

Man more Animal than Anything: The Unity in Human Agency

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Abstract

Owen Flanagan takes his claim that ‘we are animals through and through’ to imply ‘our animal side is our only side’. But ‘Cartesianism’ is not the only alternative available: Aquinas’ view of the human soul as a spiritual reality that is essentially the form of the body means that animality characterizes humans in an especially *intimate* way.

Aquinas recognizes degrees of unity. Homogeneous inanimate substances have an accidental unity; living organisms are *essentially* one: the self pervades the whole, and the form is closely related to *this particular* matter. The human soul communicates to the body the being the soul *possesses*, hence it is more intimate to the body than any bodily quality, while the body is more intimate to the soul than any of the soul’s powers. In isolation from the body the soul cannot exercise its own proper activity, which is to know sensible reality.

This high degree of *metaphysical* unity is manifest at the level of *action and experience*. Robert Sokolowski’s account of *speech* as a defining feature of human beings illustrates how bodiliness is needed for the soul’s intellectual activity. Syntactical speech is formed by and expressive of intelligence as embodied and temporally conditioned.

The human being’s superior ontological unity is not refuted by experiences of disintegration. Our soul, in its simplicity, needs to originate a unique gamut of *powers*; hence the human being can go wrong in many ways. The tension among our powers is experienced acutely *because* it is within the one soul. Human death is not really unnatural, but is more violent than in the case of the other animals. However, as a final mortification it allows us to offer our *selves* in conformity to Christ.

Keywords

Animal, unity, disunity, hylomorphic, soul, body, complexity, speech

Introduction

Owen Flanagan is Professor of Philosophy and Neurobiology at Duke University. In his 2002 book *The Problem of the Soul* Flanagan makes the following claims: ‘We are immensely complex animals [...] but we are animals through and through. Our animal side is our only side.’¹ Flanagan rightly sees human animality as marvelous. He thinks that for much of its past, and even now, our animality has been ignored or obscured by Cartesian views that posit in our being immaterial realities such as the soul, intellect, and free will. These views have resulted in dismissive or negative stances toward the body, toward our animality, toward us. Fortunately, Flanagan holds, in the new dawn that is the age of neuroscience the truth has outed: everything about us is animal. Even if we can’t quite see how this is so in every detail, we should have a reasonable trust that the already remarkable discoveries of science will lead to further ones, indefinitely. There is simply no need, Flanagan asserts, to posit false and gratuitous realities like a spiritual soul, an immaterial intellect, or a truly free will.²

Consider again the claims Flanagan makes: we are animals through and through, our animal side is our only side, there is no good reason to posit an immaterial soul, mind, and free will. Striking for the purposes of this paper is how Flanagan speaks as if these claims are essentially identical. That is, to say we are animals through and through *means* that our animal side is our only side, which in turn *means* that we have no spiritual aspects to our being. Elsewhere, Flanagan notes that we are ‘fully embodied creatures’, by which he *means* that we have no immaterial intellect.³ If the only alternative to Flanagan’s view were Cartesianism or some other form of strong dualism, then Flanagan would be right. Neither Descartes nor Socrates in *Phaedo* could say that the human being is animal through and through, because for them this would mean leaving out the important fact that humans possess a spiritual soul with an immaterial intellect.

But of course another alternative does exist: the Thomistic hylomorphic view, which sees the human being as possessing a spiritual soul that in its essence is nothing less than the form of the body. The human spiritual soul couldn’t be what it is without naturally sourcing the body, nor could the human body be what it is without being actualized and structured by the spiritual soul. In other words, there is a way in which we humans, for Thomas, *are* animals through and through, since both our body and soul are intrinsically marked

¹ *The Problem of the Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), xiv-xv.

² ‘Humans possess no special capacities, no extra ingredients, that could conceivably do the work of the mind, the soul, or free will as traditionally conceived’ (xii). Also xiii-xvi.

³ xii.

by animality. In such a view, as opposed to Flanagan's, one could be animal through and through and yet still possess a spiritual soul, intellect, and free will.

In this paper I will not argue that we do in fact have a spiritual soul and spiritual powers. I will presuppose Thomas's arguments that we possess these and his argument that we exist as a hylomorphic union of spirit and matter.⁴ Instead, I will consider Flanagan's first claim, namely, that we are animals through and through. Thomas, with Flanagan, maintains that we are animals in our very essence. Thomas and Flanagan also agree that we can be considered, at least in certain ways, the highest kind of animal. What I will argue is that Thomas's view ups the ante even further. Thomas holds an even more privileged view of human animality than Flanagan does—and he only holds this because he also holds that we have a spiritual soul. To put it differently, in terms of Thomas's metaphysics, it's not just the case that we are the highest kind of matter-form composite; we're also the most unified matter-form composite. Our soul, spiritual as it is, and our body are more unified than a non-human animal's soul and its body. Animality thus characterizes humans more integrally and intimately than it does dogs or monkeys, and only because of the spiritual soul we possess. If this is true, then perhaps it is a thinker like Flanagan who ends up threatening the marvelous truth of human animality.

In the first part of this paper I will give a metaphysical argument from Thomas's principles to show that our soul and body are qualitatively more unified than a non-human animal's soul and body. The second part of the paper will note some confirmations of my thesis in the realm of human action. I will show how human action possesses a distinctive grade of unity that we do not find in the actions of other animals and that mirrors the metaphysical unity of the human being itself. In this second part I'll employ some insights from the phenomenologist Robert Sokolowski.

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 75-6 (hereafter, *STh.*); *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, qq. 1-2 (hereafter, *Disp. de anima*); *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 2 (hereafter, *De spir. creat.*); *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 68 (hereafter, *ScG*). For studies, see Anton Pegis, *St. Thomas and the Problem of the Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1976); *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1963). Also Sophia Vanni-Rovighi, *L'Antropologia filosofica di San Tommaso d'Aquino* (Milan: Societa editrice vita e pensiero, 1972); Norbert Luyten, 'L'homme dans la conception de S. Thomas', in *L'anthropologie de saint Thomas*, ed. N. Luyten (Fribourg, 1974): 35-53; B. Carlos Bazan, 'The Human Soul: Form and Substance? Thomas Aquinas's Critique of Eclectic Aristotelianism', *Archives D'Histoire Doctrinale et Litteraire du Moyen Age* 64 (1997): 95-126; Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003), Part II; Stephen Brock, 'The Physical Status of the Spiritual Soul in Thomas Aquinas', *Nova et Vetera* 3.2 (2005), 231-258.

