

NO ROOM AT THE INN:
CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF MIND MEETS
THOMISTIC PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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SUMMARY: 1. *St. Thomas on the sentient and intellective souls.* 2. *The contemporary problematic.* 3. *Conclusion: The cultural significance of Thomistic philosophical anthropology.*

Dedicated to Ralph McInerny, Joseph Bobik and James
Ross – *Requiescant in pace*

THE history of philosophy teaches us that the way in which important philosophical problems are formulated is highly contingent and deserving of scrutiny. The very setting up of a philosophical problem, along with its range of possible solutions, is itself an important philosophical task, and it can be done either well or badly, in a way that illuminates a particular philosophical landscape or in a way that obscures it and leads the unwary into research projects that bear little fruit *per se* and might even do intellectual damage. For instance, in another place I have tried to show how the contemporary discussion of causality (i.e., efficient causality) within Anglo-American philosophy is locked almost exclusively into competing strains of Humean empiricism and does not even take into account the Aristotelian alternative that underlies the so-called ‘intuitions’ that drive the discussion forward.¹

I have long thought that Francisco Suarez’s most important contribution to the history of metaphysics consists as much in his clear-headed and painstaking formulation of one after another metaphysical problematic as in his own proposed solutions to the problems that he has formulated. Something similar is true *in excelsis* for St. Thomas. When I conduct a seminar on a sizable portion of the *Summa Theologiae*, I always have my students first read the most important introductions leading up to and extending through the set of

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¹ See Parts 3 and 4 of *Suarez on Metaphysical Inquiry, Efficient Causality, and Divine Action*, which serves as the introduction to F. SUAREZ, *On Creation, Conservation, and Concurrence: Metaphysical Disputations 20-22*, translation, notes, and introduction by A.J. Freddoso (St. Augustine’s Press, South Bend, IN 2002).

questions we will be dealing with. Then I ask them, as they go through the relevant questions, to pause at the beginning of each article and ask, “Why does he bring this issue up at this point and in this way?”. Since St. Thomas is both a brilliant thinker in his own right and a self-conscious participant in several longstanding intellectual traditions, the answer always lies either in the orderly sequence of his investigation or in the writings of the authorities cited in the objections and *sed contra*.

This is very good training for approaching contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. In this paper I propose to do just that, albeit in a sketchy and programmatic way. After reviewing relevant highlights of St. Thomas’s account of the sentient and intellective souls, I will discuss some features of the contemporary problematic in philosophy of mind that are bound to strike a Thomist as strange and insufficiently motivated. I will close by stepping back from the world of professional philosophy in general and making a few brief remarks about the cultural significance of a Thomistic account of the human animal.

1. ST. THOMAS ON THE SENTIENT AND INTELLECTIVE SOULS

We’re animals, or so at least St. Thomas rather plausibly contends; so let’s begin by talking about the other animals. For as the song has it, “There’s animals and animals.”

Notice, first, how typically Aristotelian a move this is – beginning our consideration of a given issue with what is lower in the ontological hierarchy and moving toward what is higher. To cite another example, a great deal of confusion is engendered in contemporary analytic action theory by the fact that most of those (relatively few) philosophers who are willing to countenance genuine agency, i.e., genuine efficient causality, regard it as peculiar to human beings or, at most, to rational agents in general. That is, they treat the rest of the universe, including the world of non-human animals, as devoid of agency and, like Berkeley and Descartes before them, recognize agency just in the case of intellectual agents. An Aristotelian, by contrast, sees human agency as simply a higher-order manifestation of a feature shared by every primary substance in the universe, animate and inanimate. So without denying the peculiarity and metaphysical (if not always moral) nobility of human agency, the Aristotelian looks to nature in general for clues to understanding human agency and its place in the natural world.

In the present case, we begin with cognition and affection in non-human animals in order to better understand human cognition and affection. To make our reflections more concrete, let’s begin with an individual ‘brute’ animal, say, Arnie Aardvark. Arnie’s aardvark-soul is the formal principle or ‘form’ that constitutes him as a unified living organism and, more specifically, a liv-

ing corporeal substance of the natural kind *aardvark*. In conferring undivided *aardvark-esse*, this form dominates every part and power that belongs to Arnie; this is one reason why St. Thomas insists that the proper subject of Arnie's 'substantial form' is 'primary matter' – with the consequence that all of Arnie's material constituents, at any given level of scientific description, lose their status as independent substances (or 'subsistents') and are taken up into the life of the unified *aardvarkian* organism. From St. Thomas's perspective, it's just an amazing fact about nature that unified physical substances that are potentially decomposable without material remainder into the elements, i.e., fire, air, earth, and water, (or, at the next level up, into minerals, or at yet the next level up, into flesh and bones and sinews and nerves, etc.) should have the sentient powers that *aardvarks* have.² Later I will offer a few thoughts on the Aristotelian philosophy of nature that this description presupposes. But right now I want to concentrate on St. Thomas's account of Arnie's powers of sentient cognition and affection.³

