

Thomas Aquinas, the Beginning of Human Life and the Science of the Soul

18/2015

Political Dialogues

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/DP.2015.005>

Abstract: Thomas Aquinas, the Beginning of Human Life and the Science of the Soul

The research question of the paper is: *Is a view – prevalent within a modern Catholic Church – that human life begins at the moment of conception coherent with the Catholic teachings on the soul and man?* The thesis of the paper is the following assertion: *A modern view that human life begins at the moment of conception is incoherent with the Catholic teachings on the soul and man. A view that is coherent with these teachings is a view that human life begins at some time after conception (delayed hominization account).* The research method employed in the paper is the method of reflective equilibrium. The main conclusion of the paper is a call for the revival of the delayed hominization account both in philosophy and Catholic teachings.

1. Introduction

In this paper I shall analyse background theories of a relatively new contention within the Catholic Church that human life begins (that soul is created by God) at the moment of conception; I call this idea, for the sake of simplicity, the *Immediate Ensoulment Account*. Particularly,

I will inquire into the relation between the claim that human life begins at the moment of conception, i.e. that human soul is created at the moment of conception (*Immediate Ensoulment Account*) and the teachings about the soul that have been espoused by the Catholic Church by and large since Thomas Aquinas, namely the idea that: (1) a soul is the form of a human body; and (2) what we essentially are is not a soul but a substance comprised of a rational soul which is the form and a body which is the matter – I call this traditional teachings about the soul, for the sake of simplicity, the *Science of the Soul*. I will try to answer a question whether this traditional teachings about the soul, the *Science of the Soul*, are in a state of reflective equilibrium¹ with the position that we begin our existence at

1 To be consistent and to be in a state of reflective equilibrium are two different things. Usually this difference is explained by elaborating on the distinction between consistency which is only a necessary condition of reflective equilibrium and coherence which is what the reflective equilibrium is about. According to Norman Daniels this difference consists in the fact that “an acceptable coherence requires that our beliefs not only be consistent with each other (a weak requirement), but that some of these beliefs provide support or provide a best explanation for others”. N. Daniels, *Reflective Equilibrium*, in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

the moment of conception, the *Immediate Ensoulment Account*. To boot, I will confront with each other two views about the beginning of human life, on the one hand a traditional view that human life begins some time after conception which I call the *Delayed Ensoulment Account* and which is represented by the Thomas Aquinas' philosophy and, on the other, a modern view that human life begins at the moment of conception, the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* which is represented by the contemporary Catholic Church; I will examine them as far as their coherence (reflective equilibrium) with the *Science of the Soul* is concerned.

The main thesis of my paper is the claim that the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* is not in a state of reflective equilibrium with the *Science of the Soul*; the view on the beginning of human life that is coherent with the *Science of the Soul* is the traditional Aquinas' *Delayed Ensoulment Account*. I also hold that from a philosophical point of view the state of reflective equilibrium between the *Science of the Soul* and the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* can be reached only by changing and adjusting the *Science of the Soul* in such a way as to suit the *Immediate Ensoulment Account*. I argue though that this strategy is undesirable and in the actual fact unacceptable since it slips into the Cartesian concept of the featureless soul; I hold that abandoning the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* and supplanting it with the traditional *Delayed Ensoulment Account* can be advantageous from the point of view of coherence and the preservation of the traditional, Catholic teachings about the soul. In this paper I mainly deploy the method of reflective equilibrium² which

² On the method of reflective equilibrium see *inter alia*: N. Daniels, *Wide Reflective Equilibrium*

along with the subject-matter of this study places my investigations within the purview of practical philosophy. My study then is not a historical reconstruction of philosophical beliefs and institutional arrangements that existed at the time of Aquinas and later on; it is a philosophical inquiry into the logical relation between sets of beliefs. The order of proceedings will be as follows: in the § 2 I will sketch the logic of the *Science of the Soul*; in the § 3 I will analyse how the *Delayed Ensoulment Account* equilibrates with the *Science of the Soul*; and in the § 4 I will scrutinise if the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* can be coherent with the *Science of the Soul* and if so, at what price.

