Is Anyone Else Thinking My Thoughts? Aquinas's Response to the Too-Many Thinkers Problem

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Introduction[1]

It has been recently argued by a number of metaphysicians that any variety of dualism that claims that human persons have souls as proper parts (rather than simply being identical to souls) will face a *Too-Many Thinker* problem. Such a view, they argue, entails that for any given human person S, for every single thought that S has, a corresponding thought will be had by S's soul, thus resulting in twice as many thinkers as we would have pre-theoretically suspected, along with a host of problematic consequences.

Prima facie, if anyone falls prey to this objection, the Christian Scholastics of the 13th and 14th centuries do. Philosopher-theologians such as Aquinas repeatedly and straightforwardly claim that a soul is not a human being but is merely part of a human being. These thinkers also casually attribute thought both to the human person and to that person's soul; they also tend to move freely from talk of what our soul knows to talk of what we know (and vice-versa).

I begin this paper by discussing this objection in detail and noting several key assumptions that it depends on. I will then briefly argue that on a cursory reading Aquinas appears to be committed to these assumptions. But this is not the end of the story; I will go on to argue that on one (admittedly heterodox) interpretation, Aquinas does in fact resist one of the key assumptions of the objection. So then, to the extent we

[1] In this paper, I use the following abbreviations for Aquinas's texts: *Summa theologiae* (*ST*), *Summa contra gentiles* (*SCG*), *Scriptum super Sententiis* (*Sent*), *De principiis naturae* (*DPN*), *Quaestiones disputatae de spiritualibus creaturis* (*QDSC*), *Quaestiones disputatae de anima* (*QDDA*), *Sententia libri de anima* (*InDA*), *Super 1 ad Corinthios* (*In1Cor*). All translations are my own.

find the objection compelling, we have a reason to prefer this kind of interpretation of Aquinas's account to more orthodox readings.

The Merricks-Olson Objection

In his book, *What Are We*, Eric Olson claims that compound dualists (i.e., those who believe that human persons[2] are beings composed of an immaterial soul and a material body) face what we may call the "Too-Many Thinkers" problem:

> "If our souls think, yet we are not our souls, then we are not the beings that think our thoughts. We merely have thinking parts. That might make it true to say, in the right context, that we think, just as it might be true to say in the right context that my house is made of glass owing to the fact that it has glass windows. But we are not thinkers in the strictest sense. And the idea that we don't strictly think, whereas things other than us think our thoughts, is hard to warm to. If I believe that I am the compound, doesn't my soul believe that it is the compound? How do I know that I'm not making that mistake? What justifies my belief that I am the compound and not the soul?"[3]

Olson seems to vacillate between two worries for compound dualism; if we have souls as parts, then either (1) we aren't the things doing "our" thinking, or (2) there are too many thinkers. The first of these worries is grounded in the conviction that, whatever we are, we are essentially thinking things. Now, if we respond to this first worry by claiming that both souls and persons think, Olson claims this leads to the even more incredible consequence that there are two thinkers for every human person; that is, for every human being, there will be a soul that is thinking in addition to the human being that is thinking.

Trenton Merricks agrees with the substance of Olson's objection, providing a compressed version of the same critique in his *Objects and Persons*:

[2] In this essay, I take 'human person' and 'human being' to be synonymous expressions, and will freely switch between them.
[3] Eric Olson, *What We Are* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 169.

> If the soul has the same mental properties as the 'compound' person, then we have twice as many thinkers as persons. Moreover, this view implies that I cannot tell whether I am a soul or a compound; after all, things seem exactly the same to both; thus I can't tell whether or not I am a person or even whether I am spatially extended.[4]

Call the objection common to these two passages the **Merricks-Olson Objection**. Now what precisely is the Merricks-Olson objection, and what assumptions does it depend on? To begin, according to compound dualism, in addition to human persons there are also human souls. A person is not identical to a soul,[5] but is something that has a soul as a proper part. But what is it that thinks, according to the compound dualist? It is philosophical commonplace to assume that we are persons (perhaps essentially so), and since we seem to be the sort of things that have mental states and act on account of those states, we take it for granted that persons are able to think.[6] But most dualists posit the existence of souls because they deny that any material thing could think. So, the thrust of the Merricks-Olson objection is that the compound dualist has to bite one of two bullets here; either (1) she must deny that we are thinkers (properly speaking), or (2) her view leads to a kind of overpopulation of human thinkers.