Let's begin with the latter, i.e., with Arnie's passions or feelings. According to St. Thomas, Arnie's passions are movements of the sentient appetite, i.e., feelings that are grounded in physiological changes and that are directed toward and caused by objects of sentient cognition. St. Thomas tells us that the physiological changes are, as it were, the matter of the passions, whereas the appetitive movements, i.e., the feelings directed toward the various objects, are, as it were, their forms. He does not have much to say about the correlations between the physiological changes on the one hand and the feelings on the other. He simply assumes that in general such correlations obtain and, given the resources available to him, describes the physiological changes in ways that are based on common sense and classical medical theory. ("Arnie felt the heat leave his front legs as he shrank back in fear from the approaching python." "Arnie's heart was pounding as he approached the termite mound with an avid desire to eat.") Given modern advances in neurophysiology, we have a somewhat better grasp today of the physiological correlates of Arnie's (and our) feelings, even if the correlations have turned out in their details not to be very simple or straightforward. But St. Thomas's account of the passions is meant in any case to be a piece of philosophical anthropology rather than of natural science, and so he and his followers can rest content with letting neurophysiologists and medical specialists fill in the details.

² From a Thomistic perspective it makes no essential difference what the correct characterization of the material constituents at the various levels turns out to be. This is an empirical matter falling within the purview of the natural sciences. But the findings of the natural sciences need a philosophy of nature to situate them and clarify their metaphysical significance. I will have more to say about this later in the paper.

³ The following account of sentience is based mainly on *Summa Theologiae* I, qq. 77-78 and I-II, q. 22.

Things get just a bit more complicated when we turn to Arnie's sentient cognition. In the case of the exterior sensory powers, certain physiological changes in the relevant corporeal organs are accompanied by what St. Thomas calls – perhaps unfortunately – ‘spiritual’ changes (*transmutationes spirituales*) whereby the *per se* objects of sentient cognition are united intentionally – in a “non-material mode” – with the cognitive subject, viz., Arnie himself. I say ‘unfortunately’ here, since the use of the terms ‘spiritual change’ and ‘non-material mode’ might give the impression that St. Thomas believes that the nature of sensing requires the sentient soul to be subsistent in its own right and in some robust sense independent of matter. But, of course, he believes just the opposite, as he makes clear in *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 75, a. 3. Indeed, he attributes to Plato the (in his eyes) mistaken view that even Arnie's soul is subsistent; for Plato, he claims, attributed sensings «to an immaterial principle, arguing that just as intellective understanding belongs to the soul in its own right, so too does sensing. And from this it followed that even the souls of non-rational animals are subsistent.»⁴

Instead, St. Thomas's own view is (broadly speaking) that the corporeal organs of sentient cognition are analogous to a matter which, through changes caused by sensible qualities, can come to be informed ‘intentionally’ by a determinate range of those qualities in such a way that the resulting acts of the sensory organs count as sensings of those same qualities. But because these sensings are exercised by means of physiological changes of a special sort, and because their range of objects is limited by the corporeal nature of their organs, they do not require a subsistent immaterial subject. All they require instead as their first subject is a corporeal organism informed and unified by a sentient soul; in other words, the composite aardvark-substance, Arnie himself, is what first and foremost sees and hears and smells, etc. So Arnie's sensings of colors, sounds, tastes, smells, etc., do not involve an immaterial power or subsistent immaterial subject. Like the sentient affections, they are simply the ‘inside’, as it were, of a special kind of higher-level physiological change. And because sensings of exterior objects are presupposed by the ‘interior’ sensory powers whose acts are common (or coordinated) sensings, imaginings, remembering, and ‘estimative’ or ‘cogitative’ judgments about particulars, the same general account holds for these latter acts as well. (In what follows, I will, for the sake of simplicity, refer just to sensings and feelings when I speak of sentient cognition and affection, but these designations are meant to include acts of the interior sensory powers as well.)

