

ABSTRACT

A Treatment of Hylomorphism(s)

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My thesis discusses a hylomorphic theory of composition, contrasting hylomorphism with physicalism on the one hand and Cartesian substance dualism on the other. Hylomorphism can be a slippery theory or family of theories to work with, so I proceed to a treatment of the terms and concepts which hylomorphic theories employ, and attempt to address some of the most immediate questions and obscurities that arise. Examples include the nature of forms as understood by hylomorphists, or the meaning of “prime matter.” Next, I elaborate the differences between several contemporary articulations of hylomorphism, with special attention to the debate between corruptionism and survivalism. After that, my thesis examines the strength of the motivation for hylomorphic accounts generally, and concludes with an evaluation of what hylomorphism has to offer.

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A TREATMENT OF HYLOMORPHISM(S)

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Baylor University
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Honors Program

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Waco, Texas

May 2019

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction: Hylomorphism in Brief

The central question I hope to answer asks what hylomorphism is, what its concepts mean, and how it compares with alternative accounts. Hylomorphism is a theory of being. Thereby it is a theory of identity - involving sameness, difference, and change – and of composition, involving parts and wholes. In application, hylomorphism is also a theory of persons. My concern in this paper will be to explain and evaluate hylomorphism, with a special focus on the composition of persons. However, it is not possible to apply hylomorphism to the metaphysics of persons without understanding hylomorphism in general.

The name comes from *hyle* (matter) + *morphe* (shape or form) in the Greek, and it is the view that every physical thing or object is a composite or compound of matter and form. A form configures some matter and makes it the thing, or *substance* (a term of art which I will discuss in chapter 2) which it is. But from this point it will be easiest to start by saying what hylomorphism is not. Hylomorphism is an anti-materialistic theory, and it is simultaneously an anti-Cartesian theory.

A hylomorphic theory of persons will hold that a person is a single substance comprised of matter and soul. Contra physicalist theories, she is not reducible to matter. But she is also not a composite of two substances, mind and body, at the same time, nor a being whose essence is just mind, which might operate a body as if by remote control. And on this view, souls are not to be understood, at least not primarily or exclusively, as

immaterial thinking substances, but rather as forms. What does thehylomorphist mean by forms? A form is, on this view, not a mere abstract, like a shape or arrangement, but rather a concrete particular which inheres essentially in the substance which it instantiates, and which configures matter so as to constitute that substance. In other words, a form is not just the configuration but also the configurer of a substance. A form is what makes a thing the substance which it is, and it is the essential part of the thing.¹

Unlike Platonic forms, which are abstract universals, Aristotelian and Thomistic forms are concrete particulars. They are immanent; they are in the things which they configure. And almost all forms are material forms. According to the classic views at least, the only forms that have something immaterial about them are the souls of intelligent things. Here, demands for clarification immediately present themselves.

I will elaborate on this general picture ofhylomorphism in greater detail, and by doing so I hope to provide a basic understanding of the concepts hylomorphic theories employ, as well as some of the main issues that divide hylomorphists among each other. That is the primary objective of this thesis. In chapter 2, I explain the terms and concepts which hylomorphic theories employ. The meaning of substance, form, and prime matter will be treated there. In chapter 3, I will discuss several variants ofhylomorphism and present the debate between corruptionism and survivalism. In chapter 4, I will discuss the motivation for a hylomorphic theory and conclude by identifying a few strengths of hylomorphism in general.

The secondary objective of this thesis, then, is to undertake some of the groundwork which is a precondition to uncovering a single best version ofhylomorphism

¹ This language of “parts” stands in need of qualification, however. I take this up next chapter.

– one that is robust and internally coherent enough to stand up to the more predominant positions and schools of thought in metaphysics and philosophy of mind, like physicalism and Cartesianism. However, I do not attempt decisively to establish such a robust hylomorphism here; that is a project for future research.

I will argue that, although hylomorphism might require more extensive metaphysical revisions and commitments than either Cartesianism or physicalism seems to require, hylomorphism offers unique advantages when it comes to the identity of objects over time, predication, and explanatory laws of nature. If that's the case, then an objection to hylomorphism which is rooted in a concern for parsimony may not be as well-founded as it initially appears. I will not aim to demonstrate the decisive superiority of a hylomorphic theory over all competitors, but rather to investigate the character of some hylomorphic views and indicate their weaknesses and strengths.

I engage just a few authors since their accounts, and the differences between them, provide more than enough material to sustain discussion. Chiefly these are Edward Feser, Eleonore Stump, Brian Leftow, and David Oderberg. These are contemporary philosophers writing in the midst of, or in the wake of, the growing sense of the failure of the physicalist project in contemporary philosophy. That sense of physicalism's deficiency prompted (or contributed to) a moment of renewed interest in ancient and medieval philosophers' non-physicalist theories, and the hylomorphic theories propounded by Aristotle and Aquinas number among them.

Some disclaimers are warranted. I deal here with a roughly-Thomistic version of hylomorphism, since this is the standard version, and the one around which most discussion orbits today. There are other versions, such as those forwarded by Avicenna

and Scotus, with which I am not familiar, as well as more contemporary variations. Also, I am assuming and not defending the existence of the Christian God and angels, for the purposes of this paper; these assumptions will become relevant during discussions about souls. However, this paper does not commit, for example, to the possibility of communion with saints, though some of the authors whom I discuss do so.

Meanwhile it should be noted now that not all hylomorphists are on the same page, and not all of them are interested in a version of hylomorphism which is fully consistent with that of Aristotle or Aquinas. For instance, Oderberg will reject the Aristotelian division of the soul into a material and an immaterial part, and instead will treat the soul as unitary, indivisible, immaterial, and thoroughly intellective in nature.

Note also that I have used the terms “human” and “person” interchangeably throughout. In some contexts this will be controversial, but I think it is permissible here, even if the identification may remain open to dispute. For Aquinas and his followers this identification is correct; only a human will be a person and all humans will be persons.

It is now time to elaborate the hylomorphic view in greater detail. Hylomorphism will tend to seem strange at the outset; this arises in part from its conceptual distance from both materialism and Cartesianism, which are probably more familiar. We might start by saying that, on a hylomorphic account, a “human is a composite of matter and soul”² – but we should take care to be specific about what kind of composite or compound we are talking about. On a hylomorphic view, a person is not some sort of mereological sandwich of matter and a ghostlike ethereal soul. The soul, and a form in general, is not a component part in that ordinary sense, even in the way that an operating

² Stump, Eleonore. *Aquinas*. Routledge, 2003. 211.

system is a component of a computer, much less in the way that a wheel is a component of a car. However, according to a hylomorphic account it is also true that an object's form is a more important constituent of the object than its matter is.

In order to understand how this can be so, we should eventually discuss the nature of a form. By doing so we will be grappling with one of the most pressing difficulties for any hylomorphic theory. But before discussing forms, it is necessary to understand what the hylomorphist means by "substance." The following chapter will treat the terminology and concepts which hylomorphism employs, including substance, matter, and form.

CHAPTER TWO

Hylomorphic Terminology and Concepts, Elaborated

Substance

A hylomorphist will define substance as the basic “unit” of being. The insight of the original hylomorphist, Aristotle, is that there are many ways to talk about being, but all of those ways ground out in substance. Aristotle holds that our various ways of talking about being, for instance quantity, quality, relation, possessing, and acting-upon, revolve around substance.

Ed Feser describes substance as follows:

Substances, in general, just are the sorts of things which exist in themselves rather than inhering in anything else, and which are the subjects of those attributes which do of their nature inhere in something else. This is true of material substances like stones, and it is true of angels, which as creatures of pure intellect are immaterial substances.¹

A thing which is a substance in the primary sense will be a concrete, particular thing, and not a general category, or an abstract term. Examples of primary substances include an individual person, or this chair. Aristotle says that the terms that pick out and name substances are never predicates. Predicate terms or property terms are always attributed *to* something; in contrast substances can stand in relation to something else, but are not predicated *of* something else. For example, 'Socrates' is not a predicate.

Substances can exist on their own; a property like a wrinkle, in contrast, can't exist

¹ Feser, Edward. “Aquinas on the Human Soul.” In *Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, edited by Jonathan J. Loose, Angus J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland. Wiley, 2018. 132.

without something to be a wrinkle in. A wrinkle is an ‘accident’ and not a substance. We may also think of a substance as a center of agency; as a kind of node in a causal web or nexus. This is not so with a property or accident, which only modifies those nodes and the links between them.

In addition to the primary substances described above, there are also secondary substances, which are kinds or universals. An example is “man,” when understood not as a particular, but as “mankind.”

