

## A Mental Analysis of Creatures with respect to the Simplicity of God

**I**F man is compared to the other visible creatures of the universe, be they animated or inanimated, organic or inorganic, he stands out above them all because he is a *rational* animal. *Reason* is proper to man, hence man does not only feel, but he also understands his feelings and is able to better his conditions, which no other inferior creature can do. From this fact we infer that man possesses a *spiritual soul*, superior to all other material creatures.

We also believe that, besides the visible universe, there exist hosts of spiritual creatures, and we know that above all there is God, Who is also a spiritual substance. When man is compared to the spiritual substances, he is found to be the least perfect among them all; because the spiritual soul which makes man the most perfect creature of the visible universe is, in the realm of spiritual beings, the least perfect. In fact, the more the spiritual substance is immaterial, the more it is intellectual. Hence man—whose soul is the substantial form of his body and, for that reason, essentially and transcendently bound to it—is the least immaterial of the spiritual substances and, therefore, the least intellectual and the least perfect. Indeed, man, during his life-time in the body, cannot understand or perform any of his intellectual operations, unless he is aided by the body. Hence all knowledge takes rise from the senses, and the intellect cannot work unless the intellectual species, which is the object of the intellect, is formed by the aid of the imagination. The other spiritual substances, however, are independent of matter: the species, which inform their intellect, are not formed from the imagination, but they are naturally infused or formed by an external agent acting directly on their intellect.

Consequently, there is a great difference in the act of knowledge of the various spiritual substances. God knows everything by one simple eternal act, by which He comprehends His Own essence and all possible creatures because the divine essence is the exemplary cause of all possible beings and consequently contains everything in itself. The Angels know God, themselves, and the other creatures in the species which are infused into their intellect either by God, their Author, or by other external agents. Finally, man knows God as well as the other spiritual and mate-

rial creatures, including himself, through the outer senses, the imagination, and the intellect. The sensual organs perceive the objects of knowledge and transmit their material species, or the sensation, to the imagination; the active intellect abstracts from the imagination a spiritual representation of the object; and, from the union of the passive intellect and the spiritual species of the object, knowledge is engendered. Hence man understands things by means of their species, in so far as these are abstracted from them by the external senses and, through the imagination, are spiritualized and brought into the intellect. In other words, man understands by means of the analysis or synthesis of the various elements found in the material images of things supplied by the external senses; and for this reason man can be described as a *discursive animal*. The higher and more perfect spiritual substances, on the other hand, are not discursive; their intellect, being more perfect, does not abstract the spiritual species of its knowledge from the imagination by the process which is essential to man, but these spiritual species are received ready-made from the Author of nature or from an external agent, and so they see things by intuition and their knowledge is not discursive, but *contemplative*. Man understands by degrees, proceeding from one object to another, because of his dependence on the material knowledge derived from the senses: the purely spiritual substances, independent as they are of all material elements, see things directly and immediately in their infused spiritual species.

This metaphysical introduction finds its empirical explanation in the natural Sciences. Scholars, in order to understand and explain the object of their respective science, analyse or dissect it into its minutest elements: for this purpose they use all kinds of instruments, and, where these prove insufficient, they have recourse to the microscope in order to detect by sight what they cannot analyse by means of other instruments! This shows that man's knowledge consists of the analysis and the synthesis of the elements of which the objects of our knowledge are formed, as we have stated above, proceeding, not from the empirical proof of the natural sciences, but by explaining metaphysically the theory of knowledge in spiritual substances.

What natural scientists do by means of instruments and of microscopes, metaphysicians do by the dissecting power of their intellect. It was centuries before the invention of the microscope and of the various other instruments of physical analysis, that