I should note that my central thesis, namely, the greater unity of the human being as compared with other animals and physical substances, may sound immediately problematic, since on Thomas's view human death is a separation of soul and body. Thomas would also hold with St. Paul that all humans experience 'the war of the flesh against the spirit'. Thus, even Thomas's own Christian tradition could seem to point not to a greater unity of human soul and body, but a greater disunity than is found in other animals. Though a full examination of this problem would require a separate inquiry, I'll present the outlines of a response in my concluding comments.

I. Human unity at the level of substantial being

IA. *Thomas on the superior unity of human beings*

Thomas holds that all things, simply as existents, are one: undivided in their being.⁵ So to hold that certain things are more one than others is to maintain that certain things are less divisible in themselves than others are. Thomas speaks to the greater unity of the human being in *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 68. After an extensive argument that in humans the spiritual soul is the form of the body, Thomas states the following, as if in response to a likely supposition:

Yet something constituted by intellectual substance and corporeal matter is not less one than something constituted by the form of fire and its matter; as it happens, it is more one, since as much as form more transcends matter, so much the more one is that which is brought about from it [form] and matter.⁶

Thomas contrasts the human situation with that of fire, a safe but illuminating example: the form of fire is certainly inferior, relative to the human form, and fire has a manifest tendency toward division, dispersion. Most would probably readily agree that a human being is more unified than a fire. Still, Thomas's reasoning here would imply that human unity is greater than the unity of even a higher animal,

⁵ *ST*, I, q. 11, a. 1.

⁶ 'Non autem minus est aliquid unum ex substantia intellectuali et materia corporali quam ex forma ignis et eius materia, sed forte magis: quia quanto forma magis vincit materiam, ex ea et materia efficitur magis unum.' Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. I translate *forte* here as 'as it happens', which seems more appropriate, given the context, than James Anderson's 'perhaps'. See *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book Two: Creation*, Trans. James Anderson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p. 205. Thomas immediately gives a universal reason for his claim, which makes it unlikely that he would express the claim itself tentatively. This is the only passage I know of in Thomas's *corpus* that explicitly affirms human hylomorphic unity as greater than the unity of other composite substances.

like a dog or monkey. Thomas spends the remainder of the chapter articulating the diverse levels of form in the physical cosmos, beginning with the lowest substances, moving upward through plants and animals, showing at each step how form more and more transcends matter, and concluding with the intellectual human form, which ‘exceeds (*excedit*) the condition of corporeal matter’, such that it is ‘not totally comprehended (*comprehensa*) by matter or immersed (*immersa*) in it’. As surpassing matter more than all sub-human substantial forms do, the human soul with its matter, Thomas maintains, gives rise to a greater unity than do those lower forms with theirs.

So the argument is simply this: the more a form transcends materiality, the greater the unity constituted by that form and its matter. Since the human form as rational transcends materiality more than all other natural forms, it and its matter make the human substance more unified than any other natural substance.

IB. Two grades of natural unity: The continuum and the whole

But what this conclusion means is not immediately evident, and it’s not evident why the conclusion follows. Just how are higher beings in the natural realm less divisible—more unified—than lower ones? Clearly, for example, humans are not less composed of parts than other composite substances are; in fact, experience and science indicate just the opposite. Owing to their greater powers (both in kind and in number), higher composite substances are more complex, in terms of parts, than lower ones.⁷ Nor are humans less divisible (or destructible) in a sheerly quantitative sort of way. Substances like diamond, for example, could seem much more unified than a human being just because of diamond’s greater resistance to quantitative division. And diamond, like human being, is a natural substantial unity; both are composed of substantial form and corporeal matter. In all natural substances, as opposed to artifacts, the substantial form is present in the whole and in all the parts: one half of a diamond is no less diamond than the other half, just as my arm is no less human than my head.⁸

⁷ *ScG*, II, c. 72; *ST*, I, a. 77, a. 2.

⁸ This presence of substantial form in the whole and in all the parts reveals natural beings as greater unities than artifacts, wherein the form of the whole (like a house) only arranges, and does not actualize the parts as such. See *ST*, I, q. 76, a. 8; V *Metaphysicam*, lect. 7, n. 851; X *Metaphys.*, lect. 1, nn. 1922, 1926. Thomas develops this notion of natural unity into an articulation of substantial form as *wholly* present in the whole body and in each part. He calls this a totality, or wholeness, of essential perfection, e.g., the wholeness of a substance as possessing its proper form and matter. Such wholeness is distinguished from wholeness of quantity and of power. See *Disp. de anima*, q. 10; *De spir. creat.*, a. 4; *ScG* II, c. 72. This essay owes much to Thomas’s discussions in these texts.

Yet a closer look at this example reveals how in comparison with a human being the unity of diamond is far more precarious from the standpoint of the particular reality at hand, e.g., ‘this particular diamond’ in comparison with ‘this human Socrates’. For in homogenous substances like diamonds, a part, presumably all the way down to the specific molecular structure, possesses the form in as perfect a manner as the whole does. That the given instance of diamond exists unifiedly and not as a multitude of smaller diamonds results not from anything in the demands of its own nature, but simply from circumstantial forces surrounding it. We can refer to such a unity as that of a *continuum*.⁹ The parts of a given diamond are parts only in the sense of quantitative continuity, or physical contact; in themselves, they could just as well be separate instances of diamond, which is to say that they are parts only *accidentally*. In turn—and this is the crucial point—the original whole is one only *accidentally*.

The unity of a continuum is substantial as a unity of form and matter, but accidental with respect to quantity: the substantial unity is not strong enough to carry through to the quantitative realm. Even the substantial forms of continuums effectively share in quantitative divisibility, since division of these substances indirectly divides the forms themselves. Continuums, then, are never intrinsically complete or incomplete. Our everyday speech indicates as much: in noticing water or granite on the path we’d refer it not as ‘a water’ but as ‘a puddle of water’, or simply, ‘some water’; not ‘a granite’, but ‘some granite’, or *a piece of granite*. All inanimate substances in the strict sense are homogenous and thus possess the unity of a continuum.