Things are different, of course, when we turn to the human animal and add intellective understanding and willing to the powers of the soul. I will not rehearse the arguments for the subsistence and immateriality of the human

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 75, a. 3, resp.

soul, except to note that the twentieth century provided interesting supplements to the basic arguments espoused by Aristotle and St. Thomas. I have in mind contributions by the likes of Kurt Gödel, J.R. Lucas, Roger Penrose, and James Ross.⁵ Here, however, I want to take note in particular of a few ways in which, on a Thomistic account, intellective activity in the human animal is continuous with and yet transformative of the sentient acts we share in common with Arnie and his friends.

First of all, the base-level account of sentient cognition and affection continues to hold for human sensings and feelings; that is, human sensings and feelings are exercised by means of physiological acts, and these acts are all attributed in the first instance to the human animal as a whole. Human beings are truly animals. To be sure, our specific sensory powers differ to some extent in their nature and range from those of non-rational animals, but these differences are of a piece with the differences found among the species of non-rational animals themselves. (Think, for instance, of the differences between an insect or crustacean, on the one hand, and a mammal or marsupial on the other.)

What's more, even though intellective operations are not, according to St. Thomas, exercised by means of the acts of any corporeal organ, they nonetheless depend heavily on, and are heavily influenced by, the work of those corporeal organs that effect sensings and feelings.⁶ St. Thomas explicitly insists that, in this life at least, we can have intellective understanding of material substances only through physiological changes that precede the intellect's own peculiar operation and through physiological changes that are conse-

⁵ Edward Feser helpfully reviews various of these arguments in a blog entry entitled *Some brief arguments for dualism*, part IV (edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2008/10/some-brief-arguments-for-dualism-part_29.html) and in the three other parts linked at the beginning of that entry. See also "Dualism," by H. ROBINSON (2003, 2007), in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>), edited by E. Zalta. Unlike Feser, I am very uneasy describing St. Thomas's position as a form of dualism – even 'hylomorphic dualism' – since it is precisely the unity of the human being that St. Thomas wants to emphasize over against Plato's position, which (as he interprets it) posits many substantial forms in the human composite. (The term 'hylomorphic dualism' originates, I believe, with David ODERBERG in his excellent book *Real Essentialism*, Routledge, New York 2007). This is largely a verbal disagreement, but I for one resist making Thomistic philosophical anthropology conform to what I believe to be the illegitimate contemporary taxonomy of 'solutions' to the alleged 'mind-body problem', according to which each solution is either a type of materialism or a type of dualism.

⁶ Here is St. Thomas's explanation of how intellective understanding is related to the body: "The body is not required for the intellect's action as an organ by means of which that action is exercised; rather, the body is required for the sake of the action's object (*ratione obiecti*). For a phantasm is related to intellective understanding in the way that a color is related to seeing. But needing the body in this sense does not rule out the intellect's being subsistent" (*Summa Theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 2, *ad* 3).

quent upon the intellect's own peculiar operation.⁷ In addition, St. Thomas attributes differences in various mental aptitudes and types of intelligence to differences in physiological makeup and consequent differences in the powers of memory, imagination, and cogitation.⁸ (It follows, as an aside, that the advance of brain science can hardly produce any embarrassment for a Thomist, and when claims to the contrary are made, they can always be traced back to either ignorance of or mistaken ideas about the Thomistic position).

On the other hand, the discontinuities between us and Arnie are just as impressive. Because of our ability to grasp material natures intellectually, the character of both our sensings and our feelings is, according to St. Thomas, radically upgraded. Given our intellectual 'light', we are able to sense not only colors, sounds, smells, etc., but substances and actions as such. Given our higher volitional powers, we are able to desire not only physical pleasure, but higher-order goods as well; to fear not only imminent physical threats, but also spiritual dangers; to hope not only for material well-being, but also for eternal life.

On the side of speculative or theoretical reason, we are able to sense paradigmatic individual substances *as* individual members of natural kinds, to arrange their species and genera into taxonomies, to study their properties and their causes, and to teach others about them.⁹ Therein lie the beginnings of natural science. We are able to engage in thought that abstracts altogether from everything non-quantitative and thus do mathematics; to create stories and other narratives; to fashion works of art, from paintings and sculptures and buildings to musical and cinematic pieces; to write poetry; to play games; to engage in political activities; to establish schools and universities; to laugh; to have deep conversations; to ask about the meaning of our lives; and to seek wisdom systematically, searching for the ultimate causes of our universe and of our very selves.

From this perspective, one of the most grievous theoretical errors of the seventeenth-century empiricists was to deny this 'radical upgrade' of sentience and to insist, in effect, that our sensings and feelings are *exactly* like those of Arnie and his non-rational compatriots, limited in their cognitive reach to mere colors and sounds and smells, etc. Kant accepted this limitation and fashioned his 'Copernican revolution' on top of it. While thus parading under the banner of intellectual humility, he made a veritable way of life out

⁷ See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 84, aa. 6-7.

