On Hylemorphism and Personal Identity

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Abstract: There is no such thing as ‘the’ hylemorphic account of personal identity. There are several views that count as hylemorphic, and these views can be grouped into two main families—the corruptionist view, and the survivalist view. The differentiating factor is that the corruptionist view holds that the persistence of the soul is not sufficient for the persistence of the person, while the survivalist view holds that the persistence of the soul is sufficient for the persistence of the person. In this paper, I argue that hylemorphists should prefer the corruptionist view. This project ought to be of interest to anyone working on issues of personal identity, not only because hylemorphic views are historically important, but also because they are currently receiving significant attention in the personal identity literature.

Hylemorphism—roughly, the view that material substances are composites of form and matter—is starting to get some serious attention. As the recent literature makes clear, there are a number of quite different philosophical views that can sensibly be called ‘hylemorphic’. In this paper, I will narrow the term in two ways. First, I will be speaking of hylemorphism only as it applies to human beings, not as a general theory of material objects. Hylemorphism as an anthropological position, like the more general ontological theory into which it fits, has received significant consideration recently. But in anthropology as in ontology generally, there are various ways to be a hylemorphist. So the second way in which I focus my discussion here is by considering only those views that are influenced by St. Thomas Aquinas. When I use the term ‘hylemorphism’, then, it must be understood as so limited.

Hylemorphists believe that human beings are composites of body and soul. It is widely thought that hylemorphism also entails that once the body and soul separate at death, the human being they once composed no longer exists. The latter claim, however, has recently come under withering fire. Several philosophers argue that St. Thomas himself believed that human beings continue to exist after their deaths. Alternatively, it has been argued that although St. Thomas himself denied that human beings exist after their deaths, contemporary hylemorphists should not follow him on that point.

There are a number of ways to explain the mechanism by which we supposedly survive our death. Eleonore Stump, for example, argues that living human beings are constituted by both body and soul, while human beings after
death are constituted solely by the soul. Christopher Brown argues that living human beings are composed of body and soul, and dead human beings are composed solely of their soul. Such views share the belief that the persistence of the soul is sufficient for the persistence of the human being. Any hylemorphic view that accepts this claim is an instance of what I will call ‘the survivalist view’. (Or, for pleasant stylistic variation, ‘the survivalist account’.) In a sort of borderline instance of a survivalist account, David Hershenov argues that human beings are only contingently alive, and hence can survive as brains or souls or other such non-organisms. We’ll take a closer look at the details of this view in section two below; for now I will say that strictly speaking this is not a version of the survivalist view, but the reasons for that need not occupy us here. For this paper, I shall be considering Hershenov’s view as an instance of the survivalist account.

The ‘corruptionist view’, on the contrary, claims that the persistence of the soul is not sufficient for the persistence of the human being. On the corruptionist view, there aren’t any dead people. There are disembodied souls, but they aren’t human beings, nor do they constitute or compose human beings.

In this paper, I will criticize the survivalist view. This will not be a historical argument. Instead, in this paper, I offer a philosophical argument against the survivalist view, and rebut arguments by Hershenov against the corruptionist view. (Some of his arguments, if successful, would undermine other versions of the survivalist view, and not merely the corruptionist view.) Despite the non-historical nature of this paper, I will nevertheless cite texts from St. Thomas in the argument of section one in order to buttress an intuition I’m relying on. This seems fair game to me since hylemorphists are likely to give a fair amount of weight to the stated positions of St. Thomas.

I make no attempt to convert anyone to hylemorphism. I mean to show that hylemorphists should accept the corruptionist account, not that everyone should be a hylemorphist. Those who are not hylemorphists might still find the paper interesting, and given the increasing attention to hylemorphism in the literature, it’s not a bad idea to have some grasp of the view.

The survivalist view faces a very serious objection, having to do with parthood. Before I can state the objection, I need to say a few more words about the survivalist account. Christopher Brown—one proponent of the survivalist view—claims that, according to St. Thomas, the body and soul compose the human being. He’s using a standard notion of composition here: he just means the body and soul are proper parts of the human being. According to Brown, St. Thomas thinks that composition is not identity: an object is not identical with its parts. It is a distinct thing. So the human being is an object composed of two other objects, namely, body and soul. So far, there’s nothing that runs contrary to the corruptionist view here. But Brown’s Aquinas also thinks that human beings survive death. After death, human beings are composed solely by their souls.
Composition is still not identity: the person is composed by, but non-identical with, his soul. Thus, the soul is a proper—not an improper—part of the person.