metaphysicians discovered in the analysing power of their intelligence the most powerful instrument capable of dissecting all beings, even the spiritual ones, into their various elements; thus it was that there came into being the immortal science which took the name of Philosophy, *the love of knowledge*! Philosophers to-day are fully aware of the great contributions which Natural Science has made to the scientific heritage of mankind in general and of philosophers in particular. But they rightly maintain that mental analysis is rather much more intimate and profound than physical and experimental — both extensively, since it embraces all beings, even spiritual substances, which evade all experimental and material control, and intensively, since mental analysis can still dissect even in cases where empirical means are simply of no avail: thus the minutest element of an empirical analysis, an indivisible atom or electron, is still divisible in so far as the metaphysician is concerned, because, being a body, it is still physically composed of matter and form (and there we have the celebrated theory of *hylomorphism*); and, moreover, it is also composed metaphysically of essence and existence, of specific nature and individual qualities, of substance and subsistence. Hence metaphysicians, like students of the natural sciences, analyse the objects of their science, but their analysis is not physical and material, but logical or mental. Thus they arrive at a very subtle analysis of beings, which is even more intimate, profound, and complete than any dissection performed by empirical instruments.

Since the oldest days philosophers classified or grouped the various creatures in different ways: as the object of this article is the mental analysis of creatures, I limit myself now to the classification of things as given by the Angelic Doctor.

St Thomas divides all possible things and groups them into three classes: a) The first class comprehends those things that are complete in themselves and exist independently of and outside our intellect: thus God, angels, men, animals, trees, and minerals are beings that fully exist outside our intellect and independently of our intellect. — b) The second class, on the contrary, comprehends those things which have no existence of their own outside our intellect, they are the creation of our imagination and depend entirely on it; thus dreams and fictions have no reality but in our intelligence. — c) The third class is made up of those things that exist only in our imagination or in our intellect, but they are abstractions of existing objects. Thus Peter, Paul and

John are three men, they are not the same man, but they all have the same human nature. Human nature as such is not Peter, nor Paul, nor John, it only exists in our intellect, but it has been abstracted from individuals in which it really exists. Things which belong to this third group are something between the objects of the first and those of the second group; in fact, they do not exist outside our intellect and independently of it, as those of the first class; but on the other hand they are not fictitious, but abstract ideas, universals, which, though they cannot exist as such outside our intellect, they exist outside our intellect and independently of it in each individual being of that species (1). We are here mainly concerned with the first class of beings. These things, one excepted, namely God, even if at first sight they appear to be simple or do not admit composition, can however be mentally analysed.

This brings us to the object of this paper, namely *a mental analysis of creatures with respect to the simplicity of God*. This title needs a short explanation. According to our human mode of thinking, the more a thing is simple, the more it is imperfect; because a simple element has no parts, no composition, whereas all compound things are formed of simple elements. Hence the more simple is the more imperfect — This is only true of material substances which are formed of various elements; but it does not apply to spiritual substances. A spiritual substance has no parts, it has no material elements of composition, though it may admit non-material compositions, as we shall see further on. The more a spiritual substance is free of such non-material compositions, the more it is perfect. Hence God, Who is the most perfect being, is at the same time the most simple. But because we are most compound, being formed of matter and spirit, we cannot understand directly the simplicity of God; consequently we endeavour to arrive at the knowledge of the simplicity of God, indirectly, by way of excluding from God all kinds of composition.

(1) S. THOMAS, in *Lib. I Sententiarum*, Dist. XIX, qu. 5, art. I: "Eorum, quae significantur nominibus, invenitur triplex diversitas. Quaedam enim sunt quae secundum esse totum completum sunt extra animam; et huiusmodi sunt entia completa, sicut homo et lapis. Quaedam autem sunt quae nihil habent extra animam, sicut somnia et imaginatio chimaerae. Quaedam autem sunt, quae habent fundamentum in re extra animam, sed complementum rationis eorum quantum ad id, quod est formale, est per operationem animae, ut patet in universalibus".

The Angelic Doctor, in his first treatise of his immortal work, the *Summa Theologiae*, explains the unity of God's nature and its various perfections. After demonstrating the existence of God, he endeavours to explain the divine essence, and in the first place he proves that God's essence is absolutely simple: simplicity is God's first and fundamental perfection: and because God is most simple, He is most perfect. Let us resume as briefly as possible St Thomas's demonstration of the simplicity of God's nature.

The Angelic Doctor arrives at demonstrating that God is most simple by way of exclusion. Keeping in view the various kinds of composition which are found in the various creatures, he proves that no one of these compositions is to be found in God. Following in the footsteps of the Angelic Doctor in this demonstration of the simplicity of God, we easily arrive at the most perfect analysis of all compositions which may be detected in each being.