⁸ See, e.g., *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 84, aa. 7-8, q. 85, a. 7, and q. 101, a. 2, and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 51, a. 1.

⁹ For an excellent treatment of the complexities of taxonomy construction – as well as the attendant philosophical errors relevant to it – see D. ODERBERG, *Real Essentialism*, cit., chap. 9.

of (what I would call a prideful) intellectual pessimism about theoretical reason's power to discover the real causes of things or God their creator.

On the side of practical reason, the powers of intellective understanding and willing transform our 'animal' activities into potential paths toward genuine beatitude – or toward perdition, as the case may be. Within certain limits, we are able to plan our lives, to adopt ends, to choose suitable means to those ends, and to try (at least) to integrate our lives into unified virtuous wholes. Unlike Arnie, we are not constrained to act immediately or by instinct on our feelings, but are instead able to resist those feelings, or to control them, or even to habituate them. What's more, on this account our desire for beatitude *as human animals* – ultimately, in the light of Faith, our desire to abide *as human animals* in the intimacy of the inner life of our Trinitarian God – is sufficient to open us up to a life of enduring and self-transcending sacrificial love in accord with the good defined for us by the sort of animals we are.

I note here in passing that, from this perspective, Duns Scotus's moral distinction between the *affectio commodi* and the *affectio iustitiae*, where the latter is effectively detached from our animality and counted as the only fundamental desire aimed at a transcendent 'moral' good, is itself, like its Kantian successor in moral theory, a step in the direction of treating human agents as, in effect, non-animals.¹⁰ Tellingly, sentient affection or appetite cannot on Scotus's view (or on Kant's) be the subject of virtues. Hence, Scotus's distinction and its aftermath tend toward doing something in moral theory that is analogous to what Descartes' substance dualism does in metaphysics, viz., to effectively separate us in genus from the animals – and with consequences just as dire, or so at least I would claim. So while materialism is not pretty in either metaphysics or moral theory, it is not the only serious mistake to be avoided here.

In summary, then, what Thomistic philosophical anthropology delivers is an account of the human being that comports very well with our ordinary ways of thinking about ourselves and about non-human animals. Further, it provides us with a philosophical framework for receiving and understanding the wide-ranging deliverances of the natural sciences that bear upon our self-understanding.

2. THE CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMATIC

When, given these Thomistic principles, we next turn our attention to contemporary analytic philosophy of mind, we are bound to feel disoriented.

¹⁰ A similar sentiment, developed with insight and depth with respect to Kant, can be found in Appendix C of Candace VOGLER's *Reasonably Vicious* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2002), pp. 223-229. Also worth looking at is the brief but profound reflection on morality and reward in Romano GUARDINI's *The Lord* (Regnery Gateway, Washington, DC 1954, 1982, 2012), pp. 100-103.

There are at least two main reasons for this, and I will try to indicate them briefly. (In what follows a certain amount of simplification is unavoidable, but the general picture is, I believe, accurate¹¹).

First of all, the contemporary problematic is normally formulated in such a way that there are only two main solutions to the metaphysical ‘problem’ posed by ‘the mind’. One of them is variously called *materialism* or *naturalism* or, especially in its dominant reductionistic versions, *physicalism*. Even though these terms have differing connotations and are difficult to define with precision, for present purposes we can characterize negatively the position they name by saying that this position denies that human cognition or appetition requires the existence and action of a subsistent immaterial subject. There are many species of materialism, differing in interesting ways from one another. But they all share in common a disdain for the immaterial and for other marks of ‘enchantment’ or ‘spookiness’, as their ‘tough-minded’ proponents so charmingly put it. The second main solution is the contradictory of materialism, viz., *immaterialism*.

So on this standard rendition of the problematic, because Thomism posits an immaterial and subsistent human subject for the operations of intellectual cognition and affection, it is lumped together with (a) Descartes’s version of substance dualism, according to which human beings are in effect divided beings most closely identified with their immaterial souls, whereas non-human animals are conceived of reductionistically as complex mechanisms that do not have sensings or feelings or any interior life at all, and with (b) something like the position that St. Thomas attributes to Plato, according to which human beings are explicitly identified with their immaterial souls, whereas the human bodily organism has its own distinctive multiplicity of substantial forms.¹² In other words, Thomism gets put into the same general category as philosophical anthropologies according to which human beings are not properly speaking (i.e., *per se*) living animals at all, but are instead immaterial souls closely associated with animal bodies constituted as such independently of the relation to their souls – regardless of whether these animal bodies are conceived of reductionistically (Cartesian dualism) or non-reductionistically

