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## The Dispute over Delayed Animation: When Does a Human Being Begin?

The dispute over delayed animation, although having its roots already in ancient culture and philosophy, started for good only in contemporary times when the right to kill unborn children (so-called abortion<sup>1</sup>) entered the canon of constitutional law and, what is even stranger, started to be proposed for inclusion into basic human rights.<sup>2</sup>

Despite being discussed nowadays mainly in medical and legal sciences, the problem involves disputes of an ethical, religious and ideological nature. In the ongoing discussions, one can notice a clear lack of anthropological and metaphysical argumentation that would address the question about the beginning of the human being (which entails the question about the beginning of being *per se*) in the light of the common properties that are inherent in all really existing beings and the

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<sup>1</sup> For more about abortion, see M. Czachorowski, “Abortion in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 7, no. 4 (October–December 2018): 567–578.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Ch. Zampas, J. Gher, “Abortion as a Human Right – International and Regional Standards,” *Human Rights Law Review* 8, no. 2 (2008): 249–294.

metaphysical laws that govern the manner in which real things (including human embryos) exist.

In turn, when looking for the origins of the philosophical dispute over delayed animation among contemporary neo-Thomists, one must take into consideration first the Aristotelian concept of the soul that theoretically underpins the concept of delayed animation, and then the transition of the Aristotelian soul to Thomistic anthropology that does not accept the idea of delayed animation. Some commentators of Aquinas, overlooking the originality in his approach both to the concept of being and to that of the human being, reduce him to the position of an ingenious commentator of Aristotle and make him an adherent of delayed animation.<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, however, as far as metaphysics and anthropology are concerned, is someone more than a prominent commentator of Aristotle.

Although its main considerations on the issue of delayed animation are given in the context of Aristotle's and Aquinas's philosophical anthropology, this article also discusses the concept of the human being (more specifically—the soul) as it is formulated by Plato.

For Plato, the soul, equated with the human being as such, is a perfect being, a substance (to use Aristotle's terminology) that exists in and of itself, the structure of which does not encompass the body.

For Aristotle, the soul is a subontic component, without which the being cannot exist and which is included in the *compositum* of the human being. The soul, therefore, does not exist before and outside the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, J. J. Conley, "Delayed Animation: An Ambiguity and Its Abuses," in *Life and Learning XII*, ed. J. W. Koterski (Washington, D.C.: University Faculty for Life, 2003), 160: "In fact, many prominent Catholic thinkers, such as Aquinas, clearly supported delayed animation;" and D. A. Jones, *The Soul of the Embryo: An Enquiry into the Status of the Human Embryo in the Christian Tradition* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 124: "Thomas Aquinas presents a coherent and powerful argument for delayed ensoulment."

body. Together with the body, it constitutes one human being. The soul is not a substance (a being as such), but an element of being.

For Thomas Aquinas, in turn, the human soul is a substance, albeit incomplete, but still a substance which “naturally” is assigned to the body. As a substance, the soul is endowed with independence in existence, which makes it an act of existence in relation to the body: the body receives existence from the soul and cannot exist without the soul. It is the soul, then, that ontically, genetically and temporally conditions the existence of the human *compositum*.

It is this triad of approaches: Platonic, Aristotelian and Thomistic, that will be discussed in this article in order to show the specificity of Aquinas’s philosophy and to resolve the dispute concerning delayed animation.

### **Plato: The Human Being as a Soul Trapped in a Body**

In his *Cratylus*, Plato tries to formulate the basic meaning of the terms created to define various facts, events and things. Among them, such terms as “human,” “soul” and “body” appear. Plato explains,

I mean to say that the word “man” (*ho anthropos*) implies that other animals never examine, or consider, or look up at what they see, but that man not only sees (*opope*) but considers and looks up at that which he sees, and hence he alone of all animals is rightly a human (*anthropos*), meaning that he examines and analyzes what he saw (*anathron a oopen*).<sup>4</sup>

When he discusses the term “soul,” Plato explains its etymology and meaning in the following way:

Those who first used the name soul (*psyche*) meant to express that the soul when in the body is the source of life, and gives the power of breath and revival (*anapsychon*), and when this reviv-

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<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, trans. B. Jowett (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 399 c.

ing power fails then the body perishes and dies, and this, if I am not mistaken, they called the soul (*psyche*).<sup>5</sup>

When the term “body” is concerned, Plato writes:

For some say that the body is the grave (*sema*) of the soul which may be thought to be buried in our present life; or again the index of the soul, because the soul gives indications to (*semainei*) the body; probably the Orphic poets were the inventors of the name, and they were under the impression that the soul is suffering the punishment of sin, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is incarcerated, kept safe (*soma, sozetai*), as the name *soma* implies, until the penalty is paid; according to this view, not even a letter of the word need be changed.<sup>6</sup>

The soul, as we learn from Plato, was understood as something that is self-contained and transcendent (external) in relation to the body, that gets into the body and, thus, animates, revives and organizes it, that in itself it is the body’s source of life and action.

In Platonic anthropology, we encounter two images of the soul: (1) a prototype (*paradeigma*) of an ideal and perfect human being identified with the soul-spirit, and (2) a being that is imprisoned in the body, that does its penance there, and that constitutes, together with the body, the terrestrial human being. Being in the body is not a natural place for the soul. Therefore, the death of the body is regarded as the liberation of the soul.

What is the Platonic spirit-soul? Most of all, it is the ideal human being. We can define it as an ideal, complete substance, the structure of which does not include the body. The Platonic spirit-soul dwells in the *hyperuranium* or, as Aristotle would put it, in the supralunar realm. It is, as some hold, an emanation of the world’s soul or, as some others

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 399 de.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 400 c.

argue, a creation of the Demiurge based on the pattern (*paradeigma*) of the world's soul.

This soul in turn, when residing in the body, constitutes the human being but it is not one with the body. What is more, the body for it is a grave (*sema*). Indeed, the soul enters the body and animates it, maintains and preserves the nature of the body, both its life and its transformations, yet the death of the body is not the death of the soul, but the liberation of the latter. The soul, according to Plato, may transfer from one body to another as a source of animation for each of them.

The Platonic concept of the terrestrial human being allows to speak of the temporal animation of the body by the soul. In other words, it allows to accept the existence of bodies that do not have a soul. And this view, which goes back as far as to Plato, seems to constitute one of the sources of theoretical support for the delayed animation of a human embryo.<sup>7</sup>

### **Aristotle: The Human Being as a *Compositum* of Soul and Body**

In Aristotle's time, the word "psyche," as Paweł Siwek explains, was:

[A] topic of disputes. The meaning of the term, nonetheless, was never questioned. It encompassed the general factor ("principle"—*archē*) due to which we consider an individual endowed with it to belong to living entities, whereas we ascribe an individual lacking it to inanimate entities. In other words, the soul for the ancients was not only the principle of the psyche, in its contemporary understanding, but it was the principle of life in general. It was, therefore, ascribed not only to human beings and animals, but also to plants, since they also manifest various life-

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<sup>7</sup> For more about the Platonic idea of the human being, see M. A. Krapiec, "Man in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*," *Studia Gilsoniana* 7, no. 4 (October–December 2018): 599–603.

related functions: they consume sustenance, they grow to the sizes appropriate for a particular species, they reproduce and they eventually succumb to processes that lead to death. The cluster of these functions encompasses what Aristotle calls nutritive life and its soul, the source of it, is called the nutritive one (*threptike*). This soul can be found in all living creatures on Earth, for in all of them the aforementioned functions occur. The higher forms of life—the sensible (*aisthetike*) and rational (*noetike*) life—are based on it. Thus, when he considers the most general definition of the soul (*koinotatos logos*), it is the nutritive soul which Aristotle mainly has in mind.<sup>8</sup>

In this way, what comes out is a new understanding of the soul in general, and of the human soul in particular.

The Aristotelian understanding of the human being and the human soul is composed into his hylomorphic conception of being. Form can play a double function in being. On the one hand, it may organize matter from within, and then it is called the soul. It causes that some beings-substances are living beings. The soul, so understood, comes from the transformations of matter, and the function of its activity, which is manifested in movement, is initiated by the causative factor of movement. On the other hand, form arises when matter is organized externally. Such a form, which is called either simply form or shape, is a cause of artifacts or inanimate beings that are aggregates of elements.