A greater sort of unity characterizes natural substances that we could call totalities, or *wholes*.¹⁰ These are living organisms: trees, dogs, humans. Wholes are heterogeneous; their parts are parts *essentially*, since division into parts typically does not entail a new instance of the same substance, and usually entails the part’s destruction altogether (and sometimes the destruction of the whole). Likewise, the whole is a whole *essentially*; it is, by nature, complete. Its nature demands that it exist with various sorts of parts, arranged in a particular order—generally so as to reach an approximate size—all for the sake of particular activities. Natural wholes possess a discernible completeness in themselves and accomplished by

⁹ The terms ‘continuum’ and ‘whole’ as I use them in this paper are originally suggested by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* V. See Thomas’s commentary in V *Metaphys.*, lect. 8, nn. 870-71; X *Metaphys.*, lect. 1, nn. 1922-28; *Disp. de anima*, a. 10, resp.; *De spir. creat.*, a. 4, resp.

¹⁰ V *Metaphys.*, lect. 8, nn. 870-71. Using Thomas’s geometrical examples, we could say that the living organism (the whole) is more like a circle, which is complete and lacks nothing; while the non-living substance (the continuum) is more like the straight line, which can be extended indefinitely.

themselves, as manifested in their ability to be sources of appropriate action for their own sakes, in distinction from their surroundings.¹¹ A whole, we might say, is the first sort of unity that gets us to something like a self. Diamonds are complete only by way of some external standard, such as a desired size for a ring.

Unlike the form of a continuum, the substantial form of a whole is not subject to division, even accidentally. Quantitative partition lies outside the possibilities of such substances, which means that the substantial unity of a whole is strong enough to enter the accidental realm and include a particular quantity by way of a particular shape. Consequently, in the case of a whole (a living organism) the particular physical body with its amount and structure is crucial to the realization of the nature. After all, if 'this particular human' is divided into quantitative parts, both the 'this' and the 'human' are gone; while if 'this particular diamond' is divided, the 'this' departs but 'diamond' remains.¹²

This means that living beings are more easily numbered. What counts as 'one' in non-living beings is less clear, given their lack of any intrinsic determination as to *how much* they are or ought to be.¹³

We can see, too, how the greater unity of higher substances does not mean they are less corruptible. On the contrary, their corruption is in some way easier, since the removal of quantitative unity includes the removal of substantial unity; that is, if an animal is divided so as to lose its proper shape and amount, it fairly quickly loses its substantial unity of form and matter. By contrast, the removal of quantitative unity in lower substances allows substantial unity to remain intact. After all, quantitative unity is accidental to non-living substances in the first place. In the natural realm, the less of a unity something is, the fewer are the ways in which the little unity it has can be corrupted. This is because lesser substantial unities involve

¹¹ The distinction between what I call continuums and wholes is insightfully discussed by Hans Jonas, 'Biological foundations of individuality,' in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974). Jonas emphasizes the self-actualization of living organisms.

¹² Plants and certain animals like worms, as Thomas notes, possess a trace of the homogeneity proper to non-living substances, since various forms of sheerly quantitative division can entail new instances of the same substance. Still, the fact that prior to such division a single soul is at work indicates that the homogeneity present in these organisms is more of a merely potential sort than it is in non-living substances. See *De spir. creat.*, a. 4, ad 19.

¹³ Before arguing for God as supremely one, in *ST*, I, q. 11, a. 4, Thomas argues that God is one, i.e., that there is one God, in a. 3. Here Thomas is showing that nothing like continuity or commonness exists in the Divine Nature. The Divine cannot be present in pieces or in instances. Compared to their Creator, all creatures possess something resembling continuity, since they all participate (analogously) in being (*esse*). They are all instances (analogously) of being (*ens*). Bodily living creatures, while instances of a kind, are at least not pieces.

less complexity, fewer sorts of parts, and fewer orders among those parts.¹⁴

At this point we can indicate two criteria by which to show one physical unity as greater than another. First, a greater unity will be one that is more whole or complete, more possessive of what it needs on behalf of itself, which suggests that the being's self pervades the whole, inasmuch as each part only is what it is on account of and in relation to the whole. Wholeness or completeness, then, ultimately refers to self-unity. Second, a greater unity will be one in which the form of the substance is more related to the *particular* matter in which it exists, since *this* matter, and not just this *kind* of matter, is what essentially bears the form and with it makes a whole. If human beings are greater metaphysical unities than non-human composites, they ought to be, not less divisible in terms of sheer quantity or corporeality, but less substantially divisible. They will have to be more whole, more sufficient unto themselves, and more characterized by the relation of form to *particular* matter.

Let's return to Thomas's claim that the higher the form, the greater the unity it and its matter provide. The distinction between continuums and wholes helps us see why Thomas's claim is true. For in non-living substances (continuums), form itself is 'submerged' within bodiliness to the point that it effectively assumes the dispersion that characterizes mere physical extension.¹⁵ Form's transcending of matter is relatively weak here. Yet higher substances possess a tendency to unification above and beyond part-outside-of-part togetherness. Form in such substances actualizes, organizes and structures matter by way of distinct sorts of parts, which serve the whole. This is the realm of form as soul. While quantitative continuity is still present, matter is brought together in ways beyond the merely contiguous, as is revealed in mutual interaction among the parts for the sake of some end proper to the whole substance. A part is thus not only meaningfully related to parts very different from itself, but even indicates them, as well as the entire whole, from within itself, in the sense that comprehension of the part necessarily entails some grasp of the whole and various other parts to which it is related. (See the complexity of the human genome.) It takes a greater principle of unity to pervade not just the whole and homogenous parts, as in diamond, but even parts of different sorts, acting in different ways.

The reason that the higher form entails a greater unity of the substance is precisely that the more a form *transcends* materiality, the more that form *elevates* the matter to which it is joined. The higher form, in actualizing its matter, gathers it into a unity higher

¹⁴ See *Disp. de anima*, q. 8, ad 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 10, resp.; *De spir. creat.*, a. 4, resp.

than the merely continuous—a unity of wholeness, marked by actions that more and more surpass the capacities of sheer bodiliness.

