

INTRODUCTION TO “THOUGHTS ON THE MAKE-UP OF A HUMAN PERSON”

On Friday, 26 March 2004, Grisez read and marked up John Finnis’s draft of his article, “‘The Thing I Am’: Personal Identity in Aquinas and Shakespeare.” On Saturday, Grisez reread the draft and wrote out specific comments. He thought there might be a deeper problem with the draft, so he reread a treatment of the human person he had himself worked out thirty years previously. (Readers of this will find that treatment in an item above in this column: Part VI of *God? A Philosophical Preface to Faith*, pages 343–53.) Grisez then added the general comment on the first page of “Thoughts on the Make-up of the Human Person.” Continuing to reflect, he soon sent two additional comments (pp. 2–3).

In response to Finnis’s query (bottom, p. 3), Grisez explained (pp. 4–5) why he disagreed with the view that the human soul is the Aristotelian substantial form of the body, and in the course of doing so said: “I think the soul just is the self of which we are at times more or less aware.” Grisez also pointed out that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said in a 1979 document that what is called the soul is “‘ipsum’: ego humanum.” Finnis (middle, p. 5) doubted whether Grisez meant what he was saying and pointed out: “To say that the soul is the principle of the unity of the person is one thing, to say that it just is the person is another.”

Grisez responded (bottom, p. 5) that he did want to say that the soul just is the self: “Instead of the soul being part of [i.e., a metaphysical constituent of] this body which is me, this body is part of me which is the soul that I am.” And Grisez added more than two pages (6, 7, and the top of 8) of additional thoughts consonant with that view. Grisez’s account (near the bottom of p. 6) of how the soul, understood as the whole self, can be held to be the form of the body is especially important. Finnis then responded (p. 8) and Grisez ended the exchange (p. 9).

Thus, although Grisez never carefully worked out his final view on the make-up of the human person, in this e-mail exchange he proposed that the soul, rather than being any sort of part or constituent or aspect of the person, just is the familiar self as a unified whole. Included in that whole are the thinking subject, the moral agent, and the user of many things, not least of language and other means of expression. Included in the soul also is the living body, by which we humans are aware of and deal with our bodies themselves and other things, and are in touch with one another.

On this view, death radically disables human persons but cannot entirely eliminate them. Grisez later thought that this view of the matter comports profoundly with common sense, since virtually all peoples have thought that death, rather than ending a person’s life, changes it radically and for the worse.

Readers should bear in mind that these quickly written and never revised messages do not constitute a work prepared for publication. In particular, it would be *gravely unreasonable* to suppose that Finnis implicitly agreed with everything that he did not explicitly disagree with in Grisez’s voluminous comments.

THOUGHTS ON THE MAKE-UP OF THE HUMAN PERSON

After commenting specifically on a draft of John Finnis's article, "The Thing I Am': Personal Identity in Aquinas and Shakespeare," Grisez added the following:

In general, I think the paper has the problem of being very ambitious insofar as you are dealing both with the big problem about the person and the specific problem of the moral self. The relationship between the two does not jell.

On the big problem, I've done my best in *Beyond the New Theism* [*God: A Philosophical Preface to Faith*], chapter 23. You might find it helpful to reread those ten or so pages. I just did, and they seem to me remarkably lucid and, I still think, sound. Unfortunately, I am rejecting Aquinas there, though sticking with Aristotle and Aquinas with respect to the aspect of a person as an individual, sentient organism of the human species.

On the specific problem, I don't have any problem with what you do say. You might make the thing clearer by being more explicit about free choice, self-determination, and the irreducibility of the existential order not only to the first order but to the second and fourth.

Given my understanding of the person, I disagree with: "The thing I am is identifiable more in action and dispositions to act than in self-consciousness."

If that were limited to self-consciousness relevant to the third order, that would be so. I can have a clear conscience and be in sin, so the latter identifies me, not the former. But I don't think that my self as moral subject identifies me more than my self as thinking subject, for whom all reality, including myself, is object. For I don't think one can make such cross-order comparisons.

True, Jesus was concerned with the existential self, and so should we be. But that is looking at matters from the moral point of view. From that point of view, accepting or rejecting the covenant is all important, and being faithful to acceptance is essential. But, stepping back, the moral point of view is not the only one. I'm as identifiable in my self-consciousness as in my action and dispositions to act; in fact, I'm as identifiable in using things—in writing, in speaking, and so on—as in either of the other two. And I'm also identifiable as dead when my body is extracted from the plane wreck.