The human being is a *compositum* of soul and body. But here we can notice a specific problem in Aristotle's anthropology: it is not soul and body that ultimately cause this *compositum* to become a human being. That because of which the living entity is the human being is the intellect which, in turn, is a "distinct, unaffected, and unmixed, being in

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<sup>8</sup> P. Siwek, "Wstęp [Introduction]," in Arystoteles [Aristotle], *O duszy [De Anima]*, trans. P. Siwek (Warszawa [Warsaw]: PWN, 1988), 16–17.

essence activity.”<sup>9</sup> The human being belongs to the category of beings-substances (i.e., animate beings). The soul itself, as part of the ontic structure of the living entity, is described as “the first actuality of a natural body which has life potentiality. Whatever has organs will be a body of this kind.”<sup>10</sup> The soul and the body constitute an ontic, organic unity, and not an amalgamation as in the case of Plato’s anthropology. According to Aristotle, it does not make sense to ask “whether the soul and body are one, any more than whether the wax and the impression are one . . . For, while unity and being are so spoken of in many ways, that which is most properly so spoken of is the actuality.”<sup>11</sup>

### *The Method of Analyzing the Human Soul*

Aristotle indicates that in order to present the essence of the human soul one must use an adequate method. It cannot be the method of analyzing concepts (the Platonic method of division, *diairesis*). Neither can it be the logical-mathematical method (dialectics) which is utilized in logic or the sciences. The adequate method for analyzing the soul is that of metaphysics.<sup>12</sup> The scholar “shall therefore carefully observe mental facts, he shall measure, juxtapose and classify them, and define the conditions in which they occur. He cannot, however, be satisfied with that, Aristotle promptly adds. He should try by all possible means

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<sup>9</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. D. W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 430 a 17–18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 412 a 27–28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 412 b 6–9.

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle’s treatise *De Anima* (*On the Soul*) is the first ever psychological treatise in the full meaning of the word, which is the primary study of the soul. “Of course, we would search in vain for the term ‘psychology’ in it. We will not find it either—let us note—among any of the ancient authors. The term was most probably created by Melanchton from the words *psyche* (soul) and *logos* (science) based on the pattern of the word *theologia* which was generally accepted, especially since the times of the stoics. It was popularized mostly by Rudolph Goclenius of Marburg and his student Otto Casmann. Its meaning in science was definitely established by Christian Wolff. Aristotle’s *Psychology* is known as *Peri psyches* (default: *episteme*.” Siwek, *Wstęp*, 16.

to reach the very nature of these facts, their metaphysical essence.”<sup>13</sup> For this reason, the scholar ought to use the method of metaphysical analysis, because it consists in explaining the facts in question by uncovering the ultimate reasons for their existence and action.

Besides plants and animals, there also is the human being who is endowed with a soul. In Aristotle’s psychology, however, the human soul, as well as the human being itself, constitutes a separate problem, “and this is because the human being is endowed with an intellect which . . . has a purely spiritual nature. As such, the human intellect is not a subject matter of physics (physiology), but of first philosophy, or as we would say today—metaphysics.”<sup>14</sup>

### *The Uniqueness of the Human Being*

The Aristotelian image of the human being, as well as the human soul, is fundamentally different from the Platonic one. Aristotle places the human being among living beings (*animals*) belonging to the sublunar world which is the natural place of their residence. Nevertheless, in the *Protrepticus* Aristotle emphasizes,

what makes us different from the other animals shines through in this way of life alone, a life in which what happens cannot fail to have great worth. For animals too have small glimmers of reason and intelligence, but they have absolutely no share of theoretical wisdom (*sofias theoretikes*), and this is shared only with the gods, just as humans are actually left behind by many animals in the precision and strength of their senses and their drives.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Siwek, *Wstęp*, 17–18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Protrepticus or Exhortation to Philosophy*, ed. and trans. D. S. Hutchinson and Monte Ransome Johnson (2017), 66. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

Animals, according to Aristotle, do not have even a substitute of intellect. They are endowed with imagination which, however, should not be equated with the intellect.<sup>16</sup>

The Aristotelian human being does not owe his unique place in the world to his soul, but to his intellect. The human being, as Siwek explains,

owes to his intellect the features which differentiate him from all other creatures, and which assure him an entirely exceptional place among them. These features include speech, the social, economic, and political system, science, the feeling of obligation, justice, and law, the ability of free choice, virtue and vice, etc. There is even no lack of people—adds Aristotle—who think that the gods are people who during their life rose to the heights of moral virtue.<sup>17</sup>

Aristotle is convinced that, since nature does nothing in vain, one must assume that it has made all what we can see in the world for the sake of man.<sup>18</sup>

### *Discerning the Soul from the Intellect*

Aristotle draws attention to the issue that, besides the nutritive soul (*psyche threptike*) and the sensible soul (*psyche aisthetike*), one must necessarily discern another kind of soul (*psyche benos hereron*). However, he does not call it the rational soul, but the soul endowed with the capacity to think (*tu nu kai tes theoretikes dynameos*). Only this third kind of soul (*touto monon*) is eternal and still exists after being separated from the perishable body. Thanks to the soul capable of

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<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 433 a 12–27.

<sup>17</sup> Siwek, *Wstęp*, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 1256 b 20–22; *Physics*, vol. I, books 1–4, trans. P. H. Wicksteed and F. M. Cornford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 194 a 34–35.

thinking, the human being is able not only to think, but also to live and to perceive with senses.<sup>19</sup>

By distinguishing the three types of souls, Aristotle simultaneously draws attention to the relation between them which is such that every higher-tier soul takes on the functions of a lower-tier one. He illustrates this fact with the help of geometric shapes which, when divided by diagonal lines, find in themselves some other shapes (a quadrangle finds two triangles, a pentagon—a quadrangle and a triangle, etc.).

Something similar occurs in our case: the sensible soul which constitutes the essence of the animal includes the nutritive soul of the plants, whereas the rational soul includes both the nutritive and sensible souls.

The triangle potentially contained in the shape of a higher level does not exist on its own, it only exists as an integral component of the shape. A similar case occurs with the nutritive and sensible souls. They exist in the rational soul as its parts (*moria, mere*), as its powers (*dynameis*).<sup>20</sup>

Aristotle emphasizes that the intellect which distinguishes the human soul is not equivalent to it, but is only a part of it. It is also Aristotle's merit that he grants the human soul powers that take on the functions of the lower souls. Plato did not discern the powers of the soul. For him, the soul acts holistically: the whole soul thinks, desires and feels. That is why, Aristotle criticizes, among others, Democritus, Anaxagoras and Plato for failure in discerning the intellect from the soul, which entailed the practice of ascribing to all animals—following the example of Anaxagoras—the capacity to think.

In Aristotle, we can find many passages concerning the understanding of the intellect (reason) as a power of the soul—what it is and

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 414 a 12–13.

<sup>20</sup> Siwek, *Wstęp*, 30.

what its relation to the soul is. For example, “in respect to that part of the soul by which the soul both knows and understands, whether this is distinct or not distinct spatially, we must inquire what distinguishing characteristic it has and how thinking ever comes about.”<sup>21</sup> On what the intellect is, Aristotle writes: “I speak of as intellect that by which the soul thinks and supposes.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, “those who say . . . that the soul is a place of forms speak well, except that it is not the whole soul but that which can think.”<sup>23</sup> On what remains after the destruction of a creature, he replies that “in some cases there is nothing to prevent this (*uthen kolysei*); e.g. the soul may be of this sort—not all soul but the reason.”<sup>24</sup>

### *The Problem of the Creation of the Rational Soul*

In reply to the question of how the rational soul is created, Aristotle draws attention to the fact that it is a very difficult problem and expresses awareness that by offering his answer he does not necessarily provide an ultimate solution that will satisfy everybody.<sup>25</sup> Explaining Aristotle’s thought, Siwek writes:

As far as the nutritive soul is concerned (*ten threptiken psyche*), we must assume (*theteon*) that as long as the sperm constitutes the integral part of the parent, it has a nutritive soul only in potentiality (*dynamei*); the soul emerges in it, when it begins to perform actions of nutritive life. All creatures—he [Aristotle] states right after—in their beginnings live with such a life: the life of a plant (*phytu bion*).