¹¹ In surveying the literature in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind, I have made use of several very helpful articles from the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu>), edited by E. Zalta. These articles include *Physicalism*, by D. STOLJAR (2001, 2009); *Dualism*, by H. ROBINSON (2003, 2007); *Emergent Properties*, by T. O’CONNOR and H. YU WONG (2002, 2006); *Eliminative Materialism*, by W. RAMSEY (2003, 2007); *Zombies*, by R. KIRK (2003, 2011), and *Consciousness*, by R. VAN GULICK (2004). In addition, I highly recommend Edward FESER’s *Philosophy of Mind (A Beginner’s Guide)* (One-world Publications, Oxford 2006), which is perhaps the best introduction to the contemporary debates and ends with a brief defense of the Thomistic position.

¹² See *Summa Theologiae* 1, q. 76, a. 3.

(Platonic dualism). One might have hoped for a more fine-grained problematic to begin with, where Thomistic philosophical anthropology would be seen as (a) clearly distinct from dualism in insisting that human beings are both unified substances and animals in the full-blooded sense and (b) clearly distinct from materialism in insisting that there is a radical metaphysical underpinning, viz., an immaterial form, for the human animal's distinctiveness from other animals.

Second – and this is exceedingly strange from a Thomistic perspective – the main contemporary arguments against one or another form of materialism have to do almost exclusively with sensing and feeling and not with intellectual understanding or willing. In part, this is the legacy of Cartesianism. What I mean is that quite a few materialists share in common with their dualist opponents Descartes' assumption that any sort of interior psychological life, be it sentient or intellective, must have an immaterial immediate subject.¹³ The materialists in question thus see a need to reduce (in some suitably broad sense) the mental in its entirety to the physical.¹⁴ Since it is intellective understanding and willing that Thomists take to be the only mental phenomena that require immateriality, we find ourselves in a very delicate dialectical position here.

So let's look at the materialist landscape a little more carefully and see whether we can bring some Thomistic light to it. We can begin by asking what it would be for a materialist to 'handle' sensings and feelings. What is the problem, exactly, and why is it a problem for a materialist? Here things get a bit murky. As hinted above, sensings and feelings are *not* a problem – or, at least, *should not* be a problem – for *all* materialists. (After all, by the broad criterion given above the Thomistic account of sentience in non-human animals qualifies as a type of 'materialism' with respect to non-human animals.) Sensings and feelings are a problem, it seems, only for those materialists who subscribe to a reductionistic physicalism according to which the only things that exist *per se* are those posited by an ideally complete physics. Barring the truth of some sort of pan-psychism, the 'sensuous appearances' or 'sensuous experiences' involved in sensings and feelings simply do not fit within such a physicalist picture. They are not had by particles or waves or fields or strings or by any other candidates for the ultimate physical realities. But on the reductionistic picture, it is only such things that exist *per se*.

¹³ In fairness to Descartes, however, notice that St. Thomas attributes the same assumption to Plato in, e.g., *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 75, a. 2, resp.

¹⁴ Indeed, sometimes the different parties to the dispute seem to just take it for granted that if materialism can 'handle' sensing and feeling, then it will be able to 'handle' intellectual understanding and willing as well – perhaps conceiving of them as algorithmic processes, despite some very cogent arguments for not so conceiving of them. In fact, zombies, ever popular in the relevant literature, seem sometimes to be thought of as having intellectual understanding and willing even though they have no sensing and feelings.

Well, then, one might think to begin with that if sensings and feelings are a threat to the physicalist version of materialism, then the paradigmatic materialist position should be simply to deny, in the spirit of Descartes's treatment of non-human animals, that we human beings have sensings or feelings or, *a fortiori*, understandings and willings at all. This is precisely what the aptly named *eliminative materialism* does. According to the eliminativists, the conception of ourselves according to which we refer to sensings and feelings and understandings and willings is a proto-scientific competitor to some final, complete, and true physical theory about human beings. Once we have this latter theory in hand at some unspecified future time, we will be able to (and, presumably, rationally obliged to) discard all talk about understanding, willing, sensing, and feeling, replacing it with our new scientific language. Some of you might be worried about how states or acts described in merely physical terms can be thought of as directed toward intentional objects. Others might be concerned about how, say, Dante or Shakespeare – or Sacred Scripture, for that matter – will sound in 'Eliminativese'. But, we are assured, this final physical theory will be very impressive indeed.