IC. The human soul: Spiritual wholeness

Now let's discuss the nature of this wholeness, as revealed by the human being, the most unified among natural wholes. The two grades of unity we've seen within hylomorphic substances, namely, continuums and wholes, lines up respectively with non-living and living beings. The next step is to see how, within wholes, we can find two grades of unity: one proper to non-human organisms, and one proper to humans.

If higher forms recede more and more from the quantitative dispersion characteristic of mere bodiliness, what are they approaching? What is the sort of togetherness into which the parts of matter are drawn so as to constitute a unity beyond the merely continuous? Wholes are characterized by being in some way complete: sufficient unto themselves. If we're going to rank wholes, then, we'd need to rank them in terms of how complete or self-sufficient they are.

As mentioned earlier, the upmost limit among all forms in the natural world is the intellectual human soul, which is to say that immaterial being is what all substantial forms, to greater or lesser degrees, approach. Like other substantial forms, the human soul is composed neither of physical quantitative parts, nor of form and matter. But distinctively, as indicated by its intellectual activity, the human soul is a subsisting reality possessing spiritual being.¹⁶ My claim in this section of the paper is that the unity proper to the human soul is a kind of wholeness that surpasses the wholeness proper to non-human substances. Further, to the extent that the human soul's wholeness embraces the body, the entire human person is more whole, and thus more unified, than non-human substances. In effect, within wholes we can make a distinction between physically-informed wholes (plants and non-human animals) and spiritually-informed ones (human beings).

As a subsisting spiritual reality, lacking any integral parts, the soul is indivisible—and thus incorruptible.¹⁷ It possesses the simplicity characteristic of spiritual being, which is a unity different in kind from, and superior to, any physical unity.¹⁸ Its simplicity means that the soul exists in itself, unlike a physical being which, as such, is

¹⁶ *ST*, I, q. 75, aa. 1, 2, 5; q. 76, a. 1.

¹⁷ *Disp. de anima*, q. 14, resp.

¹⁸ *De spir. creat.*, a. 4, ad 17; *ScG* II, c. 49, n. 2.

‘spread out’, existing part-outside-of-part.¹⁹ One could say that the human soul’s unity of simplicity is a kind of *wholeness* surpassing any physical wholeness, since the soul possesses its being in a *complete* manner: all together, indivisible, and incorruptible.

To better capture how the human soul’s wholeness of simplicity relates to physical wholeness, I think it helpful to use the language of ‘selfhood’. Specifically, degrees of wholeness are proportional to degrees of selfhood. As a spiritual reality, Thomas says, the soul is ‘always actually present to itself’ (*semper sibi adest actu*) simply by way of existing in itself.²⁰ These phrases refer to nothing other than the simplicity proper to spiritual being. At the same time, the soul’s existence in itself is the foundation of the intellectual act proper to spiritual being: self-awareness, which entails self-love and self-governance. Thomas refers to this fundamental spiritual act as a ‘return to self’.²¹ The intellectual return to self is a natural consequence of simplicity, of having one’s being all in oneself and not dispersed through physical partition.²² A being is intellectual, in other words, because it is immaterial, and this immaterial way of being grounds the human soul as a unique kind of whole among other substantial forms. Because the human being possesses a spiritual soul, it will be able to make a true return to self through the intellectual act of self-awareness.

We can thus return to Thomas’s hierarchy of substantial forms and view it from the top down. The unity given by form that substances approach to varying degrees, beginning with homogenous continuums, is the wholeness of selfhood: being a self.²³ Only in the human being, at the upmost limit of all substantial forms, does selfhood truly occur, as indicated by rational self-awareness and self-mastery (which characterize personhood in the first place). This is how the human being, more than any other natural substance, is whole, or complete: for it alone can determine itself. It can possess itself through knowledge and govern itself through free will. Beneath humans, animals present

¹⁹ *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia dei*, q. 10, a. 5, obj. 6, ad 6 (hereafter, *De potentia*); *ST*, I, q. 14, a. 2, ad 1.

²⁰ *ScG*, III, c. 46, n. 2: ‘Ipsa autem anima semper sibi adest actu, et nunquam in potentia vel in habitu tantum.’

²¹ *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 1, a. 9, resp.: ‘... illa quae sunt perfectissima in entibus, ut substantiae intellectuales, redeunt ad essentiam suam reditione completa: in hoc enim quod cognoscunt aliquid extra se positum, quodammodo extra se procedunt; secundum vero quod cognoscunt se cognoscere, iam ad se redire incipiunt, quia actus cognitionis est medius inter cognoscentem et cognitum. Sed reditus iste completur secundum quod cognoscunt essentias proprias...’ (hereafter, *De veritate*).

²² *De spir. creat.*, a. 1, ad 12.

²³ Jonas discusses the centrality of selfhood to living organisms in ‘Biological foundations of individuality’ and in his essay ‘Is God a Mathematician?’ in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Northwestern University Press, 1966), pp. 64–98.

certain kinds of selves, characterized not only through structural and mobile distinction from their surroundings, but fundamentally through the beginnings of self-awareness and self-directedness, in sensation and desire. Still, an animal is less of a self to begin with, compared to a human, inasmuch as the animal lacks any spiritual simplicity. As its entire being is “dispersed” in physicality, even of a very high order, the animal is the last and noblest whole for whom the realm of continuity ultimately proves decisive.²⁴ Correspondingly, the animal lacks a complete return to self through intellect. Finally, the most rudimentary dimensions of selfhood appear in plant organisms, since they at least gather themselves together into intrinsic unities marked off from their surroundings, and take in material that contributes to their preservation.

ID. The human body's participation in the soul's unity

The spiritual human soul, the highest substantial form, possesses a wholeness and simplicity that transcends the unities given by all non-human forms, and that these forms approach to varying degrees, as they constitute lesser or greater wholes out of the matter they actualize. Yet what of the entire human person, including the body? Let us grant that the soul is simple and that it ultimately allows the human being to possess itself through knowledge and love. Yet the human body is not something spiritual; it is physical and highly complex. The human body corrupts, and in this way is separable from the soul. The question, then, is how the soul's transcendent unity entails a greater unity of the whole human being. If the admittedly superior unity of the soul's essence is foreign to the body, one can't claim a corresponding superior unity of the human person.

