that man is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body. Plato, through supposing that sensation was proper to the soul, could maintain man to be a soul making use of the body.<sup>34</sup>

34. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. ed., 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1948). (Busa edition: *Alio vero modo potest intelligi sic, quod etiam haec anima sit hic homo. Et hoc quidem sustineri posset, si poneretur quod animae sensitivae operatio esset eius propria sine corpore, quia omnes operationes quae attribuuntur homini, convenirent soli animae; illud autem est unaquaeque res, quod operatur operationes illius rei. Unde illud est homo, quod operatur operationes hominis. Ostensum est autem quod sentire non est operatio animae tantum. Cum igitur sentire sit quaedam operatio hominis, licet non propria, manifestum est quod homo non est*



Commenting upon and further explicating this very passage, Étienne Gilson maintains:

But it is quite impossible to hold that the soul alone is the whole man. A general definition of anything is: "that which performs the operation proper to it." In this case man is to be defined as "that which performs the operations proper to man." Man does not perform only intellectual operations. He performs sensitive operations too.... Thus, if sensation is truly an operation of man, even though it is not his proper operation, then it is perfectly obvious that man is not just his soul but some kind of composite of soul and body.<sup>35</sup>

As it is the whole human being which performs the operations proper to human beings, and since the human being has not only intellectual activities which properly pertain to the soul but also sensitive activities which pertain to both the body and the soul, the whole human being, which senses, perceives, and understands in body and soul, must truly be both body and soul. Thus, Thomas' anthropology is rooted not in some a priori, deductive "metaphysical" reasoning, but by means of a posteriori, inductive science which proceeds from the observable animality of human beings, sensing and perceiving through their bodies as all animals do, but with the unique further capability of intellectual knowledge. Any other attempts to define the human being would do well to proceed in like fashion.

#### IV. Conclusion

In closing, there are numerous points about which I hope to have demonstrated to be not only Thomas' own position, but in fact to be the correct view on the particular matter. First, the soul, as we have seen, is incomplete in nature without the body, and thus when separated is an incomplete substance. Second, even while united to the body, it is not the soul, properly speaking, which performs all the operations proper to the human being, but rather the composite human being which, through its body and soul, senses, perceives, and understands. Furthermore, as soul is truly a *part* of the whole composite human being, no definitions of that part, even if they could very well be properly predicated of the soul, as such, are

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anima tantum, sed est aliquid compositum ex anima et corpore. Plato vero, ponens sentire esse proprium animae, ponere potuit quod homo esset anima utens corpore.)

35. Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 191–92.



rightly predicable of the whole composite, because such definitions refer to the part indeterminately and determinately rather than to the whole. Thus, though a human soul may very well be regarded as an Incarnate Spirit, the human being cannot be so defined. For though the human being truly has a spirit, *proprie loquendo*, the human being is not a spirit.

But this gives rise to an aporia: if not Incarnate Spirit, what is the proper philosophical definition of human being? Though “rational animal,” as Thomas himself argues in the *De ente* passages we have already seen, fills all the requirements of a proper definition, still this does not mean, as I think Lehrberger correctly pointed out, that this is the only philosophical definition which can ever adequately describe the human being or even that this definition has no limitations to it. Although as a Thomist, I am personally inclined to favor “rational animal,” I cannot help thinking that the postmodern mind is bound to be confused by this term. Though such a thinker, when hearing “animal,” will, due to the advances of modern biology and biochemistry, have a much better grasp of what an animal is than St. Thomas and his contemporaries, he is unlikely to understand anything like what St. Thomas did by the term “rational,” at least not without a great effort at entering into Thomas’s premodern mindset.

What term, or terms (for that matter), then, can more adequately express the human being’s specific difference, which makes it unique in comparison with all other animals and which can lead the hearer to properly understand what is being defined? Indeed, as the word “rational” attests, it is the human being’s *intellectuality*; but in what does that consist which makes the human animal unique in comparison to all other animals? The specific difference of any proper definition of the human being will have to answer this very question both adequately and clearly. To do so, that same specific difference will do well to point toward the human animal’s unique ability to consider objects which cannot be sensibly instantiated, an ability which truly distinguishes intellectual knowledge from mere animal perception.<sup>36</sup> Though much more could and should be said on this matter, I will leave that for a later date.

36. I would like to thank Dr. John Deely of the University of St. Thomas (Houston) not only for this insight, but also for his numerous helpful comments on a previous draft of this work. Without his encouragement and guidance, this paper would not have been possible.