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The Body-Mind Relationship in the Actuality of the Intellect: A Thematic Examination by Matthew of Acquasparta

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Abstract: The present study addresses the problem of the relationship between mind and body in the thought of the Italian Franciscan philosopher Matthew of Acquasparta (1240–1302). In Question 10 of the Questions on Faith and Knowledge, titled "Whether the Intellect, with Regard to Its Act, Is Bound by the Weakness and Ineptitude of the Body," Matthew argues that bodily dispositions influence the actuality of the intellect. His reflection is guided by various authorities (auctoritates), foremost among whom is Augustine of Hippo, a general point of reference that the thinker of Acquasparta adopts for his theorization. However, Matthew develops a rigorous line of reasoning in which Aristotle—through whom he also implicitly reinterprets Augustine—as well as Avicenna and al-Ghazālī play crucial roles .The Franciscan philosopher maintains that the body can distract the intellect from properly exercising its function, impairing both the soul's inward focus and the tranquility required for intellectual activity due to external disturbances. Furthermore, the compromised sensory organs of a sick, aged, or wounded body will provide confused images to the mind, thereby clouding its capacity for understanding. The strong connection between body and mind clarifies the unity of the human person as a composite of soul and body, with significant implications both in anthropology and soteriology, particularly concerning the prospect of the unity between the soul and a finally glorified body, which Christian doctrine awaits in the resurrection at the end of time.

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Physical limitations and intellectual actuality

During the later Middle Ages in Europe, the encounter between the Christian philosophical tradition inspired by Augustinian thought, the Aristotelianism rediscovered through Arab intermediaries, and the intellectual contributions of Islamic thinkers raised profound questions about the relationship between mind and body.

This interaction enriched the study of the mind-body relationship within metaphysical, anthropological, and theological contexts.

Among the contributors to this reflection is the Franciscan Matthew of Acquasparta (1240–1302). Although less renowned than other great theologians and philosophers, he remains a significant figure in the history of thought.

This study focuses on Question 10 from Matthew's Questions on Faith and Knowledge, titled Whether the intellect, with respect to its act, is constrained by the weakness and ineptitude of the body**.**

Following the style of late medieval quaestiones, Matthew opens his work by presenting nineteen arguments against the claim that the intellect in act is limited by the constraints of the body. The authorities (auctoritates) and sources he employs include Aristotle, Augustine, the Old and New Testaments, the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Avicenna.

He then introduces the contra, or opposing arguments, which he draws from Aristotle's On the Soul, On the Difference Between Spirit and Soul by Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (Constabulus), and the Philosophy of Al Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī. After addressing the contra arguments, he develops his position, identifying the ways in which the dispositions of the body influence intellectual acts. Based on his thorough and detailed systematic reflection,

he then meticulously counters all nineteen objections he had reconstructed against the thesis of a physical influence on intellectual acts.

Matthew's Thesis: The Body Influences Intellectual Activity

The Franciscan philosopher's argument is deeply grounded in frequent references to Augustine of Hippo. Augustine stands as an undisputed authority throughout the centuries of Christian thought in the Latin Middle Ages. Even during the period when the rediscovery of Aristotle in Latin Europe – mediated by Arabic and Persian scholarship – brought about a profound epistemological and scientific revolution in Western thought, references to Augustine remained constant. His influence is evident both among those who invoked him to oppose the prevailing Aristotelianism and those who employed him to integrate Aristotelian theoretical principles within the Western Christian tradition. Although the Franciscan cites Augustine to support his reflections, the systematic sources underpinning his theoretical framework are, as previously mentioned, primarily Aristotle, Constabulus, and al-Ghazālī. From each of these thinkers, he extracts a core set of concepts, constructing on them the foundations of his overarching theoretical perspective.

The first argument supporting the thesis that the body constitutes a constraint on the activity of the soul is drawn from al-Ghazālī: in his work, it is argued that the infirmities of the body limit intellectual activity, as the soul becomes preoccupied with healing the body and, consequently, cannot fully dedicate itself to understanding (Matthaeus, 1903. p. 415; cfr. al-Ghazālī in Averroes, 1961, pp. 444-446.).

The second argument emerges from the Aristotelian thesis that the intellect is corrupted by the corruption of something internal to it: Matthew comments that

the Stagirite cannot be referring to the corruption of the essence of the intellect, as Aristotle holds that the essence of the intellect is incorruptible (Cfr. Aristotle, 1956, pp. 1-25). Instead, Matthew interprets this passage as addressing the corruption of intellectual activity itself. He concludes that, according to Aristotle, the corruption of the faculty of imagination (phantasia) leads to the corruption of the act of understanding (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 415).

