

QUESTION 118

The Descent of Man from Man with respect to the Soul

Next we have to consider the descent (*traductio*) of man from man, first with respect to the soul (question 118) and then with respect to the body (question 119).

On the first topic there are three questions: (1) Is the sentient soul passed down (*traducatur*) with the semen? (2) Is the intellective soul passed down with the semen? (3) Were all souls created together?

Article 1

Is the sentient soul passed down with the semen, or does it exist through being created by God?

It seems that the sentient soul is not passed down with the semen, but instead exists through being created by God:

Objection 1: Every perfect substance (*substantia perfecta*) that is not composed of matter and form is such that if it begins to exist, this is through creation and not through generation; for something is generated only from matter. But the sentient soul is a perfect substance; otherwise, it would not be able to effect motion in the body. And since it is the form of a body, it is not itself composed of matter and form. Therefore, it begins to exist through creation and not through generation.

Objection 2: The principle of generation in living things is the generative power, which, since it is numbered among the powers of the vegetative soul, is lower than (*infra*) the sentient soul. But nothing acts beyond (*ultra*) its own species. Therefore, the sentient soul cannot be caused by the generative power of an animal.

Objection 3: That which generates generates something similar to itself, and so the form of what is generated must be actual within that which causes the generation. But the sentient soul is not actual within the semen; nor is any part of the sentient soul actual in the semen, since no part of it exists except in some part of the body, whereas in the semen there is not even a small part (*particula*) of the body, since there is no small part of the body that does not come from the semen and the semen's power. Therefore, the sentient soul is not caused by the semen.

Objection 4: If in the semen there is some active principle with respect to the sentient soul, then that principle either remains or does not remain once the animal has been generated. But it is impossible for it to remain. For either (a) it is the same as the sentient soul of the generated animal—but this is impossible, since in that case what generates would be the same as what is generated, and what does the making would be the same as what is made—or else (b) it is something else—and this is likewise impossible, since it was shown above (q. 76, a. 4) that in a single animal there is just a single formal principle, which is the one soul. On the other hand, if it does not remain, this likewise seems impossible, since in that case some agent would be actively contributing to the corruption of its very self (*ageret ad corruptionem sui ipsius*)—which is impossible. Therefore, the sentient soul cannot be generated from the semen.

But contrary to this: The power that exists in the semen is related to the animal generated from the semen in the same way that the power that exists in the world's elements is related to those animals that are produced from the world's elements, e.g., the animals produced from putrefaction. But in animals of this sort the souls are produced from the power that exists in the elements—this according to Genesis 1:20 (“Let the waters bring forth the creeping creatures having life”). Therefore, it is likewise the case that the souls of the animals that are generated from semen are produced by the power that exists in the semen.

I respond: Some have claimed that the sentient souls of animals are created by God. This position

would be acceptable if the sentient soul were a subsistent entity that has its *esse* and operation in its own right (*per se*). For in that case, just as it would have its *esse* and operation in its own right, so too its *being made* (*fieri*) would belong to it in its own right (*ita per se deberetur ei fieri*). And since a simple and subsistent entity can be made only through creation, it would follow that the sentient soul comes into being through creation.

But the root of this position is false, viz., the claim that the sentient soul has its *esse* and operation in its own right. For as is clear from what was said above (q. 75, a. 3), if that were so, then the sentient soul would not be corrupted when the body is corrupted. And so, since the sentient soul is not a subsistent form, it exists (*habet se in essendo*) in the same way that other corporeal forms do. *Esse* does not belong properly to these forms in their own right (*quibus per se non debetur esse*), but instead they are said to exist insofar as subsistent composites exist through them (*per ea*). Hence, *being made* likewise belongs properly to the composites themselves. And since what generates is similar to what is generated, it must be the case that the sentient soul and other forms of this sort are naturally brought into being by corporeal agents that transform matter from potentiality to actuality (*transmutantibus materiam de potentia in actum*) through a corporeal power that exists within them.

Now the more powerful an agent is, the greater the distance to which it is able to diffuse its action; for instance, the hotter a body is, the more remote are the places at which it produces warmth. Therefore, non-living bodies, which are lower in the order of nature, generate what is similar to themselves through their very selves and not through any mediating thing; for instance, fire generates fire through itself. By contrast, living bodies, since they are more powerful, act to generate what is similar to themselves both through something that mediates and also in the absence of anything that mediates: (a) in the absence of anything mediating, as in the work of nutrition, in which flesh generates flesh, and (b) along with something that mediates, as in the act of generation, given that an active power flows from the soul of the generating thing into the animal or plant seed (*semen*), in the way that a power that effects motion flows from a principal agent into its instrument. And just as it makes no difference whether one says that a thing is moved by the instrument or that it is moved by the principal agent, so too it makes no difference whether one says that the soul of what is generated is caused by the soul of what generates or that the soul of what is generated is caused by a power which is derived from the generating thing and which exists in the semen.