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<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429 a 10–13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 429 a 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 429 a 27–29.

<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, 1070 a 24–26. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943), 736 b 6–9.

“The same reasoning,” Aristotle continues, “must be applied to the sensual and intellectual souls.” Before they actually existed in the animal and the human being, they existed in their organisms potentially.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, as far as the genesis of the soul is concerned, Aristotle remains a naturalist. Souls are contained in the potentiality of (animate) matter and, then, extracted from it. Thus, the soul is not imprisoned in matter, nor is it created. It is constantly present in the potentiality of (animate) matter. Consequently, the soul is described as the first act of matter which has life in potentiality.

Aristotle has one more question to answer: how is the soul transferred from the potential state to the actual state? Ultimately, his solution, as Siwek explains, is that:

the sensible soul becomes actual in the living creature due to the factors that guide the process of its development; the latter finds its completion in it; but the rational soul cannot emerge in this way. For the reason that constitutes its essential part is of a purely spiritual nature; as such, it cannot be an effect of material transformations; it cannot be the final stage of the natural evolution of any sort of body (dead or alive); it must enter the living creature from the outside (*thyrathen*).<sup>27</sup>

The problem of how the rational soul “enters” the living creature opens up the door for accepting the so-called delayed animation, i.e., the temporally delayed spiritualization of a living organism which, henceforth, becomes a human organism.

As far as the nature of the intellect is concerned, Aristotle explains that the intellect must, “since it thinks all things, be unmixed, as Anaxagoras says, in order that it may rule, that is in order that it may

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<sup>26</sup> Siwek, *Wstęp*, 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 31–32.

know.”<sup>28</sup> It is not, then, that the intellect is squeezed into a particular part of being, but it extends to the entire being. What is it then? Aristotle answers: “[It] must have no other nature than this, that it is potential. That part of the soul . . . called intellect (and I speak of as intellect that by which the soul thinks and supposes) is actually none of existing things before it thinks.”<sup>29</sup> This potential (capacity) is something real and, thus, must belong to some real subject: it is subjected in the soul as a part of the soul, i.e., as the soul’s power. But, another question arises here: how does this capacity to think (the intellect, the reason) emerge in the soul that originates from the potentiality of matter? Aristotle replies: “It remains, then, that Reason alone enters in, as an additional factor, from outside, and that it alone is divine, because physical activity has nothing whatever to do with the activity of Reason.”<sup>30</sup>

Another problem which requires further consideration is how the intellect functions. Since its objects are material and the intellect is immaterial (spiritual), how can it get into contact with material things? Siwek explains:

The initiative to think must, therefore, come from some immaterial factor. According to Aristotle, it is a special efficient evaluative factor (*to poietikon*) in the intellectual soul (*en te psyche*), as its part or power. His ancient commentators called it the active intellect (*nous poietikos*). Aristotle compares its functions with that of light (*phos*) in the process of seeing. Just as light does not create colors, but only illuminates diaphanous matter (*to diaphanes*) and makes it capable of being affected by color, so does the active intellect have the task to illuminate in a way the object present in the soul in the form of an image and to extract from it its essence, that is, the idea of the object in order to actualize the

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<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429 a 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 429 a 18–19.

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 736 b.

potential intellect (*ho panta dynamei*). By adopting it, the potential intellect moves from potentiality to actuality and thereby acquires the intellectual cognition of the object.<sup>31</sup>

Aristotle tries to explain his understanding of the intellect (i.e., the rational soul) in the following way: “Now, summing up what has been said about the soul, let us say again that the soul is in a way all existing thing; for existing things are either objects of perception or objects of thought, and knowledge is in a way the objects of knowledge and perception.”<sup>32</sup>

Aristotle’s exclusion of both the animate and inanimate body from being the source of the intellect and his definite indication that the intellect must enter the LIVING CREATURE FROM THE OUTSIDE constitute the basis for the so-called DELAYED ANIMATION that is often attributed to Thomas Aquinas’s anthropology, which is not justified as it does not take into consideration the different conceptions of being and of the human soul that one can find in Aquinas’s thought.

### **Aquinas: The Human Soul as an Incomplete Substance**

Like Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas holds that the human being is a being composed of soul and body (*a compositum*). Aquinas immediately adds, however, that, while he indeed lives in the world of nature, the human being is not a creation of nature, as Aristotle claimed.<sup>33</sup>

Aquinas explains that:

In composed substances there are form and matter, for example, in man soul and body. But we cannot say that either one of them alone may be said to be the essence. That matter alone is not the

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<sup>31</sup> Siwek, *Wstęp*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 431 b 20. For more about the Aristotelian idea of the human being, see Krąpiec, “Man in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” 603–627.

<sup>33</sup> According to Aristotle human beings “are born by nature and according to nature” (φύσει τε καὶ κατὰ φύσιν γέγονε). Aristotle, *Protrepticus*, 16.

essence of a real thing is clear, since through its essence a real thing is knowable and assigned to a species or to a genus. But matter alone is neither a principle of knowledge, nor is it that by which something is assigned to a genus or to a species; rather a thing is so assigned by reason of its being something actual. Neither can the form alone of a composed substance be said to be its essence, although some try to assert this. For it is evident from what has been said that essence . . . contains not only form, but matter as well . . . Reason, too, is in accord with this, because the existence of a composed substance is not the existence of the form alone nor of the matter alone, but of the composite itself; and essence is that according to which a real thing is said to be.<sup>34</sup>

In this way, Thomas, while drawing on Aristotle, points to the different understanding of being in general and of the human being in particular. The human being is something more than a *compositum* of soul and body: he is a psychophysical unity in which his soul (his non-physical element) is, from the very beginning, a human soul, i.e., an incomplete substance which imparts existence to the body, forms it for itself, transcends it, and subjects it to its own laws.

In Thomistic anthropology, it is worth drawing attention to two images of the human being. The first shows him at the moment of the creation of the world, when he is brought into existence together with other living and non-living creatures. In other words, it is the image of the first human being who was created *ex nihilo* by God (by the act of His intellect and will) as a being, not as a soul or as a body. Hence, just as the world was brought into existence *ex nihilo* as a being, so also the first human being was brought into existence in his entirety and without using something which existed before. And, just as we can speak of the creation of the first beings, so we can speak of the creation of the first human being. The second image of the human being, in turn, shows the

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, Cap. 1 (1965). Available online—see the section *References* for details.

one who lives in time, whose coming into existence involves parents and goes through birth. In this case we can speak of the human being co-created by his parents who participate in bringing him into existence.

### *What is the Human Soul?*

The human soul, according to Thomas Aquinas, is neither a spirit (a perfect substance) trapped in a body, as Plato claimed, nor is it only an element (a form organizing matter) of a compound substance, as Aristotle maintained. It is an incomplete substance assigned to the body, existing independently, and imparting existence to the body, with which it constitutes the human being.

We can often come across statements on when the soul enters the human embryo like the following:

What about the soul? Do we receive it at the time of fertilization? – Thomas wrote that on the 40<sup>th</sup> or 80<sup>th</sup> day after fertilization. Today we know that the process of the fusion of the sperm and the egg takes about 21 hours. And no one is able to determine the moment of the so-called animation.<sup>35</sup>

The problem is that it is entirely erroneous to speak of the so-called delayed animation (regardless of whether it be delayed 40 or 80 days, 21 hours, or even several seconds), if one accepts Aquinas's concept of the soul as the only act of existence of a being. For, since the human embryo is a being, it receives its existence only from its soul—there is nothing but the human soul which shares its own existence with the human embryo and makes it a being. In other words, as soon as there is a human embryo, there is also a human soul in it—without a human soul, there is no human embryo.