The third argument, as previously mentioned, is derived by Matthew from the treatise De Differentia Spiritus et Animae (Qusṭā ibn Lūqā, 2021) and, more broadly, from medical science. Medical science, writes the Franciscan philosopher, distinguishes three sections (cellulae) of the brain: a. an anterior part (called phantastica), responsible for imaginative activity or fantasy; b. a posterior part (called memorialis), the seat of memory; c. a middle part (called logistica), where the rational faculty resides (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 415).

Drawing on these sources, Matthew develops his position and ultimately argues that the dispositions of the body influence the actuality of the intellect. This reasoning enables Matthew to address all nineteen arguments he initially identified. He rejects the claim that it is entirely and absolutely impossible for the body—under certain conditions and to some extent—to impose limitations on the intellect in act.

Matthew's solution to the problem posed in the Quaestio consists of a nuanced reflection presented in the form of the respondeo, a typical feature of the conclusion in quaestiones disputatae.

He explains that the intellect can be considered either in terms of its natural power (virtus) or as elevated by a supernatural power (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 416).

For instance, let us consider that the supernatural power in

question is that of an angel. Matthew observes that an angel, but also a demon, could effortlessly transmit visions to the human soul. In these cases, communication occurs directly between the angel and the human soul, thereby excluding any role of the human body. Consequently, there is no possibility that the body could limit the intellect in this process (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 416).

Visions can also resemble bodies. A good angel can thus communicate with the faithful, enabling them to speak of mysteries or even become prophets. In this latter case, the participation of the intellect is required.

A devil, on the other hand, can cause possession or make a person a false prophet. Nevertheless, the mode of communication is similar in both cases—whether angelic or demonic—even if the content and effects are opposite. In such instances, the soul does not actually perceive bodies, but rather images or semblances of bodies (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 416).

When God caused Moses to see the burning bush (Exodus, 3:2: "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed", English Standard Version), He elevated his soul to the realm of such visions, in which semblances of bodies are perceived. However, God can elevate the soul even further. Beyond corporeal visions, there is the realm of spiritual or imaginative visions. Matthew gives the example of Peter, who, according to Acts of the Apostles (Acts, 10:11), saw animals in a sheet, as well as the example of John, who saw the images recorded in his book of Revelation, 4:1-7.

There is also a third level, the region of intellectual visions. Here, souls can contemplate the intelligibles with pure intellect. Matthew cites, as an example, Paul's rapture to the third heaven (II Cor. 12:2), where

Paul contemplated the divine essence (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 416).

Normally, it is during sleep that the intellect receives visions. The reasons reconstructed by the Franciscan, as possibilities ("forte"), are that the soul is more inwardly focused and directed toward inner things, and that in sleep the activity of the human being is reduced while passivity is increased, and the soul is elevated above itself; and finally that sleep is similar to death, for when a person sleeps, they are in an intermediate state between life and death. Therefore (cf. Exodus 33:20), sleep represents a partial detachment from worldly life (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 416–417).

The intellect, insofar as it is elevated by supernatural forces, clearly has no possible limitation imposed by the body. On the other hand, the intellect, confined to its natural powers, is bound in its act by the very limits of the body. Matthew argues that this is evident in experience itself. However, while it is clear that the body ultimately limits the intellect when it is restricted to its natural power, it is less clear why such a limitation arises, and in what manner this occurs (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 417).

The Reasons for the corporal limitation of the Intellect in Act

The Franciscan philosopher summarizes in four points the reasons for the Intellect's limitation by the body:

1. The intellectual act is interior, intimate, calm, peaceful, certain, and discrete.
2. Since understanding is a unitary and interior act, if a person is engaged in external activities or distracted by something external, the act of understanding is hindered.
3. If the act of understanding is calm and peaceful, when the soul is disturbed by

something, the act of understanding is compromised.

4. Since understanding is certain and discrete, if the phantasmas (i.e., the image that is derived from a sensation in act, which has occurred before, and on which the intellect operates) is confused or unclear—this may occur due to the connection between the soul and the body in the human being, as will be discussed further—understanding is also affected (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 417). The confusion and lack of clarity in the phantasmas can stem from various reasons, primarily the fact that the soul must be fully concentrated and attentive in the exercise of intellectual activity. Since the intellectual act is intimate and unitary, it requires the soul to be fully engaged and focused. However, the soul can be distracted by the body and may be compelled to focus on it, perhaps due to physical discomfort. In such cases, attention directed outward, toward the physical dimension, distances the soul from its inner realm. Consequently, the distraction of the soul can prevent the intellectual act, even hindering the very act of self-awareness (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 417).