Thomas anticipates this concern. Earlier we saw that higher natural forms, *precisely in* their superior transcendence over matter, bring matter into a higher unity. Why should the human be any different? The solution Thomas provides is the crucial insight for the purposes of this paper. He explains that because the spiritual soul is the subsisting *form* of the body, the soul's transcendence over matter, far from implying some separation of the two, means rather the soul's communication of its own being into the body.²⁵ In non-human animals, form and matter participate in the being (*esse*) of the physical

²⁴ One way to see the irrational animal's subjection to continuity is in its generation, through which the whole being, substantial form and matter, is brought forth by way of physical separation from parents. In human generation, only the material principle is so divided. See *De potentia*, q. 3, aa. 9-11.

²⁵ *ScG*, II, c. 68.

composite, even though this composite has its being *through* form.²⁶ In humans, by contrast, the composite is nothing other than matter participating in the form's *own* being. Metaphysically, a unique connection exists between form and matter in humans, for the human body shares immediately in the soul's spiritual being;²⁷ while in non-human substances, matter does not share in the form's being, since the form has no being of its own. Rather, in lower substances *matter* achieves a particular degree of physical actuality, owing to the kind of form it possesses.

Thomas parses out the being of the human person in *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 68: '[f]or the being belongs to corporeal matter as to a recipient and a subject raised to something higher, but it belongs to the intellectual substance as to a principle, and according to a congruity with its proper nature.'²⁸ The 'kind' of existence, or being, that the human body participates in is spiritual, such that in this case corporeal matter is elevated. From the body's viewpoint, because a thing's being, or existence, is more intimate to it than anything else and the body participates in the soul's act of existing, the soul can be considered closer to the body than anything else that might be said of the body, which entails the remarkable fact that spiritual being is more intimate to the human body than is any physical quality.²⁹ Thomas boldly states that the corporeity—the *bodiliness*—of a human being *is* the intellectual soul, which is not actually bodily but possesses bodiliness virtually, as the sun possesses color.³⁰ The human way of being a body is only possible through spiritual being; just as the human way of being spiritual essentially entails matter and the physical order.³¹ Human matter, then, as actualized, elevated, and organized by spiritual being, is characterized by the unity of spiritual

²⁶ *De spir. creat.*, a. 2, ad 8.

²⁷ *Disp. de anima*, q. 9.

²⁸ 'Hoc autem convenienter diceretur si eodem modo illud esse materiae esset sicut est substantiae intellectualis. Non est autem ita. Est enim materiae corporalis ut recipientis et subiecti ad aliquid altius elevati: substantiae autem intellectualis ut principii, et secundum propriae naturae congruentiam.'

²⁹ '... inter omnia, esse est illud quod immediatius et intimius convenit rebus, ut dicitur in *Lib. de causis*; unde oportet, cum materia habeat esse actu per formam, quod forma dans esse materiae, ante omnia intelligatur advenire materiae, et immediatius ceteris sibi inesse' (*Disp. de anima*, q. 9, resp).

³⁰ 'Corpus autem quod est in genere substantiae, habet formam substantialem quae dicitur corporeitas, quae non est tres dimensiones, sed quaecumque forma substantialis ex qua sequuntur in materia tres dimensiones; et haec forma in igne est igneitas, in animali anima sensitiva, et in homine anima intellectiva' (*De spir. creat.*, a. 3, ad 14); '... licet anima non habeat corporeitatem in actu, habet tamen virtute, sicut sol calorem' (ad 16).

³¹ Thomas remarks that the human soul gives not simply actual being to the body, but being of a certain sort, namely, life, and life of a certain sort, namely, in an intellectual nature. *De spir. creat.*, a. 11, ad 14.

being; no other body is. As the human body participates in the soul's being, so it participates in the soul's unity.

So far we've pointed out the human body's remarkable closeness to the spiritual soul. It's no less true, however, that the human soul is remarkably close to the body. Here it is crucial to see *why* the spiritual soul and the body are naturally joined. In one sense, the soul is not a spiritual being joined with the body. For the soul, as Thomas insists, though a spiritual reality (*hoc aliquid*) in its own right, is not a being of a complete species. We should note the gravity of this statement given Thomas's metaphysics: in itself the soul lacks the completion of its nature. What the soul does not possess in its own right is that most fundamental consequence of being, namely, proper activity, which in this case is knowing sensible reality.³² As Thomas puts it, knowing belongs to the soul in its own right inasmuch as the soul is the *principle* of the intellectual operation, but inasmuch as the natural *object* of that operation is sensible being, the body shares (*communicat*) in knowing.³³ While the simplicity characteristic of spiritual being belongs to the soul, the usual fulfillment of that simplicity—intellectual activity, or 'return to self'—naturally occurs only on the condition of the soul's union with sensible being, by way of embodiment.

As we noted earlier, the complete unity of spiritual being is the wholeness of simplicity fulfilled in the intellectual return to self. This completeness does not naturally belong to the human soul in its own right, which means that its own spirituality and simplicity are inferior to those of complete spiritual substances (angels). Yet more than a comment on the soul's spiritual inferiority, this conclusion is an indication of the soul's intrinsic ordering to embodiment: its natural "part-hood" within the human being. Fully spiritual substances accomplish their own act just in virtue of being spiritual, while the human soul requires a 'going outside of itself' in order to return to itself, via the bodily dimension.³⁴

Since all substances exist for the sake of their proper activities, the body's contribution is quite literally essential. Thomas even calls the body the 'organ' of the soul, since it is crucial in order for any of the soul's powers to be actualized in their natural state. In a certain way, then, the body is closer to the soul than are the various human

³² *Disp. de anima*, q. 1, resp., ad 3; q. 8, resp.

³³ '... intelligere est propria operatio animae, si consideretur principium a quo egreditur operatio; non enim egreditur ab anima mediante organo corporali, sicut visio mediante oculo, communicat tamen in ea corpus ex parte obiecti; nam phantasmata, quae sunt obiecta intellectus, sine corporeis organis esse non possunt' (*Disp. de anima*, q. 1, ad 11).