The unpleasant nature of the first horn of this dilemma is relatively clear; it seems clear on reflection that we are the sort of things that think, are conscious, and the like. Olson appears to assume that the compound dualist won't want to seize this horn; Merricks appears to ignore the possibility altogether. So that leaves the second horn, that compound dualism leads to an overpopulation of thinkers. But it isn't immediately obvious why such overpopulation should be so bad. (Consider the case of a materialist

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[4] Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (New York, NY: Clarendon Press, 2001), 48, n. 9.
[5] As on more orthodox versions of substance dualism.
[6] It is also commonly held (though not as common as that we are persons) that cognition, consciousness, or some closely-related condition is sufficient for personhood. Obviously, if the compound dualist holds that souls think, she must deny that any such condition is sufficient for personhood, on pain of regress.

who believes that human bodies have organs as proper parts; such a materialist will likely believe that I am a thing that digests and that my stomach is also a thing that digests. Nevertheless, I'm not aware of any literature on the "Too-Many Digesters" problem.) If we assume that every thought I have is had in virtue of my soul having a similar thought[7], then there turn out to be two thinkers and two thoughts where we otherwise would have thought there was only one thinker and one thought (for instance, when I am thinking that grass is green, my soul is also thinking that grass is green). Again, though this sounds strange, it doesn't even seem worthy of incredulous stares, let alone of being taken as a decisive objection. But both Olson and Merricks point out that first-person beliefs appear to be particularly problematic on this account: when I form the belief that I am a thing composed of a soul and a body, my soul is also having a belief with the same content. But my belief is true while my soul's belief is false. (Conversely, when I read Descartes's *Meditations* in an unduly credulous mindset, I and my soul both believe that I am soul, but only my soul believes this truly.) And it doesn't seem that I have any way to tell whether I am the soul or the person, whether I am the thing that survives death or the thing that is destroyed.[8]

This then is the Merricks-Olson objection: A Too-Many Thinker problem will arise for anyone who accepts the following four assumptions:

1. Human persons are things with a soul as a proper part,
2. Human persons are things that think,

[7] That is, I am thinking that *p* iff my soul is thinking that *p*.

[8] Olson and Merricks both go on to ask how it could be that any of these first-person beliefs could count as knowledge, given that the soul and the person seem to have identical justification. I ignore this question as I have no interest in introducing epistemology into this paper. Brueckner and Buford, however, point out that this stage of the argument is only valid if justification entails truth, a condition that few impose upon justification. See Anthony Brueckner and Christopher T. Buford, "Thinking Animals and Epistemology," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (2009): 310-314.

3. Souls are things that think,
4. For any human person *S*, there is some *p* such that *S* thinks that *p* if and only if *S*'s (embodied) soul thinks that *p*.[9]

Aquinas and the Merricks-Olson Objection

At this point, the reader of this paper may be wondering what all this has to do with Aquinas and his Scholastic contemporaries. Though the Too-Many Thinkers problem might have some purchase on contemporary dualists influenced by Descartes, surely someone like Aquinas is free of such Cartesian influences. Olson and Merricks both aim their critiques at a view on which souls are immaterial substances—ultimate subjects of predication—but, it is often said, Aquinas denies that human souls are substances.[10] Despite this, I think that Aquinas's own presentation of his view makes it seem that he does fall prey to this objection (or some very close analogue), for he appears to openly endorse all four assumptions of the Merricks-Olson objection.

Begin with the first assumption: that human persons are things with souls as a proper part. Now, Aquinas frequently says that a human being is a thing composed from

[9] The parenthetical on the right-hand side of the biconditional is there since most compound dualists will believe that the soul can survive the death of the person, and thus there can be cases when the (disembodied) soul thinks though the person does not. The principle is stated in terms of "some *p*" since the Too-Many Thinker problem arises so long as there is *some* proposition that both the soul and the person occurrently think.