An example of the soul's distraction by attention to corporeal things is found in the experience of children. As Augustine of Hippo explains, the children are so absorbed by corporeal things that they are incapable even of an activity in which their soul knows itself, let alone a more extensive inner activity (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 417-418; cfr. Augustine, 2002a, pp. 143-144).

Another example is drawn from common human experience: an intense pleasure—such as the physical pleasure of union with a spouse—or a pain of equal magnitude can so distract the soul that no intellectual act is possible (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 418).

Furthermore, since the act of the intellect is calm and peaceful, when the soul is agitated and restless, Matthew emphasizes, it is hindered and compromised. The body is the natural instrument of the soul; therefore, the Franciscan writes, any physical disturbance of the body prevents the soul from exercising the intellect, an act that is calm and peaceful, and incompatible with bodily disturbances (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 418).

According to Matthew, when a person sleeps, the brain is disturbed by "smokes" and "vapors," which greatly agitate the soul and prevent intellectual activity. This also happens with children, whose brains are particularly flexible and thus capable of compromising the calm and peace required for intellectual activity. Likewise, this occurs in the case of the mad, as the soul is hindered by the condition of the brain, shaken by injuries or disturbances (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 418).

In his commentary on the Book of Genesis, Augustine of Hippo writes that the afflictions of the body we call pain are precisely disturbances of a balance (Augustine, 2002a, pp. 335-336). As long as death has not yet arrived, the soul will attend to the afflicted body in an attempt to confront its inevitable corruption (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 418-419.).

Matthew compares these Augustinian positions with a thesis of al-Ghazālī, which asserts that the care of the sick body distracts the soul from the realms of intelligible things, and consequently, the act of understanding is not possible (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 419). The Franciscan thinker also notes

that the brain is the most noble organ of the body, and therefore, when the brain is damaged, the soul is affected in a markedly more significant way than when any other organ of the human body is harmed (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 419).

Matthew then addresses the characteristics of certainty and distinction that he attributes to the intellectual act. Augustine argues that, strictly speaking, to understand something is to grasp it as it truly is; if one understands something differently from how it is, then it is not true understanding at all (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 419).

Augustine, again, in Book X of De Trinitate, Chapter 6, notes the necessity for images to be perceived as external to the soul in order to be clear and distinct, rather than internal (Augustine, 2003, pp. 50-51). As Augustine specifies in Book XI, Chapter 4, images drawn from memory but lacking the capacity to distinguish between likenesses of things and things, as happens to those who sleep or are delirious (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 419; cfr. Augustine, 2003, pp. 68-69).

The argument that the body cannot produce anything spiritual, and therefore cannot generate images perceived by the soul as internal rather than external, might be raised. However, Augustine explains, in chapter 8 of his commentary on the Book of Genesis, that the deception comes from the body but is not produced by it. The point emphasized by Augustine, and reiterated by Matthew, is that sleep, in the case of the sleeper, and a compromise in the physical integrity of the brain, in the case of those with pathological alterations of cerebral functions, both result in disturbances and interruptions of the “ways of intention.” The ways of intention ordinarily direct the act of perception from the inside towards the outside. In the cases of sleep and brain diseases, the soul is hindered along the ways of intention, and as a result, it cannot move outward.

However, the soul neither stops nor loses its strength: if it cannot direct its attention outward, it will focus, with its usual intensity, inwardly, concentrating on the images of the bodies it has stored in memory. The soul thus ends up being unable to distinguish between images and things. A common experience is that a person who sleeps and dreams typically believes they are awake. While sleeping, indeed, one has the simultaneous condition of not having open eyes to the world, and the disturbance of the ways of intention. If a person is awake but has their eyes closed, or is blind, they have blocked the perception of the immanent world; however, the sensory pathway from the brain to the eyes is not interrupted. It starts from the brain, and thus the brain is its cause: but the brain is not inactive. Consequently, the pathway works, but is blocked when it reaches the eyes, whether they are closed or not functioning. At this point, the projection towards the external world is hindered, but not before. Therefore, there can be no confusion between an external thing and the image of that thing, because the state of wakefulness, as explained, does not allow for it.