Eliminative materialism is what I would call an honest and robust and full-blooded version of materialism, and it is in its own way ingenious as well. In my experience, it ranks right up there with Al-Ghazali's occasionalism, Berkeley's idealism, and Leibniz's monadology in the degree of astonishment it produces when encountered for the first time. God has a sense of humor; it may be that one of the best indications of the immateriality of the human intellect is that the human intellect can come up with a theory like eliminative materialism.

Needless to say, very few physicalists have the audacity to espouse eliminative materialism. These run-of-the-mill physicalists are constrained to propose other solutions to the 'problem' posed by sensing and feeling. One popular 'solution' is the attempt to bypass questions about sensuous appearances by espousing some version of so-called *functionalism*, according to which the intentional content of sensing and feelings is entirely determined by the causal antecedents and consequents of the physical states that underlie them.¹⁵ This theory might not get rid of the sensuous appearances, but at least it neutralizes or tames them by rendering them scientifically (i.e., causally) irrelevant. More specifically, even if sensuous appearances are not wholly eliminable, they can still be deprived of playing any irreducible explanatory role in the behavior of animals. For instance, in ordinary parlance we might say that Arnie

¹⁵ Strictly speaking, functionalism in the abstract is not necessarily a materialist position, since sensings and feelings could have an immaterial subject rather than some type of material subject. However, in the contemporary discussion, functionalism is thought of exclusively as a version of materialism.

drank the water because he felt thirsty – i.e., because he felt a desire for water and then saw the water and proceeded to drink it. According to the functionalist, by contrast, the sensuous experience of thirst is explanatorily irrelevant; instead, thirst can be adequately characterized in wholly relational terms, i.e., in terms of what causes the ‘purely physical’ non-sensuous states that underlie it and what those states in turn cause.

One standard objection to functionalism involves the so-called ‘inverted spectrum’ and is meant to show that functionalism does not, despite its claim to the contrary, adequately neutralize sensuous experiences. Let us return to Arnie and his thirst, i.e., his felt desire for water, along with his sensing the water and his subsequent drinking. Suppose that his mom, Arlene, is drinking beside him, and assume that in both their cases the explanation of the drinking that is given by reference to physical non-sensuous causal antecedents and consequents is the same. But suppose further that before drinking, Arlene felt the same way that Arnie feels when he is bloated and stops drinking; and suppose that when Arlene stops drinking, she feels the same way that Arnie felt before he started drinking. In other words, assume that the physiological explanation is the same in the two cases, but that the feelings, i.e., the sensuous experiences, are inverted. Is such a situation possible? If it is, then functionalists seem faced with a dilemma. Either (a) they will preserve the idea that aardvarks drink because they are thirsty and call Arlene’s feeling of being bloated ‘thirst’ or (b) they will have to say that while Arnie drinks when he feels thirsty, Arlene drinks when she feels bloated. Neither choice seems particularly attractive.

Indeed, as others have pointed out, if there is a sufficient ‘causal’ explanation of Arnie’s behavior at the physiological level without reference to anything sensuous or intentional, then it seems superfluous for functionalists even to bother with talk about ‘thirst’ and other feelings in the first place. This is the so-called ‘causal exclusion’ objection. The upshot is that functionalists should just abandon talk about feelings and sensings and fall back into eliminative materialism.

From a Thomistic perspective it is, I suppose, impossible to rule out inversion scenarios *a priori*. But the Thomist will insist that such scenarios involve dysfunctions and abnormalities. What’s more, from a Thomistic perspective we should antecedently expect that in cases involving feelings there will be (at least) two levels of explanation for the animal’s behavior. Or, perhaps better, the Thomist will claim that the single full explanation for the animal’s behavior will involve the integration of different layers of explanation and different sorts of explanation, at least one of which is a higher-level explanation that invokes interior sensuous experiences and the goal-directed activity they induce – where, in Thomistic language, the sensuous experiences are themselves simply acts of sentient cognition or movements of sentient appetite. Even if this