I should say a word or two on the terminology here invoked. An improper part of a thing is just the thing itself. I am identical with my one and only improper part. But a proper part is a part of me that is not an improper part: I am not identical with any of my proper parts. Again, Brown’s claim is that after death, the human being has one and only one proper part—his soul. This claim is also endorsed by Hershonov and Koch-Hershonov.9 (As I shall argue later, it is also endorsed by Stump.)

This is a difficult claim to accept. Consider the point made by Peter Simons: ‘how could an individual have a single proper part? That goes against what we mean by “part.” An individual which has a proper part needs other parts in addition to supplement this one to obtain the whole’ (Simons 1987: 26). I’m inclined to think Simons is right: it is part of the notion of proper parthood that anything with one proper part must have more than one. The ‘Weak Supplementation Principle’ (WSP) strikes me as the best way to spell out this notion.

Weak Supplementation Principle: \( (x < y) \rightarrow (\exists z)((z < y)(z \not\in x)) \)

(The ‘<’ should be read as ‘is a proper part of’ and the ‘\( \not\in \)’ should be read as ‘is disjoint from’. Two objects are disjoint just in case they fail to overlap: that is, they share no part (proper or improper) in common.)

This principle, if accepted, requires any object which has a proper part to have at least one more proper part disjoint from the first. I claim that this is a deeply intuitive principle, and that St. Thomas himself endorsed it, or something very much like it. It could certainly be that St. Thomas’s own version of WSP is not sufficiently fine-grained: I am aware of no discussions of disjointness in Aquinas, for example.10 So when I speak in what follows of St. Thomas accepting WSP, I do not mean to argue that he was clear on the disjointness point; but that is irrelevant to my argument. For if St. Thomas simply accepts that any object with one proper part must have another (non-identical) proper part, that will be sufficient to defeat the survivalist view. I begin with the historical argument, which will eventually lead us back to the strictly philosophical matters before us.

If an object has just one proper part, then the object is no greater or lesser than its part. But St. Thomas tells us that every whole is greater than each of its parts: indeed, he tells us this is a first principle of demonstration, understood by everyone who understands what wholes and parts are.11 Hence, the authority of St. Thomas cuts against the survivalist view, insofar as the survivalist view entails the rejection of WSP.

One might think, however, that the first principle in question lacks application to the case at hand since the notion of ‘greater’ in question is quantitative, while that notion does not apply to the disembodied soul and/or human being, which have no quantity. That’s a tough case to make, though. First ‘greater’ (maius) is quite definitely not a term that necessarily implies quantity.12

Second, there are a few senses of ‘whole’ in St. Thomas. As I read him, there are two main senses, the second of which can be subdivided into three. The first
sense is simply that of being complete. (‘A whole is defined as that which lacks nothing.’) The second sense is implied in that latter citation: wholes are those things composed of parts. (‘... since a whole is that which is divided into parts ...’). Wholes in the first sense aren’t relevant to our inquiry here, since we’re interested in the relation of wholes to parts, and such wholes may be simple. (‘But a whole and the perfect are either altogether the same or else are close according to nature. He says this because a “whole” is not found in simple things which do not have parts. However, we do call such things “perfect”’. I’m taking this to be a statement of the two main senses of whole I’ve distinguished above.)

Now as I said, wholes in the second sense are divided into three: quantitative, logical or potential. What I suggest is that when St. Thomas mentions the first principle that all wholes are greater than their part, he means to refer to each kind of whole in this second division. Thus, the point of the principle is that any whole in sense two must be greater than any of its parts. There is no hint anywhere that he means to restrict the principle to quantitative wholes. If that’s right, it shows that St. Thomas accepts WSP.

But it might be replied that if the notion of ‘greater’ is being used more loosely than in a simply quantitative sense, that allows an alternative escape. For the whole—in this case, the human being—is greater than the part—in this case, the soul—insofar as the whole is the primary thing, while the part is merely a derivative thing. Or perhaps one could say that what accounts for the difference is that the part—the soul—was once united to a body, while the whole—the human being—never was. (That might be taken as evidence that the whole is greater than the part insofar as the whole is by nature a complete substance, while the part isn’t.)