[10] In *ST* I.75.2, Aquinas says that human souls are merely "subsistent things", where being a subsistent is necessary but not sufficient for being a substance. I have strong suspicions that those who cite this as evidence that Aquinas is not a substance dualist are equivocating; just because human souls aren't substances according to Aquinas's usage of 'substance' doesn't entail that such souls don't count as substances in our own, comparatively looser, sense of that term. Also, it should be pointed out that Aquinas does call the soul a substance in other texts (I take him to be using 'substance' in a broad sense more akin to contemporary usage in such passages). See, for instance, *QDSC* 2.resp: "It seems evident that the form of a human body must be a substance…to the degree that it exceeds the being of corporeal matter, being able to subsist and operate on its own, the human soul is a spiritual substance." Similar statements can be found throughout *SCG* II; see especially *SCG* II.68: "How an Intellectual Substance can be the Form of a Body." It may be suggested that Aquinas's view changed between *SCG* and *ST*; in reply, I point out that *QDSC* is contemporaneous with the first part of *ST*.

a body and a soul.[11] Taken at face value, such statements clearly suggest that a human being is a composite entity with two proper parts (namely, a body and a soul), each of which is at least conceptually prior to the entity that they come together to compose.[12] That is, provided that the explication of what it is to be a human being is given in terms of these two proper parts, it must be possible (at least in principle) to specify what each of these parts is independently of the whole that they compose.[13]

Someone might say in Aquinas's defense that Aquinas's conception of the soul as substantial form makes it improper to speak of the soul as a proper part of the human person. Yet when Aquinas himself speaks of the human soul, he tells us that it is incorporeal, subsistent, incorruptible, a "this-something" [*hoc aliquid*] that both operates on its own and exists on its own.[14] Indeed, the soul will continue to exist and can still engage in cognition (though in a somewhat different fashion) even after the human being it is a part of has died.[15] These sorts of claims do suggest that Aquinas is a substance dualist (though not exactly in the orthodox Cartesian archetype).[16] That is, Aquinas appears to state in such passages that there are such things as immaterial souls, that they are substances in their own right, and that they are one component of human beings.[17]

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[11] For instance, see *ST* I.75.4.resp: "A human being is not only a soul, but is a thing composed of soul and body."

[12] Aquinas thinks that, insofar as they are causes of it, the components of a composite entity must be prior to it. See *DPN* 4.

[13] I argue below that this reading of Aquinas is deeply mistaken.

[14] See especially *ST* I.75, articles 2 and 6.

[15] See *ST* I.89. Aquinas says there that even though the separated soul lacks certain bodily functions that are typically required for human cognition, souls can continue to cognize after death provided that God provides acceptable substitutes for these requisite bodily functions.

[16] On this reading, Aquinas's major departure from Cartesian orthodoxy is that he assigns acts of sensation and perception to the composite rather than to the soul alone. See *ST* I.75.4.resp.

[17] As pointed out in n. 10, especially in *ST* I, Aquinas refrains from explicitly labeling human souls as substances, choosing instead to only call them "subsistent things." The contemporary reader of Aquinas may will wonder whether anything substantive (pun non intended) really turns on this choice.

So, to conclude, Aquinas appears to affirm the first assumption of the Merricks-Olson objection.

Turn now to the second and third assumptions: that human persons and human souls are both things that think. Here, I claim, an examination of Aquinas's texts will show that he attributes thought to both human persons and human souls. Before looking at any texts, however, there seems to be a quick argument from premises that Aquinas accepts to the conclusion that only the human being thinks. First, it is a fundamental principle of Aristotelian metaphysics that only substances can bear accidents.[18] But acts of thinking are accidents. So, whatever thinks must be a substance; if it weren't a substance, it couldn't bear the accidents that are acts of thought. Since, as mentioned above, Aquinas denies in *Summa theologiae* I that human souls are substances, it must be the person that thinks.[19]

