

PLATO'S SOUL AND BODY RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract: Man is ideally considered to be body, spirit and soul. Since soul and spirit are used interchangeably we can ascertain that man is a unitary composition of soul and body. This accounts for the hylomorphic argument as asserted by Aristotle and Aquinas. On the contrary, man is seen as a composition of soul and body that are capable of independent existence. This is explained in the dualistic assertion made by Plato and Augustine. Both the hylomorphic and dualistic arguments concerning the nature of man have their own strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, from the metaphysical standpoint, the hylomorphic argument holds more water because of the transcendental attributes of Being; unity, beauty, good and truth which also accounts for the nature of man who is also a being and is part of Being.

Keywords: Dualism, Hylomorphism, Transcendental

Introduction

This article is based on the second objective which maps out our chapter three in our Master's Thesis which is entitled; *Analysis of Plato's Dualistic Nature of Man*. This basically deals with Plato's Metaphysics on the nature of man. While dealing with this topic of *Plato's Soul and Body Relationship*, we shall offer a critique with the aid of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas.

Plato's Doctrine of Human Nature

Plato driven by the Doctrine of the Forms had to consider reality to be from a world of Forms or Ideas and the sense world as possessing only illusions. It was upon this assertion of the two worlds that we base our assertion that Plato has a dualistic approach to human nature which entails that "a human being is composed of body and soul".¹ In this regard a person is considered not as corporeal body but as an incorporeal soul. He distanced himself from the physical reality because he deemed it as unreal. We have to look at Plato's anthropology in some detail so that we are able to understand man better.

Soul and Body

What characterizes Plato's anthropology is that man is a constitution of two realities namely soul and body and it is this that makes him a dualist. We can argue therefore in this vein that "according to Plato's anthropology, soul and body do not make one single entity in the human being".² The two though seen united in the composite human being are held as being two realities whose unity is only provisional and hardly beneficial to human beings. This is very different from the way we understand ourselves and the way Aristotle and Aquinas argued; in that we feel more at home within our bodies. Furthermore, a clear divide between the soul and the body is realized where; Plato held that the true part of man is really his soul and that the souls of men once enjoyed a kind of existence in which they were in direct contact with the ideas.³ This is so because it is a spiritual principle which participates in the form of life and consequently it is endowed with self-motion. He viewed the human soul by its origin and nature that it is particularly related to the world of forms or ideas because the knowing soul must have some similarity with its privileged objects of knowledge, namely the forms or ideas. Plato argued that since the forms or ideas are

¹ Thomas F. Wall, *On Human Nature* (Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2005), 74

² Thomas F. Wall, *On Human Nature*, 74

³ Johannes Hirschberger, *The History of Philosophy* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1958), 99

incorporeal and have no separate parts, the same was the case with the human soul. The human soul also has qualities of immateriality and simplicity and no wonder it is referred to as being a spiritual principle. Plato in his dialogues, the *Meno*, believes that the human soul must have pre-existed before its union with the soul, as argued that:

He has heard from men and women wise in things divine and competent to render an account, and from poets like Pindar that the soul is immortal, that it has seen all things in its past voyaging through strange seas of experience and that all that we learn here is reminiscence, a recovery of that lapsed knowledge. And since all nature is akin, the recollection of one thing only, if we are brave and industrious and do not yield to this eristic argument, they enable us to recover all. We see this implied in one case by the doctrine of human knowledge when Plato referred to it as recollection or remembering.⁴

This means that, it was presumed that before the union between the soul and the body, the soul had full knowledge of reality, of course drawn from the world of forms or ideas. It only forgot at the time of the union. Hence, the union of a human soul with a body is like a fall in that for some reason man fell from his high estate and, as punishment for some crime, the soul was condemned to exist as a prisoner in the body.⁵ Despite this assertion about the fall of the human soul, we do not get much information about its meaning, but we may get something said about it from the Myth of the Chariot.