In my paper I mainly draw on Jeff McMahan's excellent *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life*, Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* translated from Latin into English by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province in 1947 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

2. The Science of the Soul

There are two main claims, one about a man and one about a soul, that can be called a *hard core* of the *Science of the Soul* and of the concept of man: 1) The

and Theory Acceptance in Ethics, "The Journal of Philosophy" 1979, vol. 76, no. 5; D.W. Haslett, *What Is Wrong With Reflective Equilibria?*, "Philosophical Quarterly" 1987, no. 37/148; J. Rawls, *Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics*, "The Philosophical Review" 1951, vol. 60, no. 2; J.D. Arras, *The Way We Reason Now: Reflective Equilibrium in Bioethics*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Bioethics*, B. Steinbock (ed.), Oxford University Press, New York 2007; N. Daniels, *Reflective Equilibrium*, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2011; J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1971; R. Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously*, Bloomsbury Academic, London 2013; Ł. Dominiak, *Metoda równowagi refleksyjnej [reflective equilibrium] w filozofii polityki*, "Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne" 2012, no. 36.

soul is “the ‘form’ of the body”. 2) A man is *corpore et anima unus*, i.e. “though made of body and soul, is a unity”³. So, according to the Catholic Church, a man “is not a soul only, but something composed of soul and body”⁴, he is a substance. As Aquinas writes: “this particular man, Socrates, for instance, is not a soul, but composed of soul and body”⁵. To better understand the concept of man one has to understand the concept of soul. Starting from these two claims, I will analytically present the main tenets of the *Science of the Soul*.

(1) A SOUL IS THE FORM OF A BODY. “It belongs to the notion of a soul to be the form of a body”⁶. It follows from the concept of the form that soul is the way a body is organised, it is the actuality, the reality of a body whereas a body, a matter, is just a potentiality and thereby the opposite of reality, the opposite of what is, “therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body”⁷. Hence, Aquinas writes: “by matter we understand something purely potential: for a form, as such, is an act; and that which is purely potentiality cannot be part of an act, since potentiality is repugnant to actuality as being opposite thereto”⁸. The distinction between the form and the matter is a distinction “between actuality and potentiality”⁹, between what is and what is *not yet*, what *only can be*.

(2) A HUMAN SOUL IS RATIONAL. A form is what makes us who we are, what decides that we are human beings,

not other creatures, it is responsible for our peculiarity. Since what differentiates between human beings and other creatures is rationality, our form is and must be by necessity rational. It means that our body is organised in such a way that it has a *capacity* to maintain rational consciousness, thinking and acting; by comparison, other creatures whose forms are not rational have bodies that do not have capacities to maintain rational consciousness, thinking and acting; their bodies are organised differently than ours. “We must assert that the intellect which is the principle of intellectual operation is the form of the human body”¹⁰. “Understanding and will”¹¹ are two main powers or capacities of a rational soul and they “are in the soul as their subject”¹²; other powers that come from the soul “have their subject in the composite, and not in the soul alone” and these are “operations of the nutritive and sensitive parts”¹³ of the soul.

(3) A HUMAN SOUL IS CREATED BY GOD. “The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God – it is not “produced” by the parents”¹⁴. As Aquinas writes: “It is therefore heretical to say that the intellectual soul is transmitted with the semen”¹⁵. The rational soul is infused by God when the body is suitably organised.

(4) A HUMAN SOUL IS NOT CREATED BEFORE THE BODY. “For if it is natural to the soul to be united to the body, it is unnatural to it to be without a body, and as long as it is without a body it is deprived of its natural perfection. Now it was not fitting that God should begin His

3 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 364.

4 St. Th. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1947, I, q. 75 a. 4.

5 I, q. 75, a. 4.

6 I, q. 75, a. 1.

7 I, q. 75, a. 1.

8 I, q. 75, a. 5.

9 I, q. 75, a. 1 ad 2.

10 I, q. 76, a. 1.

11 I, q. 77, a. 5.

12 I, q. 77, a. 5.

13 I, q. 77, a. 5.

14 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 366.

15 I, q. 118, a. 2.

work with things imperfect and unnatural, for He did not make man without a hand or a foot, which are natural parts of a man. Much less, therefore, did He make the soul without a body (...) so we must simply confess that souls were not created before bodies, but are created at the same time as they are infused into them”¹⁶. That is why the soul is not created before the body and in each particular case of a new human being it is not created before the body is ready to “host” the soul. As Aquinas writes: “the rational soul, which is not transmitted by the parent, is infused by God as soon as the human body is apt to receive it”¹⁷.