Philosophers divide all sorts of compositions into three kinds: First, the *physical* or *material* compositions, such as the composition of man out of a body and a soul. Secondly, the *metaphysical* compositions, which are not the result of the blending together of two material parts of a whole, but the putting together of two realities which transcend the physical order and pertain to the realistic but immaterial order of things; such is, for example, the composition of essence and existence in one and the same being. Existence is the reality or the actuality of the essence; but it is not a material part of the essence, though no essence can exist without existence. Hence existence does not belong to essence. Every essence is complete in itself independently of its existence; consequently existence does not belong to essence, as the body or the soul belongs to the essence of man: it is not a material part of man's nature; but it is only the reality of that nature. It is, therefore, a substantial actuality without which essence cannot exist, but essence in the intellectual order is perfectly complete without existence. If one gives the definition of a thing, for example, the definition of *man*, he would be bound to include in it all the essential elements of which man is composed; but you would look in vain to find among these elements the mention of existence. A man, or better the definition of *man*, would not have been different, even if man had never existed. The reason is that existence is not a part of man's essence. Hence we say that the essence of things is eternal and unchangeable: but no thing, ex-

cept God, is eternal and unchangeable. Essences are like numbers, that is, if you add anything to a number, say one to eight, it does not remain any longer eight, but it is changed, it becomes nine; similarly, if you add anything, which is not the bare essence of a thing, that thing will change and will not remain any longer what it used to be.

No one fails to see the difference between a physical and a metaphysical composition. A physical composition applies only when the parts or elements of the composition are capable of having their own existence, such as a body and a soul; but in the metaphysical composition the parts or elements cannot exist on their own, but they are transcendently correlative. Thus existence by itself, except in the case of God, in Whom there is no composition, cannot exist; whereas in the physical composition each part may have its own existence.

The third kind of composition is the *logical* or *mental* composition. This composition is in opposition to the other two kinds of composition, because it is not real, that is, it is not objective, but only logical or mental. Philosophers divide all real things in categories: there are two supreme categories of things: the one comprehends all *substances*, or all things which exist in themselves; the other is the category of things which do not exist in themselves, but must inhere in, or adhere to, things existing in themselves in order that they may exist; these things are generally expressed by adjectives and are called *accidents*. Thus *table* belongs to the first category, but *white* belongs to the other category; whiteness does not exist in itself, but in some object, say, in a *white table*. Both substances as well as accidents are subdivided into various categories: there are nine kinds of accidents and there are also various categories of substances.

A substance is either *corporeal* or *incorporeal*, that is spiritual. Thus man is a corporeal substance, but angels are spiritual. Corporeal substances may be either *organic* or living substances, or *inorganic*, such as metals and minerals. The living or organic substances are themselves either *sensitive*, such as animals, or *insensitive*, like plants; and *sensitive* substances or animals are either rational (man) or without reason (beasts, birds, etc.).

These various categories of substances contain a generic idea which applies to all substances contained in that category. The more an idea is generic, the more it is extensive, that is, it applies to more substances. Between two categories of substances

there is a *difference*, and when that difference is added to a generic idea a new category is formed which is necessarily more restricted in its range. Thus when to the category *substance* as such we add the difference *corporeal*, we obtain two categories, namely *corporeal substance* and *incorporeal substance*—the latter may be called spiritual substance. The two categories are clearly distinct, but they are both restricted to that class of substances comprehended in them, whereas the category *substance* as such, comprehends both kinds of substances. Substance is the *generic* idea, whilst corporeal and spiritual are *specific* differences. The union of a generic idea and of the last specific difference gives the *species*, to which when the individual qualities are added we arrive at the idea of an *individual*. Thus Paul is the result of a single pattern of human nature plus the individual qualities of Paul. Paul is distinguishable from Peter, not because of his human nature, which is common to both, but because of the individual qualities which are proper to each one of them. Hence Paul and Peter are two individuals of the same species, human nature.

Human nature is moreover distinguishable from the nature of a beast or of a bird, not only because of the individual qualities of each man and of each beast, but also because the specific nature in both is different. A man and a beast are both animals, but man is a *rational* animal, whereas a beast is an *irrational* animal. Hence between a man and a beast there is a specific difference, *reason*, which divides the two categories apart, namely that of men, rational animals, and that of beasts, irrational animals.