These suggestions founder, however, on the fact that there can only be a distinction between (for example) a primary and a derivative thing if there are two distinct things there to begin with. And the very problem at issue here is: what could there be that distinguishes the whole from its part, when there is only one part? To elaborate: imagine there is something that has only one proper part. That thing would have, in some sense, two (non-identical) parts: the proper part, and the improper part. Now, the question is: what accounts for the non-identity of these parts? If there are two (or more) proper parts, it’s pretty easy to see what accounts for the non-identity of either of the proper parts and the improper part. For the improper part is the whole thing, while neither of the proper parts is the whole thing. There is more to the thing than just one of the proper parts, but there’s no more to the thing than the improper part. But in the case of the thing that has just one proper part, what accounts for the non-identity? Saying that the two things differ in their properties doesn’t solve the problem: it states it.

It might help to see why I find objects with only one proper part so perplexing if we think about the Indiscernibility Problem (a.k.a. the Grounding Problem). Those who believe that, say, a lump of clay is non-identical with the statue it constitutes face this problem. The statue and the lump differ in kind, and the
difference between them is hardly trivial. It has significant implications with respect to their persistence conditions, for example. One of the objects—the lump—can survive being squashed, while the other cannot. Now, the question for the constitutionalist is that since these two objects share all their parts, how could these differences in properties come about? How can the lump have different modal properties than the statue? What is the source of that difference? I suggest that the survivalist has a similar worry. (A similar worry, not the same worry. I'm only drawing an analogy here—I'm not proposing that the Indiscernibility Problem itself faces the survivalist. It doesn't, not exactly anyway, since the person and the soul don’t share all their proper parts: the soul has none, and the person allegedly has only one. And the Indiscernibility Problem afflicts those who believe in distinct objects that share all their proper parts.) If we want to claim that the soul and the person differ, for example, in their modal properties—say, the person can have parts, while the soul can’t—then we ought to be able to give some account of what grounds this important difference. But how do we manage to do that, when there’s nothing there over and above the one part? I can’t see it. Again, just saying that the two things do have different properties doesn’t solve this problem: it poses it.

A further citation from St. Thomas is in order, from his Commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. In the course of a very intricate argument, the Philosopher (Aristotle, I mean) wrote that ‘... if [anything] is a compound, clearly it will be a compound not of one but of more than one (or else that one will be the thing itself) ...’ St. Thomas’s explanation of this passage is:

> Therefore, if this something else when found is not an element but is composed of elements, it is evident that it is not composed of one element only, but of many; because if it were not composed of many but of only one, it would follow that that element would be the same as the whole; for what is composed of water only is truly water. (Aquinas 1995: 552 (Book 7, Lesson 17))

What the quotation seems to tell us is that anything composed of only one thing must be identical with that one thing. In short, it seems to say that if a thing has only one part, that part must be an improper, rather than a proper part: the whole must be the same as the one part. That appears very clear until you get to the final clause. There, St. Thomas seems to say something different: effectively, he seems to be saying that if a whole is made of only one kind of element, the whole must be the same kind of thing as the element. You can’t get flesh out of earth alone: something made of earth alone is, well, earth. However, I think it’s easy enough to see the final clause as supporting my argument. For, to my mind, the reason we find it so obvious that a whole composed of just one element must be the same kind of thing as the element is that we find it obvious that a whole composed of just one part is identical with that part.

But even if one resists that suggestion of mine, the text above is still fairly devastating to the survivalist view. For if the compound must be the same kind of
thing as the one element in it, and if the human being is composed solely of her soul, then she’s the same kind of thing as her soul. But the soul is only a part of a human being. So if the person is the same kind of thing as its one part, the (alleged) post-mortem human being must be only a part of a human being, rather than a whole human being. But that’s inconsistent with the claim that the human being survives her death. (In fact, it just is the corruptionist view, according to which only a part of the human being survives death.) So even if one were inclined to reject WSP, one would nevertheless be pushed out of the survivalist view by the passage from the Commentary, provided one takes St. Thomas as an authority.

To close out my case that St. Thomas accepts WSP, I will present two more texts. First, he writes, ‘Further, every union is either according to essence, thus form is united to matter, accident to subject, and a part to the whole, or to another part in order to make up the whole’ (my emphasis.). He also writes—in this case commenting on Aristotle—that ‘the parts of these substances are many, because since each whole is composed of many parts, there must be more component parts than composite wholes’ (my emphasis.). These texts are both very clear in their insistence on the need for multiple parts in wholes. It is also worth noting that in every case I know of where St. Thomas speaks of the relation of wholes to parts, he always puts parts in the plural. Never does he stop to add ‘or part’ when he speaks of wholes in relation to parts.

