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FOREWORD: THE THOMISTIC APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

JUAN JOSÉ SANGUINETI*

CONTEMPORARY discussions in the field of philosophy of mind and philosophy of neuroscience usually mention different positions such as dualism, emergentism, functionalism, materialism and others. It is odd that Thomism never appears in these classifications. Perhaps the Thomistic account in the topic of the distinction between body and soul and their relationship is confounded with an instance of dualism, though normally dualism is characterized in terms of Cartesian philosophy. This absence could be considered even positive for followers of Aquinas, because they could present themselves in the debate with a sense of novelty, since Thomas' position is widely ignored. The following contributions can be seen as an invitation to philosophers to shift their attention to the Thomistic approach in this area. They have not the pretension of covering the entire problem, for which some bibliography is indicated, particularly by Freddoso. His paper presents the Thomistic account of the body and mind problem in a very different way from what is usual in modern debates. The ignorance of the Thomistic position could be understood also as the incapacity of posing the problem in the classical metaphysical way, due to the predominance of the scientific approach that gives a very simple view even of concepts going beyond the usual scientific objects (as intention, volition, Self). The three papers of this monographic section try to focus the problem upon some relevant points that can be introductory to a more profound comprehension of the issue.

One of these points is the question of immateriality. Thomists claim to be far from dualism. Their position cannot be placed either within a sophisticated naturalism vaguely open to topics such as freedom or intellectual knowledge, or in the line of the dualistic framework that sees the human being as constituted by two different kind of substances, mind and matter. The Thomistic version is not an easy position, since it maintains that the human soul is the form or the substantial act of the organic human body, and that, consequently, intellectual powers are exercised in strong association with sensitive opera-

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tions and, therefore, with an essential link to the brain, whereas at the same time the view holds that the human soul is spiritual.

Anyhow, modern brain discoveries, as we read in Freddoso's paper, "can hardly produce any embarrassment for a Thomist". The importance of the brain in Aquinas' anthropology is quite natural in his Aristotelian account of the human soul and also in the naturalistic flavor of his time (the thirteenth century) in the faculties of Medicine in many universities, specially in Italy. The brain research in those times, following Avicenna's (Galenic) medicine, was important and it is the basis of later developments that ended up in the brain anatomic revolution in the Renaissance. The interesting point is that nature was contemplated in that period, in the Aristotelian circles, according to a particular philosophy of nature which disappeared in modernity, with the arrival of mechanicism (seventeenth century). To speak of immateriality in an analogical sense was fundamental for an approach that could range from elementary substances up to human animals endowed by intellectual and volitional capacities that, being immaterial in a strong sense, were considered nonetheless as completely natural (not supernatural).

O'Callaghan and Klima, though differently, face the problem of immateriality and universality. The distinction between sensing or feeling and understanding or willing is central in Aquinas, in contrast with views in the current debates in philosophy of mind. It is significant that the usual examples of mental acts, in opposition to neural acts, as suggested by Freddoso, are often referred in these debates to pain, desires or thoughts, indistinctly, which means to take the Cartesian framework in order to discuss whether mental acts are original or not, ignoring that their relationship to brain events is very different in each case.

Universality, a characteristic of human thought, is a property which opens the way to the strong immateriality of the human intellect and, then, to the possibility of seeing the human soul as subsistent, therefore immortal. Klima's paper is concerned with an important objection, coming from Scotus and others, according to which sensitive powers even in non-human animals seem to be related not properly to singular objects but rather to types of objects, which in this sense apparently show some universality. This point, if not cleared, could weaken the claim that only the intellect grasps universals. With the recourse to some observations taken from Thomas Sutton, Klima shows that sensitive apprehension necessarily refers to real singulars. This point helps to understand, I think, how non-human animals discriminate kinds of things, though lacking a real comprehension of universals.

O'Callaghan, on the other hand, discusses Pasnau's arguments that seem to undermine the Thomistic reasoning in favor of the human soul's subsistence based on the capacity of the intellect of understanding universals. That inference would be subjected to the so-called content fallacy, i.e. it would ar-

gue erroneously that if the content of the thought is immaterial, then the act of thinking should be immaterial. The irony, in O'Callaghan's remark, is that Aquinas precisely attributes to Platonists this wrong argumentation that identifies the *modus essendi* with the *modus cognoscendi*. O'Callaghan's paper makes a very important distinction between immaterial in the sense of not being matter and immaterial in the sense of being incorporeal. In this line of thought, it can be said that a form is material when it cannot be dissociated from matter or from a material thing. Ultimately, O'Callaghan holds that Pasnau's interpretation is based upon a representational account of knowledge attributed to Aquinas.

The Thomistic approach to the problems faced by modern philosophers of mind and of neuroscience shows the importance of the distinction between intellectual knowledge (and volition) and sensitive cognition (and emotion). Think, for example, of the relevance of distinguishing between sensitive consciousness and intellectual consciousness. These distinctions can be established on the basis of a clarification of what it means to be universal and particular, and to be immaterial and material. Of course, the whole philosophy of knowledge is at stake in this task. Dualism is avoided if we work out ontological and epistemological problems in terms of a philosophy of nature, of life and, ultimately, of human beings. The Aristotelian view does not need to establish the absolute separation between physical, in terms of modern scientific categories, and spiritual, which in this sense will be unavoidably a different substance simply added to matter. The distinction between body and soul can be understood in a very different framework, which is very helpful for a sound comprehension of the personal spiritual dimension. This is the main point which emerges from the Thomistic thought concerning this philosophical issue.

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