claim is somehow shocking to a certain sort of philosopher, it is hardly surprising to ordinary people. You go to the ophthalmologist. She examines your eyes and then, after flipping a few lenses, tells you that you should be seeing the letters very clearly now; and, behold, you are indeed seeing them very clearly. Other specialists can tell you when it hurts or when you're feeling thirsty or when your tooth has been desensitized to pain, etc. And as the relevant natural sciences advance, they are able to tell you many other amazing things about your sensings and feelings. This is exactly what one would expect from a Thomistic perspective, and it is not at all problematic. St. Thomas, for instance, tells us that the physiological changes are «posited materially in the definition of movements of the appetitive part,»¹⁶ and he is equally insistent that acts of sentient cognition are the acts of material organs. It's only a misleading and ideologically charged picture of sensings and feelings, on the one hand, and of the potentialities (or lack thereof) of matter, on the other hand, that would have led anyone in the first place to treat sensuous experiences as problems to be eliminated or in some way neutralized rather than as elements to be integrated into a complete scientific explanation of animal behavior. To be sure, things get a bit murkier when it comes to intellective understanding and willing. But even here, as noted above, the dependence of intellective acts on the exterior and interior sensory powers guarantees that there will be many interesting correlations between even thoughts and physiological states – though there will always be limits to what these correlations can be used to 'prove'.¹⁷

Finally, notice that, from a Thomistic perspective, the inverted spectrum objection is wholly irrelevant to the debate between materialism and immaterialism, since it has to do with sensings and feelings, and sensings and feelings do not in themselves require an immaterial subject.

At any rate, in the face of challenges such as the inverted spectrum objection and the causal exclusion objection, some materialists retreat to what is called 'property dualism'. According to this position, human cognition and affection have no immaterial subject, but they do involve psychological properties which are neither identical with nor reducible to physiological properties, but which are nonetheless correlated with physiological properties 'in the right way' – whatever that right way turns out to be.¹⁸ So one finds a standard

¹⁶ *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 22, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁷ For an interesting reflection on the limits of neuroscience, see R. TALLIS, *What Neuroscience Cannot Tell Us About Ourselves*, «The New Atlantis», Fall 2010, pp. 3-25 (thenewatlantis.com/docLib/20110315_TNA29Tallis.pdf).

¹⁸ I myself am still trying to figure out why property dualism is often presented as an alternative to materialism. I suppose the answer is that 'materialism' is said in many ways, and property dualism is indeed distinct from the sort of reductionistic physicalism that many philosophers have in mind when they use the term 'materialism'. However, given the above characterization of materialism as the contradictory of immaterialism, property

property dualist claiming that sensings and feelings are not identical with or in any way reducible to the physiological processes that properly fall under the purview of the natural sciences, but that they nonetheless *supervene upon* such processes. The promise, almost surely misguided given the terms of the problem, is that somehow a way will be found to integrate the psychological and the physiological so conceived into a coherent causal picture.¹⁹

If we tried to force Thomism into the current problematic in philosophy of mind, then on the surface it might seem that the Thomistic account of non-human animals is a version of property dualism. However, this appearance is misleading. For what St. Thomas says about sentience in non-human animals is already embedded within a full-blown philosophy of nature that (a) includes a well-ordered general account of the powers peculiar to the form of sentient beings and is thus already capable of accommodating new findings about the physiology involved in sensing and feeling, and that (b) is at home with talk of causal connections between the psychological and the physiological, where by ‘causal connections’ the Thomist means a full array of formal, material, efficient, and final causes. Why settle for a dubious substitute when you can have the real thing?

When all is said and done, however, the discussion of property dualism does not, from a Thomistic perspective, establish anything at all, one way or the other, about the immateriality of the human soul. For from a Thomistic perspective, sentient consciousness is a feature both of non-human animals, which do not have immaterial souls, and of human beings, who do. To the extent that philosophers of mind lump sentience and intellection together, they have conflated what a Thomist wants to distinguish. And it just may be that distinctively Thomistic contributions to the contemporary discussion could begin with the distinction between sentience and intellection and go on to show how taking this distinction seriously might re-shape the contemporary philosophical problematic and its interface with neurophysiology and the other relevant sciences. This sounds like a worthy research project for the new generation of Thomists, who will want to insist with materialists on our oneness and animality as human beings, while insisting with dualists on our radical distinctiveness within the world of animals.

dualism, when taken as a general theory that applies to both the sentient and the intellectual, is clearly a form of materialism.

¹⁹ The best exposition and defense of this position occurs in David CHALMER’s *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, New York 1997). Interestingly, property dualists seem to think that it is only sentience, and not intellection, that undermines straightforward materialism. For a sympathetic but tough-minded discussion of property dualism, see E. FESER, *Philosophy of Mind*, cit., esp. pp. 108-114. In particular, Feser argues that in the end there is no integrated causal picture, but that instead property-dualism ends up treating psychological properties as epiphenomenal.

3. CONCLUSION: THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THOMISTIC PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

I want to close with a few brief remarks about the cultural significance of the issues discussed in this paper. As Walker Percy was fond of pointing out in oftentimes hilarious ways, in our culture we oscillate between regarding ourselves as beasts and regarding ourselves as angels.²⁰ These seem to be the only two choices – just as, in the philosophical problematic I outlined above, the only two choices afforded us are materialism and dualism.