While we are making distinctions, it should also be noted that what a hylomorphist means by ‘substance’ is rather different from what the Cartesian substance dualist means by it. For the Cartesian, there are two kinds of substance in the universe: mind and matter. Substance means for the Cartesian just a kind or class of “stuff.” For the hylomorphist, in contrast, substance is a more profound and heavy-laden term; substance involves not just kind-of-stuff but also a principle of identity. And according to hylomorphic accounts, in contrast to Cartesian substance dualist accounts, formless matter is not a substance at all. It takes form and matter together to comprise substance, at least in the ordinary cases.²

Classification

Here we may as well address the classification of hylomorphism as a theory of metaphysics and of personal composition, as it compares to reductive physicalism on the one side and Cartesian substance dualism on the other. I have drawn briefly upon this contrast already, but it deserves further attention. Reductive physicalism, also called

² Angels, for instance, will be a prominent exception.

reductive materialism, holds that everything which exists is physical – each thing is either composed of physical particles and bound by physical forces, or is at least fully comprehensible to a hypothetically-completed theory of physics and articulable in its terms. Mental states and phenomena, for instance, would be reducible to physical states and phenomena, according to the reductive materialist. Hylomorphism contradicts a reductive physicalist account by claiming that *nothing* which exists is reducible to mere matter – everything which truly exists does so through substancehood and thus through form.³

How does hylomorphism compare to Cartesian substance dualism, then? In general, substance dualism is the doctrine that there are two kinds of substance in the universe, immaterial mental substance and material substance, and that a person is identical with his immaterial mind. On this view, a person's body will belong to him, but it will not be one of his constituent parts in a literal sense. We are speaking roughly when we speak of our bodies as parts of ourselves, according to the thoroughgoing Cartesian. Insofar as substance dualism and hylomorphism both seem to break reality down into two categories, matter and something irreducible to matter, someone might be tempted to classify hylomorphism as a variant of substance dualism. But this would be a mistake.

I have already explained the stark difference between what the Cartesian means by “substance” and what the hylomorphist means by that term. The differences between Cartesianism and hylomorphism stem mainly from their disagreement about substance.

³ Most forms are material forms, but this must not be taken to imply that forms are made up of matter or that they can be reduced to matter in any way. I discuss this below, in the section on the meaning of form.

Hylomorphism also contradicts non-reductive physicalism insofar as the hylomorphist holds that there is no way to account for an intellectual form in even broadly physical terms.

To the question of whether hylomorphism is a kind of substance dualism, I respond that hylomorphism is not a substance dualism with respect to persons (and persons are usually the reference point when we're talking about dualism): hylomorphism holds that a person is a single substance, and though she is comprised of form and matter, neither is a substance in its own right while she is a substance. So we can call hylomorphism a kind of substance monism when it comes to persons.

Meanwhile, hylomorphism is a substance *pluralism* when we look at the broad metaphysical picture: there are innumerable kinds of substances in the universe. And while forms are never reducible to material forces and particles, they are also not ghostlike ethereal substances which are separate from the material objects they configure, and nor are most forms mental in nature. The distance between a hylomorphic account and a Cartesian one should be clear. There are more nuanced views available besides Cartesian substance dualism and reductive physicalism, but I use them as the two opposite poles around which to frame our discussion, since doing so helps to illustrate hylomorphism's unique claims.

Care should also be taken when speaking about hylomorphism and emergence. On the hylomorphic account, things are more than the sums of their parts: when they get configured as the substances which they are, new properties and causal powers *emerge* which were not properties of any of the constituent parts – for example, sensation in an animal is not a property of any of its parts, on the hylomorphic view. A new substance can emerge from a change in the arrangement of some matter, a change which is proximately due to a form's operation on that matter – and this can be a natural rather than supernatural process. So hylomorphism does posit a kind of emergence. However, it

is potentially misleading to apply the label “emergentist” to a hylomorphist, as Leftow does,⁴ given what contemporary literature in philosophy of mind usually means by emergentism. Emergentism today refers most often to the view that an immaterial and irreducible mental substance emerges from specific arrangements of physical particles, and this emergentism is a variation of Cartesian substance dualism. This kind of emergentism has little to do with hylomorphism.

Matter

Enough has now been said about classifying hylomorphic theories in general. Before moving on to a discussion of what is meant by “form,” it is necessary to make some points about matter. For the hylomorphist, it is impossible to describe matter at any length without reference to form, but let what has been said about form so far suffice as a reference point in the following comments on matter. The first thing to say about matter is that the hylomorphist understands it as mere potentiality, which requires form in order to be actualized and *be a thing*. Feser summarizes the traditional hylomorphic position on matter as follows:

the matter of a thing is essentially its *potential* to receive form, whereas the form of a material thing is what *actualizes* its matter so as to make of it a concrete thing of specific kind...It is because matter just is the potentiality to receive form that material things can perish, since a thing's matter is never “locked on” to the form of that thing. It is always ready in principle to take on some other form instead. If we abstract from our notion of matter *all* form, leaving nothing but the pure potential to receive form, we arrive at the idea of *prime matter*.⁵

⁴ Leftow, Brian. "Souls Dipped in Dust." *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, edited by Kevin Corcoran. Cornell University Press, 2001. 120-121.

⁵ Feser, 133.

Prime matter is defined as matter with no substantial form of its own; it is non-substance.⁶ For that reason it can never exist on its own or be encountered directly. It is always one step or “layer” below the form, the single form, that configures any given substance. But when that substantial form is displaced, a new substantial form (or more than one new substantial form) always replaces it within that matter, such that matter is never left unconfigured by some form or other. Unconfigured matter could not properly be said to exist, since substance is necessary for full-fledged being, on a hylomorphic account. So we can speak about prime matter conceptually as matter that’s not configured, but in fact all matter is configured by form and is therefore in a condition of substancehood. Prime matter underlies each material thing, but it never exists “bare” and “naked,” separated from any form or complete substance. We never encounter raw prime matter. The hylomorphist’s understanding raw matter as pure potentiality and as non-being is probably jarring for someone who has not encountered this position before: according to most of our intuitions, matter feels like the most solid and actual category of existence; the least tenuous and the least dependent upon anything else for its existence. But the hylomorphist insists that matter never stands alone – if it is actual, it has been enformed.

Form

Now it may be safe to proceed to the discussion of forms. This is *the* hard concept for hylomorphism in general. Hylomorphic theories might stand or fall depending on how well they can manage to explain what a form is and then employ that concept. I provided

⁶ Leftow, Brian. "Souls Dipped in Dust." *Soul, Body, and Survival: Essays on the Metaphysics of Human Persons*, edited by Kevin Corcoran. Cornell University Press, 2001. 136-137.

a brief characterization of the hylomorphist's understanding of forms in my introduction. Form is an identity-giving principle⁷ which actualizes some matter's potential for substancehood. "and together with the matter" form "composes a definite material substance or natural body."⁸ For a hylomorphist like Aquinas, "to be is to be configured or to have a form; and everything, material or immaterial, is what it is in virtue of a form."⁹ In contrast to a Platonic form, a form as understood by Aristotle and Aquinas is not an abstract entity, like a mere shape, arrangement, property or pattern. Nor, then, could a form be a universal like a genus. Nor is a form just a linguistic convention (like a special way of talking about matter) or a purely mental, and mind-dependent entity. A form is also not an activity. Rather, a form is a concrete particular which exists in the world, and it is *immanent* in the thing which it configures. And for Aristotle and Aquinas, forms are causes. They cause substances, like persons, to be the substances which they are. So the hylomorphist grants forms metaphysical priority over matter; forms govern and determine matter, in the most immediate sense.

I have said that a form is not a mere shape. But form is often described as shape, arrangement, organization, or configuration. Hylomorphists, Aristotle included, often write like this; in the Greek *morphe* is the word for both shape and form. So it will be helpful to investigate how these terms like "shape" and "arrangement" ought to be understood, as applied to Aristotelian and Thomistic forms. First, then, in what sense can a form be said to mean just "shape"?

⁷ Form is a principle in a special sense, but care must be taken when speaking this way. I take this up below.

⁸ Bernard Wuellner, S.J., *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co., 1956), 48.

⁹ Stump, 200.

It would be better and truer to the hylomorphist's purposes, I would contend, to say that form is a shape-maker or shape-giver; it configures some matter to look the way it does and to take the shape it does. This is because we typically understand "shape" as something abstract; not as a concrete particular which has causal power in itself, which literally causes a substance to be what it is – but this is what a form does, on the hylomorphic account. A form causes a thing to be the thing which it is; the form constitutes its very identity. So perhaps it is acceptable to speak of form as shape if we are speaking roughly, but if we are speaking precisely it will not be correct. There certainly exists a relationship between form and shape: the relationship is all-important since form is entirely responsible for shape, and there is no shape in all of existence which does not owe itself directly to form (whether accidental form, substantial form, or both).