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<sup>35</sup> A conversation on the consequences of *in vitro* fertilization between Rev. Prof. Andrzej Muszala and Joanna Bątkiewicz-Brożek, "In vitro: Gorszy start [In Vitro: A Worse Start]," *Gość Niedzielny*, no. 30 (July 29, 2012): 22.

According to Aristotle, the soul which is the first act of the body and its organizer is contained in the potentiality of matter and brought into existence and action by the influence of the highest sphere of the fixed stars (the first heavens), whereas its rational part is given to the soul from the outside, namely the sphere of the sun. It is, then, Aristotle's intuition that, although the human being comes into the sublunar world, his coming requires the contribution of a superlunar factor. Accordingly, the human being cannot be regarded exclusively as a product of nature.

Aquinas, in turn, grounds his approach to the problem of the existence of the human being in the most fundamental experience of the human being's psychophysical unity in existence and action—"for each one is conscious that it is himself . . . who is conscious both that he understands, and that he senses."<sup>36</sup>

Due to specifically human activity (cognition, freedom, love), it must be asserted that it comes from the source (subject) that cannot be a product of nature. Thus, there is a need to search for an adequate explanation of the source (subject) of human activity by applying the principle *agere sequitur esse*—one's manner of activity follows upon one's manner of being. Likewise, since specifically human activity cannot be determined by nature, neither can the source (subject) of human existence be a product of nature. The soul, as an act of existence and a substantial form of a human being, is not only assigned to a matter, but also organizes it and grants it a defined existence. Therefore, it is an individual act of existence of the human being as a human being, not as an animal (or a living being). The human soul, understood as the act of the human being's existence, can be neither a derivative of matter or of form, nor a result of the combination of matter and form. Since it can-

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<sup>36</sup> "[E]xperitur enim unusquisque seipsum esse . . . qui percipit se et intelligere et sentire." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [S.Th.] I, q. 76, a. 1, resp. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

not be found in the natural world, the source of the human soul's existence must be looked for beyond the world of nature.

All of this, for Aquinas, is the basis for discovery of the soul as the first act of the human being's existence, the incomplete substance which must be brought into existence in a specific, unique way: not from the previously existing matter or form, but by the act of creation *ex nihilo*. And, this involves not only the first human being who was brought into existence by creation, but also all the other human beings living in time who, in order to come into being, must be co-created. The human being living in time can be given by his parents—a man and a woman—what is deposited in their potentiality, namely in the endowment of their bodies; however, that what makes his body a human body is not contained in the potentiality of the bodies of his parents, but comes from outside of them, namely from the Creator. In other words, the Creator brings into existence the human being living in time “in the human being,” i.e., with the cooperation of the other human beings: the mother and the father.

In this way, Aquinas arrives at the concept of the soul being directly created by the Creator, or, precisely speaking, the concept of the human being created by God. The soul in the first instance is an act of the human being's existence as a human being. Moreover, the soul is a substance, albeit incomplete, but a substance, i.e., a being (whereas, for Plato, the soul was a complete substance and, for Aristotle, it was an element of substance). Aquinas fundamentally differs from Aristotle: while the latter sees the essence of the soul's activity in motion and in the organization of matter, Thomas sees motion as that which must be subjected in something already existing. Therefore, the soul as a principle of motion is not the first, but at most the second act of being. According to Thomas, the human soul, as an incomplete substance existing in itself, creates its own body and, together with it, becomes a complete human being.

### *The Soul and Its Powers*

Like Aristotle, Aquinas distinguishes the powers of the soul. Unlike Aristotle, however, he includes the (active) intellect to them and sees it as a part of the structure of the soul that, from its beginning, is a rational—and, hence, human—soul. And it is the soul, not just the intellect, that makes the human being a human being. The specificity of the human soul, as the most perfect among all souls, is that it is the ultimate subject of all human powers: both corporeal and spiritual, vegetative and sensitive, cognitive and appetitive (volitional).

Aquinas distinguishes the powers of the soul on the basis of specific actions. The ultimate criterion for discerning a particular power, as the direct foundation for a kind of actions, is always the so-called adequate formal object. Applying this criterion to his analysis of human nature, Aquinas discerns the following powers: vegetative (*vegetativum*), sensitive (*sensitivum*), appetitive (*appetitivum*), intellectual (*intellectivum*) and locomotive (*motivum secundum locum*)—each of them contains in itself many other powers and is for them the direct, albeit non-ultimate, subject.

Aquinas stresses that, although there is one soul, there are many powers in it. Therefore, there must be a specific order of interdependence between the powers. This interdependence, while involves one power in relation to another, is also based on the order existing between objects.

In turn, the dependence of one power on another may be understood in two ways: (1) according to the natural order (*secundum naturae ordinem*), i.e., from the point of view of perfection, and (2) according to the order of generation and time (*secundum ordinem generationis et temporis*). That which is crucial for the understanding of the emergence of the powers and their actions is primarily the fact that to be a potential is to be subjected in a subject. And it is the human soul that is

this subject without which no human embryo can organize itself. For nothing can be actualized unless it first exists in potential. In consequence, the rational powers (intellect and will), that develop their activity in time, are from the very beginning subjected in the soul which is a rational soul and, together with the body, constitutes a complete human substance.<sup>37</sup>

### Does Aquinas Accept the So-Called Delayed Animation?

There is a long-standing dispute in the field of philosophy, particularly in ethics, about Aquinas's view on when the human embryo is animated.<sup>38</sup> This dispute seems to have arisen from the fact that some interpreters of Thomistic thought, relying on medieval commentaries on Aristotle, wrongly claim that Aquinas supported and adopted Aristotle's view on the so-called delayed animation. Thomas is then erroneously thought to hold that the human embryo is initially only a living being endowed with a nutritive soul that, in the course of development, is replaced by a sensitive soul and that, in turn, by a human (rational) soul—which simply means that only the human (rational) soul makes the embryo a really human embryo, and that, during the span from its

<sup>37</sup> For more about the Thomistic idea of the human being, see Krapiec, "Man in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*," 627–641.

<sup>38</sup> Authors who take on these issues are, among others: F. Böckle, N. M. Ford, T. Ślipko, E. Blechschmidt, C. Valverde. See F. Böckle, "Probleme um den Lebensbeginn. Medizinisch-ethische Aspekte," in *Handbuch der christlichen Ethik*, vol. II (Freiburg in Br. 1978), 36–59; N. M. Ford, *When Did I Begin? Conception of the Human Individual in History, Philosophy, and Science* (Cambridge 1991); T. Ślipko, *Zarys etyki szczegółowej. Etyka osobowa [Outline of Specific Ethics. A Personal Ethics]*, vol. 1 (Kraków 2005), 241–243; E. Blechschmidt, "Zur Personalität des Menschen," *Communio* 11 (1982): 171–181; S. Swieżawski, "Objaśnienia [Glosses]," in Święty Tomasz z Akwinu [Saint Thomas Aquinas], *Traktat o człowieku [Treatise on Man]* (Kęty: Antyk, 1998), 734; C. Valverde, *Antropologia filozoficzna [Philosophical Anthropology]*, trans. G. Ostrowski (Poznań 1998), 290–295; L. Ostasz, *Rozumienie człowieka. Antropologia filozoficzna [The Understanding of Man. Philosophical Anthropology]* (Olsztyn 2003), 55–66.

beginning to its merging with the human (rational) soul, the embryo is not a human being. Such an interpretation is usually fueled by Aquinas's words from *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 118, a. 2, ad 2. But, although many scholars interpret Aquinas as an advocate of delayed animation, there are others who oppose such an interpretation. Mieczysław A. Krąpiec, for example, draws attention to the fact that, although he knew the Aristotelian and medical theory suggesting that the male embryo receives the rational soul on the 40<sup>th</sup> day and the female embryo on 90<sup>th</sup> day after fertilization,<sup>39</sup>

Thomas Aquinas regarded the human paradigm based on the conception of Christ as more important, as he wrote: *Oportet ergo ut conceptio in Christo non praecedat tempore completam naturam carnis eius. Et ita relinquitur quod simul concipiebatur et concepta est. Propter quod oportet conceptionem illam subitanam ponere, ita quod haec in eodem instanti fuerint . . . In aliis autem haec successive contingunt, ita quod maris conceptio non perficitur nisi usque ad quadragesimum diem ut Philosophus in IX De Animalibus dicit, feminae autem usque ad nonagesimum.*<sup>40</sup>

The above quotation indicates that Aquinas has no doubts that the moment of conception is the moment of the human being's origin.