Reply to objection 1: The sentient soul is not itself a perfect substance that subsists in its own right (*per se subsistens*). This was explained above (q. 75, a. 3), and it is not necessary to repeat the explanation here.

Reply to objection 2: The generative power does the generating not only with its own proper power (*non solum in virtute propria*), but also with the power of the whole soul of which it is a power (*in virtute totius animae, cuius est potentia*). And this is why a plant's generative power generates a plant, whereas an animal's generative power generates an animal. For the more perfect a soul is, the more perfect is the effect toward which its generative power is ordered.

Reply to objection 3: The active power which exists in the semen and which is derived from the generating animal is, as it were, a certain motion of the generating animal itself. And this power is neither the soul nor a part of the soul, except virtually—just as what exists in the saw or the axe is not the form of the bed, but instead a certain motion that tends toward a form of that sort. And so the active power in question need not have any actual organ (*aliquid organum in actu*); instead, it is grounded in the very animal spirits (*in spiritu ipso*) included in the semen, which is frothy, as is clear from its whiteness.

These spirits also contain a certain heat that is derived from the power of the celestial bodies, by whose power the lower agents act with respect to their species—as was explained above (q. 115, a. 3). And it is because it is in spirits of this sort that the soul's power comes together with a celestial power

that one says that “a man and the sun generate a man.” And as is explained in *De Anima 2*, this elemental heat is related as an instrument to the soul’s [generative] power as well as to its nutritive power.

Reply to objection 4: In perfect animals, which are generated by sexual intercourse (*ex coitu*), the active power exists in the male’s semen—this according to the Philosopher in *De Generatione Animalium*—whereas the fetus’s matter is what is provided by the female. Within this matter there is a vegetative soul from the very beginning—i.e., a vegetative soul not in second act but in first act, in the way that the sentient soul exists in animals that are sleeping. And as soon as it begins to attract food, it is already actually operating. Thus, matter of this sort is transmuted by the power that exists in the male’s semen until it is brought to the actuality of a sentient soul—though not in such a way that the very power that previously existed in the semen becomes the sentient soul, since if that were so, then what generates would be the same entity as is generated, and, as the Philosopher points out, this would be more like nutrition and growth than like generation. Afterwards, when, through the power of the active principle that had existed in the semen, the sentient soul is produced in the generated animal with respect to one of its principal parts, then the child’s sentient soul is already beginning to act to complete the child’s own body through nutrition and growth. But the active power that had existed in the semen ceases to exist once the semen is dissolved and the animal spirits that were in it vanish. This is not problematic, since that power was an instrumental agent and not a principal agent, and an instrument’s action ceases once its effect has been brought into existence.

Article 2

Is the intellectual soul caused by the semen?

It seems that the intellectual soul is caused by the semen:

Objection 1: Genesis 46:26 says, “... all the souls that came out from Jacob’s loins (*de femore Iacob*), sixty-six.” But nothing comes out from a man’s loins except insofar as it is caused by the semen. Therefore, the intellectual soul is caused by the semen.

Objection 2: As was shown above (q. 76, a. 3), in man the intellectual soul, the sentient soul, and the nutritive soul are one and the same soul in substance. But the sentient soul in man is generated from the semen, as it is in the other animals; thus, in *De Generatione Animalium* the Philosopher says that the animal and the man are not made at the same time, but that instead the animal having a sentient soul comes first. Therefore, the intellectual soul is likewise caused by the semen.

Objection 3: It is one and the same agent whose action is terminated in the form and in the matter; otherwise, the form and the matter would not be a unified entity absolutely speaking. But the intellectual soul is the form of the human body, and the human body is formed through the power of the semen. Therefore, the intellectual soul is likewise caused through the power of the semen.

Objection 4: A man generates something similar to himself in species. But the human species is constituted by the rational soul. Therefore, the rational soul is from the one who generates.

Objection 5: It is ridiculous to claim that God cooperates with those who are sinning. But if rational souls were created by God, then God would sometimes be cooperating with adulterers, from whose illicit sexual union (*de quorum illicito coitu*) a child is sometimes generated. Therefore, it is not the case that rational souls are created by God.

But contrary to this: In *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus* it says, “Rational souls are not produced through sexual intercourse (*non seminantur per coitum*).”