Care must also be taken when speaking of a form as a principle, because one might understand a principle as something abstract and perhaps merely descriptive, and not causal. But, as has been said, a form is not like this. We can, however, say that form "is a 'principle' in the sense of being that from which the identity of the substance is derived — that *in virtue of which* the substance is what it is."¹⁰

Is a form to be understood as a configuration, or an arrangement? As "structure," "ordering," or the way in which something is put together? These terms go deeper than shape. I would answer that a form is these things, but it is also more. Stump considers "configuration" to be appropriate for what is meant by material forms generally, and uses

¹⁰ Oderberg, III.

“configuration” in her description of form.¹¹ However, I would still qualify the use of this term insofar as “configuration” or “arrangement” still suggests something abstract, or, if a particular, still not a particular which has the kind of causal power to order and configure that an Aristotelian form does. It is possible to avoid understanding the arrangement an abstract by considering the arrangement or configuration of a specific object not as an abstract pattern, but rather as a particular which belongs to the object. Nevertheless, this does not bring us all the way to what is meant by form. We think of a thing’s configuration as being due to something else, but not as being a cause of the thing itself, which is how we ought to understand form. For the form has agency of a certain kind; it makes Thing X to be X rather than something which was only potentially X. A mere structure or arrangement or organization, normally understood, would not be said to have this causal power. Yet form does have kinship with an arrangement or configuration insofar as an arrangement can be said to be the ordering of an object, and a form is responsible for such ordering. A form, then, could be said to be a structure, arrangement, or configuration with a certain type of agency: unlike a *mere* arrangement, it must also have the causal power to configure the thing which it configures. It is not only a thing’s ordering, but also its orderer.

Someone might ask further, is a form the same as a quiddity or essence? The answer depends on what we mean by those. Quiddity and essence might imply that we can reduce a thing to its quiddity or essence and it will still be the same thing. But according to the hylomorphist, we cannot reduce regular substances to their forms, stripping away their matter; they cease to be the things that they were. So form does not

¹¹ Stump, 194.

mean the same thing as essence or quiddity, understood in that way. On the other hand, if all that is meant by quiddity or essence is “that which makes the object what it is and gives it its identity,” then a form could be said to be a quiddity or essence.

One might wonder: does the act of creating or instantiating the substance X give rise to the form of X, whose being present then simultaneously brings X into being? Or should we say instead that creating X causes the form of X to be present since it must be, given that X was brought into being? Which is “logically prior,” if any: the form or the complete substance? The answer seems to be that in almost all cases, the form and the complete substance are caused together; they are logically and temporally simultaneous. The matter which is to be configured bears within itself the potential for certain forms, and causes which affect that matter can cause a form and substance to come about.

Leftow puts it like this:

How do these "forms" come to be? Thomas writes that substantial forms preexist in the potency of matter: “The sensible and vegetable soul are drawn from the potency of matter, just like other forms whose production requires a power transforming matter.”

For Thomas, causes "draw" new forms from matter's resources. They alter the matter's quantity and qualities, shaping it, making it hotter, colder, wetter, dryer. Thus they bring it into new states (heat, moistness), which naturally emerge in it. These changes "dispose" matter for a new substantial form. Given the right quantities and qualities, the form supervenes.¹²

One distinction which is relevant in this section is the distinction between substantial forms and accidental forms. “A substantial form is the form in virtue of which a material composite is a member of the species to which it belongs, and it configures prime matter” – thereby configuring matter into a complete substance.¹³ The roughly-

¹² Leftow, 121.

¹³ Stump, 194.

Thomistic hylomorphic views I discuss in this paper hold that a given substance has one and only one substantial form.¹⁴ Oderberg drives home the point:

Substantial form *permeates* the entirety of the substance that possesses it, not merely *horizontally* in its parts —there is as much dogginess in Fido's nose and tail as in Fido as a whole—but also *vertically*, down to the very chemical elements that constitute Fido's living flesh.¹⁵

In contrast to substantial form, an accidental form modifies an existing substance without rendering it a different species of substance. For example, being-seated is an accident of the substance Socrates. Another example of an accident would be an injury; the injured creature is still the same substance as it was prior to its injury. Here is Feser on the subject:

If we abstract from our notion of matter *all* form, leaving nothing but the pure potential to receive form, we arrive at the idea of *prime matter*. Matter having some form or other is *secondary matter*. There is a corresponding distinction between kinds of form. A form which makes of prime matter a concrete *substance* of a certain kind is a *substantial form*. A form which merely modifies some secondary matter - matter which already has a substantial form - is an *accidental form*.¹⁶

Note that accidental form can only configure what is already a substance (a single accidental form may configure several substances at once); accidental form supervenes on substances. Accidental forms do not confer new substances on the material that they configure. In contrast, substantial forms do confer new substancehood upon the material that they configure, “driving out” the earlier substantial form(s) in the process.

¹⁴ Ibid., 195.

¹⁵ Oderberg, IV.

¹⁶ Feser, 133.

Here I should point out the distinction between real substances and artifacts. *Artifacts* are objects which, in a hylomorphic framework, are not truly things in themselves: an artifact lacks a substantial form for itself and is “held together” by an accidental form, supervening on several substances which are already themselves configured by substantial form. Most human tools and buildings are examples of artifacts. A thing counts as a true substance, in contrast to an artifact, “when, in its mature and normal state, it exhibits certain properties and causal powers that are irreducible to those of its parts,” and it is in this sense that a human being, for instance, is a true substance.¹⁷ Feser gives us a helpful example to clarify the difference between substance and artifact. Imagine that Tarzan makes a hammock from some liana vines. A vine’s parts “have an inherent tendency to function together to allow the vine to exhibit the growth patterns it does, to take in water and nutrients, and so forth,”¹⁸ and this natural ordering toward self-completion is one way that we can tell that a vine is a substance, whose matter is configured by a substantial form. In contrast, the hammock has no such natural ordering principle and its parts have no natural tendency to comprise the hammock – Tarzan had to interfere with them and force them to do so. Tarzan imposed the structure and function of the hammock upon the parts of the hammock. This is how we can tell that the hammock is not a true substance and that it has, therefore, an accidental rather than a substantial form. The substantial forms of the vines remain in the hammock; the accidental form of the hammock modifies them but does not thereby eliminate them. For

¹⁷ Feser, 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*,133.

our purposes enough has now been said about the distinction between substance and artifact.

Another important distinction which hylomorphic theories employ is that between material forms and subsistent forms. *Material forms* are configurational states which have the causal power to actualize a substance in some matter. These are the forms of most regular substances, including plant and animal souls; these inform non-human material objects.¹⁹ But there are also *subsistent forms*, which are immaterial rather than material, and can exist independently of matter; they exist without configuring matter – for a Thomistic hylomorphist an angel would be an appropriate example of a subsistent form.²⁰ And a subsistent form is itself configured; it has an ordering and arrangement of its own.²¹

A human soul is one kind of subsistent form, but it is unique among subsistent forms insofar as it does configure matter in addition to having its own configuration, even though it does not need to configure matter in order to exist. The human soul is also not fully immaterial, but only partially so, on the Aristotelian view. The bulk of this discussion will take place below. For the present, we will have to grapple with the fact that most forms are material forms, and try to unpack what this might mean.

When it is said that a form is a material form, does this mean that the form has mass and spatial extension? Can we cut such a form into parts or pieces, as we could cut most material things? Affirmative answers to these questions would spell trouble for

¹⁹ Stump, 198.

²⁰ Hasker, William. "A Critique of Thomistic Dualism." In *Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism*, edited by Jonathan J. Loose, Angus J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland. Wiley, 2018.

²¹ Stump, 199-200.

hylomorphists. Since the form of a squirrel, for instance, must configure the entire squirrel, this form would have to have the same volume as the squirrel. But we have said that the form of a substance is not identical with the complete substance. This means that, where the squirrel is, there would be two entities with the exact same volume occupying the exact same space – these two entities being the material form and the complete substance. We could run something similar with other material properties like mass, and arrive at similar consequences.

The hylomorphist takes these consequences to be absurd. So it can't be the case that, on a hylomorphic account, "material form" means something which has properties such as mass and extension. The best way to resolve the issue is to say that a material form is not matter, and it does not have such properties as volume, mass, or divisibility into parts. Nor does a material form consist in sheer potentiality, as the hylomorphist says that matter does. Instead, a material form is called a material form because it configures a material thing, and because this material form has nothing immaterial about it, such as intellect.²² So material forms deserve to be described as material in a different sense than complete material substances do. This response to the problem of a form's materiality risks making a form seem more like an abstract entity rather than a concrete particular, a proposition which is not acceptable to a hylomorphist. Alternatively, it might make material form feel immaterial somehow, since it acts and configures without being made of matter – also unacceptable. I would acknowledge this as a difficulty for hylomorphic theories. When it comes to such details, the concept of form seems to lose some

²² The traditional hylomorphist understands intellect as an immaterial power; this will come up later in this chapter and in the next.

resolution. But since the hylomorphist admitted from the start that form is a basic concept and it can only be explained so far, let us press forward anyway.