Therefore, we can say that the indwelling of the soul in a body is like an imprisonment.⁶ The term imprisonment speaks volumes about the way Plato deemed the union between the soul and body to be; the body in its earthly condition is in shackles to the body. No one would want to be imprisoned and that is how terrible this image is. Nevertheless, it's not all bad, this situation does not have bad effects only and so we realize that for Plato the "soul seems to be a life-principle: something that, by entering a body, makes that body alive, or animates it".⁷ This good effect sounds like it benefits only the body and not really the soul. It is very difficult to see how the soul benefits in making the body move and animate it.

In the same way that Plato was talking about how evil the body is, he should have had the same tone when talking about how evil the soul could be. He was quite hard on the body and this explains why when he was talking about a human person, affinity went more to the soul. He observed that it is true that the soul benefits the body by being its principle of motion and animation:

The body keeps us busy in a thousand ways because of its need for nurture. Moreover, if certain diseases befall it, they impede our search for the truth. It fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense, so that, as it is said, in truth and in fact no thought of any kind ever comes to us from the body. Only the body and its desires cause war, civil discord and battles, for all wars are due to the desire to acquire wealth, and it is the body and the care of it, to which we are enslaved, which compel us to acquire wealth, and all this makes us too busy to practice philosophy.⁸

In this quotation, Plato cites the examples where the soul could be deceived by the senses and situations where the soul can be enslaved by the desires proper to the body. Plato was of the understanding that some human souls allow themselves to be charmed and dominated by the love of sensual pleasures and by evil passions, thereby making the pursuit for wisdom in practicing philosophy impossible.⁹ It is therefore clear that his view of the body was very negative.

Consequently, the union of the two seems not fair on the part of the soul. So the soul which is the representation of man, is constantly seeking for a way out. Therefore Plato offers some advice:

⁴ Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), 157

⁵ Johannes Hirschberger, *The History of Philosophy*, 99

⁶ Johannes Hirschberger, *The History of Philosophy*, 99

⁷ Christopher Janaway, "The Pre-Socratics and Plato", in *Philosophy 1-A Guide through the Subject*, Ed. A. C. Crayling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 370

⁸ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), Phaedo 66b-d

⁹ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedo 66b-d

While we live, we shall be closest to knowledge if we refrain as much as possible from association with the body and do not join with it more than we must, if we are not infected with its nature but purify ourselves from it until the god himself frees us. In this way we shall escape the contamination of the body's folly; we shall be likely to be in the company of people of the same kind, and by our own efforts we shall know all that is pure, which is presumably the truth, for it is not permitted to the impure to attain the pure.¹⁰

He offered a way in which souls would be purified from the contamination of the body. In assessing his advice, we observe that Plato put down the body's nature, and this had a negative influence on many philosophers and even Christians; such that they considered the body to be evil and the source of it when it should be considered neutral but as a means for knowledge acquisition.

Parts of the Human Soul

The position Plato took on the body has been stated and we know that he had to concentrate on explaining the nature of the human soul because that is what a human person really is according to him. Nevertheless the reality of the body though very negative, is acknowledged and that is why his understanding of the nature of man is based on dualism. Therefore, we can take a further study on the nature of the human soul by arguing that in spite of its simplicity, it has three functions:

The first, we say, is the part with which a person learns, and the second the part with which he gets angry. As for the third, we had no one special name for it, since it's multiform, so we named it after the biggest and strongest thing in it. Hence we called it the appetitive part, because of the intensity of its appetites for food, drink, sex, and all the things associated with them, but we also called it the money-loving part, because such appetites are most easily satisfied by means of money.¹¹

We can itemize them simply as the rational soul, spirited soul and the appetitive soul. These functions of the soul bring out to us how our minds or personalities are organized in life.¹²

Three Groups of Functions in the Soul

In defining them and situating them in the organization of life, we can ascertain that the rational soul or reason "is conceived as that in us with which we pursue truth by rational means. It is not just the capacity for reasoning, but embraces also the desire *to learn the truth* and to regulate ones behaviour accordingly".¹³ Plato had to associate it with the head in the human body and argued that it enjoys the high degree of simplicity, it is also immortal. In the ideal state that Plato imagined, he associated this group of functions with the rulers for they were to govern with reason because it has the capacity to achieve certain goals and always goes for the love of truth.¹⁴ One with reason governs for the good of the entire entity.