Though I have found no evidence that Aquinas ever offers such an argument, he does claim in a number of passages that, properly speaking, it is the composite human person that undergoes mental states like thinking and believing. So, he says that it is "more appropriate to say that a human being understands by means of their soul" than it is to say that the soul understands.[20] I take the "by means of" here to mean that the soul is something like an instrument of thought; just as we couldn't see if we didn't have eyes, so we couldn't think if we didn't have souls. But that is entirely compatible with the human person being the one actually performing the thinking. He emphasizes this in his Disputed Questions on the *De anima*, where he states that "a human being understands by

[18] Thus Aquinas: "Actions belong to supposits and wholes, and not, properly speaking, to parts, forms, or powers…" *ST* II-II.58.2.resp. (My thanks to Therese Scarpelli Cory for pointing me to this passage.)
[19] The fact that Aquinas offers no such argument seems to me additional evidence that he does regard souls as substances in the sense that they are among the ultimate bearer of properties.
[20] *ST* I.75.2.ad 2.

means of the possible intellect…so if there were one possible intellect in all human beings, it would follow that whatever one human being understood would also be understood by others."[21] Finally, in his commentary on the *De anima* he points out the unpleasant consequences that would follow upon a denial that the composite human person thinks:

> It is clear that it is the human being that understands. And if this is denied, then the person asserting this view doesn't understand anything, and so we should not listen to them.[22]

Yet despite all these passages that speak of thinking as an activity performed by human beings, Aquinas *also* asserts that thinking is something that is principally done by souls. Indeed, the lengthy discussion of human cognition in the *Summa theologiae* begins by asking "how a soul conjoined to a body understands" material things, immaterial substances, and itself.[23] And throughout this discussion he regularly and quite explicitly attributes acts of intellectual cognition to the soul. For instance, he tells us that

> A thing principally operates due to a form of that to which the operation is attributed. For example, that by which a body is principally healthy is health, and that by which the soul principally knows is knowledge. So, health is a form of the body and knowledge is a form of the soul.[24]

The principle appealed to here is that whatever object bears the form of *F*-ness is the object that is most properly said to be *F*. But, since every instance of knowledge is a form that is borne by the soul, it is the soul that principally knows.

Likewise, while explicating the difference between sensory and intellectual cognition, Aquinas attributes the latter to the soul rather than to the composite entity:

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[21] *QDDA* 3.sed contra.
[22] *InDA* III.7.20 (n. 690).
[23] *ST* I.85.prooemium.
[24] *ST* I.76.1.resp.

> [Aristotle] claimed that sense does not have a proper operation that the body does not share, and so sensing is an act of the conjoined being and not of the soul alone…In contrast, Aristotle did claim that the intellect has an operation that it does not share with the body, [namely, intellectual cognition].[25]

He affirms this point—that acts of sensation belong to the composite but acts of intellection belong to the soul alone—in several other places as well, though perhaps nowhere else so explicitly.[26]

Finally, the fact that some kinds of cognition continue after death, when the composite no longer exists, provides additional evidence that Aquinas takes souls to be performing these cognitive acts.[27] Since it is clearly the soul performing these kinds of cognition after death, it seems reasonable to also attribute these acts to the soul when it is embodied. Given all these texts then, Aquinas seems to affirm the second and third assumptions of the Merricks-Olson objection as well.

Finally, in at least one text, Aquinas gives an argument that appears to implicitly rely on the truth of the fourth assumption of the Merricks-Olson objection:

> *If the soul has a natural knowledge of all things*, it does not appear possible that such great forgetfulness of this natural knowledge could occur that it would not know that it has this kind of knowledge. *For no human being forgets the things that he knows naturally*.[28]

The particular argument here shouldn't concern us; what should concern us is the way that Aquinas smoothly moves from attributing an instance of knowledge to the soul to attributing that knowledge to the human being. By pointing out that the composite person does not have a certain epistemic property—that of naturally knowing a particular

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[25] *ST* I.84.6.resp. Though in this article Aquinas speaks as if he is merely reporting the views of Democritus, Plato, and Aristotle, context makes it clear that he favors Aristotle's answer to the question.
[26] For instance, he clearly has this in mind in *ST* I.75.4, where he argues that if sensation were an operation of the soul rather than of the whole person, then "every operation which is attributed to a human being would belong to the soul alone." The implication here being, of course, that intellectual operations *do* belong to the soul alone.
[27] See *ST* I.79, as well as *QDDA* 17-21.
[28] *ST* I.84.3.resp (emphasis added).