Once again, this argument is derived from Augustine. In the case of sleep, the life of perception is suspended by the condition of sleep at the level of the brain. During dreaming, no distinction is made between external objects—which cannot be perceived while asleep—and their images, upon which the soul focuses, unable to project itself outward onto the world. The same happens to the frantic, as in their case, too, there is a problem at the level of the brain, not of the sensory organs (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 419-421; cfr. Augustine, 2002a, pp. 486-488).

Matthew's fourth argument centers on the natural union of soul and body in human beings. This is a central issue, for from this union arises every

possibility of the body's conditioning influence on the soul. Indeed, soul and body cannot be considered separate in humans; rather, they form a unity that is constitutive of the human person. Human activities can be attributed to the soul (such as thinking) or to the body (anything related to the physical dimension), but these activities, in themselves, belong to the composite of soul and body that constitutes a human. There are also other activities where both soul and body are necessary: an example is drawn from the tenth chapter of the twelfth book of Augustine's On Genesis, where it is written: "it is still not the body that is the subject of sensation, but the soul through the body" (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 421; cfr. Augustine, 2002a, p. 220).

This Augustine's thesis allows Matthew to identify the modes of participation of the soul and body in carrying out the same action: the soul acts in and through the body, thus creating the impression that the actions belong solely to the body. The activity of sensing, for instance, referred to by Augustine in the cited passage, is commonly attributed to the sensory organs, excluding the soul. If this is the case, it becomes possible to clearly distinguish between actions the soul performs through and within the body, and those actions the soul undertakes independently of the body. Reasoning and understanding, for example, are not carried out with the participation of the body, and therefore can be attributed solely to the soul. This approach allows one to circumscribe the activities proper to the soul that do not involve the body, without artificially excluding those domains in which the soul operates through the body; such domains are clearly distinguished rather than dismissed (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 421–422).

The question that arises at this point is: in the activities that the soul performs without the body, does the body interfere in any

way? Does it impose any limitations? Matthew of Acquasparta, in this fourth argument, notes th at: the soul is nevertheless inclined to the body; the soul is united to the body as a substantial perfection; the soul and body constitute a unity; the activities proper to humans are still attributable to this soul-body unity; Matthew then adds a metaphysical framework to the previous points, writing that, based on the relationship between being and acting, in which the former necessarily precedes the latter, if the being of the human depends on both the soul and the body, so too does the acting of the human depend on both the soul and the body together. Matthew reiterates that the being of the human depends on both the soul and the body together, but he can thus emphasize that the being of the soul does not depend on the body. However, he goes a step further: arguing that the being of the soul depends on the being of the man as a whole. The soul is one with the body, and consequently the soul requires a suitable disposition of the body in order to function properly (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 422).

The natural union between the soul and body implies that the soul, although not ontologically dependent on the body as such, in its "being in the body", indeed depends on the body. When the soul is bound to the body, therefore, its activities, including those that do not require any participation of the body, are still activities of the human being as such, i.e., of the soul and body together. That is, the body does not participate in understanding and reflection; however, it is necessary for the body to be in an appropriate condition for the intellect to function, just as it must be suitably disposed for human existence itself (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 422). There is indeed an influence of the body on the activities strictly proper to the soul. But what does Matthew of Acquasparta mean by "adequate disposition"?

Let us consider the brain, the noblest organ of the human body, the seat of the actions and movements proper to the soul, as the Franciscan philosopher writes.

The operativity of the soul within the body—and thus the human person's faculty of understanding, reasoning, and comprehending—cannot precede the being of the soul within the body: once again, it is emphasized that being comes before operating. Another side of the coin: given the metaphysical relationship between being and operating, such operativity must cease before being ceases. Furthermore, the body's disposition adequate to being must precede that adequate to the activity of the soul, and will terminate after the latter (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 422).

Children have a soul before their capacity for understanding matures; in the elderly, the faculty of reasoning diminishes before death.

However, when intellectual activity is in action, it is observed that it is not equal in all men. Matthew points out that in some individuals, greater sharpness can be noticed, while in others, conversely, there is a certain dullness. These differences in the ways in which intelligence operates and manifests depend precisely on the dispositions of the brain in particular, and of the body more generally.

If the body, and especially the brain, is damaged, injured, ill, or subject to other forms of inadequacy, the intellect suffers in its operativity. This is observed in every person through temporary inadequacies, which Matthew lists in the cases of children, those who sleep, the furious, and individuals particularly shaken by frantic agitation. For others, with permanent brain damage, whether congenital, resulting from accidents, illness, or age, the limitation of intellectual activity due to the body is evident in a non-

transitory manner (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 422.