The spirited soul has an intermediary role and we can assert that:

This is the wilful, dynamic, executive faculty within the soul. The spirited part expresses itself in anger, righteous indignation, ambition, courage, pride, or assertiveness. It is the source of the desire for honour, respect, reputation and self-esteem. The spirit is associated with the passions or the emotions.¹⁵

In the context of the human body, it was related to the heart of the human body and these characteristics are all fitting to the guardians or soldiers in Plato's ideal state. Unlike the rational soul which relies on reason, this group of

¹⁰ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedo 67a-b

¹¹ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Republic 580d-e

¹² Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1967), 54

¹³ Christopher Janaway, "The Pre-Socratics and Plato", in *Philosophy 1-A Guide through the Subject*, Ed. A. C. Crayling, 371

¹⁴ James Bull, *Looking at Philosophy* (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1963), 71

¹⁵ Helen Buss Mitchell, *Roots of Wisdom: A Tapestry of Philosophical Traditions, 6th Edition* (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011), 36

functions is guided by opinion [*doxa*] in regard to what is beautiful and good.¹⁶ That is why it is possible for it to error and so will have to be guided constantly by the rational soul for truth. With the rational soul being the highest in terms of certitude about the truth, we have the appetitive soul as the lowest in this hierarchy of functions. Plato considered the appetitive soul to be “the part most closely related to the needs of the body”.¹⁷ When we look at the appetitive soul from the standpoint of the human body, we see it located below the diaphragm. In the ideal state its corresponding function is that of the workers who anchor their lives on satisfying the desires for food, drink or even sex.¹⁸ In many cases the appetitive soul is rebellious to the rational soul or reason.

The Relations among the Functions of the Soul

Plato in the *Phaedrus* took time to elaborate on the relations that exist among the functions of the human soul that we just discussed. He put the relations within the soul in the Myth of the Chariot as narrated:

Now here is what we must say about its structure. To describe what the soul actually is would require a very long account, altogether a task for a god in every way; but to say what it is like is humanly possible and takes less time. So let us do the second in our speech. Let us then liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer. The gods have horses and charioteers that are themselves all good and come from good stock besides, while everyone else has a mixture. To begin with, our driver is in charge of a pair of horses; second, one of his horses is beautiful and good and from stock of the same sort, while the other is the opposite and has the opposite sort of bloodline. This means that chariot-driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business.¹⁹

In this myth, he narrated that the human soul when considered in its original state is like a chariot which is drawn by two winged horses and driven by the charioteer where one horse is a docile beast; it represents the spirited soul. The other horse is an ungovernable animal; it represents the appetitive soul. The charioteer himself is reason, which strives to guide the chariot properly.²⁰ We see that within the functions of the soul; reason, spirit and desire or appetite have very close relations whereby the desire or appetite and the spirit depend on reason for guidance, but for the chariot to move the three have to relate and this relationship is inevitable.

We have in the Myth of the Chariot realities that Plato bring out as regards the nature, functions and relations of the human soul. He contends that; “all soul looks after all that lacks a soul, and patrols all of heaven, taking different shapes at different times”.²¹ This means that the chariot travels through the world of forms or ideas and the soul can contemplate the forms. Such a reality can only be imagined to have taken place during the pre-existence of the human soul. The soul lived before its embodiment into the human body and while at that state its role was to contemplate the forms as a form of knowledge acquisition, something we will handle in chapter four; the relationship between knowledge and the objects of knowledge, particularly man as object of knowledge.

Furthermore, we see in the myth that as the chariot was travelling in the world of forms, at one point trouble arises during the journey. Reason has trouble to guide the flight of the winged horses and the chariot falls down.²² It was at this point in the existence of the soul that when the horses lost their wings that the human soul was incarnated in the human body. The incarnation of the soul within the body creates Plato’s dualistic nature of man because man, who is largely considered soul, now has a body also. This explains how a human being appeared and the two parts that constitute his being. We can attest that now that the soul is in a body, it forgets what it had known before. But when the soul perceives things of this world, it is progressively reminded of the forms or ideas.²³ When this happens we see growing knowledge about the soul’s former world and it begins to contemplate again on the forms in that the mutilated wings of the horse long for their restoration and regeneration.