In order to fully uncover Aquinas's views on animation, we must perform the following steps: (1) qualify his texts on animation, (2) analyze the words he uses, and (3) refer to (metaphysical) system analyses.

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<sup>39</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*, in Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Opera omnia*, vol. 6–8 (Parma 1856–1858), III, d. 3, q. 5, a. 2, resp.

<sup>40</sup> *Super III Sententiarum*, d. 3, q. 3, a. 2, in M. A. Krąpiec, *Ja – człowiek [I – Man]* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2005), 159.

### *The Qualification of the Texts*

There are two types of Aquinas's writings where we can find his texts on the issue of animation, namely: commentaries to various texts written by others (including Aristotle) and stand-alone writings in the form of questions that specify objections, teach how to solve the main problem, and reply to objections.

In his commentaries on Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas discusses and explains the Stagirite's position. It does not mean, however, that he always agrees with Aristotle. Thomas's views on particular Aristotelian ideas, then, should be taken into consideration. In his questions, in turn, two elements are crucial: the teaching (*respondeo*) and the reply to objections. The two latter are binding, even if they sometimes require supplementation as problems considered in them are posed differently today.

The text from the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 118, a. 2, ad 2, that gives rise to many controversies, reads:

Consequently it must be said that the soul is in the embryo; the nutritive soul from the beginning, then the sensitive, lastly the intellectual soul. . . . [T]he intellectual soul is created by God at the end of human generation, and this soul is at the same time sensitive and nutritive, the pre-existing forms being corrupted.

This text is cited by interpreters as an example of Aquinas's statement from which one cannot but conclude that he accepts delayed animation. It is worth mentioning, however, that this text does not come from the teaching (*respondeo*) on how to solve the problem, but from the reply to an objection.<sup>41</sup> It means that what is particularly important here is that to which the objection refers. And the objection refers to Aristotle's position on the origin of the soul:

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<sup>41</sup> The fact that the problem appears not in the body of the teaching (*respondeo*), but in the reply to an objection, provides the basis for my interpretation.

[T]he Philosopher says that the animal and the man are not made at the same time, but first of all the animal is made having a sensitive soul. Therefore also the intellectual soul is produced from the semen.<sup>42</sup>

It is then possible to understand Aquinas's reply as developing an argument for the impossibility for the human soul to originate from matter (*semen*). Moreover, it is also, as it were, Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle who was a naturalist (as we would say) as regards the origin of plant and animal souls, and referred to some sort of an external factor (the sphere of the sun) as regards the source of the human capacity to think. Aquinas wants to interpret this capacity not as some sort of a power but as the human soul itself.

Admittedly, Thomas's reply could suggest that delayed animation consists in the succession of souls and, consequently, in the succession of the perfection of existence. But such a suggestion does not seem to be accepted by Aquinas, as he writes that "no substantial form"—i.e., no human soul, because, in the case of the human being, the soul is a substantial form—"is susceptible of more or less; but addition of greater perfection constitutes another species."<sup>43</sup> The reply to objection 2 is primarily focused on explaining that the human soul, which is a rational soul, cannot come from matter or from the potentiality of matter, as is the case with vegetative and sensitive souls. The human soul is one that is directly created together with the body and encompasses vegetative and sensitive functions.

It is also necessary to observe that the Article 2 of Question 118 refers to the problem: is the intellectual soul transmitted with the semen? Thus, the main emphasis of Aquinas's argument is on indicating that the vegetative and sensitive souls can originate from the transfor-

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<sup>42</sup> *S.Th.* I, q. 118, a. 2, o. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *S.Th.* I, q. 118, a. 2, ad 2.

mations of matter (semen), whereas the intellectual souls cannot, because the more perfect cannot originate from the less perfect.

Another example of Aquinas's elucidation of the specificity of the human soul, on the basis of which we can exclude his acceptance of delayed animation, comes from *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Aquinas explains that the human soul, as the highest in the hierarchy of souls, encompasses the whole human body and each part of it without any intermediaries. Moreover, the human soul does not lose its spiritual nature when it unites with matter, nor is it embedded in or enveloped by matter, but it is present in matter in another way. Simply speaking, the human soul united with matter creates an organic, living being, called a human being.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Analysis of Texts*

There are texts in Aquinas that are clearly in support of the rejection of delayed animation. They include the following:

[N]o substantial form is susceptible of more or less; but addition of greater perfection constitutes another species.<sup>45</sup>

[I]t is not possible for the same identical form to belong to different species.<sup>46</sup>

[I]f the vegetative soul is from the beginning in the matter of offspring, and is subsequently gradually brought to perfection; this will imply addition of further perfection without corruption of

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<sup>44</sup> "Non enim est in materia sicut materiae immersa, vel a materia totaliter comprehensa, sed alio modo, ut dictum est." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* [S.C.G.] II, c. 69, n. 4. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>45</sup> "[Q]uia nulla forma substantialis recipit magis et minus; sed superadditio maioris perfectionis facit aliam speciem." *S.Th.* I, q. 118, a. 2, ad 2.

<sup>46</sup> "Non est autem possibile ut una et eadem forma numero sit diversarum specierum." *Ibid.*

the preceding perfection. And this is contrary to the nature of generation properly so called.<sup>47</sup>

The text that should ultimately remove all doubts entertained by interpreters of Aquinas as to the origin of the human soul, reads as follows:

[T]he intellectual soul is created by God . . . and this soul is at the same time sensitive and nutritive.<sup>48</sup>

Of course, one can raise the question: when is the human soul created? At the moment when the body is adequately prepared for the reception of a rational soul, or earlier? Aquinas's replies to these questions can be found in the following texts:

[A]lthough the soul has a complete act of existing of its own, it does not follow that the body is united to it accidentally: first, because the same act of existing that belongs to the soul is conferred on the body by the soul . . .<sup>49</sup>

The soul communicates that existence in which it subsists to the corporeal matter, out of which and the intellectual soul there results unity of existence; so that the existence of the whole composite is also the existence of the soul. This is not the case with other non-subsistent forms. For this reason the human soul retains its own existence after the dissolution of the body; whereas it is not so with other forms.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> "Si enim a principio in materia prolis est anima vegetabilis, et postmodum usque ad perfectum paulatim perducitur; erit semper additio perfectionis sequentis sine corruptione perfectionis praecedentis. Quod est contra rationem generationis simpliciter." *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> "Sic igitur dicendum est quod anima intellectiva creatur a Deo . . . quae simul est et sensitiva et nutritiva." *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> "[L]icet anima habeat esse completum non tamen sequitur quod corpus ei accidentaliter uniatur; tum quia illud idem esse quod est animae communicat corpori." Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de anima* [*Q. de anima*], a. 1, ad 1. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

<sup>50</sup> "[A]nima illud esse in quo ipsa subsistit, communicat materiae corporali, ex qua et anima intellectiva fit unum, ita quod illud esse, quod est totius compositi, est etiam

The above texts show that Aquinas is convinced that “to exist” for the human body means to be united with the human soul. For the body does not have a separate existence or a separate principle of organization, i.e., it is not a substance. The human body exists because, as matter organized by the human soul, it benefits from the soul’s existence and operation. Therefore, the human soul is not only a substantial form of a body, i.e., such a form that makes a body exist and be a human body, but also, and primarily, an incomplete substance that, creating a body for itself, becomes a human being. In a being, however, there can be only one substantial form (incomplete substance) of this type. Hence, Aquinas stresses that, in the human *compositum*, there is only one soul—the one that is simultaneously rational, sensitive and nutritive, in the sense that, while being the first act of existence of the human being, it possesses and employs all its rational, sensitive and nutritive powers. According to Aquinas, then, it is that, from its very beginning, the human embryo exists as a whole human being that, as time goes by, goes through the process of actualization—and not that the human embryo becomes a human being part by part and stage by stage, as the proponents of delayed animation claim. As Krapiec explains,

There is, therefore, only a single existence of man, but man has this existence not because it is a result and consequence of material organization, but because it belongs to the soul, which, being subsistent on the strength of the existence belonging to itself, likewise is also the form of the body, to which it imparts its existence.<sup>51</sup>

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ipsius animae. Quod non accidit in aliis formis, quae non sunt subsistentes. Et propter hoc anima humana remanet in suo esse, destructo corpore, non autem aliae formae.” *S.Th.* I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 5.