I confess none of this is anything like a knock-down argument. For just as the many philosophers who either find the Indiscernibility Problem unproblematical, or else believe they’ve solved it, are not moved by that objection, it may be that many philosophers will find the alleged problems with denying the WSP to be unproblematical, or else believe they can solve them. If the reader finds herself completely unmoved by what I’ve said, then I fear my argument in this paper will simply be lost on her. Nevertheless, I do think that many philosophers would be strongly inclined to agree with me that anything with one proper part must have at least two, and I believe St. Thomas is one of those philosophers.

Further, if WSP is, as I suspect, a per se nota proposition, one shouldn’t expect to be able to demonstrate its truth (nor should one attempt to do so). Hence, it is no surprise that I can’t give a compelling argument for the principle: no more could I give a compelling argument for the law of non-contradiction! While the former is somewhat controversial, and the latter is less so, I myself find them to have roughly equivalent epistemic status. So instead of offering direct argument for WSP, I can only show that (1) rejecting WSP leads to a problem resembling the Indiscernibility Problem and that (2) it is an opinion of the wise, and hence worthy of respect. This, I have tried to do.

But there’s more to be said. Some might think that not only is there no knock-down argument for the WSP, but there are considerations against it. To assess that latter claim, we must press forward, but we begin with a brief apparent digression.

WSP (or something like it) seems like a fairly fundamental element of any theory of parthood. It fits, for example, into Classical Extensional Mereology (CEM). (I certainly do not endorse CEM: I am simply citing it as an example.
of an influential mereological theory.) Two other basic principles of CEM are as follows:

Asymmetry: \((x < y) \rightarrow \sim (y < x)\)

Transitivity: \(((x < y)(y < z)) \rightarrow (x < z)\)

These two principles, together with WSP, do not yield the result that no two distinct objects are made of exactly the same parts. It is an axiom of CEM that no two objects can have all and only the same parts. That is, defenders of CEM hold that ‘it never happens that the same things have two different fusions’. This is a controversial claim: many philosophers do think that the same things can have two different fusions. They think that is, that it often happens that two objects share all their parts at some level of decomposition. As we’ve seen above, some philosophers will say, for example, that a statue and the lump of clay that constitutes it share all their parts at some level of decomposition, yet are distinct objects. So it is controversial to claim that no two objects can share all their parts. But in accepting WSP, one has not accepted that controversial claim. Asymmetry, Transitivity and WSP need to be supplemented further in order to obtain that result.²⁵

So much for the apparent digression. Now, on to the argument that is intended to show that rejecting WSP is not particularly costly. (Notice that the argument is offered precisely because Hershenov and Koch-Hershenov recognize that there seems to be an intuitive cost associated with rejecting WSP. So while the principle is not universally seen as intuitively plausible, it is, at least, seen as such by those authors.) Imagine a tree with many branches growing out of its trunk. When we look at the tree, we might think that there are at least two things there: the tree, and the trunk. And we might say that the trunk was a proper part of the tree. And we might further note that the tree has some parts that the trunk lacks: namely, branches. Now, if someone lops all of the tree’s limbs off, the tree becomes limbless. In such a case, it seems the tree has no parts the trunk lacks. But we don’t think that when the tree lost its limbs, the trunk ceased to exist. We’re inclined, rather, to say that there are still two distinct objects there: the tree, and the trunk. And thus we have to grant that the two objects share all their parts. Then Hershenov and Koch-Hershenov tell us:

Readers should not object to [the survivalist account] on the basis of the soul being the only proper part of the human being if they believe that the branchless tree can have the trunk as a proper part and yet possess no other proper part that isn’t shared by the trunk. The branchless tree and the trunk are atom for atom the same but are not the same object because they have different historical properties and modal properties. (Hershenov and Koch-Hershenov 2006: 446)

Since this tree/trunk story is supposed to be wholly plausible, and since it is taken by its authors to involve rejecting WSP, its thrust is supposed to be that it’s not really painful to reject WSP. When we apply the same line of thinking to the separated soul and the human being, we are supposed to think it’s not so bad to
believe that the human being can exist with just one proper part. (The fact that the soul itself has no proper parts is not directly relevant.)