From all this it follows that an individual being admits many compositions, namely its individuality and its specific nature, the specific nature and the generic category, or better categories, in which it is comprised. In fact, in the case of man, there is a composition of human nature and of the individual qualities, of rationality and animality, of animality and a living being, of a living being and an organic body, of an organic body and a corporeal substance.

All these compositions are the work of our mind which from the various beings abstracts a common or universal idea, existing in each, and thus arrives at a classification of all beings. Although in an animal, be it a man or a horse, we can by the work of our intellect, distinguish its organic body and its corporeal substance, we cannot separate these two things asunder: they are two inseparable formalities of one and the same thing; and yet they are

visible only to our mind. Hence all these compositions are logical or mental, and though they have their basis objectively in things, they are a creation of the mind, and exist only in the intellect. They can never be confused with the physical or even with the metaphysical compositions, which are not only objective, but also entirely independent of our intellect, and exist prior to all consideration on the part of our intelligence.

Having examined the different kinds of composition, namely physical, metaphysical and logical, we may now pass on to examine mentally the various compositions of creatures. I have promised to follow St Thomas Aquinas, who in his demonstration of the simplicity of God (*Sum. Theol.*, I, qu. III) excludes from the Godhead, one by one, the various compositions which are found in the various creatures.

This demonstration consists of eight articles, which can easily be divided into two parts. The first part proves that God is most simple in Himself or in His essence; the second part (article 8) shows, against all kinds of ancient as well as modern pantheistic aberrations, that God cannot come in composition with creatures. We are not concerned at present with such external compositions, but we limit ourselves to the internal compositions, discussed in the first part of this demonstration.

The demonstration of the simplicity of God, worked out by the Angelic Doctor, consists of seven articles, which are easily divided into three groups of two articles each, the seventh being an epilogue, comprising the doctrine of the previous six articles. In the first pair of articles, St Thomas excludes from the Godhead all physical compositions, arguing that God is not a corporeal substance and consequently has no body; in the second pair, he excludes metaphysical compositions; and, finally, in the third pair of articles, he also excludes all logical compositions from the Godhead, and thus, in the seventh article, he concludes that God is most simple.

Following further in the footsteps of the Angelic Doctor, let us examine the various compositions which he finds in the various creatures and which he excludes from the Godhead; I am sure that in so doing we arrive at the most perfect mental analysis of creatures.

First, *physical compositions* : At the beginning of this investigation I deem it necessary to recall that all creatures, that is, all created substances, belong to a twofold category of substances,



namely corporeal and spiritual. Dealing with physical compositions, we are naturally concerned only with corporeal substances.

A corporeal substance is not merely matter, but it also has a dynamic or active principle. If this active principle is such that it can exist by itself, independently of matter, then, as in the case of man, that principle is a spiritual substance, like the human soul; but if it is not subsistent in itself, like the soul of a brute or of a tree, it is not spiritual; it is however, more perfect than matter, and, consequently, it is not the product of matter; it is a substantial act existing in matter and depending on matter, which, therefore, cannot have an existence in itself. Let us also leave aside this active principle and limit ourselves to the consideration of corporeal substances.

St Thomas excludes from the Godhead all physical compositions. He first proves against some ancient heretics that God has no body: God is a pure spirit (John iv, 14); this is done in the first article; consequently, in the second article, he shows that in God there is no composition of matter and form. This second article is most important because it deals with the composition of all corporeal substances which, according to the Scholastics, are formed of matter and form, according to the theory of *Hylomorphism*.

The Scholastic theory of *Hylomorphism*, which tries to explain the internal composition of all corporeal substances, has often been ridiculed by physicists and rejected as a fantastic aberration of ancient and mediaeval philosophy. Philosophers, on their side, rejected the various theories of physicists who held that corporeal substances are composed of atoms or of electrons, protons, and neutrons.