¹⁶ James Bull, *Looking at Philosophy*, 71

¹⁷ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 54

¹⁸ James Bull, *Looking at Philosophy*, 71

¹⁹ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedrus 246a-b

²⁰ Johannes Hirschberger, *The History of Philosophy*, 99

²¹ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedrus 246b-c

²² Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedrus 246c

²³ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedrus 248c

It is therefore important to note how Plato imagined the character of a good person would be in such a world. We cannot be thinking only about the world of forms without making our physical world better and meaningful; but of course drawing inspiration from his theory about the soul. Plato argued that “the soul’s only proper function is to reason and pursue the truth; in the *Protagoras* the view [put simply] is that the only desires one could ever act on are rational desires”.²⁴ We in the physical and experiential world can have a good person, only in such a situation; where the lower desires of the appetitive soul are well subordinated by reason or the rational soul, because for the spirited soul, it was deemed as having no problems in being guided by reason. The appetitive soul is what was considered rebellious and needed ordering by the faculty of reason. That was the solution for our earthly world and society to have a well ordered person or persons.

Unity in the Human Soul

While we have certainly seen that the soul which is one and has three parts as its composition, on the contrary, according to Plato, the three parts of the soul are certainly not separate portions making up the characteristic human element.²⁵ They are distinct from each other in function, just as we know from our experience that our actions have their origin in very different sources. Plato did not handle the question of how these groups of functions that are distinct, but issuing from one soul could be brought together. Nevertheless, it suffices to know then that the soul which is one has within it three functions that have different sources and our own experience testifies to this fact.²⁶ But to explain how they are united, was not something Plato laboured to explore in his psychology.

Eros as a Unifying Factor

We have just discussed the issue that there is nothing that unifies the three functions of the human soul for Plato. This section seeks to express what causes the soul to long after goals that are not yet attained in one’s life. As a matter of fact, we can affirm that there exists one unifying factor which, says Plato, pervades the tripartite soul. It is called Eros, which is desire.²⁷ We may have different ways of looking at Eros; this one is the force behind all human willing, thinking, and acting, so it impels our souls to go after goals we have the desire to achieve. We have for instance a way of looking at *erotic*; we don’t have to throw it away here because Plato had included it in his understanding of Eros or desire. Plato’s is a broader view of what desire and love truly mean in our human existence.

While we take *Eros* in Greek for love, for “Plato love is the feeling that something is lacking, a search for what one does not have, for what is missing”.²⁸ It was held that love by its nature always seeks that which is missing, especially in the areas of beauty and goodness. Hence, Eros or love in this particular sense doesn’t have as its object any specific good; its role is to cause each part of the soul to go after its own good; the rational soul towards the forms or ideas and their truth, beauty and goodness, the spirited soul towards noble and generous ideals and the appetitive soul towards sensible satisfactions.²⁹ Eros according to Plato brings to us the unity that the soul has but not how the three functions of the soul are united amongst themselves.

The Immortality of the Human Soul

In addition to Plato’s understanding of the soul and body and their relationship, we discuss the immortality of the soul. By way of implication, we can see that the body of man was not considered immortal by Plato, contrary to what Christians argue that while the physical bodies face decomposition, there will be resurrected bodies that will live eternally. This underscores an implication that the rational soul or human soul is immortal and leaves out the immortality of the human body. Plato put up several arguments in favour of this assertion. One of them is that:

Then he will do this most perfectly who approaches the object with thought alone, without associating any sight with his thought, or dragging in any sense perception with his reasoning, but who, using pure thought alone, tries to track down each reality pure and by itself, freeing himself as

²⁴ Christopher Janaway, *The Pre-Socratics and Plato in Philosophy 1-A Guide through the Subject*, Ed. A. C. Crayling, 371-372

²⁵ Christopher Janaway, *The Pre-Socratics and Plato in Philosophy 1-A Guide through the Subject*, Ed. A. C. Crayling, 371-372

²⁶ Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1953), 22

²⁷ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedrus 251c

²⁸ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 57

²⁹ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 57

far as possible from eyes and ears and, in a word, from the whole body, because the body confuses the soul and does not allow it to acquire truth and wisdom whenever it is associated with it.³⁰

Since the soul belongs to the world of forms and the forms or ideas are incorruptible, it must also dwell on that for its immortality. This is a matter of logic. If something belongs to the world of spiritual beings, it must also be spiritual and the same with anything belonging to the material world, it must also be material. In this case, we have the soul which according to Plato fell from the world of ideas which is incorruptible, it follows therefore that the soul which belongs there must also be incorruptible.