The possibility of responding specifically to the different potential arguments against the influence of the body on the operation of the intellect is possible in light of these systematic considerations.

Phantasms, senses and intellect

The Franciscan thinker identifies two potential causes of constraint of the intellect to bodily limits. The first cause would consist in dependence on phantasma. However, the intellect does not exhaust its cognitive possibilities in its reliance on phantasma, for example in case of intellectual self-understanding or the knowledge of mental habitus. The intellect therefore is not bound to phantasma at least as far as the sphere of self-consciousness is concerned: the intellect by essence is not limited by the imperfections proper to the body (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 410).

Nevertheless, one might argue that the intellect is bound to the body through the body's transience, fragility, and susceptibility to corruption. However, this is not the case. The philosopher reports how physical limitations do not entail impairments even of the sensitive faculties (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 410-411; cfr. Aristotle, 1956, pp. 1-25.). If old age weakens the eyes, for example, this corresponds to a progressive physical weakening, but the sense faculty as such is not weakened with it. Aristotle explains this with the hypothesis of the replacement of the eyes of the old by the eyes of the young, but current techno-scientific developments support all the more what the Stagirite argued: transplants, prosthetic implants etc. show today how the Aristotelian argument can hold up, on the condition, of course, that we remain welded – for reasons of hermeneutic strategy – to his anthropology.

The key to refuting this first and significant argument against the influence of the body on the soul is found by the Franciscan philosopher through a refocusing of the problem. Reiterating that the intellect can carry out activities without the intervention of phantasms, Matthew nevertheless observes that what can affect the intellect in action is a condition of physical infirmity or disorder of the phantasms, which certainly entails not that the intellect is limited as such, but that it is distracted, directed elsewhere, disturbed: this situation means that physical dispositions affect intellectual activity, though not impairing it as such (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 423).

Sensitivity and intellect

The senses have a greater degree of concreteness than the intellect, concreteness that should bind them more closely to the physical frailty of the human body. However, as we have already seen, if the senses themselves are not inherently compromised by physical transience, then it is even less tenable to claim that the intellect is (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 411). Matthew denounces here, however, an error in the premise: it is incorrect to claim that sense is not impaired by the impairment of the relevant sensory organ. If a man has one eye extirpated, sight is impeded. But there is also a metaphysical argument. The more perfect an action is, the more easily it can be impeded. Between the activity of the intellect and that of the senses, it has a higher degree of perfection the former. Consequently, the activity of the intellect is more susceptible to being hindered by physical impairments than the activity of the senses (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 423). Matthew subjects this argument to criticism on the basis of the observation that the intellect can be hindered in its actuality by something, but, when such potential restraint is not in place, it causes no problem to the mind, and leaves it free in its actualization. It can

be seen, however, that when sensibility passes from potency to act, it represents a limitation to the act of the intellect, so that, if there were no actuality of sensibility, the act of the intellect would be strengthened and not restrained by it (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 411; cfr. Aristotle, 2002a, pp. 324-345; Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite, 2011, pp. 211-214). When the soul devotes itself fully to intellectual activity, rising above all restraints to sensibility, its most proper actuality is enhanced; on the contrary, when the soul is distracted by worrying about an infirm body, it is hindered in its activities. The latter is not a school hypothesis, but an unavoidable circumstance, since the soul is the perfection of the body, and therefore cannot disregard it, as long as it is united with it (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 423-424).

Matthew then draws a scale that graduates the connection of human faculties with material bodies, identifying the senses as the faculty most connected to matter, the intellect as the faculty furthest from the body because it is not connected to matter at all, and the imagination as the faculty that, in this sense, has an intermediate position between senses and intellect, being less connected to matter than the senses but more connected than the intellect. According to the greater or lesser degree of connection with matter, the faculties are more or less bound by the proper limits of bodies: according to the thesis that Matthew later refutes, the intellect would therefore not be bound in any way by the limits of bodies, since it has no connection with matter (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 412). It is an idea that the Franciscan calls weak for several reasons. First, like the senses, the imagination is also dependent on a bodily organ. Second, and as a consequence, impairment of the sensory organ hinders the sense in action as much as impairment of the imaginative organ would

hinder the imagination in action. Matthew thus argues that, although it might appear that imagination could still operate despite injury to its organ, in reality, any imaginative activity would be so disordered that it could hardly be considered true activity at all. Third, the greater perfection of the intellect entails its easier impediment, as noted above, and therefore the argument would in any case be ungeneralizable even to the intellect itself (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 424).