proposition—Aquinas takes it as demonstrated that the person's soul also doesn't possess that epistemic property. Assuming that knowledge entails belief, then, Aquinas commits himself here to the claim that *S*'s (embodied) soul believes that *p* only if *S* believes that *p*. This is, of course, logically weaker than the fourth assumption of the Merricks-Olson objection, but I take the ease with which Aquinas makes this particular inference as evidence that he endorses the fourth assumption (or something very much like it).

A Possible Response for Aquinas

I have argued to this point that Aquinas affirms all four assumptions that lead to the Too-Many Thinker problem. That is, he believes that every human person has a soul as a proper part, that both souls and persons think, and that there are at least some thoughts had by both souls and persons. Now, one could try to resist the problem on Aquinas's behalf by arguing that Aquinas really rejects (4). Such a strategy might first note that my textual argument for (4) was the weakest of all; it would also note that in arguing for (3) I provided evidence that Aquinas does think there is a difference between the person's thoughts and the soul's thoughts. Recall again the passage from *Summa theologiae* I.84 that I quoted above:

> [Aristotle] claimed that sense does not have a proper operation that the body does not share, and so sensing is an act of the conjoined being and not of the soul alone…In contrast, Aristotle did claim that the intellect has an operation that it does not share with the body, [namely, intellectual cognition].[29]

Here Aquinas draws a distinction between sensitive cognition and intellectual cognition, where the former includes perception and knowledge of particular truths, the latter cognition of universals and general truths. Sensation, he seems to say, is to be attributed

[29] *ST* I.84.6.resp.

to the composite being that is the person, while intellection is to be attributed to the soul. With this distinction in hand, it might seem that Aquinas can resist the worst implications of the Too-Many Thinker problem. The person has some thoughts and her soul has others, so there are still two thinkers where we would have expected one; however, since there are no thoughts *shared* by both the person and her soul, the problematic epistemic consequences that Merricks and Olson draw from the existence of paired thinkers melt away.[30]

Perhaps this will be the most successful strategy for resisting the Merricks-Olson objection on Aquinas's behalf. But I have my doubts regarding the possibility of cleanly drawing the distinction between sensitive and intellectual cognition at the level of propositions,[31] and I find compelling Aquinas's conviction, quoted earlier, that the human being is what understands if anything does. So, in what remains, I will attempt to map out a different strategy for resisting the Too-Many Thinker objection on Aquinas's behalf, a strategy according to which Aquinas denies the first assumption, namely that human beings are things with a soul as a proper part.

To begin, it must be remembered that human souls are, for Aquinas, the *substantial forms of human bodies*. As such, souls are necessary for there to be human bodies at all. It is easy while skimming the passages in which Aquinas speaks of the human person being composed of body and soul to take 'body' for a human-shaped

[30] Another possibility, which I don't have space to address here, is that one might also deny (4) by claiming that Aquinas holds that only disembodied souls think (and consequently that all of Aquinas's talk of the thoughts of embodied souls is a kind of shorthand). My thanks to Michael Rota for raising, and Therese Scarpelli Cory for pressing, this point.

[31] I do not have the space here to defend this claim at length, but such a defense would begin with the observation that every thought with the content *x is an F* appears to bring together the cognition of a particular with that of a universal.

material object with arms, legs, organs, arteries, neurons, and the like.[32] But this is deeply misguided; we must remember that, for Aquinas, the existence of a human-shaped material object with the relevant kind of structure *requires* that there be a substantial form giving that object that kind of structure. In the absence of substantial form (*per impossible*), matter is entirely undifferentiated. So, when Aquinas says that the human being is a composite of soul and body—since there is nothing but entirely undifferentiated matter prior to the coming of the human soul—the term 'body' in these contexts must be taken to refer to *prime matter*. Aquinas says exactly this in his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*:

> Soul must be understood as something existing in a subject. *And here 'subject' is taken broadly*, not so only an actual being is called a subject—which is the way in which an accident is said to be in a subject—but *so that prime matter, which is a potential being, is called a subject*.[33]

Here Aquinas is explaining that when he says that a human soul informs a body, he really means that a soul informs prime matter. He repeats this point a few paragraphs later:

> A substantial form does not come to an already preexisting subject, but only to one potentially existing—that is, to prime matter.[34]

We now have a rather different picture of the human person: rather than being composed of body and soul (where 'body' is taken for a human-shaped material object), we should say that a human being is composed of a human soul along with a parcel of undifferentiated matter.