<sup>51</sup> Mieczysław Albert Krapiec, *I—Man. An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. M. Lescoe et al. (New Britain, Conn.: Mariel Publications, 1983), 103.

Aquinas locates the human soul—or in fact the human being, because, for him, the human soul is an incomplete substance that, together with the body, constitutes the human being—on the boundary between spiritual and corporeal beings.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the soul is a concrete subsistent being (*hoc aliquid*). The term “concrete subsistent being” can be understood in two ways: (1) as “anything subsistent” (*pro quocumque subsistente*), or (2) as “that which subsists, and is complete in a specific nature” (*pro subsistente completo in natura alicuius speciei*).<sup>53</sup>

Following this distinction, Aquinas holds that the human soul can be comprehended as a concrete subsistent being only in the first sense. For, despite the fact that it exists independently as it has its own act of existence, the soul is an incomplete substance with respect to its species (*incompleta in ratione speciei*) and that is because, in order to be a complete human substance, it requires a body.<sup>54</sup> As an incomplete substance, then, the human soul does not fulfill human nature completely, because it does not cover its genericness entirely. It attains its completeness only through its unity with a body.<sup>55</sup> A complete human substance is, therefore, a *compositum* of soul and body, i.e., an individual human being.<sup>56</sup>

At this point, it is necessary to mention once again Aquinas’s understanding of the two images of the human being and, consequently, the two historical stages of the human being’s creation. The first stage

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<sup>52</sup> “[E]st in confinio spiritualium et corporalium . . .” *S.Th.* I, q. 77, a. 2, resp.

<sup>53</sup> *S.Th.* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 1.

<sup>54</sup> “Sic igitur, cum anima humana sit pars speciei humanae, potest dici hoc aliquid primo modo, quasi subsistens, sed non secundo modo . . .” *Ibid.* See also *Q. de anima*, a. 1, ad 2.

<sup>55</sup> “[E]tsi [anima] possit per se subsistere, non tamen habet speciem completam, sed corpus advenit ei ad completionem speciei.” *Q. de anima*, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>56</sup> “[C]orpus non est de essentia animae, sed anima ex natura suae essentiae habet quod sit corpori unibilis. Unde nec proprie anima est in specie; sed compositum.” *S.Th.* I, q. 75, a. 7, ad 3. See also *Q. de anima*, a. 1, ad 7.

involves the first human who was brought into existence together with the world created *ex nihilo*. At this stage we can speak of the creation of the entire human being as a corporeal and spiritual entity, just like of all other beings that were brought into existence as individual whole entities. The second stage involves the human who is born into the already existing world; at this stage, we deal with the process of co-creation based on the participation of already existing human beings: the man and the woman. The first creation consisted in calling the human being (together with all other beings that constituted the newly created world) into existence by God *ex nihilo*. The second creation, called procreation or co-creation, is also performed by God, but this time in the human being, from the human being and with the participation of the human being (the man and the woman): *homo generat hominem et Deus*; for the human being alone does not have the power to call into existence the immaterial soul, neither by begetting nor by making.

We can see, therefore, that in no way can we attribute to Aquinas views that support delayed animation. Attributing such views to Aquinas would result in some type of Platonizing his anthropology (i.e., seeing the soul as that which enters the body and controls it) or confusing his anthropology with that of Aristotle. In Thomistic anthropology, the soul is that which, together with the body, constitutes the human being as a corporeal and spiritual entity.

### *System Analyses*

System analyses are fundamental for metaphysical explanation and, as Aristotle already observed, the issues related to the human soul belong to the realm of metaphysical inquiry. At the very beginning, however, one must notice that here the understanding of the system itself and, consequently, the way of drawing inferences from the system fundamentally differ from those functioning in the formal (logical and mathematical) sciences. The word “system,” used in realistic metaphys-

ics, means the internally consistent mode of existence of beings. And it is this internally consistent mode of existence of beings that is the basis of the consistency of a formulated theory, the justification of its claims and the consequence of their inference.<sup>57</sup>

In realistic metaphysics, then, the reference to the concepts of being and the human being is the basis for system demonstration.

1. *The argument from the primacy of the soul in being (as its esse, i.e., its act of existence).* What is *esse* in being? It is, Aquinas says, “the highest perfection of all,”<sup>58</sup> since its relation to all other things depends on the fact that it is their act. For everything has actuality inasmuch as it exists. *Esse* is the actuality of everything that is real, even in combination with the forms. Thus, it is related to other things as received is to receiver. When one speaks of something that “it exists,” its existence (*esse*) is regarded as something given, and not as something to which it is given.

For Aquinas, the perfection of *esse* manifests itself in the fact that it is the first act of a being that makes this being exist. There is simply no being without the act of existence. Existence (*esse*) is given to every being and assigned proportionally to it: the existence of John is different than that of Eve or an animal or a plant, the existence of a substance is different from that of an accident. Yet, in each of these cases there is no being without the act of existence (*esse*). In the case of man,

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<sup>57</sup> See more in A. Maryniarczyk, *System metafizyki. Analiza ‘przedmiotowo-zbornego’ poznania* [System of Metaphysics: An Analysis of ‘Objective-Carrying’ Knowledge] (Lublin: RW KUL, 1991).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. “[H]oc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum . . . Unde patet quod hoc quod dico esse est actualitas omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum. Nec intelligendum est, quod ei quod dico esse, aliquid addatur quod sit eo formalius, ipsum determinans, sicut actus potentiam: esse enim quod huiusmodi est, est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo cui additur determinandum.” Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q. 7, a. 2, ad 9. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

it is the human soul that is the first and necessary act of existence (*esse*) of the human being.

In the Thomistic conception of being, the act of existence inherits the functions of the Aristotelian form. And thus, this act not only organizes matter, but also grants it existence. Moreover, as more perfect, it has the power to move matter (together with the whole being) through development (actualization) from less to more perfect states. The human soul, understood as the first act of one's existence, comes from the act of creation (not from the transformations of matter) performed at the moment of procreation. This means that the soul (1) is created in a human body made of a material given by a woman and a man, (2) inherits all the functions (nutritive and sensitive) contained in the potentiality of the human material, and (3) is the only substantial form of a human being. In other words, the human material (i.e., the egg and sperm that come from parents) is a component of the organic (vegetative-sensitive) body whose organization and functioning become, at the moment of fertilization, fully subject to a newly created soul of a child. Here we can see the difference between the creation of the first man—who, like all other beings, was created *ex nihilo*, that is, by the act of the intellect and will of the Creator—and the begetting of men which, unlike animal generation, is an act of co-creation. For, at the moment of conception, parents cannot transmit the soul to their child, because the soul, which is the principle of life and generation, is not derived from the potentiality of the matter of their bodies.

Since it is the soul that imparts existence to the body, no kind of human body (zygote, embryo, fetus, etc.) can exist before the soul comes into being. For nothing can exist without existing. Therefore, something of a paradox would be posed if the delayed animation of the human embryo were accepted: the embryo would have to exist without an act of existence.

The human soul as an incomplete substance, despite existing in itself as in its own and adequate subject, is nonetheless assigned to the body together with which it constitutes the human being. Therefore, the soul can create its own body, organize it, and impart existence to it.<sup>59</sup>

This argument needs to be supplemented by the reference to the triple primacy of act (existence) over potentiality (body) with respect to: being, time and cognition. The act of existence (*esse*) is that which makes things beings; therefore, nothing can exist without the act of existence. This is the primacy of act over potentiality with respect to being. With respect to time, the primacy of act consists in the fact that, also in relation to beings that emerge in time (including the human beings), it is that which originates the existence of being. That is why, the human body cannot exist prior to the human soul. And, lastly, with respect to cognition, the primacy of act indicates that only that which already exists and is determined in its existence can be cognized. Therefore, knowable processes taking place in the human embryo are, indeed, manifestations of the acting act, i.e., the soul.