Turning to another question, in what sense can a form be part of a thing? It is correct in some sense to say that form and matter are each parts of a whole thing, but perhaps not in the sense that we usually use. The form is what it takes to make a whole; to make a thing – a form is what defines wholeness and thingness. That is not true of “parts” as we normally use the term; ordinary parts partake in generating whole-thingness, but do not define what wholeness means for the thing of which they are a part.

Eleonore Stump’s answer is that

a form is not an “integral” part of a thing in the way that walls and a roof are parts of a house; rather, “a form is a part of a whole only as a metaphysical part. As a metaphysical part of this sort, a form could not interact causally with the matter it informs...[but in fact,] the form has causal influence in the sense that the composite has the causal influence it does because of its form.”²³

Oderberg’s answer to the question of whether a form is a “constituent part” runs as follows:

It is a "constituent" in the sense of being a real part or element of [a substance], though not on the same level as the substance's natural parts, for example, the branch of a tree or the leg of a dog; rather, it is a radical or fundamental part of the substance in the sense of constituting it *as* the kind of substance it is. It is a "principle" in the sense of being that from which the identity of the substance is derived — that *in virtue of which* the substance is what it is.²⁴

I articulated what the hylomorphist thinks of the independent existence of matter when I discussed prime matter. What, then, does the hylomorphist think about the

²³ Stump, 210.

²⁴ Oderberg, David S. “Hylemorphic Dualism.” In *Personal Identity*, edited by Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

independent existence of forms, in general? This will be a difficult question to answer, and the attempt will also involve clarification of what is meant by the existence of matter without form. I begin with Stump's position. Stump holds that, unlike subsistent forms, material forms do not exist on their own, apart from the matter which they configure.²⁵ Subsistent forms, meanwhile, are complete substances or not depending on what kind of subsistent form they are. The subsistent form of an angel is a substance, as the angel just is that subsistent form. A subsistent form of a human, however, will not be a complete substance in its own right.²⁶ However, Aristotle's *De Anima* reads as follows near the beginning of Book II: "we say that one genus among the things that exist is substance: one type as matter, which is not in virtue of itself an individual; another as shape or form, in virtue of which a thing is straight away called an individual; and a third as a compound of these. Matter is potentiality, while form is actualization..."²⁷ This description suggests that there are three types of substance: matter-by-itself, form-by-itself, and a compound which culminates in a complete individual thing.

I would argue that this suggestion is a quirk of the language, and that hylomorphists, Aristotle included, generally employ "substance" to denote this third category: a complete, individual thing – and not matter or form by themselves. In ordinary cases concerning material objects, matter-by-itself and form-by-itself are not possible for a hylomorphist; they are only separable from the complete substance in word, i.e. account or definition, but not in reality. With a few exceptions like prime

²⁵ Stump, 209.

²⁶ Ibid. We have not yet discussed souls in depth, but I mention this here because it is relevant to understanding forms generally.

²⁷ Aristotle. *On the Soul*. Translated by Fred D. Miller, Jr. Oxford University Press, 2018. 411b.6-10; p.21.

matter, angels' souls, and the productive or agent intellect of a human soul (which will come under discussion in the next section), we only speak of "matter by itself" and "form by itself" with reference to the original substance under investigation, which, together, this matter and form comprised.

So we could say that "matter-by-itself" denotes matter without the form of the original thing that we were considering, but it is never truly formless, if it really exists. This yields one limited sense in which matter can be substance, as the quote from Aristotle has suggested. It comes down to the way we are speaking and making our references: for Aristotle, matter is always matter *of* something.²⁸ So, some wood which is the matter of a tree is not tree-substance without the form of the tree, but it is still substance when separated from that form of the tree – just different substance, namely wood-substance. This wood-substance is matter-by-itself with reference to the form of the tree, which it lacks, but it is not matter-by-itself absolutely.

We say that matter is only potential being and not actual being, and that form is actualization (or substance is actualization by way of form).²⁹ That's right, if we mean the following. The matter of a substance like a tree is, without the form of the tree, only potentially the tree. This captures the sense in which matter is only potential being. However, this same matter is not potentially, but actually, something else, namely some

²⁸ Ainsworth, Thomas, "Form vs. Matter", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016.

²⁹ One may ask, why is it that hylomorphic theories hold that both the form and the substance of some thing are the "actualization" of that thing? The answer is that if the form of S is present in a place, then S is actual, there – and if the substance S is present there, then S is actual there. This is why both form and substance have been referred to as actualization.

wood if the substance in question is a tree.³⁰ Matter is only potential being, but that is spoken with respect to a particular substance S whose form does not presently configure this matter of which we are speaking. With respect to a different substance, Q, this matter is actual being –with respect to this substance it cannot be spoken of as “just matter” or mere potentiality, since with respect to this substance Q this matter is configured by the corresponding form: it is not “matter by itself” as it is with respect to substance S, whose form it lacks. Since prime matter never exists by itself, all matter will *be* through form, as substance. But we can now see what is meant by talk of matter-by-itself.

Another potential confusion lurks: one might dispute Stump’s claim that material forms do not exist on their own by invoking Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, wherein he states that “no one makes or begets the form,” and it is not the form but the individual complex of form and matter, i.e. the substance, which comes to be and ceases to be.³¹ Aristotle thus implies that substantial forms are eternal and imperishable: substantial forms exist independently of their substances, even if these forms are material and not subsistent forms. But Stump holds that material forms come into being contemporaneously with the particular substances they configure, and to go out of existence with the substances they configure.³² And Feser sides with Stump about this perishability, claiming that it would be very mysterious for an Aristotelian hylomorphist to say that “the form of a substance persists after the substance has gone out of existence.”³³ Yet Aristotle himself has

³⁰ Or it might be some pre-tree organic matter rather than wood, depending on whether we are speaking prior to or posterior to the advent of the form of the tree.

³¹ Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Richard McKeon. The Modern Library, 2001. 1043b.15-17. 815.

³² Stump, 201.

³³ Feser, 144.

attributed permanence to forms. How can we resolve this? I think the solution turns upon the difference between a kind or species of form, on the one hand, and an individual and particular form on the other: I suggest that we understand the former as imperishable and the latter as perishable. Stump was writing of particular forms when she attributed perishability to them. So long as Aristotle was referring to kind or species of substantial form, rather than individual forms, when he said that no one makes or begets forms, his position and Stump's are compatible.³⁴ Further research might investigate the question of the perishability or imperishability of material forms, but the inconclusive treatment just given will have to suffice here.

Some readers may have sensed a difficulty in articulating what a form is; at worst, form almost feels like a theoretical posit which has been designed in order to make an arbitrary view coherent. It might feel as if there's no analogous concept that one can connect to a form, so as to make intuitive sense of form. The hylomorphist can respond that this is simply the way it is. There is no good analogy to a form because a form is an irreducible part of existence, just like matter is. Forms do not reduce to anything else or admit of easy analogy because they are a basic posit, like matter is for most of us. You wouldn't ask for an analogy to help you understand matter; you take it as given – at least provisionally. It might be worth trying to do the same with form, and to approach the concept on its own terms.

³⁴ As evidence in support of this interpretation, I refer to *Metaphysics* 1049b.18-23: Aristotle's "other actually existing things" which precede their substances can only be the substantial forms of the substances named. But these prior things, substantial forms, are what Aristotle referred to as "the actual which is identical in species though not in number." So it seems like it is the species of substantial form, and not a particular substantial form, which is prior to a particular substance and which is eternal and imperishable.

Soul, body, and persons

Though not all ambiguities about forms have been resolved, I hope that the above treatment of form has provided enough clarity to move on to a specific kind of form: a soul. As Feser puts it, “the word “soul” is in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy essentially a technical term for the substantial form of a living thing.”³⁵ According to Aristotle, a soul is what makes a thing alive.³⁶ And “the body is not the actualization of the soul, but the soul is the actualization of some body.”³⁷ It is clear that objects like bowls and rocks won’t have souls, even though they have substantial forms. However, soul will not be restricted to intelligent beings either. According to a hylomorphist like Aquinas,

A plant has a soul in virtue of the fact that it has a configuration of matter which allows for nutrition, growth, reproduction, and other sorts of activities common to living things. Non-human animals have souls, since they, too, are living things; but the configuration of their matter allows them an operation not possible for plants, namely, perception. Unlike human souls, the souls of plants and non-human animals are nonetheless material forms, and even a material form that is a soul goes out of existence when the material composite it configures goes out of existence.³⁸

If Stump is right to claim that particular material forms are perishable, most souls will be mortal. And even if she is wrong and substantial material forms are imperishable, the animals which these material souls configure will perish when their souls are separated from their matter. Early in Book II of *De Anima*, Aristotle submits that a soul “is substance in the sense which corresponds to the definitive formula of a thing's essence.

