

Two Theories of Soul

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Abstract

I (1) outline two accounts the Catholic Church gives of the human soul, calling them the Lateran and the Vienne doctrines, and (2) argue they are inconsistent. (3) I run over several difficulties in the more popular Lateran doctrine. (4) I look at three uses to which Catholics might want to put a theory of the soul, and question whether either of the theories on offer can meet their needs. (5) I distinguish the Biblical idea of resurrection from the Greek idea of immortality. Finally (6) I commend the Vienne doctrine as philosophy but advise supplementing it with a view of creation, salvation and sanctification as forming a continuum rather than a discontinuous series of episodes.

1

What is a theory of soul a theory about? The English word ‘soul’ is used in a number of idioms that cause no perplexity such as ‘I went to the party, but I didn’t know a soul’, ‘His music is technically proficient but lacks soul.’ But when our discourse takes a religious turn, and we are told that we have souls and ought to care for them, we may wonder what exactly a soul is supposed to be. Philosophers have a way postulating and discussing entities known only to themselves, such as universals, sense-data and qualia; and theologians are in danger of making out that souls are like that, vitally important entities which only they are equipped to describe. Any such claim should arouse our suspicions. How can philosophers or theologians, who after all are only human beings in ivory towers, have access to things unknown to anyone else?

In fact souls are not quite like that. The word enters our culture from ancient Greece and Rome, and expresses two distinct notions which we all now have. First, it is used for that in us which is immortal. Homer describes the souls (*psuchai*) of the Suitors slain by Odysseus as fluttering away to Hades like squeaking bats,¹ and

¹ *Odyssey* 24. 5–10.

Greek vase paintings show little men coming out of the mouths of the dying and flying off. Secondly, we draw a distinction between living things and things we call 'inanimate' like pebbles and human artifacts. The word 'inanimate' comes from the Latin *anima* which we translate 'soul', and ought to mean 'without soul'; and ancient philosophers used *anima* or *psyche* for whatever it is that distinguishes living things from lifeless. It is obvious that we have souls in this second sense, since we are certainly alive. Whether we have souls in the first sense, whether there is anything in us that is immortal, is disputable, but at least the dispute is intelligible to people other than philosophers and theologians. Plato thought that the two notions are co-extensive, that what distinguishes living things from lifeless (and not just human beings from inferior species) is in fact the presence in them of something immortal;² but even if this is right, the notions are still distinct.

The Catholic Church offers two accounts of the soul. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council declared that God 'created all things, visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal; by his omnipotent power at the beginning of time he created out of nothing both kinds of creature, spiritual and corporeal, that is, angelic and mundane; and then human beings, as a kind of common product of spirit and body.'³ This declaration may not have been intended as a formal statement of what the soul is; the council fathers wanted to insist against the Albigenses that human bodies and matter generally are created by God, and their thought may have been less we each consist of an angelic spirit and a physical body⁴ than merely that we so to speak straddle the invisible world of angels and the visible world of physical bodies, and are citizens of both. The Fifth Lateran Council, however, three hundred years later, is more dogmatic, and says that each person's 'thinking soul' (*anima intellectiva*⁵) is immortal and 'infused' (*infunditur*), that is to say *poured*, or in some other way inserted, into his body⁶. Finally Pius XII's encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950) says that souls are 'immediately created' by God. When Vincentius Victor maintained this doctrine of immediate creation against Augustine's

² *Phaedrus* 245 c, 249 a-b.

³ Denzinger-Schönmetzer 800.

⁴ The notion of a body employed by the Council is the physicist's, not the problematic notion used by philosophers. For a physicist, a body is anything with mass and (though today this is thought unimportant) the power to affect sense-organs. For coroners and undertakers, a body is a corpse. In ordinary speech by 'my body' we often mean my torso, or the whole of me except my head, hands and feet. But for a philosopher, 'my body' means none of these things, and what it *does* mean is a problem on its own.

⁵ The phrase translates Aristotle's *dianoetike psyche*, *De Anima* 3 431a14. Aristotle speaks of a self-nourishing soul and a perceiving soul as well as a thinking soul; Aquinas and other Christian Aristotelians say that only the thinking soul is immortal and capable of existing apart from the body.

⁶ Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1440 Here the notion of body used is that of the philosopher.

preferred view that souls come by parental propagation, Augustine thought it caused difficulties for the doctrine of original sin,⁷ but the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches both that the soul is not produced by the parents, s. 366, and that original sin is ‘transmitted by propagation’, s. 404.