The other argument is that:

For every bodily object that is moved from outside has no soul, while a body whose motion comes from within, from itself, does have a soul, that being the nature of a soul; and if this is so—that whatever moves itself is essentially a soul—then it follows necessarily that soul should have neither birth nor death.³¹

This entails that if the human soul was able to pre-exist, before its union with the body, then it seems natural that the soul should keep on existing after the death of the body. Christians would be pleased to get this view about the soul, that it has existence even after death and for Plato; it is because that's its nature. The soul is believed not to have the same fate as the body based on the argument that they are different from each other.

The last argument for the immortality of the soul is that, “proofs of the immortality of the soul are based on the soul's uncomplicated form, its immateriality and its analogy to the eternal Ideas and to truth, which is known through the soul”.³² As a matter of principle, if the soul is a principle of life, then death cannot touch it. But the human soul is indeed a self-moving principle which is closely related to the idea of life. Since life and self-motion are intrinsic qualities of the soul, then a dead soul would seem to be a contradiction. In this case, we cannot imagine that life can be dead, the soul as principle of life cannot die at all.

A Critique on Plato's View of Human Nature

While acknowledging the big contribution that Plato offered in the understanding of man, or our anthropology; we can therefore, ascertain the arguments of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas on the nature of man.

Aristotle's Hylomorphic Nature of Man

In the study about human nature that we saw in Plato, we have in Aristotle a direct assault to what we have held so far to be the case about man. Plato was working with dualism whereas; Aristotle chose to go with the theory of hylomorphism.³³ Nevertheless, both did acknowledge the existence of soul and body, but differed in their positions on how they relate. Let us discuss Aristotle on human nature using his theory of hylomorphism by looking at what is contained under this theory.

The Essence of the Soul

In his hylomorphism theory concerning human nature Aristotle had to handle the essence of the soul in his work *De Anima* [On the Soul]. It was an important aspect of man's nature even for him. We really have to assert that when Aristotle talks about the essence of something he is to be interpreted as thinking of its true or proper, and by no means arbitrary, definition.³⁴ His essences are by no means anywhere near to the Platonic objects that have separate existence from the physical reality. Therefore to situate the soul in this basic understanding, it is held that the concept of the soul has to be taken as the principle of life as we attest:

³⁰ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedo 66a

³¹ Plato, *Complete Works*, Ed. John M. Cooper, Phaedrus 245e

³² Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 54

³³ Ronald Polansky, *Aristotle's De Anima* (Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 171

³⁴ Anthony Flew, *Body, Mind, and Body* (London: The Macmillan Company Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1964), 72

For Aristotle it will be determined that soul is fundamentally the principle bestowing life upon a body capable of life. Soul and body are for him somehow one, the soul giving unity to the body or matter, enabling the living being to engage in its various functions. The view of soul and body united as form and matter later receives the name *hylomorphic* theory.³⁵

In this case, it was very difficult for Aristotle to separate the soul from the body as Plato. It was observed when discussing Plato's ontology that he created two worlds of existence; one for the soul and the other for the body, and further affirmed that the soul got superimposed into the body.

Aristotle argued to the contrary that:

The soul is the form or realization of a living body. The soul *informs*, or gives *form* to, the matter of a living thing, giving it its corporeal being and making it a live body; that is not a question of the soul's being superimposed on the body or added to it; rather, the body is a living body because it has a soul.³⁶

In this explanation, we see that the soul has basically no operation or affection exclusive to itself that would merit it being considered separable from the body. This is what consolidated his stance on the inseparability of soul and body. Furthermore, when he affirmed this hylomorphic position, he went on to imagine modifications of the soul such as meekness, fear, compassion, anger, love, hate and joy that they couldn't exist without the body. All these for him, occur as in the person that is experiencing them and not in the soul separated from the body as argued by Plato.