But their line of thought doesn’t help, for two reasons. First, as I pointed out above, one can accept WSP without accepting the uniqueness of composition. I could grant that the tree and the trunk are two distinct material objects that share all their parts at some level of decomposition, and still insist that anything with a proper part must have at least two disjoint proper parts. This is because both the tree and the trunk do have at least two disjoint proper parts (the tree has lots of molecules as parts, and so does the trunk). The fact that they share all those parts has no bearing on the question of whether any object can have but one proper part. So the story they tell doesn’t help undermine our inclination to accept WSP.

Secondly, according to hylemorphism, Hershenov and Koch-Hershenov’s account of the tree and its trunk isn’t an accurate one. The branchy tree is a substance. As such, it is a composite of some appropriate matter, and a substantial form. The trunk, however, is just a spatial part of the tree. It is not a substance, any more than all of me minus my left arm is a substance. So the tree and the trunk are distinct, but not (just) because they differ in their material parts. They differ in their metaphysical parts as well, since one has a substantial form and one doesn’t. When the branches are lopped off, we may choose to say the trunk survives, but if it does, and is distinct from the tree, then it still lacks a substantial form. But the tree, if it survives, still has a substantial form. It has one part that the trunk lacks. Hence, this is not a case of two material objects sharing all their parts. Hence, I conclude that the tree/trunk example does not help motivate the rejection of WSP. It does bear stating that the tree/trunk problem runs into the Indiscernibility Problem I discussed earlier unless one adopts this hylemorphic approach to it (according to which they do have different parts). For on the story as Hershenov and Koch-Hershenov tell it, the two objects share all their parts, but have quite different properties: and then I wonder how that could be. But, as I said when I introduced the Indiscernibility Problem, that’s quite distinct from (though analogous to) our discussion of the WSP.

Assume for the moment, then, that you agree it’s a bad move to reject WSP. Even if you do, you may not have to reject the survivalist account, since Stump’s version of it may seem able to avoid rejecting WSP. She claims that the human being is constituted by body and soul while alive, and by soul alone when dead. To claim that, say, a lump of clay constitutes a statue is not to say that the lump is part of the statue; constitution is not typically a mereological notion. So if I claim that the soul constitutes the person, I do not seem to be claiming that the soul is a proper part of the person. And hence, a fortiori, I do not seem to be claiming that the soul is the person’s one and only proper part. In short, there do not seem to be any mereological claims involved in Stump’s version of the survivalist view, so the WSP seems irrelevant to it.

But things are not as they appear. Stump tells us that body and soul constitute the human being, and that constitution is not identity. That is, she claims that the human being is not identical with the two things (or, in the case of a dead person, the one thing) that constitute(s) it. But typically, constitution is taken as a one-one
relation. A lump of clay (one thing) constitutes a statue (one thing). A human animal constitutes a human person. And so forth. So Stump’s usage is somewhat non-standard. That’s no objection to it, of course: I simply point out that most ‘constitutionalists’ have a somewhat different notion in mind than Stump has when they use that language.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed, it appears that what she has in mind when she talks about constitution is something more like David Lewis’s meaning.\textsuperscript{28} Lewis argues that one thing (say, a dog) is, in fact, identical with the many parts that ‘constitute’ it. Of course, Stump rejects the identity claim, but she does accept the one-many use of the constitution language. On her usage, again, the metaphysical parts of a thing constitute it (and constitution is not identity). In short Stump’s is a mereological use of the constitution language.

Since Stump is using the terminology in a mereological way, she is vulnerable to the problem posed for the other defenders of the survivalist account. So when she says that a person after death is constituted only by the soul (and that constitution is not identity), she means that the person is non-identical with its one and only proper part, then she is committed to the claim that an object can have just one proper part. But that’s wrong. So Stump’s view cannot be sustained, either.

If these considerations are correct, then the survivalist view faces serious problems.

2.

But there is a way to avoid rejecting WSP, while nevertheless endorsing the survivalist view, or something very much like it. David Hershenov has recently developed a view that is committed to the rejection of WSP (Hershenov 2008). But with a minor twist, his view can be stripped of that problematical commitment. After explaining his view, I will add that minor twist to it, hence creating a Hershenov-inspired view, which I will call the Contingency Thesis (CT). Many of Hershenov’s arguments in favor of his view can serve equally well as arguments for CT. Hence, I will criticize some of his arguments for his view, even though the view I will be attacking will actually be CT.