(5) A HUMAN SOUL IS IMMORTAL. The Catholic Church teaches that the soul “is immortal: it does not perish when it separates from the body at death, and it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection”¹⁸. The human soul cannot cease to exist by virtue of being a form. As Aquinas writes: “Wherefore matter acquires actual existence as it acquires the form; while it is corrupted so far as the form is separated from it. But it is impossible for a form to be separated from itself; and therefore it is impossible for a subsistent form to cease to exist”¹⁹.

(6) A HUMAN SOUL CAN COGNISE AFTER DEATH. After death, which is the separation of the soul from the body (then body receives a new form of a corpse), soul can still understand; “when it is separated from the body, it has a mode of understanding, by turning to simply intelligible objects”²⁰. But since for a soul it is unnatural to exist separated from the body and it is not for the soul’s good – “now the soul, as a part of

human nature, has its natural perfection only as united to the body”²¹ – it cannot cognise as versatilely as it does when it is connected with the body: “the soul apart from the body through such species does not receive perfect knowledge, but only a general and confused kind of knowledge. Separated souls, therefore, have the same relation through such species to imperfect and confused knowledge of natural things as the angels have to the perfect knowledge thereof (...) Hence it follows that separated souls know all natural things not with a certain and proper knowledge, but in a general and confused manner”²².

(7) THE FINAL GOAL AND GOOD OF THE SOUL IS RECOVERY OF THE BODY AT RESURRECTION (not the bodiless existence after death). For all the aforementioned reasons connected with the state of the perfection of the soul it follows that not the after-death-separation from the body is the soul’s aim (as it could be in Plato’s or Augustine’s philosophy) but the Resurrection of the dead when the soul “will be reunited with the body”. The good of the soul is in the unity with the body.

3. The *Delayed Ensoulment Account* and the *Science of the Soul*

So, how is the *Science of the Soul* and the idea that we essentially are substances compatible with the traditional view that human life begins at some time after conception that was represented by the Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy, in a word with the *Delayed Ensoulment Account*? What is the most important distinction that we have to underline here, is the difference between a body and a substance.

16 I, q. 118, a. 3.

17 I, q. 100, a. 1 ad 2.

18 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 366.

19 I, q. 75, a. 6.

20 I, q. 89, a. 1.

21 I, q. 90, a. 4.

22 I, q. 89, a. 3.

We are not our bodies but substances i.e. bodies of a specific “*form and life-long act (uality) by which the matter of my bodily make-up is constituted*”²³; in the case of human beings this form, this “factor” of organisation is rational. “In animals of other species, the corresponding factor is both vegetative and animal; in plants it is only vegetative (which already includes the remarkable features of generation); in members of our species the one factor unifying and activating the living reality of each individual is at once vegetative, animal (sentient and self-locomotive), and intellectual (understanding, self-understanding)”²⁴. So, we are not our bodies but bodies of a specific organisation, peculiar to our species, that is capable of maintaining rational consciousness.

If we were pure bodies (organisms) – indeed an unusual view for a Catholic²⁵ – then by definition we could not begin to exist later than our organism does which is at the moment of conception (setting aside a phenomenon of twinning and the ambiguity of the definition of an organism); but according to Aquinas we are not pure bodies but bodies organised in a specific way, namely in such a way as to support peculiarly human psychological capacities. So, we begin to exist not when our bodies begin to exist but when our bodies are properly organised to “host” rational consciousness since only then we can be what we are i.e. rational substances. The key issue here is the idea that rational soul cannot be created before the body is ready for it: “the

rational soul, which is not transmitted by the parent, is infused by God as soon as the human body *is apt to receive it*”²⁶. And when the human body is ready to receive the rational form? When it develops proper structures that are able to support rational consciousness; it happens when the human body finishes the process of consecutive substantive changes from the substance of a vegetative form to the substance of a sensitive form and finally to the substance of a rational form. None of the previous stages of this development, neither vegetative nor sensitive, even though there are consecutive souls at each of these stages, is able to support human psychological make-up. “Consequently it must be said that the soul is in the embryo; the nutritive soul from the beginning, then the sensitive, lastly the intellectual soul”²⁷. What is more, these transient souls/forms, vegetative and sensitive, must cease to exist for the rational soul/form to take over. Aquinas vehemently dismisses the view that the human body is already a human being from the moment of conception, existing at the beginning in the imperfect state that later changes, by the gradual process of development, into the perfect, rational state. Aquinas gives many reasons why it cannot be the case. “Therefore some say that in addition to the vegetative soul which existed first, another, namely the sensitive, soul supervenes; and in addition to this, again another, namely the intellectual soul. Thus there would be in man three souls of which one would be in potentiality to another. This has been disproved above. Therefore others say that the same

23 J. Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, Oxford University Press, New York 2004, p. 178.

24 J. Finnis, *Aquinas...*, p. 178–179.

25 See J. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins of Life*, Oxford University Press, New York 2002, p. 4.