The Immortality of the Intellect

Aristotle while refuting the immortality of the soul, he rather suggested the immortality of the intellect when he contends; "even if feeling pain or being glad or understanding are in the fullest sense movements, and each of these is a *being moved* [e.g., being angry or fearful occurs by some movement of the heart], this being moved is from the soul".³⁷ While it was true for these to be part of the soul facing corruption, understanding was suggested to either be of the soul or from some other nature. He proposed that the intellect while believed to be of the soul, it exhibited characteristics that were more godlike and unalterable. Hence the argument; "this intelligence, he adds, is separable, impassive and without mixture, since it is essentially an activity...only after it has been separated is it truly what it is, and only this is immortal and eternal".³⁸ One component of the soul which is the intellect seems to have a different fate from the rest in that it is immortal.

The Soul as Form of the Body

We draw from the platonic perspective the idea that, substance has to do with the relation of things to the world of forms which is a result of the separation between the two worlds; the physical and the spiritual ones. This is not the same with Aristotle. When we study his work the *De Anima* book II chapter I, it is emphasized that the notion of substance is not to be equated with the idea of substance as that which can significantly be said to exist separately.³⁹ It means that for him form and matter are never to be thought that they can be held separately from each other. As a matter of fact, "it would seem that Aristotle's doctrine that the soul is the *form of a natural body such as has in itself the principles of motion and rest* must commit him to saying that it would not even make sense to assert the immortality of the soul".⁴⁰ He did disregard his suggestion that somehow the soul was immortal in this assertion that he made about their relationship.

Aristotle was very categorical in making it clear that despite the inseparable nature of the two, they were still very different when he contends:

³⁵ Ronald Polansky, *Aristotle's De Anima*, 4

³⁶ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 78

³⁷ Anthony Flew, *Body, Mind, and Body*, 75

³⁸ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 79

³⁹ Ronald Polansky, *Aristotle's De Anima*, 149

⁴⁰ Anthony Flew, *Body, Mind, and Body*, 76

Therefore every natural body sharing in life will be a substance, and this substance will be in some way composite. Since, however, it is a body of such and such a nature, i.e., having vitality, the soul will not itself be the body. For the body is not one of the factors existing in the subject; rather, it is as the subject and the matter. It is necessary, then, that the soul be a substance in the sense of the specifying principle of a physical body potentially alive. Now substance, substance [in this sense] is act; it will therefore be the act of a body of this sort.⁴¹

It is affirmed that indeed what is the composition of soul and body while being unitary is by and large of different realities altogether. It can as well be mentioned in a generalized manner that for Aristotle the soul will be the primary act of a physical bodily organism.⁴²

His approach to human nature is a unitary one between soul and body and in emphasizing it; he refused to admit that the two could be held separate when he argued:

Then, *Therefore it is evident* he deduces a truth from the foregoing. Having shown that the soul is the whole body's actuality, its *parts* being the actualities of the body's parts, and granted that an actuality of form cannot be separated from that which is actual and has form, we can certainly conclude that no soul can be separated from its body.⁴³

This was to be taken also in the situation that even if some parts of the soul were to be separated, there would be considerable amount of the soul's components that would not be. Aristotle in this regard did not completely let go of the notion of Plato's forms and immortality of the soul's intellect which would jeopardize his hylomorphic theory of the human nature.

The Essential Relationship of Soul and Body

The relationship between the soul and body in the platonic metaphysics which was demonized, here finds some essential connection when it was argued in this fashion:

And that such is the case is confirmed by reason: the act of any one thing is of that which is in potency to it, and it occurs naturally and fittingly in matter appropriate to it. That the soul, then is an actuality and the formal principle of a thing in potency to exist accordingly, is evident from these considerations.⁴⁴

He realized that there was no way act and potency could not essentially relate and while he praised his predecessor on the difference between soul and body, Aristotle went against the idea that the union between the two was an *unhappy* one. On the contrary, he was of the view that the soul of man is his form and that form exists; limited, individuated. The mark of manifestation of that limitation is the body of man, and man would not be man if he did not exist as circumscribed, so to speak, as having this body and existing in this time and this place.⁴⁵ The kind of body he talked about was one that is physical and organic.