I shall call this teaching the ‘Lateran’ doctrine. It is Platonic in character. In the *Phaedo* Plato introduces the soul by considering death: death is the release of the soul from the body (*Phaedo* 64 c), so the soul is what the body loses.⁸ He examines the suggestion that this is just the physical structure which enables us to do the things we do, but argues in reply that it is an intelligent agent dwelling within the body and repairing it somewhat as a weaver dwells within his clothes (*Phaedo* 85–95). In the *Timaeus* he says that human souls are made in large numbers by a divine craftsman or Demiurge and then sown into bodies (*Timaeus* 41 d – 42 a) and in the *Republic* and *Gorgias* he gives confessedly fanciful descriptions of the existence of souls after death and their being judged and rewarded or punished. Plato says that souls were created at the beginning of the world, that they had a life of contemplation before being implanted in human bodies, and that they are liable to be reincarnated many times. These doctrines are rejected by Christians. But Augustine asks for a modified Platonism,⁹ and that the Lateran doctrine provides.

In 1312, however, the Council of Vienne declared that the ‘substance of the rational or thinking soul is truly and of itself the form of the human body, and anyone who says it is not is to be considered a heretic.’¹⁰ The word ‘form’ here (*forma*) is taken from Aristotle, who says that body and soul are related as matter and form (*De Anima* 2 1–2). Aquinas argues in the *Summa Theologiae* (1a. q.76 a.1) that the thinking soul is the form of the body, and says ‘This is Aristotle’s demonstration in *De Anima* 2.’ The primary purpose of the Council of Vienne was to condemn the Templars, but it was called by a Dominican Pope and took the opportunity to condemn the Franciscan Jean Pierre Olivi. Its declaration on the soul is aimed against him, and must have been intended to endorse the account of soul Aquinas, rightly or wrongly, took to be Aristotle’s. I call this the ‘Vienne’ doctrine. Despite its slightly dubious origin it has never been retracted and appears in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

⁷ *On the Soul* 1. 17. Vincentius Victor held that *animas a deo, non ex propagine fieri, sed novas singulis insufflari*, Migne PL 44.484.

⁸ In *Phaedrus* 245 c – e and *Sophist* 249 a-b Plato uses a different approach and takes soul to be the source of life and movement, but reaches the same conclusion about its nature.

⁹ *City of God* 22.27.

¹⁰ Denzinger-Schönmetzer 902.

s. 365: ‘The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the “form” of the body.’

2

Scholars are agreed that Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories of soul are in conflict, and anyone who is not committed to holding that everything taught by the Church is true must see that the Lateran and Vienne doctrines are inconsistent. The inconsistency may be masked by using the word ‘principle’. Aquinas calls the human soul ‘the principle of intellectual operation.’ or ‘the first principle of life.’¹¹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* s. 363, uses the phrase ‘the spiritual principle in man’ (similarly *The Oxford English Dictionary*). These phrases are ambiguous, since various sorts of thing can be called ‘principles’: the word translates the Greek *arche*, ‘source’, which can be applied to any sort of explanatory factor. ‘The principle of intellectual operation’ could be our power of understanding, or a proposition like the law of excluded middle, but it could also be the ingredient in us that understands, as the intoxicating principle in wine is the ingredient (ethanol) that intoxicates. The principle of life could be the electricity in a living organism’s nervous system or a living thing dwelling in it like a diver in a diving suit. But the Lateran doctrine clearly teaches that a human being is a composite of two different things, a soul and a body, with different origins, the soul ‘immediately created’ by God, the body produced by natural forces and biological evolution: two components somehow joined together like (to use a model Augustine takes from Varro¹²) a yoke of oxen. The Vienne doctrine, in contrast, is that a human being is a single thing, not a composite of soul and body but a unity.

The Vienne doctrine borrows a technical term from Aristotle, ‘form’. Unfortunately there has always been uncertainty about how we should understand Aristotle’s distinction between matter and form. The general view of scholars today is that it is the distinction between thing or object and property or attribute, and when he says that soul and body are related as form and matter, he means that the soul is that structure, and more important, that set of capacities, by virtue of which a human body is a human being. The concept of soul which interests him is that concept of that, whatever it may be, which distinguishes living things from inanimate; and this is plainly a set of vital abilities: to assimilate food, to grow, to reproduce, and more interestingly to perceive, think and move or stay motionless on

¹¹ *Summa Theologiae* 1a q. 75 a. 2; q. 75 a.1

¹² *City of God* 19.3, a passage referred to by Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a q. 75 a. 4; see also *City* 22.27–8.

purpose. There is room for disagreement about whether or not these abilities are basically physical, whether or not, that is, they can be identified with our physical make-up and explained by the processes studied by evolutionary biologists. But at least it is clear that a living organism is not composed of matter and capacities, that capacities are not poured into matter like liquid into a jug. The only parts of which we are composed are our body parts. We do not consist of arms and legs and the way in which they are put together, any more than a house consists of the materials out of which it is built and the way they are put together.¹³ Nor are capacities or structural properties brought into being in the same way as the things that have them. It makes sense to say bronze is brought into being: we can bring it into being by mixing copper and tin; and we can bring a brazen sphere into being by shaping bronze into a sphere. But it does not make sense to talk of bringing mixing into being, or bringing into being a shape or a capacity¹⁴. An artist might be said to create a design like the Willow Pattern; but it remains a mere possibility until he decorates something with it. So if the soul is a form, it does not make sense to talk of creating an actual individual soul.