Hope all of this helps.

Germain

Finnis replied:

Subject: Comments on The Thing I Am

Germain,

Many thanks, indeed. Will reread chapter 23. (Incidentally, is *God? A Philosophical Preface to Faith* purely and simply a reprint, or did you add something however little?)

John

Subject: Re: Comments on The Thing I Am

John,

That title is of a reprint, changed only by adding a brief, new preface—which I attach. However, so far as I know, he has not done anything about publishing it, though I have a contract that would have had it out long ago.

I'm glad my work on the paper seems helpful.

GG

Subject: Various selves

Dear John:

Reflecting a bit more on various selves, I think we would say that the self-determined self is more truly oneself than the self-determining self, since the self-determined self is actual. It's not the [act of] choosing but what one becomes in choosing what one chooses that counts, contrary to the view that autonomy per se is good.

But consider the second order. The self that knows itself along with other things, the subject rather than the object, seems to be more truly oneself. Obviously, the two are inseparable at certain points, but the subject is always at work even when not reflexive, while the knowing self as object of knowledge is rather unsatisfactory and elusive.

Then there is the fourth order. Everyone has a self that he/she makes (and others in various ways contribute to) and uses as a primary means of communication, and, to some extent, as a sheer work of artistic self-expression. That's the persona that social psychologists talk about. It's very obvious that public figures and con men do that. But it's also true of people who take care to express their inward reality appropriately. Think of Mother Teresa's habit, her cleanliness, her nonuse of makeup, etc. Some people have several personas that they change in different contexts. Mother Teresa, I suspect, did not. Some difference is not all bad, though. We have a somewhat different persona when giving a public lecture than when playing with our grandchildren. (I never growl at my students but am grandpa bear with the kiddies.) Here, it seems, the more real self is the user rather than the used, the constant self-projector rather than the persona/ae one projects.

Now, if the preceding is true, it seems that there is an oddity about the third order. There, it's true for the convert or pervert to say: I no longer am what I was.

But in the fourth order, the person of multiple personas would say: You only know me in this relationship/situation, but I'm more than that. Or perhaps even: I am not who you think I am. You think I am your teacher, and that it's none of my business that you are taking dope and messing up your life. But I'm also your brother, and I happen to believe that I ought to be my brother's keeper.

And in the second order, the knowing subject is so much more prominent than the incidentally known self-as-object that even great philosophers overlook themselves as object—that is, as

within the subject matter of the general propositions they assert—and so regularly fall into self-referential inconsistencies.

I don't know whether any of this is relevant to your friend William [Shakespeare] but it does bear upon personal identity in various senses, so I thought it might help.

GG

Subject: Helena and Bertram have no selves

Dear John:

Someone might criticize your effort by pointing out that the characters in plays and novels and so on have no selves and no identities at all. They are imaginative constructs, objects of art—things the playwright or novelist uses to do whatever he/she is up to—express himself/herself, educate, entertain, etc.

Unlike people, characters created by good artists have nothing contingent about them. Everything is there for some good reason, everything is rightly taken by the audience/ reader as significant. Still, we can think of and talk about them as if they were real people, because we can imagine and remember them, etc. and many of the top-level sensory organizers we use to manage our experience of people work when we deal with them.

One reason historical plays and novels work well if they are done well is that we cannot tell where biography/history stops and fiction begins. And if the author is really good, we don't care. Of course, the person presented in any biography—and maybe even more so in an autobiography—is not entirely a real person either, but more or less a creation of the writer and a product of mistakes in reporting, lies, misinterpretations.

Authors are didactic when they communicate directly what they want to communicate. They are not didactic when they make their point by means of characters and situations that are cleverly enough constructed so that we go with them and begin thinking of their constructs as people. Shakespeare does that, so that the audience feels like they are having an experience of people and events, and so are open to learning by the experience.