Augustine's Position on Human Nature

We have seen that for Plato man is dualistic, meaning he is both soul and body, and capable of separate existence. This is not the case with Aristotle. He holds the two in a hylomorphic relationship. He affirmed the reality of the two, but was strongly in favour of their essential compatibility as that between actuality and potency. On the other hand, St. Augustine in his book *On the Greatness of the Soul*, handles the human nature topic; he looks at the distinctive features of the soul and the body and consequently exposes the relationship between the two.

The Soul Resembles God

⁴¹ Aristotle, "De Anima", in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 555

⁴² Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 64

⁴³ Aristotle, "De Anima", in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. Richard McKeon, 555

⁴⁴ Aristotle, "De Anima", in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, Ed. Richard McKeon, 556

⁴⁵ F.C. Copleston, "Knowing and Reality", in *Perspectives in Philosophy*, Ed. Robert N. Neck (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), 39-40

We did mention earlier that Augustine as a Christian and philosopher had the inclination in him to drag everything towards God. For him everything was to direct us to God, otherwise such a thing lacked credibility and authenticity. The same as he did in the process of knowledge, we see him do in our understanding of human nature about the soul and body. In his dialogue with his friend Evodius, he did assert that; “I believe that the soul’s proper abode, to put it that way, and its homeland, is God Himself by whom it has been created. But its essence I cannot properly identify”.⁴⁶ He knew where the soul came from and its destination, but not the essence that is proper to it.

Nevertheless, Augustine knew of what elements man was composed of when he attests; “when the question is, of what elements man is made up, I am able to answer-of a soul and a body”.⁴⁷ In this regard, we can ascertain that he too was of the view that man was a composition of soul and body, despite having no proper understanding of the soul, he argued that he could properly tell of what the body was composed of, namely of earth, or of water, or air, or fire, or of all these things together, or of any combination of them. Furthermore, Augustine contends concerning the soul that is in the image of God who created it.⁴⁸ It was argued logically, that since the soul was created in the likeness of God, it is also immortal like him, just as anything made by man who is mortal is equally mortal.

The Soul is Incorporeal

The dialogue between Augustine and Evodius went on and in it Augustine was forced to explain more on the nature of the soul. In the dialogue Evodius was told:

But if you want a definition of the soul, and so ask me-what is the soul? I have a ready answer. It seems to me to be a special substance, endowed with reason, adapted to rule the body. And now give this your particular attention-the question now at issue: whether the soul has any quantity and, so to say, local extension. Of course, precisely because it is not a body-otherwise, as our previous reasoning proved, it could not perceive anything incorporeal-it doubtless lacks the space by which bodies are measured. And for this reason it is impossible to believe or conceive or understand that the measure of the soul’s greatness is of that sort.⁴⁹

What this means is that the soul has characteristics that are particular to it that enable it to control the body such as memory, intelligence which are natural to any human person. Much more to this, Augustine added that the souls of religious people should have a certain Divine Providence to bestow upon them the blessing of discovery so that they can strive piously, chastely, and perseveringly to know themselves and their God, that is to know the truth.⁵⁰

Thomas Aquinas’ Assertions on Human Nature

Aquinas wrote at length on many topics in his work *Summa Theologica*, among them was the topic on human nature. We are already previewed to the fact that Aristotle took the hylomorphic approach in asserting the relationship between soul and body of man. It is interesting to see if Aquinas takes the same view; that the soul and body are held inseparable and enjoy an essential relationship.

The Soul is not a Body

We can ascertain from this subheading that Aquinas had first to distinguish between the soul and the body which are the two constituents of human nature. He argued that for us to seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life in those things which live: for we call living things *animate*, and those things which have no life, *inanimate*.⁵¹ Aquinas was reacting to previous philosophers who confused the soul to be corporeal and for him, the two were very different and the soul was not the same as a body. In making the distinction between the two, Aquinas contends:

⁴⁶ Augustine, *On the Greatness of the Soul*, Transl. Joseph M. Collieran (New York: The Newman Press, 1950), 14