³⁴ *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 9, resp.; q. 8, a. 6, resp.; *ST*, I, q. 55, a. 2, resp.

powers, even those of reason and will.³⁵ (As Thomas mentions in *Summa Theologiae* I, Question 75, *proemium*, the body pertains to the soul's essence itself, while the powers flow from the essence.) As well, it is not as though the bodily realm serves simply as extrinsic instrument for the intellect's spiritual act, since what the human intellect naturally targets is the being of physical realities.³⁶ These are the things we know best and most properly.³⁷ We should think of the soul as spiritual in order to approach the human being accurately, but in seeing the nature of the soul's bodily-mediated spiritual act we finally do best to think of the soul as 'human'.

It is only the human person, body and soul, that realizes what ought to be present in any case of substantial being: existence and natural activity. Since the acts involved here are intellectual, the human person can be seen as a participant in the kind of unity proper to spiritual substances. Yet because the human person realizes these acts through soul *and* body, the person remains only a participant in this spiritual unity, transcending the unity of solely physical substances, but beneath that of purely spiritual ones.

Let's recall the two criteria for higher unity established earlier: (1) something is more unified than something else if it is more whole: more complete, or sufficient unto itself. (2) One natural substance is more unified than another the more it is characterized by form being joined to this particular matter, rather than just a certain kind of matter. In light of these criteria, we can conclude that the human being is a greater unity, metaphysically, than other natural substances. First, the entire human person—soul and body—exists through the one act of spiritual being originating from the soul. As sourced by a spiritual principle of unity and existing for the sake of self-unity in action, the human person more than all other composite substances is characterized by the unity of wholeness: completeness, or selfhood, fully actualized in the return to self that includes self-awareness and self-governance. Second, the human person's form is distinctly characterized by union with 'this particular matter,' inasmuch as a particular human soul essentially communicates *its own* spiritual existence to 'this matter,' and remains oriented to do so for eternity. It is no objection to this conclusion that the human body corrupts, since all lesser bodies are also corruptible. The point is that while a human body, this body participates in a being and unity that transcends lesser substances.

³⁵ *Disp. de anima*, q. 10, ad 1: 'Et propter hoc totum corpus, cui respondet principaliter anima ut forma, est organum . . .'

³⁶ *ST*, I, q. 84, a. 7, resp.; q. 85, a. 1, resp.

³⁷ For an excellent discussion of the human intellect's natural partnership with the physical realm, see Brock, 'The Physical Status of the Spiritual Soul.'

II. Human unity revealed in action

So far I have attempted to elucidate Thomas's claim that the human form/matter relation entails a greater unity than does the same relation in other natural substances. This claim regards the superior unity of the human person at the level of first actuality, or substantial being. We might wonder what this superior unity 'looks like' or feels like, especially given our spatially distended and remarkably complex bodiliness.

In this latter part of the paper I will first briefly remark on the connection between bodily complexity and human action. I will then engage the thought of Robert Sokolowski in order to show how embodied human action can reveal the striking unity of the human being.³⁸

IIA. Human complexity as serving human action

The human body may be the most complex physical reality in the universe. As Thomas sees it, this complexity is the direct exigency of the human soul's superior capacity for action.³⁹ Human beings possess greater power than any other composite substance because they possess intellect; yet as we've seen, the human intellect requires bodiliness for the completion of its act, which in turn demands the whole gamut of lesser powers. Because the human being among all creatures is the least simple—the most complex—in the realm of power, it is able to be the most disunified creature at the level of action.⁴⁰ But this would be another inquiry.

IIB. Sokolowski and declaration as manifesting human unity

Robert Sokolowski's *Phenomenology of the Human Person*⁴¹ is an attempt to reveal what human beings are by looking closely at their

³⁸ See Sokolowski, *The Phenomenology of the Human Person* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). I focus on Sokolowski because he offers a recent, very readable attempt to recapitulate and develop major strands of the phenomenological tradition. Sokolowski looks primarily to Husserl and his focus on the categorial dimension of properly human activity (e.g., *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, 215).

³⁹ *Disp. de anima*, q. 9, resp.

⁴⁰ *ST*, I, q. 77, a. 2. Alongside wholeness of quantity and wholeness of essence, Thomas distinguishes wholeness of power (*Disp. de anima*, q. 10, resp.). Considered in terms of power, the substantial form of an organism is wholly present only in the organism as a whole; it is partially present in the eye, via the power of vision, and partially present in a different way in the ear, via the power of hearing, and so on.

⁴¹ Hereafter, *PHP*.

rationality, or ‘engagement in truth’.⁴² Sokolowski hones in on speech as the paradigmatic human activity. Further, he describes how human rationality is paradigmatically present in and through a particular act of speech:

The role of syntax in our experience, activity, and speech is the central theme in my analysis, but I begin the book with a particular syntactic form, which I call the ‘declarative’ use of the first-person pronoun. It is the use we make of the word *I* and its analogues when we endorse or appropriate a particular exercise of our rational, syntactic powers, when, for example, we say, ‘*I know she is coming,*’ or ‘*I promise I will be there.*’ Such declaratives could not be used except on the foundation of another syntactic articulation, and they mention us precisely as actively engaged as agents of syntax or agents of truth. They designate us as persons in action, as acting rationally even as we utter the words.⁴³

That speech should be considered a prime candidate for revealing human being is not surprising; it is often considered one of the definitive activities distinguishing humans from other animals. Indeed, according to Sokolowski we think in words, which are first and foremost public, interpersonal communications. Private thinking is ‘the derivation from or the rehearsal for a public performance. It is the shadow of what we do in public [. . .] We tend to think of speech as voiced thought (“thinking out loud”) but we should think of silent thinking as unvoiced speech.’⁴⁴ The essentially embodied character of human reasoning, and thereby of all properly human action, comes to the fore.⁴⁵

⁴² *PHP*, 1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁴ *PHP*, 62. Thomas does not tend to put things this way, though such a description may be in conformity with his principles. Certainly Thomas holds that human thought always involves phantasms and always involves words, though the exterior word, while better known to us, is consequent upon the interior word in the act of understanding itself; see *ST*, I, 85, a. ad 3; *De veritate*, q. 4, a. 1, resp.; a. 2, ad 4. In *ST*, III, q. 60, ad 6, Thomas states that by means of words we can express our thoughts with greater precision, implying that speech (vocal or written or silent) is a human *telos*. He gives a kind of priority to words received from others in *DV*, q. 11, a. 2, ad 11, while comparing knowledge received through teaching to knowledge acquired directly from things. See also *I Peri hermeneias*, lect. 2, where Thomas discusses the social dimension of man’s rationality and the priority of vocal over written words. Helpful discussions, with bibliography, of the role of words in Thomas are Joshua Hochschild, ‘Mental Language in Aquinas?’ in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Gyula Klima (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 29-45; and Sokolowski, *PHP*, 286-303.