I respond: It is impossible for an active power that exists in matter to extend its action to the

production of an immaterial effect. But it is clear that the intellectual principle in man is a principle that transcends matter, since it has an operation that the body does not share in. And so it is impossible for the active power that exists in the semen to produce an intellectual principle.

Likewise, it is also the case that the power existing in the semen acts in the power of the soul of the one who generates insofar as the soul of the one who generates is the actuality of a body, using the body itself in its operation. But the body does not share in the act of the intellect. Hence, the power of the intellectual principle, insofar as it is intellectual, cannot reach to the semen. This is why in *De Generatione Animalium* the Philosopher says, “It follows that the intellect alone comes from the outside.”

Again, as was established above (q. 75, a. 2), since the intellectual soul has an operation without the body, it is subsistent, and so *esse* and *being-made* belong properly to it (*sibi debetur esse et fieri*). And since it is an immaterial substance, it cannot be caused through generation, but can instead be caused only through being created by God.

Therefore, to claim that the intellectual soul is caused by the one who generates is nothing other than to claim that it is not subsistent and that, as a result, it is corrupted along with the body. This is why it is heretical to say that the intellectual soul is passed down with the semen.

Reply to objection 1: In this passage, through synecdoche, a part is being posited for the whole, i.e., the soul for the whole man.

Reply to objection 2: Some have claimed that the vital operations that are apparent in the embryo do not come from its own soul, but instead come either from the mother’s soul or from the formative power that exists in the semen.

Both of these alternatives are false, because works of life such as sensing, being nourished, and growing cannot come from an extrinsic principle.

Therefore, one should claim that the nutritive soul exists in the embryo from the beginning, and later the sentient soul, and, last of all, the intellectual soul.

Thus, some claim that a second soul, viz., the sentient soul, is added to (*supervenit supra*) the vegetative soul which first existed in the embryo, and that, once again, a third soul, viz., the intellectual soul, is added to the sentient soul. And so in a man there are three souls, one of which is in potentiality to another.

But this was disproved above (q. 76, a. 3).

And so others have replied that the very same soul which at first was merely vegetative is afterwards, through the action of the power that exists in the semen, brought to the point of becoming sentient, and, finally, is brought to the point that the very same soul becomes intellectual—not, to be sure, through the semen’s active power, but through the power of a higher agent, viz., God, who illuminates it from without (*Dei deforis illustrantis*). And this is why that Philosopher claims that the intellect comes from outside.

But this position cannot stand.

First of all, no substantial form admits of more and less; instead, the addition of greater perfection makes for a different species, in the way that the addition of a unit (*additio unitatis*) makes for a different species among numbers. But it is impossible for numerically one and the same form to belong to diverse species.

Second, it would follow that the generation of an animal is a continuous movement, proceeding little by little from the imperfect to the perfect, as happens in the case of an alteration.

Third, it would follow that the generation of an animal or a man is not a generation absolutely speaking, since its subject would be an actual entity. For if a vegetative soul exists in the offspring’s matter at the beginning and then is brought little by little to the status of a perfect entity, there will always be a subsequent addition of perfection without any corruption of the preceding perfection. But

this is contrary to the notion of generation in the absolute sense.

Fourth, either (a) what is caused by God's action is something subsistent, and in that case it would have to be something different in essence from the preceding form, which was not subsistent, and so we are back to the opinion of those who posit more than one soul in the body; or else (b) what is caused by God's action is not something subsistent, but instead a certain perfecting of the preexistent soul, and in that case it necessarily follows that the intellective soul is corrupted when the body is corrupted—which is impossible.

There is yet another way of replying, in accord with those who posit a single intellect in everyone. But this was disproved above (q. 76, a. 2).

And so one should reply that since the generation of one thing is always the corruption of another, it must be claimed that, both in man and in the other animals, when a more perfect form arrives, there is a corruption of the prior form, yet in such a way that the subsequent form has whatever the first form had, and still more. And so it is through many generations and corruptions that one arrives at the ultimate substantial form, both in man and in the other animals. This is evident to the senses in the case of animals that are generated from putrefaction.

So, then, one should claim that the intellective soul, which is simultaneously sentient and nutritive, is created by God at the end of human generation, and that the preexistent forms are corrupted.

Reply to objection 3: This argument is relevant in the case of diverse agents that are not ordered to one another. But if there are many agents that are ordered to one another, then nothing prevents the power of the higher agent from attaining to the ultimate form while the powers of the lower agents attain only to some disposition on the part of the matter. For instance, in the generation of an animal the semen's power disposes the matter, whereas the soul's power gives the form.