The Atomic theory is as old as Democritus, who taught that the ultimate constituents of all corporeal substances are indivisible particles (*atoms*, from the Greek verb: *temno*, to divide, and the negative particle *a*) differing both in form and in their relation to each other. This old theory never died out in the course of centuries, but on the contrary it has been brought to higher perfection by various generations of physicists and chemists. To-day the Atomic theory explains the composition of corporeal substances by those chemical combinations which take place between the **ultimate particles of bodies**, uniting atom to atom, in proportions expressed by some simple multiple of the number of atoms. The Atomic theory has been brought to a still greater perfection by modern research, especially in the field of electricity. Science, to-

day, has travelled far beyond the indivisible limits of the atom! It now speaks of *Electrons*, *Protons* and *Neutrons*. The Electrons are particles or corpuscles vastly more minute than anything heretofore contemplated by Science—in mass, about a thousand eight hundredth part of that of a hydrogen atom; they are identified with the charge of negative electricity. The Protons and the Electrons, which together constitute what physicists call the *nucleus* of the atom, account for the mass of the atom, and, whilst Protons have a positive electric charge, the Neutrons have no electric charge whatever.

*Hylomorphism*, on the contrary, flatly denies the existence of *simple* bodies. All corporeal substance, however minute, is necessarily compound. Atoms are not all identical; they contain something which is common to all, namely, that which gives *extension* to all bodies, as well as something which is proper to each and so distinguishes the various kinds of atoms; this differentiating principle is precisely the *active principle* found in the various bodies. The common element is called *matter*, whereas the active differentiating principle is called *form*. Whether these names are properly chosen or not, is quite irrelevant; it is clear that *hylomorphism* is not a fantastic aberration of philosophers, but a well founded theory, perfectly corresponding to objective reality.

I do not think that both theories, the Atomic and the Hylomorphic, once contained in their proper limits, are incompatible; on the contrary, I believe that these two theories complete one another. In fact philosophers do not use instruments or microscopes in order to select the composing elements of corporeal substances, as physicists do; but they make use only of their intellect, and so their analysis is only mental. Hence when the physicists arrive at the last elements of their empirical analysis of corporeal substances, be they atoms or electrons, these physically indivisible elements are still mentally divisible for the philosophers; because, since they are bodies, they are still compounded of a common element, that is *matter*, and a specific difference, that is *form*. Hence the theory of hylomorphism goes mentally farther than the theories of physicists can go. We therefore conclude that all corporeal substances admit a physical composition; they are composed of two essential elements, which, according to Scholastic philosophy, are called matter and form. This composition is found in all corporeal substances. We are not concerned

here with other physical compositions such as may take place in the various kinds of corporeal substances : these are more particularly dealt with in physics, in chemistry and in other special treatises. We, therefore, pass on to the second kind of compositions, namely the metaphysical compositions.

Secondly, *metaphysical compositions*: In the third and fourth article St Thomas excludes from the Godhead two metaphysical compositions, namely the composition of *nature* and *person*, and that of *essence* and *existence*; and concludes that no metaphysical compositions can be found in God. This demonstration is complete only in the case of spiritual substances; and, as the Angelic Doctor has already proved in the first part of this demonstration, God is not a corporeal substance, but a spirit; hence it was utterly out of place to speak of those metaphysical compositions which are found only in corporeal substances. In fact, in corporeal substances there are other metaphysical compositions, besides those of nature and person, and of essence and existence, which for the sake of argument we cannot omit. Let us, therefore, enumerate in the first place the various metaphysical compositions.

In every being we must carefully distinguish two different orders : the order of *subsistence* and the order of *existence*. Subsistence and existence are not the same thing. They are two substantial acts of the essence, but distinguishable and separable from each other, exactly because they belong to two different orders.

We have seen above that existence is the substantial act by which the essence is brought in the order of real things; but we have also said that existence is not a part of the essence and that essence is complete in itself without existence. Therefore, essence and existence in all creatures are two different things and, consequently, all creatures, be they corporeal or spiritual, admit a real and metaphysical composition of their essence and their existence. This composition is most universal and most important because it draws a most clear line of distinction between God and His creatures. Only God is His Own existence and therefore He is the One who really *is* and cannot fail to be ; all other creatures receive their being from God, and consequently can fail to be, unless the One *Who is* gives them and preserves in them the act of being.