⁴⁵ Thomas distinguishes human action, properly speaking, from any action of a human, where the former refers to an action sourced in conscious, free agency, while the latter refers to something that happens in one, or to one, or in some way as proceeding from one, but in less than human fashion. See *ST*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1. Human persons, thanks to their spiritual powers, are characterized by the ability to act of themselves, deliberately.

By emphasizing speech as syntactical, Sokolowski draws attention to the way in which it is formed by and expressive of intelligence as embodied and temporally conditioned.⁴⁶ In further highlighting the significance of the first-person declarative, he reveals how our rationality, and thus our personhood, is most properly realized in and through an act of explicit self-return:

Strictly speaking, nothing more than ‘It is snowing’ is said about the world when I say, ‘I know it is snowing,’ but something new is said in another dimension on the margin of the world, and specifically on this particular edge that is me as an agent of truth in action; I am indexed as such. [. . .] Declarative speech gives us the primary intuition of the personal in its actual presence, the rational in its actual exercise, and the original distinction of the person from his context.⁴⁷

Sokolowski takes seriously the language of ‘the self’ as complementary to notions of ‘person’, ‘man’, and ‘human being’.⁴⁸ Not just our intellectual activity, and not just our intelligible objects, but also our very selfhood is displayed in first-person declarative speaking. The key idea is that the more we are cognitively active, the more we are able to be present to ourselves. Merely registering a state of affairs (‘It is snowing outside’) includes perceptual self-awareness, which animals also possess, and adds to it the activity of articulation, which involves a ‘pre-reflective sense that *we* are the ones registering the fact’. Yet declaration, in which we explicitly articulate ourselves as registering reality, brings us fully to light as human agents of truth.⁴⁹

Sokolowski argues that the first-person declarative is the ‘proper whole for language’, since only in its light do we properly make sense of ‘partial’ uses of language like exclamations (‘Ow!’) or simple

Still, a human action, while spiritually informed, is not the act of a spirit. Thomas insists equally on the intellectual act as spiritual, but also on the agent of the intellectual act as the human person, soul and body. The experiential cornerstone for his entire philosophical analysis of the human being is Augustine’s simple observation that “I understand myself understanding”: *Intelligo me intelligere* (*ST*, I, q. 76, a. 1; q. 87, a. 3, sc; *Disp. de anima*, q. 2; *De spir. creat.*, a. 2). Augustine’s observation is the sort of statement that nicely exemplifies the “return to self” characteristic of human wholeness; it is a perfect example of Sokolowski’s first-person declarative. Thomas employs Augustine’s observation as evidence for his own argument that the spiritual soul is indeed the form of the body. Thus, the ‘I’ who experiences ‘myself’ as understanding is body and spirit. Human action, while specifically differentiated by the dimension of personal agency, essentially possesses a bodily dimension. Through his own interpretation of Augustine’s reflection, Thomas offers a phenomenological principle of fundamental importance and fruitfulness. The latter part of this essay is an exploration of that principle, focusing on the fact that the ‘I’ who experiences itself understanding is bodily *even within* the experience of itself as understanding.

⁴⁶ *PHP*, 35-41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

statements of fact ('It's snowing outside'). In declaration 'we find the language itself, its use, and the user who declares himself as using it'.⁵⁰

Two things are notable in this analysis, when viewed in light of our earlier discussion of Thomas Aquinas and human unity. First, the activity that Sokolowski uses as his way into the human being is one that uniquely images the metaphysical unity of the human being. Speech is characterized by a remarkable degree of physical complexity and temporal distention; yet it is unified in an intelligibility that transcends physicality, encompassing past, present, and future. Though articulation itself is necessarily distended, the articulated unity, as such, is not, even if that unity is recognized as tenuous in reality. When I say, 'Socrates is standing over there,' we are aware of various physical unities in the situation: Socrates is a kind of physical unity, as is his place. The length of time he will stand in the place is a temporal unity; even the sentence I utter is contained within a particular amount of time. Yet what the sentence asserts is the unity of Socrates with the position he maintains in the place he is in. This unity, as perceived by reason and articulated in words, is itself neither a temporal nor a quantitative amount. It is, rather, an intelligible structure, an order in things available to and articulated by thought alone.⁵¹ Just as such, it is not fully characterized by physical or temporal extension; it can be communicated to many, translated, and reformulated all while remaining itself.⁵² Yet it can only be expressed in and through the sensory, temporal sphere. Speech thus imitates the structure of the speaker: an intellectual form expressed in physicality, but thereby granting to its physical constituency a remarkable sort of unity.⁵³

The second notable thing about Sokolowski's analysis is his emphasis on first-person declaratives. If speech itself images our unity as integrally composed of intellectual and material principles, declarative speech goes one step further to reveal our unity as wholes, as beings that are most what we are in and through self-return, but a self-return only accomplished through awareness of exterior reality.

Sokolowski goes on to describe how the syntactical structure characteristic of speech informs *everything* we do *as human*. Not just our thinking and speaking, but also our practical activity (which would include all artistic and moral action) is characterized by an

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-34, esp. 34.

⁵¹ *PHP*, 55-58. See also David Braine, *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit* (London: Duckworth, 1993) pp. 440-445.

⁵² *PHP*, 55-58.