Now it is clear from what was said above (q. 105, a. 3 and q. 110, a. 1) that a complete corporeal nature acts as the instrument of a spiritual power, especially God's power. And so nothing prevents it from being the case that the formation of the body is from a corporeal power, whereas the intellective soul is from God alone.

Reply to objection 4: A man generates what is similar to himself insofar as through the power of his semen the matter is disposed for the reception of the relevant form.

Reply to objection 5: What belongs to nature in the action of the adulterers is good, and God cooperates with this. But what belongs to the disordered desire is evil, and God does not cooperate with that.

Article 3

Were all human souls created together at the beginning of the world?

It seems that all human souls were created together at the beginning of the world:

Objection 1: Genesis 2:2 says, "God rested from all the work that He had done." But this would not have been the case if He were to create new souls every day. Therefore, all the souls were created together.

Objection 2: Spiritual substances are especially relevant to the perfection of the universe. Therefore, if the souls were created with their bodies, then every day innumerable spiritual substances would be added to the perfection of the universe, and so the universe would have been incomplete (*imperfectum*) at the beginning. But this is contrary to what Genesis 2:2 says, viz., that God had completed all His work.

Objection 3: An entity's end corresponds to its beginning. But the intellectual soul remains after the body has been corrupted. Therefore, it began to exist before the body.

But contrary to this: In *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus* it says, "The soul is created with the body."

I respond: Some have asserted that the intellectual soul is accidentally united to the body (*accidat uniri corpori*), asserting that it has the same status as spiritual substances that are not united to matter. And so they have claimed that the souls of men were created at the beginning along with the angels.

But this opinion is false.

First of all, it is false at its root. For if being united to its body were accidental to a soul, then it would follow either that (a) the man who is constituted by this union is a being *per accidens* or that (b) the soul is the man—which, as was shown above (q. 75, a. 4), is false. Moreover, as was shown above (q. 55, a. 2 and q. 85, a. 1), the fact that the soul is not of the same nature as the angels is proved by its diverse mode of understanding. For as was explained above (q. 84, aa. 6-7), a man has intellectual understanding by receiving from the senses and turning himself toward phantasms. And so the human soul needs to be united to a body, which it needs for the operation of its sentient part—something that cannot be said of an angel.

Second, there is an evident falsity in the position itself.

For if it is natural for the soul to be united to its body, then existing without a body is contrary to its nature, and the soul does not have the perfection of its own nature when it exists without a body. But it would not have been appropriate for God to begin His work with imperfect things and with things that lie beyond nature. For He did not make man without hands or feet, which are natural parts of a man. *A fortiori*, then, He did not make the soul without the body.

On the other hand, if someone asserts that it is not natural for souls to be united to a body, then one must ask for the reason why souls are in fact united to bodies. And it is necessary to reply either that (a) this occurs by the soul's will or that (b) it occurs for some other reason.

If it occurs by the soul's will, then this seems ridiculous:

First, the volition in question would be unreasonable if the soul did not need the body and yet willed to be united to it. For if the soul did need the body, then it would be natural for it to be united to the body, since nature does not lack in what is necessary.

Second, there would be no explanation for why a soul that had been created at the beginning of the world would after so long a time will to be united to a body now. For a spiritual substance is beyond time, since it lies outside the revolutions of the heavens.

Third, it would, it seems, be by chance that *this* soul should be united to *this* body. For this union would require the concurrence of two wills, viz., the will of the soul coming to the body and the will of the man who is doing the generating.

On the other hand, if a soul is united to its body in a way that lies beyond both its will and its nature, then the union must result from a cause that does violence to the soul, and so the union will be a source of pain and sadness for the soul (*erit ei poenale et triste*). This opinion follows the error of Origen, who claimed that souls are embodied as a punishment for sin.

Hence, since all these claims are ridiculous, one should reply simply that the souls were not created before the bodies were, but were instead created simultaneously with being infused into their bodies.

Reply to objection 1: God is said to have stopped on the seventh day, but not from all work; for John 5:17 says, "My Father is working even until now." Rather, He is said to have stopped making new genera and species of things that did not in some sense preexist in His first works. For the souls that are now created preexisted by way of a likeness of species in the first works, which contained the creation of

Adam's soul.

Reply to objection 2: As regards the perfection of the universe, something can be added every day to the number of individuals, but not to the number of species.

Reply to objection 3: The fact that the soul remains without the body is due to the corruption of the body, which is a consequence of sin. Hence, it was not appropriate for God's works to begin with this. For as is written in Wisdom 1:13 and 1:16, "God did not make death ... but the wicked have called it upon themselves with works and words."