³⁵ Feser, 141.

³⁶ Aristotle. *On the Soul*. Trans. Miller. 413a.20-21. 23.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 414a.17-20. 25.

³⁸ Stump, 201.

That means that it is 'the essential whatness' of a body of the character just assigned."³⁹ If this soul, this essential whatness of a given organism, disappeared from the organism, the organism would cease to be an organism except in name. And since a soul comprises the essential whatness of a living thing, it must be the bearer of the living thing's defining attributes and powers. Aristotle holds that, for animals with the following faculties,

knowing, perceiving, and believing do belong to the soul, however, along with having appetite, wishing, and the desires generally. Also, animals undergo movement in place by means of the soul, as well as growth, maturity, and decline.⁴⁰

The soul is the principle of the things we have mentioned and is defined by them: namely, the faculties of nutrition, perception, and cognition, as well as movement.⁴¹

So the soul of a human person will be intellective in its character, intellection being a distinctive power of the human substance. A person will in fact be defined as an animal with a rational, intellective soul.⁴² However, it is only partially correct, on this view, to say that the intellect is the form of the person. For Aristotle and Aquinas, the form of the person encompasses more than the intellect; it also encompasses the lower animal functions such as growth, nutrition and sense perception. The intellect is the predominant feature of the human soul, but not its only one. In *De Anima*, Aristotle further distinguishes the *affective*, or *possible intellect* from the *productive* or *agent intellect*: the former passively receives potential knowledge and "images," receiving and even becoming the forms of the objects of thought. Meanwhile, the productive, agent intellect

³⁹ Aristotle, *On the Soul*. Trans. Smith. II.1. 412b.10-11.

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *On the Soul*. Trans. Miller. 411a.25-30. 19.

⁴¹ Ibid., 413b.10-13. 24.

⁴² Feser, 135. Leftow, 134.

actively makes potential knowledge actual by combining what the possible intellect has received and stored.⁴³ So not only is the active intellect not the entirety of the human soul; it is not even the entirety of the intellect.

Note also that the substance which is a person is not the same thing as the substantial form, the soul, of that person. The substantial form of the person generated or gave rise to the substance which is the person, but is not identical with it. A person is, in other words, not just his form, his soul – at least under normal conditions. As with all forms, the human soul makes the substance it constitutes that substance, a human person, which it is:

the arrival of the human soul "turns" the matter from which a human would come into matter in which a human exists, nonhuman tissue into human, and as Thomas sees it, not one bit of that human tissue had been there before the soul arrived. Of course, this "creation" is not ex nihilo...⁴⁴

A body, meanwhile, is simply defined as the matter of a living thing, while it is living and being configured by a soul. But some clarification is in order:

Aquinas thinks that when we use the names of the living body and its parts for the dead body and its parts, we use those words equivocally. The soul is the substantial form of the human body, and death separates it from the matter it previously organized...At death, the soul is replaced with a different, non-animating substantial form. The matter of the body is then configured in a substantially different way and so has a form different from the one it had before death. That is why the body can be called 'a human body' only equivocally even immediately after death.⁴⁵

⁴³ Aristotle, *On the Soul*. Trans. Miller. 430a.10-22. 57.

⁴⁴ Leftow, 128.

⁴⁵ Stump, 194-195.

A body is not just any sort of matter. Hylomorphic views define “body” as matter that belongs to a living animal, and an animal is defined in reference to a specific kind of form, a soul, that enables the substance it configures to conduct vegetation, nutrition, sensation, and so on – and such a form is not present, when the former animal is dead. So there can be no “body” there, properly speaking. By definition, a body is matter which is being configured by a soul, in the present tense. The term “body” refers only to the matter, however, and not in addition to the soul which is doing the configuring, and for this reason “body” is not synonymous with “living substance,” or “person” in the case of humans. It is therefore incorrect to identify a person with his body, even though “body” is defined by reference to soul.

Stump finds something redundant about describing a person as a composite of soul and body, since “there is a living human body only when matter is configured by the form that is the soul.”⁴⁶ This would be like saying that a person = soul + (soul + matter), she suggests. However, I think that I am right in claiming that the term “body” does not denote the soul at all as part of its own reference, even though it presupposes the soul and there is no body without soul. So describing a human as a composite of soul and body is acceptable, even though the use of the term “body” does assume that the composition already exists. It remains true, as Stump notices, that body does not stand to soul exactly as raw matter stands to form.

To take up another semantic issue, I believe that it can be correct to say both that “the soul is the form of the person” and “the soul is the form of the body.” These statements are not synonymous, but both are true. The difference is that a soul is a

⁴⁶ Ibid., 203.

constituent of a complete substance, but not a constituent of a body. In each case, however, the soul is the form which is related to the latter term and makes it what it is.

I should also point out that, on a hylomorphic view, since a soul is *in* an organism just as all forms are in the things which they configure, the soul goes where the organism's body goes. Further, "considered with regard to the wholeness of essence, for instance, the whole soul is entirely in each part of the body, just as whiteness is entirely in each part of a completely white thing," though the operations of the soul remain localized in various parts of the body.⁴⁷ So the hylomorphist has an answer to the question of where souls are located spatially while they are configuring matter.

It would be evasive to conclude this section on souls, bodies, and persons without addressing the following question: In what sense, or to what extent, is it correct to say that a person is a material thing? Leftow, for instance, attributes to Aquinas the belief that "though a human soul is an immaterial thing, each human is one material thing, not a complex of a soul and a material thing. And yet that material thing is just a soul draped in primary matter."⁴⁸

This flat or unqualified suggestion that a person is a material thing is even stranger given that Leftow's version of hylomorphism treats the whole human soul as immaterial. As will be seen, not all versions do. We are about to enter some deeper water. The question of whether a person is a material thing will connect to a debate among hylomorphists about whether a person survives the death of her body. In the next chapter,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁸ Leftow, 120.

I take up the differences and disagreements between proponents of Aristotelian-Thomistic hylomorphism.

There is a potential controversy about personal composition which I want to dissolve preemptively, if I can.⁴⁹ Aquinas says that “man is composed of a spiritual and a corporeal substance.”⁵⁰ But elsewhere he writes, “soul and body are not two actually existent substances. Rather, from the two come one actually existing substance.”⁵¹ What are we to make of this? One option is to interpret the first statement as having been spoken somewhat loosely and imprecisely, and to interpret the latter statement as Aquinas’s true position, and the one which is most suitable for a traditional version of hylomorphism. Alternatively, we could take the first statement to mean that a person’s matter and form would each be substances in their own right if they were not conjoined – however, while they are conjoined so as to constitute the complete person, neither can be a substance in its own right, since Thomistic hylomorphism holds that only one substantial form obtains within a substance at a given time. Either way, the apparent disparity between these two statements need not make serious trouble for hylomorphism.

⁴⁹ This controversy also connects to the question about matter-by-itself and form-by-itself.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Ypsilanti, MI: NovaAntiqua, 2009. I, q.75, a.1.

⁵¹ Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa contra gentiles*. Turin: Marietti, 1909. I 69, 164.

CHAPTER THREE

Variants of Hylomorphism, Differences about Thought, and Corruptionism versus Survivalism

In this chapter I explore the some of the important contrasts between the positions which roughly-Thomistic hylomorphists take. These disputes will revolve around the subject of the soul's immateriality and its intellective faculty, and by examining them we will encounter a challenge for hylomorphism consisting in the question of where to locate thought and intellection. By this route we will come to the debate over corruptionism and survivalism.

Thought, and the materiality or immateriality of the soul

Leftow and Oderberg both consider the human soul to be completely immaterial.¹ Yet they diverge from each other insofar as Oderberg takes the exercise of rational thought to be “an essentially immaterial operation,”² conducted directly by the soul, and Leftow in contrast holds that thought must transpire in material bodies. While Leftow submits that, for Aquinas and thus for an “authentic” hylomorphism, thinking and intellection do not take place in any bodily organ, and a person does think by virtue of a soul, Leftow denies that Aquinas believes intellection to take place within the soul:

All a Form "does" to its bearer is *be* there. For Thomas too, all my soul "does" to me, in enlivening me, is *be* there—in other words, it is just what Thomas thinks is

¹ Leftow, 131. Oderberg, David S. “Hylemorphic Dualism.” In *Personal Identity*, edited by Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul. Cambridge University Press, 2005. I.