GG

Subject: Selves

Dear Germain,

Very many thanks for the most illuminating series of further reflections, especially those on “various selves”. I have reread *Beyond the New Theism* pp. 343-53, and have worked up the gist of a new conclusion (or it might be an introduction to the paper). You say in your commentary on my paper that in those pages of *BNT* you are “rejecting Aquinas” (though keeping his and Aristotle's account in one respect). Could you say a word or two more about what it is in Aquinas that you are rejecting there—not to argue the point but just to identify it? It would be very helpful. Sorry to take up your time.

John

Subject: Re: Selves

Dear John:

In fact, “rejecting” is perhaps not the right word. My policy in writing that book was not to go after Aquinas or any of our good guys, unless it was absolutely necessary. All the people whose views I straightforwardly reject are non-Catholics, mostly nonbelievers. But look at note 6 on p. 405, which ends: “But I do not find his own solution satisfying.”

I do think Aristotle’s account is the best available of the unity of a sentient organism. If it isn’t completely compatible with what we now know, I think something like it could be worked out that would fit all the data. And I think that account also will work for human persons insofar as we are sentient organisms. But, to put it more clearly, I do not see how the substantial form of the body can survive the death of the body. ... What I meant to suggest in the chapter is that the self is not the [substantial] form of the body, not tied up in *that* way with the bodily person.

As I say on p. 349, I don’t think the person is limited to one of the four orders: “A person is in all four of the orders, and he embraces them all of them in himself.” I also indicate in the same paragraph why I think the unity of the person cannot in principle be explained. Aristotle and, I think, Aquinas hold (or would hold if they were pushed) that the human person really belongs only to the natural order, and think that the other three orders (to the extent they recognize them as distinct) are, as it were, reducible to the person. I set out four “aspects” of the person in the last full paragraph on p. 350, and then say on p. 351: “The person is the self (read: soul) who unifies these four distinct and irreducible but normally inseparable aspects.” I say “normally inseparable” to allow for what [Catholic] faith seems to require: that after one dies, the soul (self) survives and, if rightly disposed, enjoys the beatific vision for an interval before the resurrection of the dead.

(I think it *might* be consonant with [Catholic] faith to suppose that when one dies in this universe, one begins to be, fully equipped with a risen body, in the new heavens and new earth. That universe being entirely physically discontinuous with this one cannot be compared with this one as past, simultaneous, or future. From our point of view, it is future and coming for us—as long as we live. If that idea is okay, we’ll never be without a body.)

In short, I think the soul just is the self of which we are at times more or less aware: the self I hurt when I get careless, trip and fall down the stairs, the self I credit for thinking up modes of obligation, the self I blame for my sins, and the self I admit has little skill in playing basketball. Obviously, I’m sometimes not aware of that self at all, much less always aware of all that it embraces; and there is nothing in my view that precludes holding that there are things in myself of which I’m never aware at all. So, the point is not that my self unifies all the aspects of my personhood by being aware of them. It’s more modest: that self which is somehow aware of the four aspects does somehow—and I know not how—unify them.

This way of putting things seems to me to fit all the data of the problem. I don’t think it is a different form of dualism, and I don’t think it is vulnerable to the arguments we use against dualism. My body is not something I have and use; rather, it is (normally) a constituent of my

self, of my soul. This way of putting things also makes my soul not mysterious but familiar. I think it very nicely fits what the CDF document on *Certain Questions concerning Eschatology* subsequently said about the survival of the soul (see *AAS* 71 [1979] 939-43), #3 in the list of items that the Church teaches “in the name of Christ,” for there it says that what subsists and is called the soul is “ipsum ‘ego humanum’”. I do not think Aquinas could agree with that.

Looking at the chapter now, I wonder if I should not have been more dialectical with Aquinas and thus more straightforward. It might have made the proposal I’m making clearer. As it has happened, I know of nobody who ever has commented on it.

Germain

Subject: Re: Selves

Dear Germain

Thanks again—very helpful again. I was gratified to find that the two passages of chapter XXIII that you refer me to are the two I had just typed out to present your theory in a new conclusion to the paper.

But I doubt whether you really want to say (as you do at the end of the email) that “the soul just is the self ... I hurt when I get careless, trip and fall down the stairs”. To say that the soul is the principle of the unity of the person is one thing, to say it just is the person is another, and it is the person, John Finnis, I myself, who gets careless and fall(s) down the stairs, the very same person, John Finnis, me myself, as is hurt by the fall.