Imagination and memory

The imagination, although bound to the senses more than the intellect is bound to the senses, is not limited by them. Consequently, the intellect, which is less bound to the senses, cannot be considered to be limited by the senses if neither is the imagination (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 412). Matthew refutes this consideration, noting that senses and imagination are less linked than imagination and intellect. This degree of closeness is proved by Matthew with two demonstrations. The first is constituted by the fact that imagination has in itself the disposition necessary for the being and working of the soul in the body, which brings it closer to the intellect than it binds it to the senses. Moreover, the imagination is able to retain the sensible even in the face of any impairment of the sense organs (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 424-425; Augustine, 2002b, pp. 324-379). It is a human specificity to have the faculty of retaining in memory even intelligibles, which – unlike sensibles – are not acquired by the soul through the body. But if it is possible to distinguish between intelligence and memory, it is because in the former there is that which is considered in act, whereas in the latter there is that which is not thought in act (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 412; cfr. Augustine, 2003, pp. 270-272). But the soul's ability to understand through intelligibles, which it retains through intellectual memory,

occurs correctly only if the body is properly disposed. Otherwise there will be, on the one hand, confused phantasms, and on the other, the soul occupied with caring for the diseased body. Hence, it is again demonstrated that the body influences the soul in a determining way (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 425). Moreover, logic and grammar are in the soul per essentiam, but they do not enter it by means of the senses. Thus, can one refute the thesis that the intelligible species, which memory preserves – although they arise from an illuminative process whose source is the agent intellect – are nonetheless necessarily bound to the phantasms of things external to the soul (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 412-413)? The intellect, in itself, can understand without phantasms of external things, but the actuality of its effective understanding would nonetheless remain subject to those disturbing phenomena of corporeal origin that have already been observed and considered earlier (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 425).

Mental Capacities and Physical Condition

The Franciscan philosopher also considers how, while an increase in the power of the intellect strengthens it, physical weakness has no negative effect on mental capacities (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 411); the opposite can happen per accidens, because when the flesh weakens, its capacity to distract or oppose the spirit is likewise diminished. But a body in its natural disposition does not hinder the soul; on the contrary, the better its physical condition, the greater its adequacy for intellectual activities.

Persian sources also allow Matthew to support this position: the philosopher draws on Avicenna and al-Ghazālī to observe that the intellectual faculties are strengthened after the age of forty. While in the young, passions hinder the full

actualization of intellectual activity, with maturity, these passions wane, and the mind has greater potential for actuality (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 423; al-Ghazālī in Averroes, 1961, p. 444; Avicenna latinus, 1968, p. 98).

One might still argue that the intellect would have to be a perfection of the body in order to be bound by the body's limitations. To claim that the intellect is not a perfection of the body, however, would be, according to Matthew, an absurd thesis (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 413). But according to Matthew, the intellect essentially is precisely a perfection of the body. The diriment philosophical question is to clarify how this essentiality is to be understood. Matthew points out that, on one hand, one might argue that the intellect exists only if it perfects the body. However, this position is untenable, since the soul's immortality frees it from dependence on the body with respect to its essence. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the intellect is essential perfection of the body because the intellect is perfection of the body by its own essence and not by accident. This second way of understanding essentiality is correct. With theoretical rigor, Matthew therefore concludes that the argument is fallacious because it is based on a syllogism in which essentiality is understood in the first way in the major premise, and in the second way in the minor premise. The conclusion therefore is fallacious. Matthew, the Franciscan philosopher, further observes that even when the intellect does not actually perfect the body, it retains an essential inclination to do so. Thus, the perfection proper to the intellect, according to its nature, is realized only in conjunction with the body (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 425–426; cf. Augustine, 2002a, pp. 464–506).

Aristotle think that the intellect is never in act in any part of the

body (Aristotle, 1956, pp. 58-87): a specific part of the body in which intellectual actuality would take place would mean the existence of a physical organ that serves as an instrument of the intellect (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 413). However, if the intellect perfects the body, and if it is granted that soul and body are united, it follows that soul and body do not function independently of one another, but rather act together as a unified mind-body composite. Therefore, one must return to the consideration that an adequate bodily disposition is necessary for the operation of the mind-body composite, and this consideration means in turn that the body, if it is disturbed, impaired, etc., ends up impairing the act of the intellect (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 426).