² Oderberg, I., V.

present to account for my having certain powers. Thomas does speak of the soul as doing certain things – understanding, moving the body, and so forth – but he does so only because he has a paraphrase to hand: "the eye ... cannot be said ... to act through itself the parts' acts are ascribed to the whole through the parts: we say that the human sees through the eye So it can be said that the soul understands, as that the eye sees, but it is more properly said that the human understands through the soul."³

Thus, according to Leftow, there is little or no room for incorporeal human activities or immaterial intellectual powers: on his view souls are thoroughly immaterial, but they do not directly conduct the operations of intellection and understanding – these must be left to the body, though not to any particular organ, even though they ultimately take place by virtue of a rational soul's configuring that body. What this means is that no intellective power can survive when the soul is separated – not even in an attenuated degree.

Leftow's position is partly compatible with Stump's insofar as Stump holds that all human cognitive functions, including intellective function, are implemented in the body.⁴ However, unlike Leftow, Stump believes that the soul can perform limited cognitive functions apart from the body. She also does not commit to the proposition that the entire human soul is fully immaterial.

Meanwhile, Oderberg's account contradicts Stump's and Leftow's because on his view, the soul by itself is responsible for higher level cognitive functions. He understands the human soul as being purely rational and intellective: the form which is a person's soul, according to Oderberg, "just is the person's rational nature."⁵ This is a departure from the Aristotelian position insofar as the latter held the soul to encompass nutrition

³ Leftow, 132.

⁴ Stump, 210.

⁵ Oderberg, III.

and sensation as well; according to Aristotle, the form is not *just* the person's rational nature. I discussed the reason in chapter 2.

Since Oderberg holds that a human soul, his substantial form, consists in his rational nature, and since Oderberg insists that the exercise of rationality is an immaterial operation, he concludes that the human soul must be fully immaterial.⁶

He communicates his position as follows:

The hylemorphic theory is dualistic with respect to the analysis of *all* material substances without exception, since it holds that they are all composites of primordial matter and substantial form. When it comes to persons, however, the theory has a special account. The soul of Fido, for instance, is wholly material—all of Fido's organic and mental operations are material, inasmuch as they have an analysis in wholly material terms. The soul of a person, on the other hand, is wholly immaterial, the argument for this being that a person has at least some mental operations that are not wholly explicable in material terms—and we can deduce what a thing's nature is from the way it necessarily acts or behaves. If, however, some such operations are not wholly materially explicable, the soul itself cannot be anything other than wholly immaterial because there is no sense in postulating a soul that is a mixture of the material and the immaterial.

To take the last point first, if the soul were a mixture of the material and immaterial it would be subject to contrary properties: qua material it would have spatiotemporal characteristics, qua immaterial it would not; qua material it would have parts, qua immaterial it would not; qua material it would be divisible, qua immaterial it would not.⁷

Clearly Oderberg's and Leftow's positions are not the original, Aristotelian hylemorphic position, though that need not be an objection. For, as I illustrated last chapter, Aristotle does not think the soul is completely immaterial. Aristotle, Leftow, Stump, and Feser would agree with Oderberg's claim that a person's mental operations are not fully explicable in material terms – a full explanation of rational thought will always involve reference to an immaterial form. Feser, for instance, maintains that “rationality is

⁶ Oderberg, I.

⁷ Ibid., V.

essentially incorporeal.”⁸ But Stump and Feser, and certainly Aristotle, might wonder what is so senseless about postulating a soul that is in some sense a mixture of the material and the immaterial. Oderberg might respond that positing a mixed soul (in any sense that has to do with materiality and immateriality) risks making the soul a composite thing, made up of parts which are separable not only in concept or account, but also in fact. And this is exactly where the Aristotelian view ends up; it posits the literal separability of the agent intellect from the possible intellect.⁹ But this conclusion does violence to the intuition that a soul, a kind of form, is unified, singular and irreducible, like other forms seem to be. So the view of the soul as completely immaterial is not without its advantages.

Unlike both Leftow and Oderberg, neither Stump nor Feser commits to the proposition that the soul is completely immaterial. And Stump and Feser strike a course between Leftow and Oderberg concerning intellection: Stump and Feser both disbelieve that the soul conducts all a person’s intellectual operations in itself, independently of the body, as Oderberg has it – instead, they hold that intellectual operations are realized in the body by the soul. But Stump and Feser both maintain that the soul possesses limited intellectual powers in its own right, contradicting Leftow.

Here, in summary, are some alternatives for hylomorphists concerning the subject of where human thought takes place:

⁸ Feser, 140.

⁹ Aristotle. *On the Soul*. Trans. Miller. 430a.15-24. 57-58.

- a) Thinking happens in the soul; the soul is responsible for higher-level thinking, though it may fall to the brain, or the body in general, to conduct lower cognitive functions.
- b) Thinking happens in the body, though still by virtue of, or *through* a soul.
- c) Thinking happens in the whole human substance; we should say therefore that “the person thinks” rather than “the soul thinks” or “the brain thinks”

Oderberg vouches for a). Leftow subscribes to b). Stump and Feser affirm c).¹⁰

However, someone sympathetic to Oderberg’s view might point out that there is something infelicitous about c) since it is counterintuitive to think that the whole human substance participates in thinking; for instance, my fingers and knees do not seem to be involved in the way that I assume my brain to be. Most people, physicalists and dualists alike, have the intuition that something more specific than the whole person is performing the act of thought, whether that something is a mind or a material brain – and if that’s the case, then that something, and not the whole person, would be the best subject for the predication of thought. Leftow’s position b) suffers from a similar vulnerability insofar as he prohibits predicating thought to any particular bodily organ, even though he argues that thought is a bodily operation.

This discussion of intellection and the immateriality of the soul brings us back to an issue I sidelined earlier. At the end of the last chapter I flagged the question of whether or not it is accurate to call persons “material substances.” From the present vantage, we are equipped to state some answers. Feser’s account resists a conception of persons as material substances; Feser holds that a human substance is corporeal in some respects and

¹⁰ Feser, 137 and 144. Stump, 203 and 212.

incorporeal in others, and this makes a human dramatically different from a paradigmatic material substance.¹¹ Leftow on the other hand makes a point of calling persons material substances and attributes the position to Aquinas.¹² Stump calls persons material substances,¹³ but may not mean the same thing as Leftow. Oderberg, for his part, would have to deny that a person is a material substance since he identifies a person essentially with an immaterial rational soul. The answers given to the question of whether a person is a material substance will bear upon our next subject, the dispute over corruption and survival.

Corruptionism versus survivalism

Fractures within the hylomorphist camp about the immateriality of the soul and about thought and intellection bring us to the most important dispute among hylomorphists. This concerns the question of whether persons survive the death of their bodies; whether persons persist between death and a general resurrection: this is the debate between corruptionism and survivalism. Feser frames the debate as follows. Corruptionism “holds that at death the human being ceases to exist until the resurrection, even though the soul carries on. The other view is called survivalism, and it holds that the human being persists in existence after death and even before the resurrection, though only as constituted by his soul.”¹⁴

¹¹ Feser, 132 and 142.

¹² Leftow, 120 and 136.

¹³ Stump, 201.

¹⁴ Feser, 143.

Hylomorphists will all agree with each other that immaterial human souls, or immaterial parts of souls, will survive death. But they disagree about whether what survives is enough to constitute a person. For, even though it still is an inherently and characteristically intellectual thing, the surviving soul lacks most of the “equipment” for thought – it has been cut off from the ability to receive new sense information; it has presumably been cut off from memory, from its storage of concepts, from its ability to generate new mental images, and so on. On the Aristotelian account, the kind of intellectual activity which the separated soul can conduct will be highly attenuated, or perhaps even nonexistent. In my last chapter I pointed out how Aristotle distinguished the productive, agent intellect from the affective, possible intellect. What I have not yet mentioned is that Aristotle holds only the productive, agent intellect to be immaterial and immortal, capable of existing without the rest of a person. Meanwhile, “thought which is capable of being affected is perishable, and, without this, nothing thinks.”¹⁵ Whatever part of the intellect survives, then, can perform intellectual operations in an extremely limited capacity, if at all. The surviving agent intellect has little or nothing to work with, when separated from the possible intellect, which is what receives and stores information and concepts.

For this reason, the corruptionist would say that, while a characteristically-intellectual type of thing does survive death, the power and activity of intellection does not survive, at least not to a sufficient extent. Intellection ceases upon death, mostly if not altogether. The corruptionist claims that this state of being is not sufficient for personhood, and so persons do not exist without living bodies. The corruptionist affirms

¹⁵ Aristotle. *On the Soul*. Trans. Miller. 430a.24-25. 58.

the return of the person in bodily resurrection, but denies that the person exists between death and resurrection.