26 I, q. 100, a. 1 ad 2.

27 I, q. 118, a. 2 ad 2. See also: I, q. 76, a. 3 ad 3 where Aquinas writes: “The embryo has first of all a soul which is merely sensitive, and when this is removed, it is supplanted by a more perfect soul, which is both sensitive and intellectual”.

soul which was at first merely vegetative, afterwards through the action of the seminal power, becomes a sensitive soul; and finally this same soul becomes intellectual, not indeed through the active seminal power, but by the power of a higher agent, namely God enlightening (the soul) from without. For this reason the Philosopher says that the intellect comes from without. But this will not hold. First, because no substantial form is susceptible of more or less; but addition of greater perfection constitutes another species, just as the addition of unity constitutes another species of number. Now it is not possible for the same identical form to belong to different species. Secondly, because it would follow that the generation of an animal would be a continuous movement, proceeding gradually from the imperfect to the perfect, as happens in alteration. Thirdly, because it would follow that the generation of a man or an animal is not generation simply, because the subject thereof would be a being in act. For if the vegetative soul is from the beginning in the matter of offspring, and is subsequently gradually brought to perfection; this will imply addition of further perfection without corruption of the preceding perfection. And this is contrary to the nature of generation properly so called. Fourthly, because either that which is caused by the action of God is something subsistent: and thus it must need be essentially distinct from the pre-existing form, which was non-subsistent; and we shall then come back to the opinion of those who held the existence of several souls in the body – or else it is not subsistent, but a perfection of the pre-existing soul: and from this it follows of necessity that the intellectual soul perishes with the body, which cannot be admitted²⁸.

28 I, q. 118, a. 2 ad 2.

It is then not the case that there is everything in the embryo already from the very beginning that just awaits development. A human being who is the unity of body and rational soul, whose form is rational, begins to exist only after the previous substantive forms which are not rational, but vegetative and sensitive, cease to exist. Hence, from the two possible scenarios: (1) the embryo is a human being i.e. a substance of a rational form that only waits to reveal this rationality; and (2) the embryo is a substance of irrational form (vegetative and sensitive), so by definition not a human being, and it has to undergo the true process of generation and corruption of substantive forms for a human being to be created at the end of this process, only the latter is the case. “We must therefore say that since the generation of one thing is the corruption of another, it follows of necessity that both in men and in other animals, when a more perfect form supervenes the previous form is corrupted: yet so that the supervening form contains the perfection of the previous form, and something in addition. It is in this way that through many generations and corruptions we arrive at the ultimate substantial form, both in man and other animals (...) We conclude therefore that the intellectual soul is created by God at the end of human generation, and this soul is at the same time sensitive and nutritive, the pre-existing forms being corrupted²⁹.”

To sum up what I have said so far, the *Delayed Ensoulment Account* is coherent with the *Science of the Soul* on the basis of the following claims: (1) a form, being an act, is what *is*, not what *potentially* can be; (2) since we are not human bodies but substances that have a rational

29 I, q. 118, a. 2 ad 2.

form/soul, we begin to exist not when our body begins to exist but when our body actually (not potentially) acquires a rational form/soul; (3) it is clear that a rational form/soul cannot be created before human body is ready for it; (4) for a human body to be ready to “host” a human soul, it already has to be (or more aptly, it *means that it already is*) organised in a proper way; (5) to be organised in a proper way means to have developed these functional structures that are responsible for rationality; in other words, it means to have actual *capacity* for rational consciousness³⁰; (6) it is possible for a human body not to be a human being: it happens in each case when a human body is not able to support rational consciousness, for instance even though a dead human body is a human body it is not a human being because it cannot (does not have capacity) support rational consciousness, i.e. it does not have a form of a human being but of a corpse; (7) an acquisition of a rational form/soul by the human body happens in a way of dying/corruption and generation of subsequent substantive forms/souls. For all these reasons for a rational soul, which is a form (an actuality) of a human body to inhabit a body, this body has to be organised (i.e. to have proper functional anatomic structures) in such a way as