Another supplement can be found in the Thomistic principle of *commensuratio animae ad hoc corpus*.<sup>60</sup> It is also indicated by some commentators of Aquinas as a supplement to the Thomistic teaching on the *compositum* of soul and body.<sup>61</sup> The expression of *commensuratio animarum ad corpora* is borrowed from Aristotle who claimed that every being is a hylomorphic unity in which the form is intrinsically

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. *S.Th.* I, q. 76, a. 1, ad 5 (see the footnote 49).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. *S.C.G.* II, c. 81: “[T]he commensuration of souls to bodies . . . this soul is adapted to this and not to that body, and that soul to another body, and so in all other instances.”

<sup>61</sup> See S. Swieżawski, “Centralne zagadnienia tomistycznej nauki o duszy [Central Issues of the Thomistic Doctrine of the Soul] (*Commensuratio animae ad hoc corpus*),” *Przegląd Filozoficzny* 44, no. 1–3 (1948): 148–154 and 172–189, and S. Swieżawski, *Święty Tomasz na nowo odczytany [Saint Thomas Reread]* (Poznań: W drodze, 1995), 139–140.

assigned to its own matter.<sup>62</sup> By referring to *commensuratio*, Aquinas clearly opposes the Platonists who held the position that the soul can be combined with various bodies. Consequently, he stresses that (1) the specificity of the human soul consists in its assignment to a concrete, particular body,<sup>63</sup> and (2) the *commensuratio* indicates that it is necessary for the soul, throughout the whole of its existence, to be united with the body—which can also serve as an argument for the immortality of the individual human being.

2. *Arguments from the universal properties of real beings.* The universal (transcendental) properties of real beings are discovered in the process of “elucidating” being, i.e., searching for such properties without which no real being can exist.<sup>64</sup> These properties relate to both the macrocosm and the microcosm, and thus also to a being that is only beginning its existence, like the human embryo and its elements. Among them, there are absolute properties that show what every being always is in itself, and relational properties that show that every being always stands in relation to the intellect and will of the Creator (in the case of natural beings) or a creator (in the case of artifacts).

The absolute properties include: *thing*—the essential determination, *one*—the intrinsic unity and indivision, and *something*—the existential sovereignty, whereas the relative properties embrace: *the true*—the instantiation of a design (the intrinsic conformity with the intellect of the Creator or a creator), *the good*—the possession of a specific purpose (the intrinsic conformity with the will of the Creator or a creator),

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<sup>62</sup> See B. Czupryn, “Komensuracja [Commensuration],” in *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 5, ed. A. Maryniarczyk (Lublin: PTTA, 2004), 738–739.

<sup>63</sup> See *S.C.G.* II, c. 73 and 81; and Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 9, ad 4 (available online—see the section *References* for details).

<sup>64</sup> On the discovery of the essential and universal properties of the world and the laws that govern their being, see A. Maryniarczyk, “On the Transcendental Properties of Real Beings,” trans. Hugh McDonald, *Studia Gilsoniana* 5, no. 2 (April–June 2016): 429–444.

and *the beautiful*—the perfection to attain. These universal (transcendental) properties of real beings constitute the basis for subsequent arguments.

2.1. *The argument from the essential determination of beings.* Metaphysical cognition leads to discovery of the fact that everything which really exists—be it in the microcosm or in the macrocosm, be it beings or their elements, be it substances, relations or accidents—is always essentially determined. In other words, it is always something of its own identity and quality. The real being is thus always either John, or Eve, or the nose of John, or the hand of Eve, or the cell of a human, or a particular plant, or a particular animal, or the like. This universal property indicates that even if some micro-being is detected with the help of a microscope, it is—just because of being a really existing thing—essentially determined from its very beginning. And thus, as something really existing, the human embryo is also essentially determined from its very beginning: it is a human being. Consequently, if delayed animation were accepted, it would have to result in a metaphysical (existential) absurdity consisting in the existence of “something” essentially undetermined, namely an undetermined embryo which would only become determined at the moment of animation.

2.2. *The argument from the unity of being.* Another metaphysical discovery shows that, although they are internally complex and composed of numerous elements, every real being is a unity with respect to its structure. The unity finds its basis in the single act of existence which actualizes the complexity of a being. Therefore, such beings as a quadratic circle, a sphinx, a pegasus, or the like, cannot be real beings, as they are internally inconsistent and without any intrinsic unity: one thing cannot be at the same time both a square and a circle, or a human and a lion, or a horse and a bird, etc. Similarly, an embryo cannot be a human being and a non-human being at the same time—and this would be the case if delayed animation were accepted.

2.3. *The argument from the existential sovereignty of being.* Metaphysics also makes it possible to discover that every real being exists as a sovereign being. Its sovereignty results from the sovereign act of existence which permeates the being and organizes it in various ways. Although the human being cannot live without air, water, or food, it does not mean that he is not a sovereign being. Arguing that what is inside of a woman's womb is a part of her body and that she is the only one who has exclusive rights to it, is like arguing that who dives in a lake becomes a part of the lake and that, consequently, the owner of the lake acquires exclusive ownership of all rights to the diver. The fact that the mother's body is the place where the human embryo lives, is nourished and develops, does not prove that the embryo is a part of its mother's body just like her organs: heart, lungs, brain, and the like. The human embryo is not an organ of its mother's body, but a genetically independent organism living in the environment of its mother's body. Besides being an organism, the human embryo is a possessor of its own act of existence which ultimately makes it a sovereign being. The embryo's act of existence is its soul's act of existence; without its human soul, the embryo could not be a human embryo, nor could it be at all. Therefore, the acceptance of delayed animation would automatically entail the undermining of the human embryo's sovereign existence.

2.4. *The argument from the rationality of being.* Metaphysical cognition also enables to discover that every really existing being implements the design produced by its creator. Artifacts embody the ideas of their human creators, whereas natural beings embody the ideas of the Divine Creator. It manifests itself in the fact that all elements of a particular being are assigned to and emerge from a particular creative idea that incorporates the holistic vision of the being. No wonder then that we are often surprised by the mystery of the human organism: the determination of its parts and their assignment to the whole. Even stem cells, although described as "pluripotent," have only such potentials as

are assigned to a particular being from which they are derived. In other words, each particular being is “informationally” determined from its very beginning. In biology, one speaks of information encoded in genetic material, which relates both to the parts of an organism and to its various properties which gradually emerge. The information included in the genetic code is that which determines the individuality and uniqueness of every human being. And, since the genetic information is already present in a fertilized egg cell (i.e., a zygote) at its very beginning, its presence must be the result of the activity of that which is the first act of the human being’s existence: the human soul. Without the soul, there would be no being informationally determined from its beginning. Therefore, by accepting delayed animation, one would accept a strange situation in which a really existing being is determined and undetermined at the same time. Such a way of thinking would breach principles and laws of the rationality (knowability) of being and, thereby, inevitably lead to absurdity.

2.5. *The argument from the purpose of being.* Doing metaphysics also results in the discovery that every being, in and through its existence, fulfills its intrinsic purpose. This purpose is where actions of every being find their origin, motif and end. What is more, everything that constitutes a being, both at the macro and micro level, is assigned to its purpose. The purpose of a human being appears together with its first act of existence: its human soul. That is why everything that happens in an embryo moves toward an end defined as the purpose of a human organism which can be designated by nobody and nothing but its human soul. In other words, since that which has no purpose cannot function and the human embryo functions from its very beginning, there must be the human soul which makes the embryo not only exist and function, but also have a purpose. It is challenged, however, by the idea of delayed animation which allows the human embryo to function before animation without having the human soul. What undermines such

an idea is the fact that it is internally inconsistent: it allows beings to function without having a determined principle of functioning.