A further logically stringent argument against bodily influence on the soul in actuality is further offered by reflection on the most serious infirmity of all: old age; and old age does not prevent the full unfolding of the intellectual faculties, as the Old Testament Scriptures also prove, Job 12:12: "Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding in length of days" (English Standard Version). Does it follow then that no physical infirmity can limit the intellect in act (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 414)? Empirical verification is sufficient: are not the elderly slowed down in their mental functioning, do they not become weak in remembering? From the age of forty-five, it is clear that there is a form of intellectual decline, which does not prevent one from arguing that there is wisdom in old age: wisdom arises from the fact that passions become extinguished and distracted less and less, and also from experience (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 426-427). The soul's best disposition for operation is when the body is in a better physical condition, and vice versa. This consideration is also reflected in the fact that when the soul eventually joins the glorious body, the body, in

that condition, will be perfectly disposed to the soul's operation and will not hinder it in any way. He adds that a healthy body – but in a postlapsarian condition – could be a hindering factor for the soul, since it could be driven to passionate distractions. The solution, however, is simple, and its efficacy reinforces Matthew's thesis: pious and moderate abstinence is sufficient to avoid an excess of passions, and leave the soul less impeded, without overdo it, because going to extremes in abstinence practices could even drive one insane, or at any rate damage the sensory organs, with a negative repercussion on the soul's functioning (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 427).

But how does the intellect operate? This question closes Matthew of Acquasparta's disanima. He identifies three moments in the operation of the intellect: a. a phantasm moves the intellect; b. the agent intellect, by its light, enables the abstraction of an intelligible species; c. the intelligible species abstracted by the light of the agent intellect enables the information of the passive intellect. Phantasma, in its action of moving the intellect, is not hindered or limited by any disease, consequently it seems there can be no physical limitation that can act by restricting the intellect in act. However, observes the Franciscan, if there are physical limitations the phantasms reach the intellect with disorder, a disorder that forces the soul to focus its attention on the phantasms, distracting itself totally or nearly totally from empirical things, so that it is no longer able to work properly in gnoseological processes (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 428).

Actions of the soul that do not require the body

A further argument is that the soul has the faculty to enact actions, without the intervention of the body. Such is in fact the act of understanding, which is

entirely in the virtue of the soul, as Avicenna argued (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 413).

Again, the diriment point is that the soul is perfection of the body and inclined to it, and the conditions in which the body is found influence the soul in the act of understanding (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 426).

Yet it is equally true that a person who is physically infirm is no less human than one who is perfectly healthy. It could be held, therefore, that the essence of the soul does not perfect the healthy body more than the infirm one, that is, that the soul is not subordinate – with respect to its own power (potentia) – on the body. The body, put another way, should not condition the power of the soul in its operation (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 414). Matthew challenges this argument on logical grounds, asserting that the major premise of the reasoning is flawed. In fact, substance, potency and operation are in a progressive continuity, in which potency adds something to substance and operation adds something to potency. For an operation to occur, the body requires a greater disposition than is necessary for mere potency, and potency in turn requires a greater disposition than substance alone. The intellect in act, that is, the actual operation of the mind, needs in conclusion, a higher and greater disposition from the body than the potency and substance. If the power of the soul is not impeded by the limitations of the body, therefore this does not imply that the operation, the intellect in act, is not impeded as well (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 426).

Such conclusions might seem to be challenged by the introduction into the reflection of Augustine's lecture that the soul has a lower and an upper part, which is the image of God (imago Dei). The Franciscan emphasizes how the nature of that image of God, constituted by the upper part of the soul, consists in the three faculties of the soul, memory, intelligence and will, three faculties that are

imago Dei provided they are in act. Notably, Augustine's Neoplatonic conception of the soul is here reinterpreted in Aristotelian terms. The soul, with respect to its higher part, is always in act. Any bodily infirmity should not then prevent any man from exercising his higher mental faculties – memory, intelligence and will – and indeed even a severely impaired, ill or otherwise physically impaired person can fully remember, intend and will. It should then be concluded this time that there is no constraint of the intellect in act to the body (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 414). But the reason why the ratio of the image remains undisturbed by any bodily limitation is that it is not properly completed in the acts, but in the order of the powers toward the acts: for it is in the powers that this ratio, Matthew writes, has its origin and seat, and only then has final fulfillment in the acts. Bodily limitations hinder the act, but not the ratio itself (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 426).