30 As McMahan points out, it is important to distinguish between potential and capacity. All too often proponents of the modern juxtaposition of the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* and the *Science of the Soul* confuse “the capacity for rationality with the potential to develop that capacity. For the human organism in its initial stages, before the brain has formed, can plausibly be held to have the potential for rationality. (...) But that is not the same as the capacity for rationality, which requires the actual presence of the structures causally involved in the exercise of rationality. Analogously, a newborn infant has the potential for sexual reproduction but not the capacity”. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing...*, p. 13.

to have capacity for rationality. Since we are not human bodies but rational substances, the only account of the beginning of our life that is coherent with the *Science of the Soul* is the traditional, Catholic, Thomistic *Delayed Ensoulment Account*.

4. The *Immediate Ensoulment Account* and the *Science of the Soul*

It is high time to give a short shrift to the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* as far as its coherence with the *Science of the Soul* is concerned. Starting with the hylomorphic idea of the soul as a form of the body, as the way the body is organised, the first option apparently available for the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* is the idea that human zygote is a human being, that it is organised in a way that is hospitable for a rational soul from the very beginning. This contention would be though at variance with both all the known facts confirmed by scientific research and with philosophical investigations. First of all, from a scientific point of view there is not even a slightest shade of proof that a zygote is equipped with any sort of anatomic structure that is empirically linked with awareness peculiar to higher animals, let alone with rational consciousness specific to *Homo sapiens*. Second of all, from a philosophical point of view a form of a body is its act, the way this very body acts, and therefore such a form can be recognised, identified, proved by judging from the acts of the body (or indirectly, by identifying a given structure of a body which is considered responsible for a rational action). Hence, a proof that a zygote *is actually* a rational entity should then be based on pointing at these actions of a zygote’s body that reveals its rationality, e.g. speaking, philosophising, producing, accumulat-

ing wealth, discussing politics and the like, and that would differentiate it from allegedly inferior entities such as elephants, chimpanzees, dolphins *etc.* This of course cannot be done; it even sounds absurd. Neither an indirect proof of the alleged rationality of a zygote can be provided. That would take indicating these functional structures of a zygote's body whose presence in human organisms is deemed both necessary and sufficient for the occurrence of rational consciousness and actions. What though could easily be proved is exactly the opposite, namely the entire lack thereof³¹.

The second option available for the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* seems to be a popular idea that human zygote is a *potential* human being. If undertaken, this defence strategy would be, forsooth, curious. First of all, what is *potentially* a human being, is not *actually* a human being or, in other words, is not a human being, period. For in this sense, potentiality means a non-existence whereas actuality means existence. As Aquinas points out, "potentiality is repugnant to actuality as being opposite thereto". So, saying that a zygote is a potential human being is saying that a zygote is not a human being (yet, probably). Of course, a fact of being potentially a human being can arguably be a source of moral value, moral standing or even a moral status; but this moral circumstance does not solve the problem of ensoulment, let alone solves it favourably for the *Immediate Ensoulment Account*. After all, a question of ensoulment is primarily not a moral question but rather a metaphysical (theological) one. So, literally taken, this defence would boil down to a glaring paradox: immediate ensoulment is true because a zygote is a potential human

31 See McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing...*, p. 9.

being, i.e. it does not have a soul yet (remember, a soul is a form and a form is an act!)³².

Finally (as far as interesting strategies go), the third option available for the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* is to jettison the traditional, Catholic, hylomorphic idea of the soul as the form of a body and replace it with a more spiritual concept according to which a soul is not so intimately connected to the body³³. This strategy would easily accommodate for the *Immediate Ensoulment Account*, since there would be nothing or very little in the body that would indicate or determine spiritual wanderings of the soul. There would be then neither inconsistency nor scientific ignorance in claiming that although a zygote does not reveal any evidence of rationality, a spiritual substance, which a soul is, is basically not of this world and nothing of a bodily nature can bond it in any way. This idea that we are spiritual entities, immaterial souls or sort of Cartesian Egos is not utterly foreign for some Catholics. Even *Catechism of the Catholic Church* encourages this kind of vision when it reads that "soul signifies the spiritual principle in man"³⁴ or that human body "is animated by a spiritual soul"³⁵. But if we conceive of the soul as an entity that is detached from the body, that is a truly spiritual entity and not just an aspect or mode of organisation of the body, then serious problems start to occur.

