

One rejection of this
doctrine, we can
solve



One fundamental philosophy of nature, or more specifically a philosophy of change which is taken very seriously, is that of St. Thomas Aquinas's hylomorphism. The area of discussion is how these elemental substances are present in non-elemental substances. St. Thomas Aquinas holds the theory of virtual presence, which states that elemental substances' powers affect the non-elemental substance into which they are subsumed. This is a part of Aquinas' doctrine of unicity.

There's also another view in which non-elemental substances are composed of complete elemental and complete non-elemental substances, which are not merely virtually present. There are several reasons for a person to pick one idea over another, but we will find through an analysis of Aquinas's argument that the view which is contrary to Aquinas's virtual presence and unicity of substances is preferential. In this paper, I will show that there is a plurality of substantial forms within a substance, contrary to Aquinas's doctrine of unicity. We will arrive at this conclusion through the careful analysis of his argument's premises. The contrary perspective is held specifically by the Franciscan School, so is not something particularly new, but I hope to help to add to the ongoing dialogue. In order to engage in discussion, an understanding of Aquinas's view is essential.

The traditional view, or Aquinas's doctrine of unicity, is one that has several issues. By rejection of this doctrine, we can solve these problems. First, empirical data that we have gathered with today's advancements in technology and science has shown that lower-order substances are not incorporated into higher-order substances such that they cease to exist as separate, individual substances. Next, Aquinas shows that lower-

ordersubstances go out of existence when subsumed by a higher-order substance, soboth the lower-order substance and its accidents no longer exist. Since thesubstances no longer exist, then all that can be subsumed into the higher-ordersubstance is prime matter, or pure potentiality. Because of this, there is noreason why the higher-order substance should take on qualitatively identicalaccidents to those that were actualized in the lower-order substance.

Anotherarea which cannot be easily explained using Aquinas’s doctrine is how integralparts of a complete substance seem to be able to exist on their own whenremoved from the complete substances of which they were a part and seem to become complete substances. Aquinas’s unicity of substances doctrine is not the bestexplanation of the composition of substances. Therefore, a plurality ofsubstances within a substance is a better solution to the problem at hand.

There are some important terms that we also must take into consideration andunderstand well to engage better the argument that is being presented such assubsistence, form, accidents, subsumption, and actuality. These terms will bedefined in detail as needed throughout. Before we get into why one should accept a plurality ofsubstances and subsequently find Aquinas’s explanation lacking, we mustunderstand as thoroughly as we can the doctrine that Thomas Aquinas holds onthe unicity of substances.

There are two types of substances that Aquinasdefines. Higher-order substances are things which are usually larger and havemore complexity built into them, such as a human being, whereas lower-ordersubstances are

often much simpler and less complex than the former. An example of a lower order substance is water. This is the beginning of a definition of substances and is left as such to aid in clarity. Later, there will be a more in-depth investigation into substances.

When Aquinas talks about substances, he often refers to a mixture of elements. This is especially significant regarding higher-order substances. Elements are things like iron, gold, or oxygen, but they do not have to be scientific elements. In fact, Aquinas understood them as things that are the lowest-order kind of a complete, created material substance. These elements that Aquinas names are earth, air, fire, and water. He sees them as being substances which, when not part of or subsumed in a larger, higher-order substance, are complete material substances (Aquinas, 2002). When lower-order substances are subsumed in larger, higher-order substances, the result is a mixture. A mixture of elements is best understood regarding the accidents or powers that are given by the lower-order substance to the higher-order substance.

Attributes from the higher-order substance are mixed with lower-order substances when the lower-order substance is subsumed (Decaen, 2000).

When thinking of what happens when we consume water, the elements hydrogen and oxygen, which are recombined into a compound, are being taken into or subsumed by a higher-order substance, the human body. An important term that we must look to Aquinas to define is complete material substances. He gives us five essential aspects or parts to help determine and identify what a complete substance is.

First, it must be subsistent, or, in other words, it has to be in existence, actualized, and not just potential or prime matter. Actuality can be understood through an example of a tree in the forest. The tree has accidents which are actualized, and it exists this way in reality.

This tree also has potentiality since it can be cut down and divided into timber by something external to it, like a lumberjack. The tree also has the potential to grow bigger and taller, which is something that is internal to the tree. Nothing can be purely potential except prime matter, which underlies a substantial change within a substance, just like the corruption, or death, into non-existence of the tree.