John

Subject: Re: Selves

Sent: Sun 3/28/2004 10:12 PM

John:

I did want to say that. But I’m not sure I still do. Like everything, when we come to the very end, it’s all in a thick cloud.

But my idea is that one’s soul is the whole—though a whole of a sort that has no other instance—and the body is one part; one’s thinking, judging, reasoning self another; one’s choosing, self-determining self another; one’s using, making, symboling self another. And all these ‘parts’ are parts of a sort that only we and such as we have.

So, I really did mean to stand St. Thomas on his head. Instead of my soul being part of this body which is me, this body is part of me which is this soul that I am.

GG

Subject: Further on soul/self

Dear John:

The note that I sent last night, fails to complete the dialectic.

Plato thought of the self in pretty much the same way I do, except that he made the mistake of supposing that bodily death is a good thing, a liberation of the self. He called that “liberated” self *soul*, and thought of it as the real, true self. Because of that, one’s soul thus thought of has and uses one’s body as an instrument extrinsic to oneself but, temporarily, inseparably joined to oneself.

Aristotle rightly saw that to be a blunder. One’s body definitely is not an instrument extrinsic to oneself. In the sense in which Plato uses “soul,” my soul is not myself: *anima mea non est ego*. But then he made the mistake of identifying the self with the living body, and holding that the soul is the substantial form of—and thus a metaphysical constituent part of—the body.

What I am saying is like what Plato had in mind, except that I think the bodily organism whose fingers are typing these words is a metaphysical constituent of my self/soul, and that when this bodily organism dies, my self/soul will be mutilated rather than liberated. I do have and use my body, but have it as part of myself and use it, not as a temporarily inseparable instrument, but as a part serving my whole self.

What I am saying is like what Aristotle had in mind in affirming that the bodily organism whose fingers are typing these words is me. But I think that my self/soul is not a metaphysical constituent of this bodily organism, but vice versa.

So, John Finnis, you who injure yourself when you get careless and fall down the stairs = the bodily aspect of the whole self/soul that you, John Finnis, are.

Plato’s view fits many of the data of experience better than Aristotle’s. People do naturally think that when one sleeps or dies, the self continues to exist, but without consciousness. But Aristotle’s view fits certain data better—namely, those of the unity of the whole self as acting person. I think my view fits all the data very well.

Germain

Subject: More on dialectic & various selves

Dear John:

DS 902/481: “the substance of the rational or intellective soul is truly and of itself form of the human body.” What do I make of that?

It clearly rejects Plato’s mistake and affirms what is true in Aristotle’s view. But, unlike Aristotle, whose position is very unclear, Aquinas certainly held that the rational or intellective soul is more than the form of the human body, and that is not being condemned. I agree that the stuff of which my body is made is my living body in virtue of the reality that is my soul/self (which includes my thinking self and my choosing self), for this organism whose fingers are

typing these words is my body only because it is part of myself. In that sense, my soul is truly and of itself form of my body.

But I don't accept Aquinas's view of the unity of soul and body, which would require one to explain "form" in the proposition of faith by (at least some version of) Aristotle's positive view, which I think is erroneous by reducing the substance of the person to the first order. Aquinas, too, is resisting that reduction, but I think that, in doing so, he lapses into inconsistency. I avoid the inconsistency by from the start considering the person in the light of the distinction of the four orders, and then maintaining that the person, as in and embracing all four orders, has a unity that, though known by experience, in principle cannot be explained. For explanation pertains to reason, and reason's four considerations correspond to the four orders.

What, then, am I doing with reasoning of the sort I'm now engaged in? Not explaining anything, not showing why in any sense of the word. Rather, getting rid of misunderstandings and reporting part of the intelligible data that all reasoning has to take into account.

Jeannette wondered what I have been thinking and writing to you about, and in trying to explain it, I came up with some things that add to what I wrote you about various selves. Since you found that helpful, you might find this so, too.

Your paper, I told her, is most interested in the personal identity that is relevant to the situation in which a real convert to Christian faith says: "I no longer am the person I was before Christ dawned on me. That person is dead. I am a new man, born again in Christ." We want to say that certainly is true, and that, while it also is true that the convert is and always will be a repentant sinner—the wretch saved by grace—the statement that he no longer is what he was also is literally true, not just a metaphor, and it's the more significant of the two truths.