Subsistence belongs to the order of essence and not to that of existence. Hence the composition of nature and person is a quite

different metaphysical composition from that of essence and existence. What we see in the external world are individuals; these singular beings are composed of essence and existence. Let us now leave existence apart and consider only the singular essence of individuals.

Every individual essence is complete in itself: it makes a unity of its own and is therefore independent of all other things, even if the other things possess the same nature. Thus two stones are of one and the same essence and equally possess in themselves the same nature of stone; but they are not the same, each one making as it does a unity and existing independently of the other. The same must be said of all other beings, be they material or even spiritual substances. That perfection which makes a thing complete in itself and independent of all other beings, even of beings of the same nature, is called *subsistence*, and in intellectual beings it is also called *personality*.

This substantial act which we call subsistence or personality is also really distinguishable from essence. Although Paul is a man, he is not human nature. Hence between the personality of Paul and the human nature existing in Paul there is another real metaphysical composition. This composition, like that of essence and existence, is also found in spiritual substances, but it is absent from the Godhead, in Whom *God* and the *Godhead* are one and the same thing.

Subsistence and personality are not the summing up of the individual notes, proper to a particular being. Paul has various particular notes by which he is distinguishable from others. These notes do not constitute Paul's person, but they constitute Paul's *individuality*. Hence individuality is to be duly distinguished from personality. In material beings, one and the same species contains several individuals, distinguishable from each other because of their particular notes; but such notes do not exist in spiritual substances. Hence, in spiritual substances, there is no real distinction between the species and the individual, but each species is individual; whereas, in material substances, there is a third real and metaphysical composition, made up of the species and of individuality.

We thus come to the conclusion that in every existing being there are three metaphysical compositions, one made up of *nature* and individuality, the second made up of the individual nature and its subsistence or personality, and the third made up of the

subsistence or personality and the existence. The first composition does not apply to spiritual substances.

Thirdly, *logical compositions*: Finally, in the fifth and in the sixth article, the Angelic Doctor deals with logical compositions, and he shows that in the Godhead there are to be found not even logical compositions: in God there is no generic idea and specific difference, nor is there in God any quality which is not His own essence: God is not only wise, but He is Wisdom itself; He is not only good, but He is Goodness. Hence God is most simple.

The same cannot be said of creatures. We have seen above, when dealing with logical or mental composition, that philosophers divide all real things into various categories; what is common to all creatures constitutes the supreme category containing a generic idea, which is then restricted to a less universal category by means of a specific difference, until we arrive at the idea of the specific nature of things. Thus man is logically composed of a generic idea, *animal*, and a specific difference, *rational*; hence the definition of man: *A rational animal*.

Besides this fundamental composition, we can easily detect in creatures other logical or mental compositions made up of the essence of things and their various qualities, *substance* and *accidents*. To avoid all possible confusion, one must note that there are two kinds of what we have called *accidents*, namely *predicables* and *predicamentals*. When we say a *white table*, *white* is accident. In as much as it is considered as a quality or an adjective attributed to a table, it is a predicable accident, and forms a *real* composition of table and whiteness. But if *white* is considered as a thing which does not exist in itself, but in a substance, it is a predicamental accident and forms only a mental composition or rather a mental division of things in order to their classification in the various logical categories.

I am afraid I have chosen for the subject of this article a very vast and complicated argument. I am the first to own that I have been rather superficial in dealing with such a subtle and difficult problem. In fact, I am quite aware that philosophers and theologians widely differ among themselves about the nature of the distinction of those compositions which I have passed in review. I abstained purposely from quoting their various opinions, and this I did for two principal reasons: first, because space would have not permitted me to give a complete analysis of creatures, had I

to discuss the various opinions concerning each one of these compositions; secondly, because such discussions would have rendered this article more obscure.

I feel that I have always followed the true doctrine of the Angelic Doctor and that the analysis of creatures I have proposed gives a fairly complete and exact idea of how philosophers and theologians conceive the internal structure of all things, be they spiritual or corporeal substances.

It is only by such a profound knowledge of the composition of creatures, that indirectly and by way of exclusion we can arrive at some knowledge of the first and the most fundamental perfection of the Godhead, namely the simplicity of God.

S. M. ZARB, O.P.