Since these substances are not actualized in reality, they cannot exist within another complete substance as an accident or material, substantial form under Aquinas's view. Another integral aspect that describes a complete substance is that it must be individual. It must be concrete and unable to be applied to another in the way that universals, like a car, can be used to describe particulars, such as a 2018 Ford Shelby Mustang GT350.

A complete substance must also have its substantial form, meaning, that the substance's matter must be unified and actualized by its form. A substance is not merely a collection of existing substances, and it cannot have the potency to be actualized by another substance. It must also have its own end, and because of this, it must be aligned to its own perfection. To reach the end of its own perfection, it must be able to act through its own irreducible, causal powers for the sake of that end. Finally, for a substance to be considered a complete substance, it must have accidents within it (Aquinas,

2002). Elements, as were brought up earlier, are considered by Aquinas to be complete substances.

These elements can be joined to form compounds, such as alloys like steel, that may be used to make a sword. Contemporarily, elements are seen by some as atoms, molecules, and even subatomic particles, all of which can be joined together to form larger compounds. While these two accounts of mixing differ, both the contemporary view and Aquinas's, hold that there are fundamental, physical, complete substances that can come together in some way to form higher-order substances. We look to Aquinas's theory of how higher-order complete substances are created by the joining of lower-order complete substances, which Aquinas defines as elements. These elements are what higher-order substances are composed of. Higher-order elements cannot come about except for the right proportion of elements. If these elemental substances were to lose some of the elements that are subsumed into them, they would not be able to exist and would corrupt back into elements, just as non-elemental, higher-order substances would.

These elements, however, would not have existed in the higher-order complete substance which existed before, which is what Aquinas's theory of virtual presence explains.

With virtual presence, elements are subsumed into higher-order substances and cease to exist. The matter that they were composed of is infused with the higher-order substances form, and consequently, is ordered towards the higher-order substance's end. Even though these substances go out of existence when this subsumption happens, Aquinas holds that they remain virtually in some way through the powers they give. Therefore, for the sake of

the higher order substances acts and ends, the accidents, or powers, become accidents of the higher-order substance, along with the accidents that the higher-order substance already possessed (Storck, 2008). Certain accidents from both the higher-order substance and lower-order substance are then combined in such a way that they are blended.

An example of when accidents are blended is when a substance which is subsumed has the accident of hyperhydration, such as water. The higher-order substance has the accident of dehydration, like a person stuck in a desert without water who would be severely lacking water. The blending of these accidents will bring about the blended accident of hydration within the human, the higher-order substance.

If we continue further into what Aquinas believes about substances and their parts, we must also give thought to the parts of a substance and what constitutes a part. Examples of parts would be the organs of an animal, such as the heart, lungs, or liver, which Aquinas would call integral parts. Integral parts, as Aquinas defines them, share part of their definition with the definition of complete material substances that he gives. These shared attributes help us to see why Aquinas's definitions and arguments contradict themselves, which allows for a better explanation of how substances exist as a plurality of substances. These shared aspects are that both an integral part and complete material substance must be subsistent, individual, and must have accidents inhering within them.

Integral parts also have a few other qualifiers in their definition that are not included in the complete material substance definition. One attribute is that

an integral part is a functional part of a higher-order substance. Another is that its matter has the substantial form of the higher-order substance, which means that an integral part is ordered by the substantial form of the higher-order substance only to exercise the higher-order substance's powers.

An integral part is also ordered to the end of the higher-order substance as well. Therefore, the part is not ordered to its end, but instead to the end of the substance of which it is a part of. The part might have retained or still have causal powers, but they will be executed for the higher-order substance's end only instead of its own (Koons, 2014). This is the point where Aquinas's view leaves room for different schools of thought on substances existing within other substances. Aquinas's view shows that if one of these integral parts is removed from the substance of which it is a part, like cutting off a dog's ear, this part ceases to exist as it did before. The matter that was informed by the part's form then receives a new substantial form or forms, and the integral part ceases to exist.

To explain why we call both an ear connected to a dog and one that is separate from the dog's head an ear in both cases, Aquinas uses the homonymy principle (Pawl & Spencer, 2016). The homonymy principle when applied says that the ear that is connected to a dog is informed by the dog's substantial form, and its ends are oriented to the ends of the higher-order substance of which it is a part, namely the entire dog itself. The severed dog ear would no longer have an attachment to the dog. Since the connected ear and the severed ear are different in these ways, one accident of the attached ear, such as its pink color is quantitatively distinct from the accident of pink color in the severed ear. These integral parts, as stated

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before accidents, individual, and have accidents within them. This is different from those elements which are subsumed in higher-order substances.