Among the conditions that hinder the act of intellect, Matthew also refers to sleep. Sleep, however, does not completely annihilate the act of the intellect. The auctoritas recalled in support of this observation is Augustine: he observes that some people have thought truth even while sleeping. Although dreams may present people or contexts that do not correspond to reality, the reasoning developed in them can still be true; thus, the intellect remains active even during sleep (Matthaeus, 1903, pp. 411–412; cf. Aristotle, 2002b, pp. 40–42). The Franciscan thinker notes that two scenarios can arise during sleep: 1. sleep is complete, 2. sleep is not complete. In the first case, when sleep is complete, the pathways of intention are entirely at rest, so nothing can be attributed to the sleeper and the issue does not arise. In the second case, it happens that the pathways of intention that reach

from the brain to the senses are in a special condition, because they are not completely placed at rest, but have an albeit limited level of activity. This means that the intellect is operating, albeit very partially. Matthew further considers whether someone who is fully asleep could still engage in intellectual production, and whether this could happen voluntarily. He concludes that this is impossible, since full sleep precludes voluntary action. So it seems that one would have to conclude that such possible production of concepts or poems, etc., which is sometimes found (although often not a successful production), would be either the result of chance, or a natural production, not voluntary, and therefore possible even while a condition of full sleep is in force (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 424; Aristotle, 2002a, pp. 464-506). Sleep then, if full, remains a condition in which the intellect is hindered in its deliberate action.

Matthew continues to develop his argument by introducing a metaphysical element into his tight argument. Operating cannot be separated from being. If the soul depended on the body to be, it would also have to depend on it to operate. However, since the soul exists independently of the body, it would follow that the intellect also operates independently of the body. The limits of the body, therefore, should not condition the activity of the soul (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 414). Again, the Franciscan refutes the argument. First, he revisits the earlier point about the relationship between being and operation, noting that operation requires something beyond mere existence. Thus, while the soul exists independently of the body, its operation can still be influenced by the body without logical contradiction. Second, it can be observed that an adequate disposition of the body is as necessary for the soul's operating as for being; for when the adequate disposition of the

body with respect to being fails, that is, when there is the death of the body, the soul separates itself from it and continues as much to exist as to operate in the particular form of soul separated, precisely, from that body to which it is naturally inclined; as long as body and soul are united, there is conditioning (Matthaeus, 1903, p. 427).

Conclusions

Matthew of Aquasparta's thesis on the various forms of the relationship between body and mind is an interesting example of theoretical and argumentative construction in the late Middle Ages. His constant reference to both Christian and Muslim philosophical authorities does not diminish the autonomy of his reflection. The positions drawn from other writings are reconsidered, interpreted, and interconnected, weaving a distinct theoretical framework that renders the Franciscan philosopher not merely a repeater of established ideas but rather a creative thinker, capable of working dynamically and productively on such ideas. Matthew demonstrates a strong continuity with Augustinianism, embracing an approach characteristic of Franciscan thought. At the same time, he adopts Aristotelian terminology, often using it to render Augustine's Neoplatonic concepts in a more actualized form. By translating the theses of the Bishop of Hippo into Aristotelian language, Matthew undertakes a properly theoretical operation, highlighting his own specific contribution while remaining within the distinctively Franciscan tradition. Moreover, he aligns with the Franciscan tradition's assimilation of Aristotle's thought—specifically, through a critical appropriation informed by Augustinianism. The Franciscan philosopher applies the same method to Islamic sources, particularly Avicenna and al-Ghazālī.

His reflection is thus guided by authoritative masters, from whom he develops his doctrine of the soul-body relationship, maintaining that the body constitutes a limit to the intellect in act. Indeed, the body can distract the intellect from its proper activity, leading the mind to focus on external rather than internal matters. The soul may also lose the tranquility that characterizes the intellectual act due to disturbances originating from the external, corporeal dimension, thereby impairing its capacity for understanding. In turn, comprehension may lose its clarity if the sensible images received from the external world are compromised by physical damage.

Beyond its epistemological significance, the anthropological dimension is among the most compelling implications of Matthew's theory of the mind-body connection. His reflection yields an anthropology in which the actions of soul and body are firmly and inseparably united, reflecting the unitary nature of the human person. This unity of the mind-body complex in humans has evident soteriological and eschatological repercussions, particularly regarding the Christian doctrine of the resurrection and the future reunification of the soul with the now-glorified body at the end of time. These considerations underscore the methodological significance of medieval modes of thought formation, especially within Matthew and the Franciscan school, which functioned as an open laboratory of speculation. In this setting, a plurality of forms of knowledge converged in a fertile and creative exchange, one that was never closed off but rather oriented toward an ever-expanding understanding of knowledge. Its implications, while manifold, remained capable of being inscribed within a comprehensive vision of being.

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