David Wiggins in 1967 suggested that the Aristotelian relationship of matter and form is that of constituents to thing constituted,¹⁵ and I defended and developed this interpretation in a number of papers in the 1980s¹⁶. As a house is conceived as a shelter for people and their possessions composed of bricks and beams put together in a certain way, so a human being is conceived as a thing that nourishes itself, perceives, reasons and acts purposively, composed of flesh and bone (or perhaps rather of head, arms, legs etc.) put together in a certain way. The concept of a human being thus comprises two sorts of concept, one of the bodily constituents, the other of the living thing they make up, and Aristotle claims that the (philosophical) concept of the body is the concept of the constituents of a human being, while the concept of soul is the concept of the self-nourishing, sentient, intelligent and purposive thing they make up. Although this

¹³ As Aristotle says at *Metaphysics* H 1043b6, a house does not consist of bricks *and* arrangement.

¹⁴ Aristotle labours this at *Metaphysics* Z 1033a24-b11.

¹⁵ *Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1967, pp 46–9. Other interpretations have been put forward; Richard King, for example, argues that Aristotle identifies the soul with life, and especially with the activity of self-nourishment (*Aristotle on Life and Death*, London, Duckworth, 2001 Ch. 1), and this interpretation apparently satisfies the theologian Nicholas Lash, but I think most scholars would say that the choice lies between taking an Aristotelian form as an attribute and taking it as a thing constituted.

¹⁶ 'Aristotle's Definition of Soul', *Phronesis*, 25 (1980) 170–86; 'Aristotle and the Harmonia Theory', in *Aristotle on Nature and Living Things*, ed. A. Gotthelf, Bristol Classical Press 1986, 131–50; 'Aristotelian Powers', *Phronesis* 32, 277–98, 1987; 'Aristotle and the Place of Mind in Nature', *Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology*, ed. A. Gotthelf and J. Lennox, Cambridge University Press 1987. 408–23.

interpretation is different from the one that identifies forms with capacities and other so called 'abstract' objects, adopting it will still not make the Vienne doctrine consistent with the Lateran. A house is not composed of building materials and a shelter; its only components are its material components. Nor, then, is a human being composed of arms and legs and an intelligent agent; the only parts of a human being are bodily. And it is possible for an intelligent agent to be brought into being, only insofar as it is possible to impart skills and good habits to someone capable of acquiring them.

Aquinas does not explicitly endorse either of these interpretations or put forward a third; but of the two, he would do better to adopt the second. He wants the soul to have capacities and operations, and a capacity cannot have further capacities or do anything. Also he wants souls to be able to exist apart from bodies, and those scholars who take Aristotle to identify the soul with a set of capacities also say his theory rules out the possibility of disembodied existence, since it is obvious that capacities cannot exist apart from the things of which they are capacities. It is not so obviously impossible that a thing at present constituted by certain bodily parts should still exist even if it were not constituted by anything.

3

Neither of these theories has any scriptural authority. That is not surprising, since, as I said, our notions of the soul come from the Greeks and Romans, not the Jews. To Christ and the apostles as to the Hebrew prophets a human being is a seamless unity. The evangelists put the Greek word *psuche* into Christ's mouth, but, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* justly observes, s. 363, it there seems to mean simply 'life,' 'the entire human person,' or 'that which is of greatest value' in us. The Pauline epistles (1 Cor 15.45–49; 1 Th 5.23; cf Rom 11.3, 16.4), distinguish between soul (*psuche*) and spirit (*pneuma*) but this is a distinction between animal or emotional life and higher aims and feelings, a distinction which falls wholly within the sphere of the psychological as we understand it today. The Maccabees held that Jews who died for God's laws would be raised up and given back life and breath (2 Mc 7.9–23) and Christian belief in an after-life is continuous with theirs.¹⁷ But what is raised up is not the soul as distinct from the body but the whole human being. To the Good Thief Christ says, not 'Today your soul will be

¹⁷ See Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.2. 2 Mc 7 14 says there is no after life for the wicked; the Pharisees, according to Josephus, thought there was; Wisdom and first century Christians are sure of an after life for the good, but seem uncertain about the ultimate fate of the wicked.

with mine in Paradise', but 'Today *you* will be with *me* in Paradise' (Lk 23.43.) In Wisdom 3.1 we are told that 'the souls of the just are in God's hands,' but if we compare that passage with Job 12.10 it becomes doubtful whether the author means more than that the virtuous themselves or their lives are in God's hands. In Ws 4.7 and 5.16 it is for good people and not just their souls that there is rest and endless life. Philo's writings, however, show that a notion of soul had entered Jewish thinking from Greece by the time of Christ, and we see it entering Christian thought from the same source in Justin's mid-second century *Dialogue with Trypho*.

Philo and Justin were more influenced by Plato than by Aristotle, and educated Christians generally, I think, have favoured the Lateran theory of soul. Plato's Socrates speaks of the body as a prison from which he desires release,¹⁸ and the same idea is expressed by Shakespeare,

'Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
Why doest thou pine within and suffer dearth?'¹⁹

and by Thomas Campion,

'Never weather-beaten sail more willing put to shore
Than my wearied spright now longs to fly out of my troubled breast.'²⁰

Descartes argues at length for a dualistic account of human beings, and Locke, Berkeley and John Stuart Mill conceive the soul or mind as a spiritual substance.²¹ Mill may have distanced himself from the Christianity of his background, but like many agnostics he could have echoed the words of the dying Emperor Hadrian 'Dear little wandering soul, guest and companion of the body, to what regions are you now departing?'²² Why, then, has the Catholic Church taken so long to formulate the Lateran doctrine, and why has it simultaneously taught the Vienne doctrine which conflicts with it?

In the first place most of those who have accepted a Lateran or Platonic account of the soul have thought that souls have a material of their own, different from the materials known to science, but capable of playing the same explanatory roles. That is almost inevitable, since they are modelling their conception of a soul on that of a material object like an artifact or a living organism. Plato himself suggests in the *Timaeus* 35 that souls are composed of being, same and other.²³

¹⁸ *Phaedo* 82 e – 83 a.

¹⁹ Sonnet 146.

²⁰ *First Book of Ayres*.

²¹ On Mill see note 31 below.

²² *Animula, vagula, blandula, hospes comesque corporis, quae nunc abibis in loca?*

²³ These rarefied constituents account for our ability to think, since the basic forms of thought are thinking to be, thinking to be the same, and thinking to be other.

His Giants in *Sophist* 247 think souls have bodies of their own; the Epicureans postulate soul-atoms smaller than other atoms but of the name indestructible solidity; and the Stoic soul is composed of something similar to terrestrial air or fire. Tertullian notoriously overdid the materiality of the soul, but many Christian writers from the third century to the seventeenth have conceived not only souls but also angels as composed of Stoic material.²⁴ The Catholic Church prefers to say that the soul is a 'pure spirit', not composed of anything; but so elaborated, the Lateran doctrine conforms less to popular ideas, and involves difficulties we shall see in a moment.

A second obstacle to saying that my soul is a thinking being placed in my body is that this seems to imply that I myself *am* my soul. Plato's Socrates says this. When in the *Phaedo* (115 c) Crito asks him how his friends are to bury him, he replies 'However you like, of you can lay hold of me and I do not escape you.' He means that what leaves his body at death is not just his soul but himself. The Church does not want us to identify ourselves with our souls, at least if that means dissociating ourselves from our bodies. Belief that we are spiritual beings merely enclosed in our bodies can beget the idea that matter, including the body, is evil; and if people think that, though they may start by being highly spiritual, like strings drawn too tight they tend to snap and fall into in all kinds of deplorable 'antinomian' behaviour, excusing it on the grounds that what their bodies do is no concern of theirs. Ecclesiastical authorities traditionally prefer moderation in spirituality to enthusiasm, and urge upon us respect for the body. If we take the Vienne view that the soul is an intelligent agent constituted by the body, we may still identify ourselves with our souls, but we cannot say that our bodies are nothing to do with us.

Thirdly, if we are really our souls and are created capable of existing separately from our bodies, why we are put into them? If the body is a prison, what have we done to have this imprisonment inflicted upon us? Plato himself in the *Phaedrus* suggests that souls start by having a disembodied existence of ecstatic intellectual contemplation, and get embodied as a result of some kind of moral degeneration: we are put into bodies as a result of a Fall.²⁵ That is not a Christian doctrine.²⁶ Theologians sometimes say that it is natural for souls to be embodied because it is natural for us to acquire knowledge through

²⁴ For Milton and seventeenth century pneumatology in general see C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, London, Oxford University Press, 1942, Ch. 15. Locke's speculations about spirits and angels in *Essay* 2.23.13 suggest respect for this current wisdom, and his elusive 'spiritual substance' (*Essay* 2.23.5) which he thinks irrelevant to personal identity (*Essay* 2.27.12–13) seems to be less a spiritual agent than the supposed spiritual material of such an agent.

²⁵ *Phaedrus* 248–9.

²⁶ It was condemned at Braga, Denzinger-Schönmetzer 456.

the senses. We are created, sure enough, with a capacity for intellectual thought, but a capacity that cannot, so to speak, be switched on except by sensory stimulus. I have not seen it added, but it might be, that we are created with a capacity for disinterested love of God, but that too cannot be activated unless we first form attachments with our human neighbours. *If* there is a non-material thing which is capable of thinking but only if has sense-organs through which to derive concepts, a kindly God will pour it into a body without delay. But the description much more naturally fits something formed from the start of material components than a pure spirit. A pure spirit dependent on senses and organic life to trigger its capacities is a creature of strange design, whereas in creatures of flesh and blood such dependence is understandable.

Next, whether we ourselves are simply spirits or genuine composites of a spiritual soul and a physical body: how can something non-material be put together with something material? A spirit cannot be joined to a material object by juxtaposition, like the blade to the handle of knife. The problem becomes more acute if we suppose, as most people taking a Lateran view do, that souls and bodies influence each other. The Stoics argued that we *have* to say souls are composed of material of some kind in order to account for soul-body interaction²⁷; Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, niece of our Charles I, defied Descartes to account for it while keeping the soul immaterial and unextended.²⁸

Finally there are no good arguments to show that souls of the Lateran type exist. There is certainly something that differentiates us from lifeless things, and the onus of proof is on anyone who denies that our limbs constitute souls of the Vienne type, intelligent agents. But why should we suppose that our bodies have joined to them spiritual components? The trouble is not a lack of scientific proof. Science can prove the presence in things only of material constituents; it can prove that there is arsenic in a bowl of soup, but not that there is an escape-clause in a contract or a prime number between 6 and 8. Catholics believe in the existence of a non-material God, and follow Aquinas's teaching that angels are completely non-material beings 'immediately' created by God. So it is understandable that the thought should occur, perhaps the 'intellectual principle' in human beings is something like an angel.²⁹ But instead of having positive reasons for thinking it is, we have the difficulties about

²⁷ *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, edd. A. A. Long and D.N. Sedley, Cambridge University Press 1987, 45 C-D.

²⁸ See Descartes, *Philosophical Writings* edd. Peter Geach and G. E. M. Anscombe, London, Nelson, 1954, pp. 277–8.

²⁹ 'In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!' But Hamlet is in fact speaking of a human being, not a soul.

junction and interaction I have just rehearsed. Besides, angelology is not a lively branch of theology at the moment, and to say that human souls are capable of bodiless existence like angels, and are created in the same way, is to model what is better understood on what is less.

4

If the Lateran doctrine runs into difficulties, and the Vienne doctrine is obscure or austere, the question may be asked: do Catholics need a philosophical theory of the soul at all? I think most people would say we need one to defend our belief in a life after death, but before coming to that, let me glance at three other possible uses of the notion of a soul.

First, the Church condemns homicide, enslaving people, abortion, mercy-killing and experiments with human embryos, partly on the ground that all human beings have souls, and souls, moreover, made in the image of God. Genesis 1.26–7 says that God created not only men but women too in his own image, and the Penny Catechism says our likeness to God lies chiefly in our souls. Part of the purpose in mentioning this when discussing acts like killing and enslaving is to distinguish human beings from animals. Animals do not have souls made in God's image, so it is all right to kill them for food, to force them to work for us and to put them down when decrepit. But that we human beings have Godlike immortal souls clinches the case, it is felt, against treating any of us in these ways.

Anyone reasoning like this way is probably using the Lateran conception of the soul rather than the Vienne. But the whole line of argument seems to me poor. If death is not the end, killing people or forcing them to work during their life on earth is surely not so bad. Christian beliefs about the soul have actually retarded condemnation of slavery and capital punishment. And now that Limbo has been abolished, we may think the lot of aborted foetuses rather enviable. Besides, the conclusion of a piece of reasoning ought not to be more certain than the premisses. Many people loudly declare we should treat others with respect and denounce murder and slavery while not accepting that we have souls made in the image of God. That premiss is less certain than that murder and slavery are evil, and we can argue against abortion and euthanasia without using it.

Secondly, the Church teaches that we have free will and that we are responsible for our actions. Mill analysed the concept of a human action as the concept of a physical event in the body caused by a non-physical event, a volition or act of will.³⁰ We may think that this analysis is obviously right, so if there are free human actions

³⁰ *A System of Logic* 1.3.5.

there must be non-physical acts of will. These will be acts by a non-physical agent, a spiritual soul.³¹ So it may be thought that Catholics need a doctrine of soul, and in fact the Lateran doctrine, to defend freedom of the will and moral responsibility.

Although the idea that we need souls to act freely is initially appealing, it runs into big difficulties. First, as we have just seen, it is a problem how something non-material can move something material. Philosophers in the British Empiricist tradition like Mill were not bothered by this, since they did not see how anything material could move anything material, but today scepticism about causal interactions in the physical world is dying out even among philosophers. If we say that the soul does not have to move the body, that the body merely moves as the soul wants it to move, why introduce souls at all? Why not say that our bodies move as we human beings want them to? And if the inertial laws state that anything at rest stays at rest unless moved by something in motion, does every voluntary action require a violation of the laws of inertia, and hence a kind of miracle?

Perhaps we may hope that God in his omnipotence can bring about the mind-body interaction Mill and Descartes before him³² regarded as a fact of every day experience. I am not sure that this hope is coherent; and in any case it will not ensure our freedom. Since the soul, we are supposing, is non-material, its acts of will cannot be determined by physical action upon it; but they must either be determined by some other influence, or else be completely random and as luck would have it. What we need for moral responsibility is not a non-material agent but a non-causal mode of determination. We need, in fact, a kind of non-causal, rational explanation, which explains action not as the inevitable effect of anything whether physical or non-physical, but precisely as freely chosen.

Current efforts by embryologists to clone human beings, to generate half-human organisms like centaurs, or to construct human babies that are wholly artificial suggest a third use of the notion of the soul. In the past when chemists tried to turn base metals to gold, and astronomers to describe the influence of the planets on human affairs, ecclesiastical authorities were usually unsympathetic, and today they oppose this pioneering in biology. Might a good theory of the soul show that scientists will never succeed in producing an intelligent being artificially? The Lateran theory requires an intelligent being

³¹ Mill prefers to use the word 'mind', which, he says, is not difficult to define: 'mind is the mysterious something which feels and thinks.' But he adds (echoing Locke, Essay 2.23.5) 'On the inmost nature of the thinking principle, as well as on the inmost nature of matter, we are, and with our faculties must always remain, entirely in the dark.' *A System of Logic* 1.3.8. We must try to do better than that.

³² 'It is just by means of ordinary life and conversation, by abstaining from meditating... that one learns to conceive of the union of soul and body.' Op. cit. p. 280.

to have a soul immediately created by God, but it cannot licence the factual prediction that nothing produced in a laboratory will be intelligent because it does not show that God could not or would not infuse a soul into an artifact. Neither theory rules out the possibility that human skill should produce the same structure of chemical components as natural generation and evolution. If it did, why should a Catholic want to deny that anything with this structure might come to speak and write and act for reasons and purposes? Why should not God have created a world in which intelligent beings can arise either through the natural processes of generation and evolution or through human artistry? A religious believer might feel that an artifact with the same physical structure as a natural baby would need a sort of push from God, a spiritual analogue to the electric shock that could restart a heart's beating, in order to act intentionally; but is this feeling rational? Insofar as a movement is explained by a kind of push or shock it is *not* explained as intentional. An artificially generated person, of course, would have genuine interests which it would be as wrong to disregard as those of a person produced naturally; ecclesiastical authorities might justly censure fabricating hominids for the pot, or for organ donation, or as slaves.

5

It remains to consider whether Catholics require a theory of soul to defend their belief in an after-life. Here we must recognise that we inherit two slightly different conceptions of such a life. The Jews employed the idea of resurrection, the restoring of dead people to life. Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Bones (Ez. 37) provides a way of imagining this. The Greeks employed the idea of immortality, of being immune to death altogether. Immortality belongs primarily to the gods, who are naturally incapable of dying, but they can give it to human beings they particularly like, though Odysseus, we are told, refused the gift. The notion of immortality becomes less clear when it is extended to souls generally, since a soul experiences death in a way when it gets separated from the body; but in itself an immortal soul can no more die than the gods could.

The first Christians worked with the idea of resurrection, but reflection soon discovered difficulties. In the first place, what if the same particles have at different times formed the bodies of several different virtuous people? Secondly, what about the interval between my dying in the odour of sanctity and the revival of my bones? Do I not exist at all in this interval? If I don't, how can the person who lives after my bones are revived be identical with me and not just a look-alike? Is not spatio-temporal continuity necessary for identity?

Richard Sorabji has recently discussed the efforts of Origen, Augustine, Philoponus and Aquinas to grapple with these problems.³³

I think they arise from two philosophical mistakes. One is the doctrine that matter is the principle of individuation. This says what makes an object identified at one place and time the same as an object identified at another is its being composed of the same matter. A risen man, if that is correct, will be the same as me only if he is composed of the same particles, and a fortiori his body will be the same as mine only if it is composed of the same particles. This must be wrong, because I am the same man that, say, flew from Prestwick to New York in 1946, but I have had a complete change of particles. And the question 'Is the body I have now the same as the body I had then?' does not normally arise. Bertram would not ask whether the body he embraced at Florence in *All's Well* is the same body as the body he sees in Marseilles, but whether it is the body of the same woman.³⁴

The second mistake is to think that there is anything which 'makes' an object identified at one time identical with one identified at another. The question 'What makes this so-and-so' is a request for what is sometimes called a 'formal' cause, an analysis of *what it is* to be so-and-so. We can ask this sort of question about properties: 'What makes something spherical? Having every point on its surface equidistant from a single point.' And we can ask it about causal and spatial relations: 'What makes Oedipus Laius' son? His having been begotten by him. What makes London north of Rome? Being nearer the North Pole.' But identity is not a relationship like parenthood in which things stand; things which stand in relationships or have properties are identical or non-identical independently of anything predicated of them. I am or am not the person you saw in New York in 1946, but nothing makes me one of the other, and nothing could make the risen man (if risen he was) that the disciples saw on the road to Emmaus identical with the man who died on the cross.

³³ Richard Sorabji: *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2006, Ch. 3.

³⁴ We speak of organic parts like kidneys rather as we speak of complete organisms. If you give me a kidney transplant, we should say that the same kidney was once yours and is now mine. Suppose then that Helena, whom we know to have been a brilliant physician, swapped all her organs with Diana. Should we say that the same body was once Diana's and is now Helena's? The notion of a person's body is not analogous to that of an organ. An organ is a part with the capacity to perform a certain function; a body may be an aggregate of parts, but an aggregate of parts capable of performing functions is not a person's body but a complete living organism. If Helena swaps all her organs with Diana, what is now her body is an aggregate of different parts, but it is no more a different aggregate than if she has simply experienced the replacement of particles which naturally attends aging and pregnancy. Her body is the same body because she is the same functioning aggregate.

Neither the Lateran nor the Vienne theory directly meets these difficulties, which is not surprising since they are theories of soul, and what is resurrected is not the soul but rather the body. Each allows an answer of a sort, but in both the implied theory of soul is idle. On the Vienne theory we can say that a resurrected man is the same if his body constitutes the same intelligent agent; on the Lateran, that he is the same if his body houses the same intelligent agent.

But these difficulties about identity are unlikely to trouble anyone but a philosopher. What troubles ordinary people is the fear that death is the end. Plato in the *Phaedo* offers arguments derived from the nature of thinking which, if successful, show that anything which is capable of intellectual thought, of calculating, comparing and so forth, must be both capable of disembodied existence and indestructible, and Christian writers like Aquinas have followed him.³⁵ These arguments relate not to resurrection but to immortality and to the soul rather than to the human being. They do not depend on any particular theory of soul. They do not depend, that is, on taking the soul either to be what inhabits a human body or what is constituted by it. But what they show, if sound, is that a soul, whichever of these two things it may be, is immortal in the same way as the gods, naturally incapable of dying.

This is not the place to point out flaws in these arguments; it is acknowledged that many philosophers from Scotus's day to ours have found them unconvincing. Medieval writers may have less worried by their weakness than we are partly, as I said just now, because of angels, but chiefly because they believed in Christ's resurrection. *Contra factum non est argumentum*, and *pro facto nulla necessitas arguendi*. And whether the arguments are weak or strong they cause embarrassments for Christian theology. One awkwardness is obvious. If the soul is naturally immortal, it cannot be said that Christ saves us from death; his saving work is limited to delivering us from sin and Hell. But even more disturbing, if souls cannot die, and the Crucifixion merely separated Christ's immortal soul from his body, the doctrine of his death takes on a different complexion: can he really be said to have died at all?

All these considerations might lead a Catholic today to drop talk about souls altogether and, like Biblical authors, stick to human beings. Unlike Biblical authors, however, people today want to draw a general distinction between the psychological and the physical. Modern philosophers try to clarify the distinction, and analyse the concepts of the physical and the psychological. The natural starting point for this philosophical enquiry is to say that we conceive ourselves as sentient, intelligent agents composed of flesh and bone or consisting of heads, hearts, hands and the rest; and this is the basis

³⁵ See especially *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.49; *Summa Theologiae* 1a q. 75 a. 2.

of the Vienne theory. But I think that for our theological purposes what we want is less a theory of soul than a view of God's dealings with the world as rather more continuous than our forbears have sometimes imagined them to be.

6

Believers in the past have sometimes seen creation as something instantaneous and perfect at the first instant. The six days of Genesis have been thought of as a mere explanatory device: of course God could and did produce everything we see, and better, in no time at all. And the first human beings were perfect. They did not evolve from other animal species; the various species of living thing were all created separately just as they are now or better. But then came man's first disobedience and God's beautiful creation was spoilt. From time to time God gave directives to the Jews, but these produced only limited and temporary ameliorations, so that in the end it took the Incarnation and Crucifixion to restore us to the state of Adam. As for human individuals, at the first instant of their existence (whether that is conception, 'quickenings' or something between the two) they are created immortal, certain to endure for all eternity, but not as yet capable of eternal happiness with God. The act of baptism repairs that deficiency: as soon as water has touched the baby's skin and the last word of the formula has been said, the gates of Heaven fly open. This is a picture not of smooth development but of fits and starts.