⁴⁷ Augustine, *On the Greatness of the Soul*, Transl. Joseph M. Collieran, 14

⁴⁸ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 117

⁴⁹ Anthony Flew, *Body, Mind, and Body*, 100

⁵⁰ Julian Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 117

⁵¹ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarence Press, 1992), 209

Now, though a body may be a principle of life, as the heart is a principle of life in an animal, yet nothing corporeal can be the first principle of life. For it is clear that to be a principle of life, or to be a living thing, does not belong to a body as such; since, if that were the case, every-body would be a living thing, or a principle of life. Therefore, a body is competent to be a living thing or even a principle of life, as *such* a body. Now that it is actually such a body, it owes to some principle which is called its act. Therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body; thus heat, which is the principle of calefaction, is not a body, but an act of a body.⁵²

We may notice that Aquinas gives recognition to both the soul and the body, but shows very clear hylomorphic tendencies even in the way he differentiates the two. The philosophical argument of act and potency from Aristotle begins to emerge anew.

The soul was considered by Plato and Augustine as substance, but Aquinas believed that the human soul was not subsistent. For that which subsists is said to be this particular thing. Now this particular thing is said not of the soul, but of that which is composed of soul and body. Therefore the soul is not subsistent.⁵³ In his view substance is the human being because he is the composition of soul and body inseparably considered. In saying this, he was attacking the thought of Augustine who asserted that the soul was capable of feeling and understanding separated from the body. The reason was that there was nothing that the soul could do without being embodied. While this was true about the soul, Aquinas understood the intellect which is part of the soul in a similar manner to Aristotle when he attests, “it must necessarily be allowed that the principle of intellectual operation which we call the soul, is a principle both incorporeal and subsistent”.⁵⁴ Despite holding strongly to the hylomorphic understanding of human nature, Aquinas left room for the possibility of something about the soul having a different source and nature when discussing the intellect. The intellect or mind has an operation apart from the body and it is incorporeal and subsistent. This is what led Aristotle to argue for the immortality of the intellect.

The Soul is not the Man

In the *Metaphysics* of Plato we talk about the real and the unreal, in the context of soul and body, we would be inclined to say that the soul is the real and the body the unreal. Consequently, we could associate man to the soul and not the body. This is different with Aquinas who affirms:

The assertion, *man is soul*, can be taken in two senses. First, that man is a soul; though this particular man, Socrates, for instance, is not a soul, but composed of soul and body...it may also be understood in this sense, that this soul is this man; and this could be held if it were supposed that the operation of the sensitive soul were proper to it, apart from the body; because in that case all the operations which are attributed to man would belong to the soul only; and whatever performs the operations of a thing; wherefore that which performs the operations of a man is man.⁵⁵

We see Aquinas cite an example of sensation which is not an operation particular to the soul but involves both the soul and body of man. Plato supposed that sensation was of the soul alone and thought that man is soul and yet sensation makes use of the body too. Hence for Aquinas, the soul is not man, but one of the compositions of human nature.

The passive and active compositions of the human soul help us to see what aspects of man are incorruptible and which ones are not. While holding on the hylomorphic theory, we realize that Aquinas continues to separate the intellectual principle of the soul from the body and he is held as having argued for its incorruptibility when he said that; “the intellectual principle which we call the human soul is incorruptible. For a thing may be corrupted in two ways-per se and accidentally”.⁵⁶ This is so because this aspect of man is his form or act and it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself and so we can say that it is not possible for a subsistent to cease to exist.

⁵² Anthony Flew, *Body, Mind, and Body*, 102

⁵³ Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 212

⁵⁴ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Complete Edition, Translated by The Fathers of The English Dominican Province* (London: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014), 482

⁵⁵ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Complete Edition, Translated by The Fathers of The English Dominican Province*, 484-485

⁵⁶ Anthony Flew, *Body, Mind, and Body*, 106

Conclusion

We set out to understand the nature of man from the Platonic standpoint and we discovered that generally, man is understood to be a composition of two different realities namely; body and soul. The ideal is that man is unitary despite having these two elements about him. This argument is advanced in our research by Aristotle and Aquinas and it is based on the hylomorphism theory. To the contrary, we have had to deal with another notion that man is not unitary but dual as represented by the two components [soul and body], that have very different attributes and are capable of existing independent from each other. Man does belong to the transcendental attributes of Being which are unity, good, truth and beauty and so the hylomorphic argument explains better the nature of man.

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