Elements also pre-exist the substance which they are subsumed into, and their matter is used to generate substances. Integral parts, on the contrary, only come about or are reproduced through dependency on the substances of which they originate. Since integral parts, though they have the attributes as mentioned earlier, lack the crucial features of having their own substantial form and their own end, they cannot be considered complete substances by Aquinas's definition.

Several other issues can be raised against Aquinas's view on substances and their parts that make his doctrine of unicity less plausible than a plurality of substances. One such objection is that his perspective on substances and their parts seems to be at odds with the empirical data obtained about the inclusion or fusion of lower-order substances into higher-order substances. For example, we can now track subsumed substances, such as the oxygen, which attaches to the hemoglobin in our blood, or water molecules as they move and disperse throughout the body. They are traced by their accidents using modern scientific techniques such as isotopic labeling, where the molecule has a radioactive isotope put into it (Allen, Evans, & Libourel, 2014). The data is contrary to Aquinas's theory as shown above since he says that once lower-order substances are subsumed, they no longer exist in the same way as they did, but we can explicitly track them as they were before they were incorporated. Aquinas's virtual presence does not help his doctrine avoid these problems that are caused by the empirical scientific

data. While virtual presence can explain why someone who is oxygenated has certain powers that they would not have if they were oxygen deprived, it does not give us any clue as to why we can track smaller substances through the larger higher-order substance.

One objection against this argument which helps solidify and support Aquinas's theory of virtual presence states that the substance as it existed before is no longer being tracked, but rather the matter that the substance was composed of as it moves throughout the higher order-substance is being traced. Aquinas says that when an elemental substance is subsumed into a larger higher-order substance, it no longer exists and ceases to be. The matter which it was formed then becomes some of the matter of the higher-order substance, and the powers from the lower-order elemental substance are taken on by or given to the higher-order substance (Barnes, 2003).

This objection goes against Aquinas's argument, which says that the matter that any substance after it ceases to exist because of subsumption, would be pure potentiality or prime matter, which is devoid of all actual properties and therefore would not be able to be tracked by tracking the properties through isotopic labeling. It would not even exist since it has no actualities. Another problem Aquinas's doctrine encounters is that integral parts are able to exist, without losing their functionality, when they are no longer incorporated in their original higher-order complete substance. A very suitable example of this would be a human kidney. The kidney can be removed, even after the death of the human, which is a higher-order substance, and be transplanted later in another human. The kidney still retains all its functionality, and so it fits the definition of a complete substance, as defined by Aquinas himself.

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This evidence gives us good reason to dismiss the homonymy principle, which was posited by Aquinas. Evaluation of Aquinas's claim that lower-order substances go out of existence when they are subsumed into a higher-order substance leads to yet another problem for his doctrine of unicity.

Using Aquinas's understanding of substances, one would have to say that elements are the matter which higher-order substances are generated from. This seems absurd since lower-order substances cease to exist when subsumed. Therefore, they would not be able to provide the matter from which something else could be made. This is distinct from one of the other complications that was brought to light before, since this issue is related to the matter itself, whereas the other was concerned with the impossibility of tracking prime matter (Barnes, 2003).

Since the entirety of a substance, its matter, and accidents cease to exist when subsumed by a higher-order substance, another issue arises when trying to explain how the accidents of the lower-order substance become those of the higher-order substance, in a qualitative way. Accidents, as understood using Aquinas's doctrine, are qualitatively identical, and they go out of existence at the same time as the lower-order substance. It follows that the higher-order substance could not have qualitatively identical accidents to those that existed within the lower-order substance. Therefore, the only thing that seems like it could be subsumed into the higher order substance is prime matter (Feser, 2014). Again, this helps out a plurality of substances rather than a unicity.

Throughout this essay, we have looked at various parts of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of unicity and his theory of virtual presence, and we have seen that there are several problems that his argument encounters which lead us to look to an alternative view of a plurality of substances which I presented through my analysis. The incompatibility between Aquinas's doctrine and the empirical data which we can collect, the problems with subsumption that do not allow for virtual presence, and the existence of integral parts as complete material substances when removed from the higher-order substance of which they were a part of are several issues which were discussed. These points allow for a rejection of his doctrine of unicity and give a stable path of reasoning to adopt a plurality of substances within substance explanation. It is vital for one to undertake a critical analysis of arguments since they can play a significant part in our understanding of how the world exists. I hope that this essay accomplished helping in an endeavor to understand existence better through the addition of thoughtful and engaging discussion. References Allen, D.

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