But here a problem arises. According to Aquinas, it is never the case that there is such a thing as entirely undifferentiated matter. Prime matter does not actually exist;

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[32] Or, for the compositional nihilists in the audience, for collections of atoms arranged armly, legly, organly, neuronally, and so on.
[33] *InDA* II.1.10 (n. 220). Emphasis added.
[34] *InDA* II.1.14 (n. 224).

there is no actual object that counts as undifferentiated matter.[35] This is so because prime matter is matter entirely without form, matter without any specifiable feature at all. For prime matter to actually exist there would have to be some actual object that had absolutely no features whatsoever. But anything that occupies a given region of space or has some determinate shape has that shape or occupies that region precisely in virtue of a form that brings about those properties. So, Aquinas thinks the actual existence of prime matter is impossible; there simply can't be such a thing. (In addition, Aquinas thinks we can't even form a distinct concept of prime matter, for anything that is conceivable is only conceivable under some feature or other.[36] And this inability to cognize prime matter is not simply due to human cognitive limitations; Aquinas argues that not even God himself could have cognition of prime matter on its own.[37])

What are we then left with? If we take Aquinas's own language seriously, human beings are composed of soul and body, where the reference of 'body' is a chunk of prime matter underlying the human being.[38] But, of course, it's not even possible to *think* about prime matter apart from the composite, let alone possible for such matter to *exist* prior to

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[35] "It must be known that matter does not have in its own nature any form or privation…Nevertheless, matter is never stripped from [all] form and privation, for it is under one form at one time and under another form at another time. Rather, matter can never exist on its own. For since it doesn't have any form in its own definition, it doesn't have actual being, because actual being is had only by form…Anything that actually exists can not be called prime matter" (*DPN* 2).

In addition, when commenting upon Genesis 1:2, Aquinas says that the existence of prime matter is not just metaphysically impossible but is logically contradictory: "Saying that matter once existed without form is to say that a being was actual without being actual, which is a contradiction" (*ST* I.66.1.resp).

[36] "The intellect only cognizes prime matter as it is related to form" (*ST* I.87.1.resp).

[37] "Since we believe that matter has been created by God (though not without form), there is indeed an idea of matter in God, but this idea is not something distinct from the idea of a composite [of form and matter]. For matter in itself does not have being and is not cognizable" (*ST* I.15.3.ad 3).

[38] It might be suggested that 'body' does pick out something other than prime matter (the human-shaped material object, the whole person insofar as it is subject to quantity, the quantified matter underlying the whole person etc.), but this is to admit that saying that the human being is *composed* of body and soul is radically misleading, since all the relevant suggestions are ultimately posterior to the human person itself. Surely it can't be correct to say that some entity *x* has as a component some *y*, where *y* is (conceptually and ontologically) posterior to *x*.

the composite. The only way I can find to gloss Aquinas's meaning here is to say that a human being is a composite, one component of which depends upon the existence of the composite.[39]

Yet if this is correct, then Aquinas's insistence that human beings are entities composed of form and matter seems to be literally false. Saying that the matter of the composite depends upon the composite for its existence appears to be the denial that matter counts as a component at all (if it is not simply incoherent).[40] For surely, composites depend on their components, not vice-versa! But in that case, Aquinas looks to be very far from being a composite dualist; though he plainly says that souls are parts of human beings, he appears to be committed to denying that human beings have any parts other than their souls.