The survivalist, meanwhile, grants that intellection after death can only transpire in a diminished and attenuated capacity. However, the survivalist believes that the death of the person does not destroy the power or the activity of intellection, because intellection is grounded in the surviving, immaterial soul. Intellection during death would still be limited, but it would be sufficient for the truth of the proposition that person survives death.

According to the corruptionist, it is incorrect to speak of the soul as the complete essence of a person; according to the corruptionist, both soul and body are essential for the person's being a person. A corruptionist version of hylomorphism still considers the human soul to be immaterial or partly-immaterial, but it nonetheless insists that you understand the person as a material substance, or at least as a substance that cannot continue to exist without matter.

We can see now that one's answer to the question about whether a person is a material thing will determine one's view about corruption and survival. If you are a hylomorphist who believes that a person is a material thing, then you will end up a corruptionist. For a surviving soul is an immaterial thing, and so cannot be a person if a person is necessarily a material thing. This is Leftow's position. If, in contrast, you believe that a person is essentially his rational nature, and that his surviving immaterial soul just *is* his rational nature, then you will be a survivalist like Oderberg: since human nature is essentially immaterial, "it does not depend for its existence on being united to matter... So a person is capable of existing, by means of his rational nature, which is

traditionally called the soul, independently of the existence of his body.”¹⁶ If you believe that a person is a mixed substance but that he can, in a minimal condition, persist or subsist as something immaterial, then you could be a survivalist of Feser’s kind.

Stump’s position is somewhat more difficult to place. Interpreting Aquinas, she takes the view that a separated soul is a “subsistent thing,” something which is able to exist on its own, but she holds nonetheless that a soul cannot subsist as a complete substance.¹⁷ A soul is only a part¹⁸ of a complete human being and it lacks the complete nature of the species, and so it “cannot be called a hypostasis or a person.”¹⁹ “The disembodied soul which persists is not the complete human being who was the composite but only a part of that human being,” and “the disembodied soul after death is consequently something like the mirror image of a human being who is in a persistent vegetative state.”²⁰ The soul’s disembodied state is thus an unnatural and impermanent condition. It is “contrary to the nature of the soul to be without the body.”²¹

Since Stump, following Aquinas, has denied that a surviving soul can be called a person in the strictest sense, her view comes close to corruptionism. However, it is possible to understand her position as a modest or qualified survivalism, because on the account she articulates “the disembodied soul still has its intellect and will, as well as

¹⁶ Oderberg, I.

¹⁷ Stump, 209.

¹⁸ Again, this language of “parts” should be understood in the sense which I explained in chapter 2.

¹⁹ Stump, 209.

²⁰ Stump, 211.

²¹ Ibid.

other divinely aided cognitive faculties,” and so “it is in fact appropriate to address the soul of Peter as ‘Peter’.”²² Per Stump, what survives is not a person in the strictest sense, but it is close enough.

Feser holds the survivalist line, and contends that a human substance, a person, persists beyond death. In his first of three arguments in favor of survivalism and against corruptionism, he contends that, because “the human being is the substance of which the soul is a form,”

if the human being ceases to exist at death, then that means that the substance of which the soul is the form ceases to exist at death. And in that case, how could the soul carry on? How could a form exist apart from the substance of which it is the form? Corruptionism seems to make Aquinas's position as incoherent as its critics accuse it of being. But survivalism does not have this problem, precisely because it does *not* say that the human being ceases to exist at death.²³

Thus, according to Feser, the soul can persist beyond the death of the body only “because the substance that the human soul is the form of persists beyond the death of the body.”²⁴ Not the soul only, but also the substance of which the soul is the form, continues to exist after death – just without the corporeal features which it used to possess.²⁵

Stump does not seem to avail herself of this argument, and so she holds that what survives death cannot be called a person in the strictest sense – it is just a soul, and not substance, which survives, on the view she presents. Overall, however, there is less distance between Stump’s position and Feser’s than this divergence might suggest. While

²² Ibid.

²³ Feser, 144.

²⁴ Ibid., 143.

²⁵ Ibid., 144. There is a danger here: Feser’s supposition of an incorporeal substance which a human soul configures and is not identical to, steers close to the substance dualist’s territory.

Feser believes that human substance survives and Stump denies this, they agree that *complete* human substance does not survive. Feser's position accords with Stump's in its emphasis on the unnaturalness of the soul's condition in its disembodied state: "the human being qua disembodied soul is *not* in his normal state;"²⁶ rather, the human person qua disembodied soul is an incomplete substance, one which survives in a "radically impaired state."²⁷ Thus, Feser would deny that human nature survives death in full, and for this reason Feser's survivalism contrasts to Oderberg's. Even though Oderberg holds that in death, the human soul "might exist in an imperfect state, since it cannot, for instance, perform acts of sensation that require material stimuli and the formation of mental images,"²⁸ Oderberg asserts that the soul of a person just is that person's nature, and that the soul, being immaterial, survives death in full. This means that complete human nature survives death.²⁹

I have now mapped some territory in the debate over corruption and survival, but I have not laid out the arguments for either side in much detail. I turn, then, to Feser's second and third arguments against corruptionism. Feser credits Oderberg for his second argument, which runs as follows:

on both the survivalist view and the corruptionist view, the intellect survives the death of the body and thought occurs as well (albeit only with divine assistance since the intellect's normal corporeal sources of information are gone). But if

²⁶ Ibid., 145.

²⁷ Ibid., 144.

²⁸ Oderberg, VI.

²⁹ Note, however, that Oderberg still holds that in normal conditions, "the soul is not the person. The person is the human being, the substantial compound of matter and form. A person is an individual substance of a rational nature, but the soul is not such a substance — for it *is* the rational nature, not a substance *with* a rational nature. Hence, the fundamental flaw in the Cartesian conception of the person is the illegitimate identification of the person with the soul..." Oderberg, VI.

thought occurs and if on Aquinas's own principles it is strictly speaking only the human being, and not the intellect, which thinks, then it follows that there must be a sense in which the human being survives as well.³⁰

Stump likewise affirmed that it is the human being, and not the intellect which thinks, strictly speaking, so this argument could be affixed to her view to bring it closer to an unambiguously survivalist position.

The corruptionist, however, might resist this argument of Feser's by denying Feser's characterization of the corruptionist position: the corruptionist could plausibly deny that the intellect survives the death of the body in any profound sense. The corruptionist might hold that whatever intellectual capacities survive are those which a mere soul can conduct, and these will be so restricted as not to presuppose a human substance for their operation. The corruptionist might also resist Feser's first argument, the argument that corruptionism is ridiculous because it makes no sense for a hylomorphist to think of a form, namely the soul, as ever existing apart from the substance of which it is a form. The corruptionist may simply deny that, or else respond that, while it is incoherent for the hylomorphist to posit the independent existence of forms (souls, here) apart from substances, the corruptionist position does not require the separated soul to exist, but only to subsist – that is, to survive in a way which falls short of full-fledged existence. These “escape routes” might prove to be dead ends for the corruptionist, but so far I have not seen them closed off decisively.

Feser's third argument for survivalism is a theological argument concerning divine justice:

After death the soul is rewarded, punished, or purged in light of the deeds of this present life. But it makes sense to reward, punish, or purge only persons, not mere parts of persons. It makes no sense, for example, to speak of rewarding or

³⁰ Ibid.

punishing Bob's foot or his pancreas for Bob's good or bad deeds. But then the soul as it exists after death must in some sense be the human person existing after death, rather than a mere part of the person.³¹

However, given the fact that souls will eventually be reunited with resurrected bodies, this argument is not particularly strong. A slap on the wrist can still be a punishment of a person, even though his wrist is not the whole of his person. The corruptionist can argue that a similar situation will apply to the soul. It may be the case that when your soul is punished and damaged while separated from your body, and then made to configure you again prior to the Last Judgment, upon resurrection you would incur all the damage and punishment wrought upon your soul during the interim. It would be something like having a grenade planted in you and then detonated. I think that this account satisfies the concern over divine justice which Feser raises, but that it remains consistent with corruptionism. Feser's third argument does not bring very much force to bear against the corruptionist position, then.

So I do not consider the survivalist arguments above to have defeated corruptionism. The debate over corruption and survival is the central debate among roughly-Thomistic hylomorphists, and it will probably remain live for a while yet.

³¹ Feser, 144.

CHAPTER FOUR

Evaluation

Motivation

Debates among hylomorphists do not imply that hylomorphic views in general are incoherent. Some readers might object, however, that even if a hylomorphic theory is coherent, there is insufficient motive to defend any hylomorphic account over its competitors. It might seem from the start that hylomorphic theories will fail to solve the old problems in philosophy of mind and theory of persons, and will meanwhile create new ones as they insist on broad, sweeping metaphysical commitments that extend far beyond personal composition.