Consider also the case of Eve—not the first parent but the one with the three faces. Eve White is a nice wife and mother who suffers from headaches and black outs. She sees a psychiatrist, who practices hypnosis, and discovers a completely different personality: the racy, wild, Eve Black. Later, a third personality appears, Jane. Eve White did not know anything about the others, though at least Eve Black, if I remember the story right, knew about and hated Eve White. In this case, the woman is in some real sense a different person when Eve White blacks out and one of the other two emerges. Yet the subject who knows herself to be Eve White and who initially is ignorant of the other two but comes to know them is just one person. And while it's literally true, not just a metaphor, to say there are multiple identities, it also is true and in this case clearly is truer to say that there is just one.

Then consider the case in which the almost completely impotent old man wryly admits to his wife that he's simply not the man he was when they honeymooned more than fifty years ago.

Finally, consider the case of the great pitcher, whose greatness is defined by his skill. In a certain game he pitches not just poorly but very differently than he has, as long as his pitching has been recorded. People wonder what happened; some suspect he must have been bribed by gamblers, but no evidence of that is found despite lengthy investigations. He just wasn't

the same pitcher that day. In this case, we suppose the sameness of the bodily individual, the arm he uses, etc. defines the identity more significantly.

See what you started by getting me to read your paper.

Germain

Subject: E copy of my paper

Dear Germain,

Thanks for all these messages. I was startled, last night, to see you saying that Aquinas thinks the soul is part of the body. Perhaps he does sometimes say something like that, I don't know offhand. Certainly all the quotations I assemble from him on pp. 178 and 179 of my Aquinas book don't say that, but rather say that the soul, if it is to be said to be a part, is a part of the [whole] man, but, in my paraphrase (fn. 216) the organizing part and indeed the very form and actuality of me. Of course, he also constantly says that it is the act of the body, and so one could say that the two statements entail that I am my body. But that would, I think, be fallacious: I am not [just] my body, any more than I am just my soul. To say, as he does, that the soul is whole in every part of the body implies, it seems to me, that, in all this, "part" must be understood in a highly analogous, anomalous, category-busting sort of sense, such as you too are striving for in your account, not least when you don't use "part" at all. Thus my final, summing-up quotation in fn. 213: "one's soul contains and is a kind of foundation for one's body [Anima enim continet corpus, et est quasi fundamentum ejus; et pars animae [continet] partem corporis: In Ps 17 {not Ps 5} v. 6]".

It seems to me unhelpful to the exposition of your position to use the language of "parts" as you do in your Sunday 10:12 PM message: "one's soul is the whole—though a whole of a sort that has no other instance—and the body is one part; one's thinking, judging, reasoning self another; one's choosing, self-determining self another; one's using, making, symboling self another." That makes five selves, each other and other, which won't do as a way of speaking about the mystery of the unity of the self, i.e. the human person. Your formulations in the book, and in your message this morning, don't have this feature.

I haven't got the clean version that you used a print of. So I send along the version in which what you had is all there but supplemented by what I have written since, up to about 6 pm Sunday. What is supplement and what original should be clearly visible in Track/Show Changes/Insertions/ Deletions. Since your comments didn't use page numbers, what they apply to should still be evident enough. If you do look at the new stuff using you in the final section, and have any thoughts, that would be a bonus.

As ever,

John

Subject: Re: E copy of my paper

Dear John:

On Aquinas, if and insofar as he does not think of the soul as a part—I mean, as the form in the whole constituted by matter and form—that’s fine. I certainly agree that even insofar as he does think of it that way, it can be called a “part” only in a special sense. It probably also is unhelpful for me to talk about parts, even with the warning that I’m talking about a whole in a sense that has no other instance. Of course, I was not trying to clean up the e-mails as I tried to clean up the chapter in BNT.

I skimmed through the revision you sent and found only one typo: search for <fours aspects>

I like the revisions and appreciate both your quote from and reference to me, and your not “outing” my deviant view, as I’ve exposed it in intimate e-mail exchanges!

When you finalize the text of the paper before (or even if only after) the conference, so that what you deliver is all in place, please e-mail me that one, too.

I think we made some important progress on person and identity, and it was fun.

All best, in Jesus,

Germain