Nevertheless, though (on this reading) Aquinas thinks human beings have only one part, he still seems to think of it as a proper part. For, he insists, Abraham's soul is something less than Abraham.[41] And this should not be thought of as merely a claim about the patriarch; Aquinas is clear that this is a general truth about human beings:

> The soul, since it is part of the human body, is not the whole human being. My soul is not me. Even if [my] soul were to obtain salvation in another life, neither I nor any other human being would obtain it.[42]

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[39] John O'Callaghan has pointed out to me that humans being are unique to some extent here; for all other material creatures, the corresponding claim would be that *both* components (that is, the form and the matter) depend upon the composite.

[40] Simona Massobrio argues much the same point: "If in effect all of the composite's actuality and being is given to it by the form and none by the matter, and if the matter considered in itself is pure passive potentiality (and indeed non-being, if considered apart from form and in itself), it seems that the composite is not really a composite at all since it is 'composed' of form and something which in itself does not exist and acquires all its being from the form." *Aristotelian Matter as Understood by St. Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, McGill University, 1991), 141-142.

[41] "The soul of Abraham is not, strictly speaking, Abraham himself, but is a part of him (and the same is true for everyone else). So the life of Abraham's soul would not suffice for Abraham to be alive or for the God of Abraham to be the God of the living. The life of the whole conjoined being is required; that is, [the life of] the soul and the body" (*Sent* IV.43.1.1.1.ad 2).

[42] *In1Cor* 15.2.

Yet, despite his insistence that the separated soul is something other than the human being and that the existence of the former is not sufficient for the existence of the latter, Aquinas simultaneously maintains that the being of the embodied soul is not something other than the being of the composite.[43] That is, though the soul is not identical to the person, the soul's being just is the person's being.

Indeed, in one early text Aquinas goes so far as to say that "the soul is not something other than the human being."[44] Now, perhaps this statement was a youthful indiscretion that Aquinas later abandoned, but I think that a promising line of interpretation can begin here, according to which Aquinas turns out to be a kind of monist. Robert Pasnau has already given one such interpretation; his Aquinas believes that forms are the only things that exist.[45] On this reading, Aquinas's claims that "material substances are composed of matter and form…cannot be taken literally."[46] Form and matter are not "separate constituents making separate causal contributions to the composite substance"; rather, "matter united to form is no different from matter's

[43] "The soul communicates the being in which it itself subsists to the corporeal matter that, along with the intellective soul, makes up one thing, so that the being that belongs to the whole composite is also the being of the soul itself" (*ST* I.76.1.ad 5). See also *ST* I-II.4.5.ad 2.
[44] "The species that is understood in actuality completes an intellect that is in potentiality. From their conjunction, one complete thing is brought about, which is an intellect in actuality. This is just like how from a soul and body one thing is brought about, which is a human being having human operations. And just as the soul is not something other than the human being, so the intellect in actuality is not something other than the intellect actually understanding, but is the very same" (*Sent* I.35.1.1.ad 3).
[45] See his *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 131-140. As Pasnau has noted elsewhere, many of the Scholastics after Aquinas (Scotus, Ockham, Suarez, et al.) thought Aquinas's account of prime matter too deflationary to be consistent with his hylomorphism (in particular, that Aquinas's prime matter is too thin to function as the ultimate substratum of change); but where those Scholastics uniformly chose to "thicken" their own accounts of prime matter, Pasnau's Aquinas makes his account consistent by watering down the hylomorphism.
[46] Ibid., 132.

actually existing,"[47] which is just for there to be an existent thing "subject to alternation, generation, and corruption."[48]

On this kind of monist-interpretation of Aquinas, then, it may be possible after all to deny the first assumption of the Merricks-Olsen objection. For even if the soul and the human person are not identical, this alone does not entail (1), provided that the human person be, say, only a mode of the soul's existence (rather than being something with the soul as a part). If matter turns out not to be an existent but rather a mode of existing, then Aquinas's talk of souls informing matter turns out to be just a way of talking about the manner of the soul's existence. So then, human persons do think, as do their souls; but since the person turns out to be the soul as it presently exists (i.e., in the material way), there is only one thinker. And one thinker is neither too many nor too few.[49]

[47] Ibid., 133.
[48] Ibid., 136.
[49] I thank John O'Callaghan, Michael Rota, and Therese Scarpelli Cory for providing helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.