⁵³ *ST*, I, q. 85, a. 5, ad 3, where Thomas notes the similarity between the unity of a predication and of a hylomorphic composite. Also I *Peri herm.*, lect. 2, which discusses speech as signifying the conceptions of the intellect.

intelligible structure realized in bodiliness.⁵⁴ Any human action displays the kind of wholeness present in the first-person declarative, inasmuch as an agent initiates an action deliberately and in some way for his own sake. The action as a whole and any part of it, while occurring in bodily context, only have meaning by way of this intelligible structure that begins and ends with the agent.

Conclusion: The disunified human being

I will conclude by briefly returning to Owen Flanagan and then commenting on the problem of human disunity: conflict, suffering, and death.

We recall Flanagan saying that our animal side is our only side. In light of the foregoing argument, a Thomist could retain that statement but in a transformed way, for our souls, though spiritual, necessarily, naturally, and essentially communicate their own being into bodies for the sake of the fulfillment that comes to any being through its proper activity. Of course, a Thomist could not agree with Flanagan's conclusion that we possess nothing spiritual, since it is precisely our participation in spirituality that grants our animality its unique character and its closer proximity to ourselves than a dog's animality has to the dog itself. Human animality in Thomas's cosmos becomes something more real and more mysterious than it ever could in a materialist worldview.

But let us return to the ubiquitous experience of ourselves as disunified. Not only are we subject to physical injury, sickness and death; we are also fragmented in uniquely human ways, through distraction, frustration, regret, and guilt. We are prey to psychological, mental, and spiritual disturbances. A full account of our experience of disunity would, for Thomas, include some consideration of Original Sin's inheritance and its effects. Here I simply wish to note two points from the standpoint of philosophical reflection: first, that the human being is potentially the most disunified creature when it comes to powers and actions; and second, that even this disunity points back to the underlying metaphysical unity of human soul and body.

First: humans as potentially most disunified. The mere fact that humans are able to experience the sorts of disunities just listed can be explained naturally. Thomas explains that precisely because man is situated as the border of the bodily and the spiritual, he is less

⁵⁴ Human practical activity is syntactical in its 'ability to do *this* in view of *that* [...]. It is only because the agent has entered into linguistic syntax that his other practices can become syntactical as well.' Thus, the 'eponymous use of reason' is speech, and '[o]ther rational activities are analogous to speech' (*PHP*, 101). See also pp. 238-270.

simple than any other being *at the level of power*.⁵⁵ As our spirituality is merely in potency to its proper act, and thus dependent upon sensation, the soul in its simplicity originates the whole gamut of powers, those proper to animals as well as those proper to spiritual beings. In proportion to the great complexity of the human being are the many ways it can go wrong.

Of particular significance for human disunity is the fact that we possess apprehension and appetite of two sorts: sensory and intellectual. There is always the possibility that our inclination toward some sensory good will oppose the rational inclination toward something else, and vice versa.⁵⁶ Indeed, to some extent our way of being privileges the sensory realm, since these realities are the ones most immediately present to us.⁵⁷

Second: Disunity points back to unity. For Thomas, our experience of sensory/rational conflict reveals disunity at the level of power, to be sure, but also confirms a corresponding unity at the metaphysical level. In defending the substantial union of human soul and body against an objection that cites the conflict between ‘flesh and spirit’, Thomas responds as follows:

[the] very fact that the flesh lusts against the spirit indicates the soul’s affinity for its body. For ‘spirit’ means the superior part of the soul by which a human being surpasses other animals . . . Now the flesh is said to ‘lust’ because those parts of the soul that are united to the flesh desire those thing which are pleasant to the flesh, and sometimes these desires are at war with the spirit.⁵⁸

In other words, if the sensory and rational powers were not as united as they are, we would not experience the conflict between them as acutely as we do.

Something similar can be said about our experience of the deepest human fissure, death itself. It might be thought that the foregoing account of human unity would maintain death to be simply unnatural, since by nature the soul and body are even more united than any other form/matter union. Yet the argument does not follow: human matter, only participating in spiritual being and unity, does not itself become spiritual. Its decomposition remains a natural possibility.⁵⁹ What does follow, it seems to me, is that the human experience of and attitude toward death would be more painfully felt than in the case of other animals. The reason for this suffering is not only that humans, unlike

⁵⁵ *ST*, I, q. 77, a. 2.

⁵⁶ *ST*, I-II, q. 9, a. 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; *ScG* III, c. 6, n. 8.

⁵⁸ See also *Disp. de anima*, q. 8, ad 7. At the end of the *respondeo* to q. 11, Thomas notes that one piece of evidence for the unity of vegetative, sensitive, and rational soul is the fact that the operation of one power, when strong, can overwhelm that of another.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, q. 1, ad 14; q. 8, resp.

animals, are rationally aware of what is happening; it is also that what happens in human death is more violent than in animal death. Death is less natural in humans than in animals, since the unity it sunders is a greater one.

But death, Christians maintain, doesn't have the last word. I'll let my final thoughts here concern Christ, who removes the sting of death, and the life He offers us. In *Summa contra Gentiles* IV, while discussing the Incarnation, Thomas states that human soul/body union is the closest analogy we have to the union of Divine Word and human nature in Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ The soul is spiritual and communicates its own being into the body, so that the body might assist the soul in its activity. Analogously, the Divine Word communicates its being into the human nature of Christ so that Divinity might most fittingly accomplish the work of salvation. Of course this is only an analogy—but the thesis of this paper, that the human soul and body constitute the greatest natural unity, contributes nicely to the analogy Thomas gives.

In this light let us consider the role of our souls and bodies in the life that imitates Christ. At times, we rightly mortify our bodies. This doesn't have to be only in order to tame lower passions. St. Thomas More speaks of how we all ought to weep over our sins. And for those many of us who aren't yet able to weep for our sins, we need not despair: our souls and bodies are so united, More says, that we can mortify our bodies in some way, for the sake of Christ, and it will be as though we are weeping for our sins.⁶¹ Indeed, the ultimate mortification, death itself, for the Christian doesn't have to be a sign of man's disunity. It doesn't have to warrant the judgment: vanity of vanities. Rather, because our soul and body are so united, when we offer our bodies in death for the sake of Christ it is as though we are offering our very selves.

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⁶⁰ c. 41.

⁶¹ *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* 2.7, Ed. Mary Gottschalk (Princeton: Scepter, 1998), 104-105. In this passage More refers to the spiritual classic *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis.