



Aquinas on the Soul

James P. Bledsoe

Volume 29, numéro 3, 1973

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020371ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020371ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Bledsoe, J. P. (1973). Aquinas on the Soul. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 29(3), 273–289. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020371ar>

AQUINAS ON THE SOUL

James P. BLEDSOE

AQUINAS' commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* is a helpful tool in picking your way through that trenchant text. But unfortunately, it has been either enshrined by tradition or ignored by its opponents. I propose to take it seriously but at the same time point out a fundamental misinterpretation embedded in it. The misinterpretation which I propose to point out relates to Aristotle's second definition of the soul. Aristotle defined the soul as "the first act of a physical organized body"¹. But since he was faced with the body-soul problem or, as we call it today, the mind-body problem, he was forced to give a second definition of the soul in order to clear up that difficulty. This second definition of the soul, as translated by W. D. Ross, is: "the soul is that by which, primarily, we live, perceive and think"².

Aquinas' commentary on the *De Anima* is based on a Latin translation by William of Moerbeke. In this translation Aristotle's second definition appears as: "Anima autem hoc quo vivimus et sentimus et movemur et intelligimus primo"³. If this is rendered literally in English, we get the following version: "The soul is that by which we live and we sense and we move and we understand primarily"⁴. The significant difference between this translation and that of W. D. Ross is the addition of the word *movemur*, or in English the words *we move*. This paper is devoted to showing the significance of this addition for the interpretation of Aquinas as well as offering an alternative interpretation which is based on the critical text as edited and translated by Sir W. D. Ross. I propose to use Aquinas' own teaching as well as Aristotle's basic philosophical principles in the development of my position.

The basic problem to be solved in the interpretation of Aristotle's definition concerns what it is that the soul is being defined as the principle of. According to Aquinas' interpretation, the soul is defined as the principle of vital operations as

1. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, II, ed. Ross, Oxford, 1961, Clarendon Press, c. 1, 412b5 (my translation).

2. *Ibid.*, c. 2, 414a12.

3. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, I, c. 1, 402a3. This and all subsequent references to Aristotle's *De Anima* in Latin are from William of Moerbeke's translation as cited in St. Thomas, *In Aristotelis Librum De Anima Commentarium*, 3rd edition, ec. Pirotta, Turin, Marietti, 1948.

4. *Ibid.* (my translation).

expressed in the words "we live and we sense and we move and we understand". According to my interpretation, the soul is defined as a "triplex anima"⁵ which is the principle of a "triplex esse"⁶ as expressed in the words "we live, perceive and think". This interpretation is based on Aristotle's contention that "living is the being of living things and the soul is the cause of their living"⁷.

The interpretation of Aristotle's second definition of the soul presupposes a grasp of the factors determining both its form and content. The kind of definition it is must be determined first in order to determine how the soul is being defined. Next the words in the definition must be considered both in themselves and as parts of the definition in order to find the criterion that determined the choice of precisely these words. Finally, I will enlist Aquinas' help in rejecting his interpretation and in the construction of my own. In conclusion I will suggest the significance of this definition for the mind-body problem.

In his commentary on the *De Anima* Aquinas delineates the mode of definition appropriate to the soul⁸. He points out that, according to the teaching of Aristotle, a substance and an accident are defined in two different ways⁹. In the definition of a substance there is nothing which is extrinsic to that which is being defined. In the definition of an accident, on the other hand, something is added which is extrinsic, that is, the subject of the accident. This difference is due to the fact that a definition states what a thing is. Since a substance is complete in its being (*esse*) and in its species, it is not dependent on anything else to be defined. However, since an accident is not a complete being in itself but depends on its subject, that is, the substance, its definition must contain its subject, e.g. a virtue is defined as a quality of the soul. The same is true of the definition of a form, since a form does not constitute a complete species in itself. So, although matter is not a part of the form, it is necessary to place it in the definition of form because form cannot be understood except in relation to matter. Thus, just as accidents are defined by addition of their subjects to the definition, so also forms are defined by addition of their proper matter to the definition. This kind of definition is referred to as an *ex additione* definition¹⁰.

Now, since the soul is a form, this second mode of definition is appropriate to it. However, in the case of the soul this mode of defining can be further subdivided insofar as the soul is defined either as a form or as a principle. Insofar as the soul is a form, it must be defined according to the mode appropriate to the definition of a form so that its definition must include the subject of the soul. Insofar as it is a principle, it must be defined in relation to that of which it is most properly the principle.

The mode of procedure appropriate to the definition of a form is a definition *ex*

5. ST. THOMAS, *In II De Anima*, lect. 5, n. 285.

6. *Ibid.*

7. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, II, ed. Ross, c. 4, 415b13.

8. ST. THOMAS, *In II De Anima*, lect. 1, n. 213.

9. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, VII, c. 5, 1030b14.

10. ARISTOTLE, *loc. cit.*, 1030b14-1030a15; Cf. ST. THOMAS, *In VII Metaph.*, lect. 9, n. 1477; *ibid.*, lect. 4, nn. 1342-1355.

additione in which the proper matter is stated *in obliquo* as the difference. This is the mode of definition which Aristotle used in the first definition of the soul¹¹.

The mode appropriate to the definition of a principle is an *ex additione* definition in which the word *principle*, or its equivalent is given *in recto* as intrinsic to the essence, and what is principiated, or caused by this principle, is stated *in obliquo* as extrinsic to the essence. This is the mode of definition which Aristotle used in the second definition of the soul¹².

In recto, the second definition of the soul states that the soul is *hoc quo*, that is, a principle, without saying what kind of *quo* principle it is. As we propose to show, it states *in obliquo* that which the soul is most properly and proximately the principle of, i.e. vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual life, understanding life in the light of Aristotle's statement that "living is the being of living things".

A definition of soul as the principle of vegetative, sensitive and intellectual life is a definition of soul according to the total ambit of its power, or as a potestative whole. Aristotle brings out this interpretation of the definition of soul when he compares it to the definition of figure. First, he clears up a possible confusion when he points out that just as there is no figure over and above the triangle, the square or any of the other particular figures, so also there is no common soul over and above the vegetative, sensitive and intellectual, having as it were, separate existence. For Aristotle a soul in the concrete is an individual vegetative, sensitive or intellectual soul; there is no universal soul which exists. Furthermore, vegetative, sensitive and intellectual souls are related in a manner similar to the way figures are related. A triangle is contained in the potential of a square for a square can be divided into two triangles but a square also has a potential over and above that of the triangle. Similarly, the vegetative is contained in the potential of the sensitive for animals can perform the vital vegetative operations, e.g. nutrition, growth and reproduction. But the animal has a potential over and above that of a plant. So also man, as well as having the potential of animals, has the added intellectual potential. Now, even though there is no universal soul and there is an order among the different souls according to their potential, the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual souls are all said to be souls. Thus, Aristotle's second definition of the soul is a common *ex additione* definition of the soul which is appropriate to it according to the total ambit of its power, i.e. as a potestative whole, but not appropriate to any soul taken separately, e.g. the vegetative soul, which Aristotle later defines as "that which reproduces another like itself"¹³.

The significance of Aristotle's approach to the definition of the soul will become evident as we consider the content of the definition. The first words of the definition are "that by which". Now, it is immediately evident from these words that Aristotle is not defining the soul as a substance, a thing or an absolute. He is defining the soul not as a that-which but as a that-by-which, i.e. as a principle having a relation to that of which it is the principle.

11. ST. THOMAS, *In II De Anima*, lect. 1, n. 213.

12. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, II, c. 2, 414a12.

13. ARISTOTLE, *loc. cit.*, 416b25.

The very first words of the definition lay out our problem for us. What is the soul the proper and proximate principle of? Aquinas maintained that Aristotle defined the soul as the first principle of vital operations. But the inappropriateness of this interpretation will become more and more obvious if we keep in mind the reason or purpose which Aristotle had in proposing this definition, i.e. to give a definition which would be appropriate to demonstrate the first definition. For after having given the first definition and explained it thoroughly, Aristotle was still faced with a difficulty. "But it is still uncertain whether the soul is the actualization of the body in the way we have discussed, or is related to it as a sailor to his ship"¹⁴. Plato (or Descartes) could readily agree that the soul is the principle of vital operations without agreeing with Aristotle's first definition of the soul.

Before tackling our problem as to what the words in the definition were used to signify, we must agree on a basic linguistic point. Word usage usually develops from a concrete to a more abstract application, e.g. *ab-trahere* was initially used in contexts such as the drawing of water out of a well and only later was applied in contexts where it was used with a sense similar to that of our word *abstract*. This linguistic development can be followed in any etymological dictionary, and it is a matter of common experience for those dealing with currently developing languages. It could be explained on the basis of our knowing process since in thinking we tend to go from the concrete to the abstract and our naming process tends to follow our knowing process.

The ability of a word to signify various things with distinct but related meanings, which are on different levels of abstractness, presents me with my point of departure for a consideration of the other words in the definition. It seems fairly obvious that the sense of the words "we live", "we perceive" or "we think" was taken from an observation of vital operations, and that they can be used to signify those operations. My question is whether they were used to signify vital operations or something different from but related to vital operations. But first we must discover what this something which is different from but related to vital operations is. In this area the biologist is the first one to check for a clue. A biologist can usually say what animals can or cannot do depending on whether they are alive or not. Thus, he seems to recognize the distinction between being alive and performing vital operations. This is a distinction which Aquinas seems to have been aware of also. "Unde nihil potest habere opus vitæ, quod non habet vitam quæ est potentiale principium talis actionis"¹⁵. Life as the potential principle of vital operations is the something which is different from but related to vital operations that we were looking for. But we still have the question whether "we live" was used to signify this or vital operations.

The proper context for this question is Aristotle's basic problematic. "But it is still uncertain whether the soul is the actualization of the body in the way we have discussed (i.e. as its form) or is related to it as a sailor is to his ship"¹⁶. Aquinas, considering the two meanings of the word *to live*, gives us a clear idea of the significance of each of these meanings for this problematic.

14. ARISTOTLE, *loc. cit.*, c. 1, 413a9.

15. ST. THOMAS, *Ia*, q. 51, a. 3.

16. Cf. footnote 14.

Vivere in animali dicitur dupliciter: uno modo vivere est ipsum *esse viventis*, sicut Philosophus: Vivere viventibus est esse; et hoc modo anima immediate facit vivere quamlibet partem corporis, in quantum est eius forma; alio modo dicitur vivere pro operatione animae quam facit in corde prout est motor; et talem vitam influit primo in cor, et postea in omnes alias partes¹⁷.

If the word *to live* is used to signify the "esse viventis", then the soul makes the body to be alive as the form of the body. But, if the word *to live* is used to signify vital operations, then the soul is responsible for these operations as a kind of agent, or mover, insofar as it moves the heart which brings about the vital operations in the rest of the body. The significance of these distinctions can be realized if we remember that if the soul is the principle of vital operations only, "ut motor", we do not yet know that the soul is the form of the body, for it is possible to have two things united in a contact of power without being substantially one, i.e. be one in vital operation but not one in being¹⁸. For this reason I think the words *we live*, or *vivimus* in the second definition of the soul signify the "esse viventis" and not vital operations.

A much more complex and difficult question is whether the words *we perceive*, or *sentimus*, and *we think*, or *intelligimus*, are open to the same interpretations as *we live*, or *vivimus*. It seems fairly obvious that these words can be used to signify vital operations. And it is in this sense that Aquinas understood their use in the definition of the soul. In fact, in a passage in the *De Veritate*¹⁹ he explicitly ruled out the interpretation of these words as signifying the "esse viventis", for he distinguished the two senses of the word *vivere* and then maintained that it was to signify vital operations that Aristotle used the words *sentimus* and *intelligimus* in the definition of the soul.

Aquinas' position on the definition was maintained in the face of his own recognition that Aristotle used these words on other occasions to signify something other than vital operations. One occasion for this recognition was Moerbeke's translation of a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. "Hoc autem, quoniam sentimus vel intelligimus, quoniam sumus. Esse enim erat sentire vel intelligere"²⁰. Aquinas expresses this recognition trenchantly in the following way: "Dictum est enim supra quod esse et vivere hominis principaliter est sentire vel intelligere"²¹. On this occasion Aquinas does not give us his understanding of the signification of the words; he merely recognizes Aristotle's usage.

Aquinas not only recognized Aristotle's usage of these words to signify the "esse viventis" but in a passage in the *Summa Theologiae* he also gave an interpretation of their use in the definition of the soul which he himself considered better than the interpretation of them as signifying vital operations. This interpretation is found as the reply to an objection which Aquinas gives when he is considering whether life is an

17. ST. THOMAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 3, ad 3.

18. ST. THOMAS, *Cont. Gent.*, II, c. 57.

19. ST. THOMAS, *De Veritate*, q. 13, a. 4, ad 2; also *In II De Caelo et Mundo*, lect. 4, n. 5. (ed. Spiazzi, Turin, Marietti, 1952).

20. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, c. 9, 1170a35, as cited in St. Thomas, *In Decem Libros Ethicorum Aristotelis as Nicomachum Expositio*, ed. Spiazzi, Turin, Marietti, 1949.

21. ST. THOMAS, *In IX Eth.*, lect. 11, n. 1908.

operation. He poses an objection which flows from the principle that nothing is divided except by what is in the same genus. Since Aristotle in the *De Anima* divided *vivere* into four operations, i.e. to nourish, to sense, to move locally and to think, live is some kind of operation. In his answer to this objection, Aquinas gives what he considers a better interpretation of *sentire* and *intelligere*.

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Philosophus ibi accipit vivere pro operatione vitæ. Vel dicendum est melius, quod sentire et intelligere, et huiusmodi, quandoque sumuntur pro quibusdam operationibus; quandoque autem pro ipso esse sic operantium. Dicitur enim IX Ethic., quod esse est sentire vel intelligere, idest habere naturam ad sentiendum vel intelligendum. Et hoc modo distinguit Philosophus vivere per illa quatuor. Nam in istis inferioribus quatuor sunt genera viventium²².

However, instead of making our problem easier, Aquinas has made it more complicated. He has made the distinction between *vivere* as it signifies vital operations and as it signifies the "esse sic operantium". But his interpretation of the expression "esse sic operantium" is that it signifies the "naturam ad sentiendum vel intelligendum". He himself then gives the reason for this interpretation in terms of Aristotle's four-fold (as Aquinas thought) distinction of *life* in the definition of the soul. "Nam in istis inferioribus quatuor sunt genera viventium".

In fairness to Aquinas, however, we should point out that he has another interpretation of *intelligere* which is not dependent upon Aristotle's four-fold (as Aquinas thought) distinction of *vivere* in the definition of the soul.

Anima, in quantum est forma corporis secundum suam essentiam, dat esse corpori, in quantum est forma substantialis; et dat sibi huiusmodi esse quod est vivere, in quantum est talis forma, scilicet anima; et dat ei huiusmodi vivere, scilicet intellectuali naturæ, in quantum est talis anima, scilicet intellectiva. Intelligere autem quandoque sumitur pro operatione, et sic principium eius est potentia vel habitus; quandoque vero pro ipso esse intellectualis naturæ, et sic principium eius quod est intelligere, est ipsa essentia animæ intellectivæ²³.

In this passage Aquinas first points out that the soul is the principle of the *esse* of the body precisely insofar as it is the substantial form of the body according to its very essence. He next points out that the soul as soul, that is, insofar as it is this particular kind of form, is the principle of a particular kind of *esse*, i.e. *vivere*. Furthermore, he says that the soul insofar as it is this particular kind of soul, i.e. intellectual, is the principle of that *vivere* which is appropriate to the intellectual nature.

Aquinas' final consideration deals with the way in which the word *intelligere* can be taken. In one way the word can be taken for operation and if it is taken this way, its principle is then a power of a habit. However, Aquinas maintains that the word *intelligere* can also be taken for the *esse* of the intellectual nature.

Aquinas' interpretation of the word *intelligere* as the *esse* of the intellectual nature throws light on the meaning of the word *esse*. He clearly makes a distinction between the intellectual nature and its *esse* when he says, "quandoque vero pro ipso

22. ST. THOMAS, *Ia*, qu. 18, a. 2, ad 1.

23. ST. THOMAS, Q.D. *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, q. 1, a. 11, eds. Calcaterra and Centi, Turin, Marietti, 1953; cf. ST. THOMAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1.

esse intellectualis naturæ". He even strengthens this statement by what follows: "et sic principium eius quod est intelligere, est ipsa essentia animæ intellectivæ". From this passage it is evident that Aquinas understands *intelligere* as signifying the *esse* of the intellectual nature and not the intellectual nature itself. Thus we see that he is not identifying *esse* and intellectual nature but distinguishing them, and that he understands the *esse* as principiated by the intellective soul.

Aquinas in a passage from the *Sentences* very clearly and succinctly distinguished these two senses of *esse* which we have been considering. And then he applied this distinction to an understanding of Aristotle's statement that "living is the being of living things" or, according to Moerbeke's translation, "vivere autem viventibus esse est". In this context Aquinas unequivocally interprets *vivere* as signifying the *esse* of living things in the sense of the first act of the soul and clearly rejects the interpretation of *vivere* as vital operations which are the second act of the soul.

Sed sciendum, quod esse dicitur dupliciter. Uno modo dicitur esse ipsa quiditas vel natura rei. Alio modo dicitur esse ipse actus essentiae; sicut vivere, quod est esse viventibus, est animæ actus, non actus secundus qui est operatio, sed actus primus²⁴.

It is clear from these statements of Aquinas that he was aware of the possibility of interpreting the words *vivimus*, *sentimus* and *intelligimus* as signifying either the vital operations or the "esse viventis". And also he was aware of the distinction of *esse* as either the nature of a thing or the first act of its essence. But it is my contention that he was precluded from interpreting these words in the definition as signifying the first act of the soul because the translation upon which he commented contained the word *movemur*. I feel confident, however, that, if the definition on which he commented had not contained the word *movemur*, he would have interpreted it in the light of the statement that "vivere autem viventibus esse est". However, before presenting my position on the word *movemur* in detail, I will first consider the significance of the word *primarily* (*primo*) and the words *and-and* (*et-et*).

The interpretation of the word *primo* depends on our interpretation of the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, and *intelligimus*. If these words signify vital operations, there is no sense in which these verbs could be modified by the adverb *primo*, for operation is a secondary effect and *vivimus primo* could only refer to life as a primary effect²⁵.

Aquinas took the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, *movemur* and *intelligimus* as signifying vital operations. Therefore, although Aristotle had placed the word *primo*, or rather its Greek equivalent, last, Aquinas placed it just before the word *quo*. In the mind of Aquinas, then, the word *primo* was used by Aristotle to indicate that the soul is the "primum principium"²⁶ of vital operations. This also seems to be the interpretation of W. D. Ross. "The soul is that by which, primarily, we live, perceive and think".

If the word *primo* is interpreted as modifying the verbs in the definition, we can leave the definition in the form in which Aristotle wrote it. Our translation would then

24. ST. THOMAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1; cf. *Ia IIae*, q. 111, a. 2, c; *Ia* q. 76, a. 6.

25. *Ibid.*

26. ST. THOMAS, *In II De Anima*, lect. 3, n. 253.

read: the soul is that by which we live and perceive and think primarily. Also, with this interpretation of *primo*, there is no need to add it to the examples which Aristotle gave of knowledge and health, as Aquinas did. Aristotle did not use it in these examples because there is no great problem involved in being, for example, healthy in first act and healthy in second act. However, there is good reason to add it to the definition of the soul for there is a difficulty with regard to the soul as the principle by which we live. Since Plato would readily agree that the soul is the principle of vital operations but he would not agree that together with the body the soul is the principle of the *esse* of living beings, Aristotle deliberately indicated by the word *primo* that the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, and *intelligimus* were to be interpreted as signifying the "esse viventis".

If, as we maintain, Aristotle had intended to define the soul in such a way as to indicate that it is the principle of the primary effect of animation, i.e. the *esse*, as opposed to the secondary effect, i.e. operation, it would be reasonable to interpret the word *primo* as modifying the verbs in the definition. The words *vivimus et sentimus et intelligimus primo* would then refer to the *esse* of vegetative beings, the *esse* of sentient beings and the *esse* of rational beings.

In order to interpret the words *and-and* (*et-et*), we must recall what was previously maintained concerning the mode of the definition for it determines the use of these words. As we saw, if this is a definition of the soul as the principle of life, it is a definition of the soul as a potestative whole. As a potestative whole, soul contains parts, just as figure contains triangle, square, pentagon, etc. as parts. The definition of soul as a potestative whole must, therefore, contain a reference to its parts but in order for the definition to have unity it must indicate the unity of the whole composed of these parts. The repetition of the words *and-and* serve the purpose of indicating that the words *we live and we sense and we understand* signify the parts of soul conjunctively.

A consequence of this interpretation of the words *and-and* is the necessity of placing only the parts of soul in the definition which are distinct according to the appropriate basis of differentiation. If the definition were to omit a part which belonged or contain a part which did not belong, the definition would lack either completeness or unity and the conjunctions would not serve to indicate the conjunction of the parts of soul which taken together constitute the whole soul.

We have now considered all of the words which make up Aristotle's definition of the soul as it appears in the Greek. But we must now consider the crucial word *movemur* which appears only in Moerbeke's translation, for it is my contention that the presence or absence of this word is a decisive key to the proper interpretation of this definition. If, as I contend, this definition is a compositive definition of the soul as it is a potestative whole, we must begin by reviewing the general procedure to be followed in order to arrive at such a definition. Next, we must consider how Aristotle actually did approach this definition. And finally, I will try to show from Aquinas' own teaching why Aristotle omitted the word *movemur* from the definition even though he had used it in his approach to the definition.

If we recollect that Aristotle thought of the definition of the soul as similar to that of figure, we can see the general procedure to be followed in order to arrive at such a definition. The various figures, e.g. triangle, square, etc., go to make up figure since there is no universal figure over and above these. So it is also with soul. The various souls, i.e. vegetative, sensitive, and intellective, go to make up soul since there is no universal soul over and above these. The definition of the soul, then, must be a definition of it as a whole, or more precisely as a potestative whole, since the soul is being defined as a principle. Thus, the soul must be defined in terms of that of which it is the proper and proximate principle, i.e. the life which is appropriate to each of its essentially distinct parts.

This brings us to Aristotle's major problem in the approach to this definition. The soul as a whole which is the principle of life has parts, but it is not immediately evident which parts are essential and which are accidental to the whole. In other words, what potential characterizes an animal, or is necessary for an animal to be an animal, e.g. nutrition, growth, reproduction, locomotion, appetite or sensation? Since the potential of a being can only be discovered through its operations, the whole approach to the second definition of the soul must be an inductive process. In this process an analysis of the operations which can be observed must be made in order to discover the essential similarities and dissimilarities of the individuals under consideration. Also, in the course of this investigation, accidental characteristics must be weeded out because they do not belong in this definition.

This process must begin with the location of the subject, or what individuals are to be considered. And Aristotle did in fact begin this way. He first made the distinction between the animate and the inanimate based on the notion that the animate have life. Then, as was his custom, he pointed out that the word *life* has many meanings. But living individuals are recognized inductively if they have any one of the following characteristics: "mind, sensation, movement or rest in space, besides the movement implied in nutrition and decay or growth"²⁷. He distinguished four classes of living individuals which can be recognized by induction. He began this four-fold distinction with the class of living individuals which are characterized by mind. Presumably he began with this class because we have first-hand knowledge of ourselves. The second class which he distinguished was characterized by sensation, the third class by locomotion and the fourth class by intussusception, or nutrition. Each of these classes of living things has many powers but the class is set off, or distinguished, from the other classes by its characteristic potential. Those living things which have only the vegetative powers are plants; those which have sensation without progressive motion are imperfect animals; those which have the power to move from place to place are perfect animals; and those which have the power of understanding are men. The appetitive power does not constitute another grade of living things because wherever there is sensation there is also appetite.

Aristotle concludes his distinction of the various grades of living things by observing that all that can be said at this point in the process of discovering the second definition of the soul is that the soul is the principle of these various grades of living

27. *Ibid.*, lect. 4, n. 273.

things which are distinguished by nutrition, sense-perception, reasoning, and movement.

Immediately on the heels of this observation, Aristotle poses a complex and difficult problem which carries forward his effort to determine what is essential to the definition. The first question which he poses is whether each of these four, the vegetative, the sensitive, the intellective and the locomotive, is each a soul or is only a power of the soul. The second question is whether they are only distinct according to their definition or whether they are also in different parts of the body.

Aristotle answers these questions in the reverse order from which they were asked because the answer to the second question lays the foundation for an understanding of his answer to the first question. In his treatment of the second question he begins with the second half of the question which asks if the parts of the soul are in different parts of the body. He first considers the problem with reference to plants because it is common knowledge that plants can be divided and each of the parts will go on performing all of the vegetative operations connected with nutrition, growth and reproduction. This indicates that the soul of a plant is actually one and does not have different parts in different parts of the body for, if it did, each part of the divided plant would not have all of the powers connected with nutrition, growth and reproduction. However, it also indicates that even though the soul of a plant is actually one, it is potentially many. Aristotle goes on to point out that this is also the case with certain animals. The worm, for instance, can be cut in two and both parts will have vegetative operation, sensation, local movement, and appetite. If these powers were in different parts of the body of the worm, when the worm is divided the two parts would not each have them all. As in the case of the plant, it is evident that the soul of the worm is not divided up according to its powers but is actually one. Thus, in certain cases it is obvious that the parts of soul are not in different parts of the body. But in certain cases it is not evident whether a power is in a separate part of the body or not. Aristotle considers this to be the case with the intellective power. He maintains, however, that it seems to belong to a different genus of soul. It seems to be separable from the other parts of soul and separate from a bodily organ as the eternal from the corruptible. It would seem from the above observations that Aristotle is maintaining that soul is divided according to certain powers, e.g. the intellective, but it is not divided according to others, e.g. growth. On the basis of these considerations a distinction could be drawn between the parts and the powers of the soul.

Aristotle next answers the first part of the second question. He points out that the powers of the soul, even though in certain cases they are not in different parts of the body, are different in definition. For instance, sensing is a specifically different operation from thinking since they have specifically different objects. Thus, the sensitive power of the soul is different in definition from the intellective power. This follows from the fact that the definition of a power is taken from a relation to its proper operation, and if the operations are different in species, then the powers will have different definitions.

Finally, Aristotle treats the main question: whether the vegetative, the sensitive, the intellective, and the locomotive are each a soul or only powers of the soul. It is evident that plants have only the vegetative and in them it is the soul, and nutrition, growth and reproduction are the powers of the soul. However, in animals the problem

is more complex. Some animals have all the powers but every animal does not have every one of them. Some animals have only vegetative and sensitive powers, e.g. sponges. Some have vegetative, sensitive and locomotive powers, e.g. dogs. And finally, some animals have all the powers e.g. man. This, then, constitutes the basis for a differentiation and classification of animals.

It is necessary to remember, however, that Aristotle has already stated that the intellective constitutes a different genus of soul. Since the intellective soul is not a species of sensitive soul but constitutes a different genus, the difference in brute animals according to their capabilities is to be understood as similar to what happens in the case of the senses. Some animals, i.e. the perfect animals, have all the senses. Other animals, e.g. a mole, have some of the senses but not all. While others, i.e. the imperfect animals, have only the sense of touch. So also, some animals, i.e. the imperfect animals, have only sensation without locomotion. While others, i.e. the perfect animals, have both. However, this constitutes only a difference within the genus of the sentient and not a difference from the sentient. In other words, the locomotive power does not constitute another part of soul but only causes a difference in animals, i.e. between perfect and imperfect²⁸.

It is important to see that this distinction between the parts of the soul is being made in order to arrive at the compositive definition of the soul. If we analyze what Aristotle has done, we see that he first showed the essential dissimilarity between the vegetative part of the soul and the other parts. He then showed the essential dissimilarity between the intellective part and the other parts of the soul, for it constitutes another genus of soul. Finally, he points out that the locomotive power does not constitute another part of soul but rather the difference between perfect animals and imperfect animals. Therefore, since the locomotive power does not constitute an essential dissimilarity but rather an accidental dissimilarity, the word *moveretur* should not be included in this definition.

If we consider the statement of Aristotle, "At present we must confine ourselves to saying that soul is the source of these phenomena and is characterized by them, viz. by the powers of self-nutrition, sensation, thinking, and motivity"²⁹, we can see that he is considering the soul in the context of the different grades of living things. In an inductive process it would be necessary to begin in this manner, for living things come immediately under empirical observation. However, the total context of his consideration determines how far he must proceed. This total context is determined by the two purposes which Aristotle had in mind: first, a scientific definition of the subject, that is, the soul; second, a demonstration for the first definition which defines the soul as the form of the body.

We have been considering Aristotle's procedure from the point of view of his first purpose. From this point of view what Aristotle was seeking was a compositive definition of the soul. Since all of the appropriate parts have to be included in the definition, and all of the accidental must be omitted, he included the vegetative, the sensitive and the intellective parts, but omitted the locomotive.

If we consider Aristotle's investigation according to his second purpose, i.e. the demonstration of the soul as form, we should arrive at the same conclusion.

28. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, II, c. 2, 413b13-414a3.

29. *Ibid.*, 413 b11.

Aristotle's reason for omitting the word *movetur* from the definition after considering it in his approach can be found in the relation of its inclusion or omission to the definition of soul as form. I will try to show Aristotle's reason for omitting this word using three passages from Aquinas' commentary, thus establishing at the same time Aquinas' recognition of the possibility of my interpretation.

The first passage from Aquinas' commentary deals with Aristotle's opening remarks in his approach to the second definition of the soul. Aquinas points out that Aristotle uses the distinction between animate and inanimate things based on the fact that animate things are living as a starting point in his demonstration of the first definition. In this way, Aquinas indicates his recognition of the key role the notion of life plays in this demonstration. He points out that Aristotle proceeds to distinguish the various meanings of the word *life* using the typical functions of various groups of living things for purposes of grouping them into types. Aquinas observes concerning this process that Aristotle here distinguishes only four modes of life whereas at the end of the *First Book* he had distinguished five genera of vital operations. "Moreover, he gives only four modes of living when above he had given five genera of operations of the soul, because he intends here to distinguish the modes of living according to the grades of living things, which we distinguished according to these four"³⁰. Aquinas here clearly states that Aristotle is not yet distinguishing life according to the parts of soul but rather according to what is more immediately observable, the grades of living things. In his consideration of the fifth genera of operations Aquinas brings out the criterion that Aristotle is using to make his four-fold division. "However, the appetite, which is a fifth besides these four, does not cause any diversity in the grades of living things. For, wherever there is sense, there is also appetite"³¹.

Aquinas' commentary on the passage in which Aristotle distinguished the five genera of operations reveals the basis for a three-fold as well as a five-fold distinction of vital operations. One way of distinguishing vital operations is according to the *mode of operation (secundum modum operandi)*. Understanding the operations in this way, there are three powers of the soul, i.e. the vegetative, sensitive and intellective, and all the operations of the soul are attributed to these. The basis for the distinction of these powers is to be found in their relation to matter. The vegetative power acts by means of active and passive qualities such as hot and cold. The sensitive power, although it does not need sensible qualities, does need a bodily organ. The intellective power, however, is able to operate without either a dependence on sensible qualities or a bodily organ. The other way which Aquinas gives for considering these operations is according to the *genera of actions (secundum genera actionum)*. From this point of view there are five powers of the soul, i.e. the vegetative, sensitive, locomotive, appetitive, and intellective.

After Aristotle has demonstrated the first definition of the soul by the second he begins his consideration of the powers of the soul and again returns to his five-fold division of vital operations. Concerning this mode of procedure, Aquinas asks two questions. Why does Aristotle give five powers of the soul when he customarily said the soul is three-fold, i.e. vegetative, sensitive, and rational? Also why does he give five powers here when he gave only four powers in his treatment of the second definition?

30. ST. THOMAS, In II De Anima, lect. 3, n. 255 (my translation).

31. *Ibid.*

Aquinas first sets out to answer the question concerning the relation between the three souls and the five powers. He points out that every potency is named from the act which is proper to it. The operative potency is named from the act which is operation. The potencies of the soul are operative because the soul is a form and the potencies of a form are operative potencies and not passive potencies³². Thus, it is necessary to distinguish the powers of the soul according to the different operations of the soul. However, an operation of the soul is the operation of a living thing. Therefore, since the proper operation of a thing belongs to it as it is (for a thing operates insofar as it is a being), it is necessary to consider the operations of the soul as they are the operations of a living thing.

Living things have basically two different modes of existence (*duplex esse*). The first of these is material and the second immaterial. According to the first, living things are like other material things and according to the second they are something like the separated substances. The difference between these modes of existence can be seen through their relation to matter. A living thing which has a material mode of existence is limited by matter in such a way that it can only be that which it is, e.g. a rose is a rose. However, a living thing which has an immaterial mode of existence is not only what it is, e.g. a dog, but in a certain way other things as well, e.g. when it sees or hears something else. This is due to the fact that it is not completely determined or limited by matter. In living things this immaterial mode of existence has two grades. The highest grade is completely immaterial. This is the grade appropriate to the intellect for in the intellect a thing exists without matter or even its individuating conditions, and the intellect needs no bodily organ. Sensible existence is midway between material existence and intellectual existence, for in the senses a thing is without matter but not without the conditions of individuation caused by matter, nor are the senses able to function without a bodily organ.

The operations of a living thing according to a material mode of existence are those of the vegetative soul. Although these operations are ordered to attaining and conserving existence as are the operations of inanimate things, these operations come about in a higher and nobler way. Inanimate things are brought into existence and preserved in existence through extrinsic causes. Animate things generate in virtue of an intrinsic principle, i.e. seed, and are preserved by an intrinsic principle through nutrition. The operations of a living thing which are according to a wholly immaterial mode of existence are attributed to the intellectual part of the soul, and those which are in between are attributed to the sensitive part of the soul. Therefore, according to this threefold existence (*triplex esse*) we differentiate the soul generically into three parts (*triplex anima*): the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual.

Having shown the basis for the division of the soul into three parts, Aquinas proceeds to give the foundation for the division of five powers. It must be first recognized that existence is always in accordance with a form. Sensible existence is in accordance with a sensible form and intelligible existence is in accordance with an intelligible form. Now from every form arises an inclination and from this inclination an operation. Therefore, an inclination follows on the sensible form which is called sensible appetite and an inclination follows on the intelligible form which is called

32. Cf. ST. THOMAS, *Ia IIae*, q. 55, a. 2, c.

intellectual appetite, or will. From appetite comes the operation which is called locomotion. Therefore, we have five powers, the vegetative, sensitive, intellective, locomotive and appetitive.

According to Aquinas in his approach to the second definition, Aristotle was trying to establish the soul as the principle of living in all living things. He, therefore, distinguished life according to the grades of living things and not according to the operations of life (*non secundum operationes vitæ*) as he did when he distinguished the five genera of powers. Appetite does not constitute another grade of living things because whatever has sense has appetite. As a consequence there are only four grades of living things.

We can see now that it is possible to speak of the powers of the soul from different points of view. Depending on the point of view, the soul has either three, four, or five powers, or potential parts. First, the soul is said to have three parts, i.e. vegetative, sensitive, and intellective, if they are distinguished from the point of view of the mode of operation, or mode of being. Second, the soul is said to have four powers, i.e. the vegetative, sensitive, intellective and locomotive, if they are distinguished according to the grades of living things. Third, the soul is said to have five genera of powers, i.e. the vegetative, sensitive, intellective, locomotive, and appetitive, if life (*vivere*) is distinguished according to the operations of life (*secundum operationes vitæ*), or if vital operations are taken according to the genera of actions (*secundum genera actionum*).

We are now in a position to see why Aquinas interpreted the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, *movemur*, and *intelligimus* as referring to the four genera of life. It is only in reference to the genera of life as distinguished on the basis of living things that we get exactly four words.

Moreover, due to his interpretation of the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, *movemur* and *intelligimus* as referring collectively to the four genera of life, Aquinas is forced to interpret these words taken singly as signifying the "operationes vitæ" which belongs to each of the different grades of living things.

If we consider the basis of these divisions, we can see that the three-fold division of the soul is the most appropriate division for a demonstration of the soul as form. The basis of this division is the fact that the operations of the soul surpass the operations of inanimate things according to three generically distinct grades or modes of being. These grades of being follow the different relations which the parts of soul have to matter. And it is from this grasp of the parts of the soul as the principle of those modes of being that the conclusion is properly drawn that the soul is the form of the body because the proper effect of the form is the *esse* of the matter³³.

Vivere in animali dicitur dupliciter: uno modo vivere est ipsum esse viventis, sicut Philosophus: Vivere viventibus est esse; et hoc modo anima immediate facit vivere quamlibet partem corporis, in quantum est eius forma; alio modo dicitur vivere pro operatione animæ quam facit in corde prout est motor³⁴.

33. "Est autem hoc proprium formæ substantialis quod dat materiæ esse simpliciter." ST. THOMAS, Q. D. *De Anima*, q. 1, a. 9, c.

34. ST. THOMAS, *In I Sent.*, d. 8, q. 5, a. 3, ad 3.

It seems reasonable to conclude that Aristotle omitted the word *movemur* from the second definition of the soul for two reasons: first, for the perfection of the definition itself and second, for the perfection of the demonstration of the first definition.

Our final task in the consideration of the definition in itself is to unite the parts of the definition to form a whole. In order to do this it will be necessary to see what determines the unity of the definition and then to interpret the parts in the light of this principle.

Aquinas faced the problem of the unity of this definition and gave us what he considered to be the principle of its solution. "Et referuntur hæc quatuor ad quatuor genera vitæ de quibus superius fecerat mentionem"³⁵. Applying this principle to the interpretation of the definition, Aquinas maintained that the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, *movemur*, and *intelligimus* taken individually refer to vital operations and the word *primo* combined with the word *quo* indicates that the soul is a *primum principium*. This interpretation was forced on Aquinas because the word *movemur* appeared in the translation of the text which he commented on. It is necessary to remember that the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, and *intelligimus* could refer either to vital operations or the "esse viventis." However, there is no *esse moventis* independent of the *esse sentientis* and *esse intelligentis* that constitutes a different mode of being. Therefore, it was necessary for Aquinas to interpret the four words in conjunction as referring to the "quatuor genera vitæ", understanding that the perfect and imperfect animals constitute two grades of animal life but not two generically different modes of being. Otherwise, Aquinas would have been trapped into interpreting Aristotle as having given a definition of the soul which lacked unity. He would have had to interpret the definition as stating that the soul is the principle of substantial life, or the "esse viventis", according to the words *vivimus*, *sentimus*, and *intelligimus* and the principle of accidental life, or vital operation, according to the word *movemur*.

Our problem, however, is not exactly the same as that of Aquinas. We do not have to deal with the word *movemur*, but only with the three words, *vivimus*, *sentimus*, and *intelligimus*. Each of these words can be used to designate a different *modus essendi*, i.e. vegetative life, sensitive life, and intellectual life; and, as we saw in the commentary of Aquinas, there are only these three distinct modes of being appropriate to living things³⁶. Furthermore, if each of these words was used to signify a different mode of being, then, according to this "triplex esse"³⁷, it would be possible to distinguish "communiter triplex anima: scilicet vegetabilis, sensibilis, et rationalis"³⁸.

In conclusion we can see that, given this interpretation of the conjunction of the words *vivimus et sentimus et intelligimus*, the interpretation of the whole definition follows. It is evident that the word *quo* designates the soul as a *quo* principle of a

35. ST. THOMAS, *In II De Anima*, lect. 4, n. 273.

36. *Ibid.*, lect. 5, nn. 282-285; cf. *De Ver.*, q. 10, a. 1, ad 2.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

formal effect. The words *vivimus*, *sentimus* and *intelligimus* taken separately signify the various modes of being according to which the soul is placed in active potency to vital operations. Since it is life according to its different grades which places the soul in potency to vital operations, this is a definition of the "triplex anima"; that is, of soul as a principle according to its parts, or, in other words, of soul as it is a potestative whole. The repetition of the conjunction *et* was used to indicate the composition of these parts, for the definition of a potestative whole must contain all of its parts in composition. The adverb *primo* is used to modify the verbs within the definition, *vivimus*, *sentimus* and *intelligimus*. The word *primo* indicates that these words are to be understood as signifying life as first act and not life as second act, i.e. vital operations. This eliminates the possibility of interpreting this definition as a definition of the soul considered as a *motor* with respect to the vital operations. From this interpretation of the definition it follows that the soul as a *quo* principle of the *esse* of the composite must be related to the body as potency or act. But since the body is not the act of the soul, the soul must be the act of the body, and precisely as the *quo* principle of the *esse* of the composite. In other words, the soul is the act of the body as its form.

The significance of Aristotle's second definition of the soul for the mind-body problem can be brought out if we turn to his *Metaphysics*. In *Book H* where Aristotle treated the principles of sensible substances, he first considered the formal and material principles and then the union of these principles. In his consideration of the union of these principles, he asked the mind-body question: "What, then is it that makes a man one"³⁹

Aristotle's response to this question is two-fold. One response is in the form of a rejection of the assumption at the heart of the question. The other response relates his matter-form theory to the dilemma. The question, "What, then is it that makes man one?" assumes that man is composed of two things and needs something to make him one. Aristotle simply denies the assumption. The second definition states that the soul is that by which we live, perceive and think primarily. If it is we who live, and the soul is that by which we live, then the soul does not have its own independent life. Without this, it does not have its own independent existence. And without this, it is not a being, i.e. a substance. But if the soul is not a substance, there can be no question of the body and soul being related as two things and, thus, no question of man's unity in that sense.

But the question still remains, if the body and the soul are not two things, what are they? There are several solutions. One could maintain that the body is something and the soul is nothing or that the soul is something and the body is nothing. Or one could maintain that they are the same thing. Aristotle prefers a version of the last alternative. His solution is based on the argument that, since the soul is that by which we live, perceive and think primarily, it is the first act of a physical organized body. He begins his analysis with living things and maintains that the body and soul are "one and the same thing, the one potentially and the other actually"⁴⁰. What he is

39. ARISTOTLE, *Metaph.*, VII, c. 6, 1045a14.

40. *Ibid.*, 1045b18.

saying is that that by which we live, perceive and think primarily is one and the same thing *with* the physical organized body, but it is not one and the same thing *as* the physical organized body. In other words, the identity of soul and body is not an identity of two things but an identity in one and the same thing. Aristotle maintains that the body and the soul are distinct in the sense that one is the first act to the other. But, united in life and having the same existence, they are one and the same thing because one is simply the actualization of the other.

This is merely an indication of the relation of Aristotle's second definition of the soul to the mind-body problem. It would take another paper to fill in the details. "But if, as we say, one element is matter and another is form, and one is potentially and the other actually, the question will no longer be thought a difficulty"⁴¹.

41. *Ibid.*, 1045a21.