One problem with any version of hylomorphism is that it seems to offer us help in the wrong place: Hylomorphism would insist that we revise all of our ordinary, contemporary accounts of composition and causation; hylomorphism would reinstate formal causes and thereby fly in the face of standard-issue contemporary physics and its impact causation. Armed as we are with a rough and ready understanding of modern physics, most of us think that we already possess working material and causal accounts of ordinary things, and we do not believe we need more help from an alien metaphysical theory, where those accounts are concerned. Rather, we need help with such phenomena as consciousness, qualia and intentionality; the kinds of things for which ordinary material explanations have tended to fall short. That is where our ordinary material explanations fall short and where we might want to posit an immaterial substance to fill

our explanatory gaps and escape from the absurdities which materialism might lead us into. But concerning these same phenomena, hylomorphism appears to offer no unique assistance which Cartesianism could not provide, and it may even provide far less assistance, insofar as hylomorphic views hold that phenomena like consciousness are realized in the physical body – which means that these hylomorphic views will face similar explanatory difficulties to those which physicalist theories face. If physicalist theories do fail, the theorist’s most natural next move will probably be to adopt a minimal Cartesianism, not to revise her entire metaphysics and adopt a position which threatens to lead back to the difficulties which made physicalism unsustainable to begin with. And if physicalism succeeds, then there is no need for the hylomorphist’s employment of forms and formal causes.

So even if hylomorphism can be made internally coherent and can avoid self-contradiction, it seems like it will start at a disadvantage compared to the more predominant theories in metaphysics, personal composition and philosophy of mind. Hylomorphic views will insist upon a plurality of kinds of causal explanation, including formal causes – this is anathema to a neat and tidy metaphysic which posits either material causes solely, or else predominately material causes with an exception made for immaterial causes involved in mental phenomena. Further, though I will not treat these subjects here, I would suggest that hylomorphic views encounter problems that arise from unique hylomorphic concepts: there will be a difficulty in reaching perfect clarity about the distinction between substances and artifacts, and the Aristotelian-Thomistic hylomorphist’s appeal to homonymy might lead to contradiction.¹ Concerns over such

¹ Ackrill, J.L. “Aristotle’s Definitions of ‘Psyche’.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series*, Vol. 73. 1972 – 1973. 119-13. Shields, Christopher. “A Fundamental Problem about Hylomorphism.” *The*

conceptual troubles are warranted, but I will argue that hylomorphism does offer unique advantages when it comes to the identity of objects over time, predication, and resistance to Humean conclusions about laws of nature.

Predication

The thoroughgoing Cartesian substance dualist insists that I am not my body: I am a strictly mental thing, and my body is just a possession of mine. This sort of dualist would be compelled to admit that it is untrue for me to say that I am 5'10," and I should have said instead that my body is 5'10". I can truthfully attribute mental properties to myself, as I do when I say that I am thinking foggily, but according to the Cartesian I cannot do the same with physical properties. Insofar as this is a counterintuitive conclusion which counts as a cost of a theory, and not an advantage or a point of indifference, a theory which avoids this conclusion can gain some ground against a theory which cannot avoid it. It is for this reason that I argue that the hylomorphist has advantages over the Cartesian substance dualist where predication is concerned. A hylomorphic solution is probably the most elegant that a theory can offer; it will posit that properties are properties of a whole substance. Thus, on a hylomorphic account, it is the same thing which is 5'10" and which is thinking foggily – this is the intuitively satisfying conclusion, for we want to attribute both physical and mental properties to the same thing, one person. But the Cartesian account would preclude this conclusion, to our likely dissatisfaction.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2016.

Personal identity

The Cartesian dualist typically founds his claims about personal identity upon something like the unity of consciousness. But Oderberg recognizes that this is a problem:

Consciousness does not *constitute* personhood; rather, it *presupposes and reveals* it. The point is well known from the classic objections of Thomas Reid and Joseph Butler to the Lockean theory of personal identity: there is a vicious circularity in trying to analyze personal identity, as Locke does, in terms of memory or of consciousness in general, since these phenomena presuppose identity (i.e., that it is the *same* person who remembers or is conscious). Yet it is a point that cannot be repeated often enough.²

If personal identity cannot be grounded in consciousness, as the stock version of contemporary Cartesianism would have it, and if, as is likely, reductive physicalism offers no clear way to speak of identity or “thinghood” except as a semantic convention, then hylomorphism offers an advantage over both views. The hylomorphist can neatly ground the cause of personal identity (and identity in general) in form, and use matter as the principle of individuation:

Form is the root cause of identity: another way of putting it is that identity has a *formal cause*. Since, however, substances are individuals and form is not of itself individual, we have to posit a *material* cause of identity as well: in other words, the identity of a substance is given by the form as instantiated in matter. That the matter is not the root cause of identity is shown by the fact that most macroscopic objects can and often do change all their matter without ceasing to persist. No substance can change its form—that is, its *substantial* form — and continue to exist. Another way of expressing the proposition that identity has a formal cause is to say that form is the *bearer* of identity.³

When it comes to identity, then, hylomorphic accounts appear to have an edge over their competitors.

² Oderberg, II.

³ Ibid., III.

Laws of nature

Another advantage of a hylomorphic position lies in its ability to provide a coherent alternative to unpalatable Humean accounts of laws of nature, which physicalists might be compelled to accept in the absence of more robust options.

Alexander Pruss states the case as follows:

Humean laws of nature do not have any causal power and fail to explain anything. That all ravens are black is only explanatorily relevant to the claim that my raven, Smitty, is black if its force goes beyond the mere description of the color of the ravens in existence.⁴

The problem is that Humean laws of nature settle for mere description, giving up on claims of causal efficacy or necessity. Intuitively, however, we want laws of nature to explain things, and not merely to describe them accurately. We want to be able to invoke laws of nature in our explanations for why things must have happened in the way that they did. But this is not possible on a Humean account of laws. Say, for instance, that it is a law that all ravens are black. The Humean says that this is a law because it is always descriptively true that all ravens are black. “But surely a part of what makes it true that all ravens are black is precisely that Smitty the raven is black. Thus, that Smitty is black partly explains why it is a law that all ravens are black. It is implausible, then, that the law should explain why Smitty is black.”⁵

But that is exactly what we want the law to do. We want to employ the law as an explanation, and to do so without circularity – Humean accounts of laws of nature insist that we forfeit this ambition. If there were no plausible accounts of laws of nature besides

⁴ Pruss, Alexander. “Aristotelian Forms and Laws of Nature.” *Analiza i Egzystencja* 24, 2013. 117.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

Humean accounts, then we might be compelled to abandon the desideratum of laws of nature which are explanatory and not merely descriptive. However, hylomorphism can make room for one plausible alternative, and thus can satisfy the desideratum of laws of nature that have explanatory power: forms will act as “lawmakers,” thus serving to supply the causal necessity which must characterize laws of nature if they are to be explanatory. As Pruss argues,

We need a name for the truthmaker of a true proposition of the form *that p is a law of nature*. The name should not be an abstract noun, because this truthmaker is not an abstract entity or concept, but an actual aspect of our existent universe, having explanatory prowess. I shall call such a truthmaker a “lawmaker” of *p*, that which makes the true proposition *p* into a law...⁶

Laws of nature are not causes, but their lawmakers can be meaningfully said to have causal efficacy or causal relevance. And there must be such lawmakers if the laws of nature are not to be Humean.⁷

Why say that such a lawmaker must be a *form*, though, as opposed to something else? The answer is that form is a good candidate because, given the hylomorphist’s definitions, forms are those things in virtue of which things act in the way that they do, and thus forms are the truthmakers of proximate explanations of activities.⁸ When the law’s explanation for N’s acting *x*-ly refers to form, the law refers thereby to a principle of necessity and not mere description: N *had* to act *x*-ly did because of its form, which makes N be the thing which it is. By such an invocation, a reference to form, the law transcends mere descriptiveness and becomes truly explanatory, as Humean laws of

⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁸ Ibid., 124.

nature can never be. Hylomorphism therefore extends the opportunity to recover explanatory laws of nature from the jaws of Humean accounts.

Conclusion

In light of these advantages, hylomorphic views deserve to be taken seriously even though they insist upon substantive revisions to our inherited physics and metaphysics. What hylomorphic views lack in bare simplicity, they might make up for in explanatory power in the respects just discussed. I do not pretend that I have mounted a thorough defense of hylomorphism nor elaborated its terms and content in full. I hope, however, that my treatment casts enough light for the reader to understand the overall contours of roughly-Thomistic hylomorphic accounts. Future scholarship should continue to grapple with hylomorphism's concepts, weaknesses, and strengths, recognizing hylomorphism as an important family of theories and a viable competitor within metaphysics and philosophy of persons.

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