St. Thomas has already helped saved us once from immaterialism or angelism. In the fascinating first chapter of *St. Thomas Aquinas*,²¹ Chesterton explains how the two saintly friars, Francis and Thomas, each in his own way, the one as a poet and troubadour and the other as a stodgy philosopher, reintroduced a robust sense of corporeal and animal nature into thirteenth-century Catholic thought and practice, hence staving off an anti-incarnational tendency toward over-spiritualization that had appeared in the medieval Church. Even today, there are remnants of this tendency – or so I would argue – in the excessively ‘intentionalistic’ proclivities to be found in certain sectors of Catholic moral thought, even among generally orthodox thinkers. To my mind, St. Thomas is still the “go-to man” on this score, and the key is his philosophical anthropology, which insists that we are animals, albeit very special animals.

In contemporary culture at large, however, it is the opposite tendency that is most prevalent – the materialist tendency, allegedly supported by natural science, to regard ourselves as beasts who are just a bit smarter than the other beasts. Once again, St. Thomas is the “go-to man,” helping us to see how we can hold that even though we are animals, we are very special animals indeed.

The moral is that it is not hard to go wrong in philosophical anthropology. Many thinkers have done so, with unfortunate consequences that range over the whole spectrum of the philosophical and theological disciplines. More importantly, the consequences seep down into popular culture itself. The stakes are high. This is one reason why St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, echoing the documents of Vatican II, insisted time and again on the importance of a deep and fundamentally sound philosophical anthropology, one that exhibits clearly how we are neither angels nor mere beasts, but instead a very peculiar sort of animal. These same two popes kept recommending St. Thomas on this very topic. No big surprise.

²⁰ See especially, W. PERCY, *Lost in the Cosmos: The Last Self-Help Book*, Farrar Straus & Giroux, New York 1983.

²¹ Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1933, 1986.

I will end with a pregnant meditation by Thomas Joseph White, OP, himself a Jewish convert to Catholicism, on the broader topic of a general renewal of Catholic philosophy and theology in light of our current cultural situation:

«The Catholic philosophical and theological response to our own secular and pluralistic age will require, among other things, the renewal of a more robust philosophical Thomism present within the intellectual life of the Church. What is required is not a return to manuals (though in truth some of these were not always as unhelpful as advertised). Rather, what is needed is a conceptually accessible, existentially compelling formation in classical Thomistic principles of logic, philosophy of nature, metaphysics and ethics, one conducted in simultaneous conversation with our contemporary cultural *Sitz im Leben*. These are the two dimensions of Aristotelian science: dialectical engagement with the culture's questions and answers, and renewed understanding and formation in the principles of the perennial philosophy. The world today is truth starved, lacking in knowledge of basic principles and ultimate perspectives. If we would respond to that challenge, our current challenge, then the philosophical heritage of Aristotle and Aquinas offers us not a romanticized vision of the past, but a challenging and viable way forward».²²

As White makes clear in what precedes this passage, the “current challenge” facing Catholic thinkers is much different from what prevailed at the time immediately following the Second Vatican Council, when Catholic intellectuals jettisoned Thomism and went in search of something more intellectually ‘relevant’. I hope that the present paper is just one more indication among many that what was rejected at that time was in fact the cornerstone.²³

ABSTRACT: Contemporary philosophy of mind looks very strange from a Thomistic perspective. First of all, it classifies any theory of mind that invokes immateriality as a form of dualism, whereas St. Thomas insisted repeatedly on the unity of the human being. Second, the main contemporary arguments against materialism focus on sensible qualia, whereas the only Thomistic arguments for the subsistence and immateriality of the human intellectual soul appeal only to intellectual cognition and affection. In this paper I begin to explore these differences and suggest at the end that contemporary philosophy of mind is the product of an ill-conceived problematic that has cultural significance.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Aquinas, dualism, epistemology, human being, human intellectual soul, materialism, philosophy of mind.

²² From T.J. WHITE, *Toward a Post-Secular, Post-Conciliar Thomistic Philosophy: Wisdom in the Face of Modernity and the Challenge of Contemporary Natural Theology*, (<http://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/Maritain%20Conference%20Document%20TJWOP.pdf>).

²³ I elaborate on this theme in *The Vindication of St. Thomas: Thomism and Contemporary Anglo-American Philosophy* (forthcoming in 2015) (<http://www3.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/The%20Vindication%20of%20St%20Thomas%207-14-14.pdf>).