The more we think about the soul in spiritual terms, the emptier and vaguer the idea of the soul gets. For instance, if we really were immaterial souls, there

32 See McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing...*, p. 13.

33 See on this McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing...*, p. 13–14.

34 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 363.

35 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 364.

would be nothing in the organisation of the material world and the body nor within the realm of empirical facts that could exclude other stances (the *Delayed Ensoulment Account* included) on the beginning of human life. On the basis of this position it would be entirely possible to claim that, for instance, there is no such thing as the beginning of human life whatsoever and that our existence is eternal; or that we begin to exist at any moment after conception or even after birth; or that we inhabit various bodies simultaneously; or that one body is inhabited by more than one soul; or that we are not created by God *etc.*, in a word, whatever would work. As John Locke put it: it is “possible for Seth, Ismael, Socrates, Pilate, St. Austin, and Caesar Borgia, to be the same man. For if the identity of soul alone makes the same man; and there be nothing in the nature of matter why the same individual spirit may not be united to different bodies, it will be possible that those men, living in distant ages, and of different tempers, may have been the same man”³⁶. The idea that we are essentially immaterial souls was of course very popular in the history of philosophy and probably the most outstanding instances of it are Platonic idea of the pre-existence of the soul and Cartesian concept of the soul as a nonphysical substance – there is no wonder then that modern Catholics are so willing to reach for it. But as Derek Parfit pointed out, there are insurmountable problems connected with this otherwise popular idea: On this view “the Cartesian Ego that I am might suddenly cease to exist and be replaced by another Ego. This new Ego might ‘inherit’ all of

my psychological characteristics, as in a relay race. On this Featureless Cartesian View while you are reading this page of text, you might suddenly cease to exist, and your body be taken over by some new person who is merely exactly like you. If this happened, no one would notice any difference. There would never be any evidence, public or private, showing whether or not this happens, and, is so, how often. We therefore cannot even claim that it is unlikely to happen. And there are other possibilities. On this view, history might have gone just as it did, except that I was Napoleon and he was me. This is not the claim that Derek Parfit might have been Napoleon. The claim is rather that I am one Cartesian Ego, and that Napoleon was another, and that these two Egos might have ‘occupied’ each other’s places”³⁷. Therefore, a strategy of employing a spiritual vision of the soul and abandoning thereby the traditional *Science of the Soul* in order to save the *Immediate Ensoulment Account*, is, on the one hand, detrimental for the whole Catholic doctrine (e.g. for the teachings on Resurrection, creation of a human soul *etc.*) and, on the other, so unspecific as to verge on the utter arbitrariness and irrationality.

5. Conclusions

In the present paper I sketched the main features of the *Science of the Soul* and examined its coherence with two alternative accounts of the beginning of human life, namely the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* and the *Delayed Ensoulment Account*. I argued for the thesis according to which the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* is not in a state of reflective equi-

36 J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Penguin Books, London 1997, bk. 2, xxvii, sec. 6.

37 D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1987, p. 228.



librium with the *Science of the Soul*; the view on the beginning of human life that is coherent with the *Science of the Soul* is the traditional Aquinas' *Delayed Ensoulment Account*. The only way of reconciling the *Immediate Ensoulment Account* with the *Science of the Soul* seems to be a thorough reformulation of the latter, so far-reaching that actually renouncing the hard core of the traditional Catholic teachings about the soul and man; this consequence is of course an utterly undesirable one and would be a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. To boot, replacing a traditional hylomorphic concept of man and soul with the idea of the soul as a spiritual substance entails other theoretical problems that seem to undermine the whole project as a rational endeavour.

It is a no-brainer that this paradigm shift within the Catholic teachings on the soul and man was induced by the developments of medical sciences, particularly advancements within embryology. From the vantage point of the contemporary medical science a traditional doctrine of quickening, let alone Augustine's and Aquinas's ideas about the exact days when ensoulment takes place, must look old-fashioned, to say the least. On the other hand it is indeed difficult to imagine how advancements in empirical sciences could possibly rebut metaphysical theories of the soul? It looks rather like a categorical mistake than a discovery. For all these reasons, and others not presented here, it looks like the traditional *Delayed Ensoulment Account* trumps its competitor in all fields and calls for the revival both in philosophy and Catholic teachings.

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