2.6. *Argument from the perfection of being.* The perfection of being, as a universal property of all existing beings, manifests itself in the internal integrality of beings which is perceived as beauty. The beautiful is a synthesis of the good and the true.<sup>65</sup> And it is a real property of every being, including a human embryo. This means that the ultimate perfection (maturity), which only the adult can achieve in full-fledged actuality, is already present in the embryo in potentiality. Being fully a human being is inherent in the act of existence, regardless of whether this act belongs to an embryo or to an adult. Behind it all, of course, there is the soul which, being endowed with the potentials of perfection, realizes them. Depriving the embryo, at the first stages of its life, of a human soul equals stripping it of the capacity to develop as a human being. The acceptance of delayed animation would then undermine the integrality of the embryo as a being by making it realize two different forms of perfection (non-human and human), while having one act of existence. It would necessarily entail the acceptance of an internal contradiction in a real being, which is an absurdity.

Further arguments are based on the first metaphysical principles that underlie the existence and cognition of beings. These include the principles of identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, the reason of being, purpose and integrality.

2.7. *The argument from the principle of identity.* While discovering universal and necessary properties without which no real being can exist, we also discover the first metaphysical principles underlying the way things are. These principles discerned by the human intellect become the principles of our cognition and reveal the foundations of the

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<sup>65</sup> See P. Jaroszyński, “Beauty in *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 7, no. 4 (October–December 2018): 579–595.

whole rational order which is established by the Creator in natural beings (just like artists establish rational order in artifacts). That is why the human embryo as a natural being is governed by the principle of identity from the beginning of its existence—from its very beginning, it is what it is.<sup>66</sup> Delayed animation, however, would suspend the principle of identity. For it claims that, during its development, the embryo initially is not a human being, but then, after animation, it becomes a human being.

2.8. *The argument from the principle of non-contradiction.* The discernment of the metaphysical principle of non-contradiction accompanies the discovery of the unity of essence and existence as a universal property of every real being. Real beings—although composed in various ways from various elements: necessary and unnecessary, essential and accidental, constitutive and consecutive—are internally non-contradictory. Their internal non-contradiction is based on a fact that each of them has its own act of existence which makes all its elements form one organic unity. The metaphysical principle of non-contradiction excludes the possibility for there to be two different acts of existence, or two different forms in one being (like, for example, in a quadratic circle, a sphinx, or a pegasus). This principle claims that real being cannot be divided simultaneously into being and non-being. But such a division would occur and the principle would be broken if delayed animation were accepted: the embryo, that is a real being proving its identity with one and the same act of existence, would appear here as having two contradictory identities: non-human and human.

2.9. *The argument from the principle of excluded middle.* The metaphysical principle of excluded middle states that between being and non-being there is no intermediary, which implicitly means that

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<sup>66</sup> Moreover, it can never lose its identity as it stems from its own act of existence, which follows the principle: *res et esse convertuntur* (“thing and being are convertible,” S.C.G. III, c. 8).

there is no middle ground between one being and another. This principle is discerned as a result of the discovery of the truth about the sovereign existence of real beings. As a real being then, the human embryo exists as a sovereign being at each and every stage of its existence. And it would be exposed to the loss of its existential sovereignty if delayed animation were accepted. For the idea of delayed animation, by accepting the existence of “soulless” embryos and regarding them as an intermediate stage toward human embryos, clearly violates the principle of excluded middle.

2.10. *The argument from the principle of the reason of being.* The metaphysical principle of the reason of being claims that every real being has its reason of being inside and outside of itself. We discern this principle together with the discovery of rationality (the true) as a universal property of the real world. As a real being, every human being finds its internal reason of being in its soul that animates its body and grants it existence. Indeed, the soul is not only an internal reason of being, but also an external one as it comes from creation. However, the acceptance of delayed animation would distort the idea of the human soul as it would lead to the absurd conclusion that the embryo as a real being has not one but two different reasons of being: not a human soul (before animation) and a human soul (after animation).

2.11. *The argument from the principle of purpose.* The metaphysical principle of purpose (teleology) claims that every acting being acts for the sake of an end. In the case of the human being, all its ends are inherent in the human soul. Thus, the whole development (the good) of the human being is assigned to discerning, pursuing and achieving the ends of the human soul. If then there is no human soul in the embryo from its beginning to its animation, as proponents of delayed animation hold, all internal processes of the embryo must be produced by random or “blind” chance, which is an absurdity.

2.12. *The argument from the principle of integrality.* The metaphysical principle of integrality claims that every being is a synthesis of the good and the true. We discern the principle of integrality when we discover the beautiful as a universal and intrinsic property of being. As such then, beauty inheres in being as long as the latter exists as a being—beginning from the moment when it comes into existence. If then the human embryo is a being, it is beautiful (its ontic structure lacks nothing) from its very beginning. Thus, to accept delayed animation which deprives the embryo of its essential structural component (i.e., the human soul) is to challenge the principle of integrality and to open wide the road to absurdity.

## Conclusion

The above arguments, based on the metaphysical conception of being (including transcendental properties of being and its first principles), demonstrate why delayed animation is not acceptable. The idea of delayed animation undermines all of the rules that govern the existence of real beings (including human embryos), namely the laws of identity, non-contradiction, excluded middle, the reason of being, purpose and integrality, and it stands in contradiction with universal (transcendental) properties of being, such as: essential determination (*thing*), intrinsic unity and indivision (*one*), existential sovereignty (*something*), the instantiation of a design (*the true*), the possession of a purpose (*the good*), and the perfection to attain (*the beautiful*).

From the metaphysical point of view, the idea of a soulless embryo before animation, cherished by the proponents of delayed animation, is as absurd as that of a real being without real existence, or—simply—a being without being. For just as any living being, in order to be a real being, must have one and the same substantial form of its own

from its very beginning, so the human embryo must be in the possession of a human soul, regardless of how old it is.

Although Aquinas's human being, like that of Aristotle, is a *compositum* of body and soul, and of matter and form, it does not mean that it is an amalgamation of body and spirit, or of animal and angel—the human being is a unity of body and soul.

The relation between the soul and the body is a necessary and essential one. Together with the body, the soul forms a monolithic human substance. It means that neither the soul alone nor the body alone can be a human being. The human soul, which is a source of material and immaterial acts, constantly manifests its specific immaterial origin and its unique nature. It always expresses its existence and activity through the body which, as a necessary component of the human *compositum*, is endowed by it with elements of spiritual life. In this way, the synthesis of spirit and matter becomes the human being who, when acting as a single subject, manifests his transcendence over matter by assigning it to a transcendent purpose inherent in his nature.

Consequently, neither the body nor the alignment of body parts can be the source of existence for the soul. The only source of existence for the human soul, and so too for the human being as such, is the Creator. “Man is generated by man and by God” (*Homo generat hominem et Deus*) is thus an anthropological principle originally discovered and applied by Aquinas.<sup>67</sup>

*Translated into English by Marcin Garbowski*



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<sup>67</sup> Its wording is a paraphrase of Aristotle's words in *Physics*, 194 b 13: “Man is begotten by man and by the sun as well.”

**The Dispute over Delayed Animation:  
When Does a Human Being Begin?**

SUMMARY

The dispute over delayed animation, although it has its beginnings already in ancient philosophy and culture, started for good only in contemporary times when the right to kill unborn children (so-called *abortion*) entered the canon of constitutional law and, what is even stranger, started to be proposed for inclusion into basic human rights. Despite being discussed nowadays mainly in medical and legal sciences, the problem involves disputes of an ethical, religious and ideological nature. In these discussions one can notice a clear lack of anthropological and metaphysical argumentation that would address the question about the beginning of the human being (which entails the question about the beginning of being *per se*) in the light of common properties that belong to really existing beings, and the metaphysical laws that govern the manner in which things (including human embryos) exist. This article discusses understandings of the human being as they are found in Plato's, Aristotle's and Thomas Aquinas's philosophical anthropology. It is this triad of approaches: Platonic, Aristotelian and Thomistic, that allows one both to notice the specificity of Aquinas's approach and to resolve the dispute concerning delayed animation.

KEYWORDS

Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, delayed animation, soul, ensoulment, abortion, anthropology, metaphysics, human being, human embryo.

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