A different picture is possible. We can believe that God created a world the physical laws of which make it natural that material bodies should in time arise with the physical make-up needed for self-replication, self-nourishment, pursuit and avoidance and other vital functions. New species of animal have arisen out of old without any clear breaks and we cannot say that there is any first member of any new species. Although some theologians feel that all the animals that have ever existed must be divided without remainder into those that had and those that did not have free will, this is treating biology like mathematics. The rational fractions can be divided without remainder into those greater and those less than the square root of two, but it is not like that with living organisms and their capacities.

We may see a continuity in the emergence of vital capacities. Aristotle says sentience belongs to body and soul together³⁶. The ability to be aware of things that affect our sense-organs is not physical since it comprises the ability to act because of them, but the sensitivity³⁷

³⁶ *De Sensu* 436a4–10, b6–8.

³⁷ Not sentience, but we say that the retina is sensitive to light, and the middle and inner ears sensitive to sound waves.

of certain parts of us to sounds, light, heat and cold and the rest is. That sensitivity is innate and comes to us from our parents.

As for intelligence, we need not postulate a single, non-physical capacity for thought, implanted by God in embryos; if we do that, we are conceiving it on the model of a physical capacity like the elasticity of a ball. Instead we may say that the only intelligent capacities we have are the specific arts and sciences and the good and bad dispositions we acquire as we grow up. These are aptitudes not just to do things but precisely to do things on purpose and for reasons. As such, they are non-physical. But they too have a physical side. When I play a trill, or type a word, or say a sentence, I perform complex movements all at once; when I read I take in written signs as groups; and this coordination depends upon physical developments in my brain. A considerate person is one who has formed a habit of noticing signs of uneasiness in others, and this, like a doctor's alertness to signs of a disease, requires the brain's becoming sensitive to selected stimuli. These developments are not genetically determined. They start with the acquisition of muscular skills in the womb and continue throughout life, partly through our deliberate efforts, and partly under the influence of our friends and our society. All we inherit is a brain structure that enables the developments to occur. But if there is something in us that enables us to acquire intelligent capacities it is this inherited bodily structure; it is not something resembling a bodily structure except that it is non-bodily, imposed 'immediately' by the Creator.

There is no first moment when we are in possession of an intelligent capacity, no moment when we could first read and write,³⁸ no moment when we are first temperate or dishonest. It is not possible even to divide all our bodily movements without remainder into those we make on purpose and those that are reflex actions or accidental. But an adult can still say 'I can read now' or 'I certainly did *that* of my own free will.'

Continuity may be seen also in spiritual development. The Old Testament prophets thought that the Jews, with their God-given laws and customs, stood to other nations as domesticated plants and animals to wild ones. Domestication is a protracted process, and there is no discontinuity between wild plums or grapes and cultivated ones. Living together with respect for Mosaic Law enhanced capacities the Jews, like other people, first developed partly as individuals striving to survive. Laws and social customs also interact with the dispositions we acquire to feel concern for others and to have regard to their interests.

³⁸ That there is no such moment is argued by Plato in *Theaetetus* 207 d – 208 b, and by Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books* p. 120; *Philosophical Investigations* 1.157.

Our own priests at Mass when preparing the chalice say the prayer: 'God, you created human nature in marvellous dignity and you still more marvellously reformed it: grant to us, through the mystery of this water and wine, some part in the divinity of Him who came in His goodness to share in our humanity.'³⁹ This divinization goes beyond the effect of good laws, but it too is a gradual affair. It comes about, we are taught, through receiving the sacraments and sharing in the life of the society of which Christ is the head, and also through extending disinterested love for our neighbours (human and non-human) to disinterested love of God. And the more God becomes incarnate in us, the less we require material constituents, since there are none in God.

Does continuity stop here? Is there a firm line between those who have and those who have not achieved independence from their bodies? Not, perhaps, so long as biological life lasts, or so long, at least, as we are physically capable of changing our characters and technical abilities by own efforts. We say in the Creed, however, that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead, and the doctrine of the Last Judgement seems to imply that the Judge *will* divide the living and the dead without remainder into those who have made the grade and those who have not.

The Final Judgement apart, we have a picture in which creation, salvation and sanctification form a continuity that embraces physical and biological processes, individual lives and collectivities, and that culminates in oneness with God. This, I think, makes it easier than the more traditional episodic picture to fit belief in an after-life into our other beliefs about ourselves and about the world, and also to integrate our religious devotions with the rest of our lives. And since the Vienne theory goes better with the continuous picture, while the Lateran goes better with the episodic, that is a further reason, if we choose to philosophise about the soul, for looking to Vienne.

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³⁹ *Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti et mirabilius re-formasti, da nobis per huius aquae et vini mysterium eius divinitatis esse consortes qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est particeps.* It is regrettable that this prayer is much shortened in English translations, and often said only *sotto voce*.