Hershenov claims that, whatever St. Thomas himself may have thought about the matter, contemporary hylemorphists should not claim that humans are essentially animals, for by avoiding that claim, they can avoid serious problems having to do with personal identity. I will argue that hylemorphists can avoid those problems even without accepting the surprising claim—a claim especially surprising for a hylemorphism, who would typically hold that the very definition of human is rational animal—that we are not essentially animals.

First, a little scene-setting. Imagine your cerebrum is transplanted into a new body, leaving its former body lying on the operating table. Assume that B1 stays alive: pumping blood, breathing, etc. That is, B1 remains a living organism. But there is now another body—call it B2—that has received your cerebrum and (let’s imagine) that your cerebrum has brought your whole personality along with it. Indeed, to make the case seem tougher, imagine that you are meditating on the
Pythagorean Theorem as the operation begins. Imagine those meditations continue ‘in’ the detached cerebrum, and then finally come to completion after the operation is over, with the cerebrum comfortably at home in B2.

So, at the end of the operation, where are you? You may be inclined to say you ‘go with your cerebrum’. Since your psychology has been transferred to B2, you’re now B2. (Or you’re constituted by B2, or composed of B2.) The criterion being applied here is one of psychological continuity. Because B2 is psychologically continuous with you, B2 is identical with you.

A problem for such a view, however, is that it seems to deny that we are organisms. After all, if we were identical with any organism after the surgery, it seems like it would have to be B1, since that’s the one we must have been identical with prior to the surgery. So the psychological continuity account has a problem. It denies something that many people, especially hylemorphists, are inclined to think: that we are (identical with) animals. But if we save the claim that we are identical with animals by claiming to be identical with B1 after the surgery, then we have to deny that we go with our psychology, and that runs contrary to what many think, as well. In short, this thought experiment makes trouble for you no matter what you think we are.

But Hershenov argues that the hylemorphist can avoid both sides of the difficulty. Here’s how. I am a professor, and a father, and an animal. But that doesn’t mean there are three objects sitting in my chair. Rather, there is one object—a human being—that is contingently a professor, and contingently a father, and, on the picture Hershenov is advancing, contingently an animal. Just as I can exist without being a professor or a father, I can exist without being an animal. That is, I have the property of being an animal contingently. This should not be understood to be an endorsement of ‘contingent identity’. It’s just a claim that animal, like professor, (or teenager, or fetus) is a phase sortal.

Now, go back to the imaginary surgery I described above. What happens in the operation, according to the view in question, is that you start out the operation as B1. Then you become much smaller (because you’re composed only by a cerebrum), and then you get much bigger when you’re transplanted into the new body. This view saves the claim that you’re an animal—for you are an animal both before and after the surgery, though not in the middle of it—while also saving the claim that you go with your psychology. So claiming that animal is a phase sortal is a very nice move. Indeed, hylemorphists claim that the soul is the source of our freedom and our capacities for rational thought, but these two powers are most distinctive of us human persons. So hylemorphists might be expected to think that where those powers go, we go. And in the transplant, those powers seem to go with the brain: so hylemorphists, perhaps, should accept Hershenov’s picture. His view has an obvious extension into the question of postmortem existence, as well. For the defender of this view can claim that we survive our deaths as non-animals: that is, we can survive with our souls as our only proper part. After all, presumably the disembodied soul also retains freedom and the capacity for rational thought. So we go with our souls just as we go with our brains. The substance that persists through the change from being an
animal to being composed only of the soul (or only of the cerebrum) is the human person. That’s the one thing that adopts and sheds the various phase sortals.

Now, this picture is committed to the rejection of WSP. (It holds, for example, that after death your one and only proper part is your soul.) But it can be changed in order to avoid that problem. If the claim were that human persons are only contingently identical with animals, and can become contingently identical with souls or cerebrums, then the view would not involve rejecting WSP. For on this view, the person does not have only the soul as a proper part: rather, the person is the soul. (Of course, this would involve accepting contingent identity, which is controversial to say the least. And that’s another reason to worry about CT. But I will not press that point here.) In short, there are two ways in which we can think of ourselves as being animals only contingently. First, we might think we human persons have the property of being animals only contingently (we might take animal to be a phase sortal); second, we might claim that we humans are contingently identical with animals, and can become identical with other things, such as cerebrums or souls. The former is Hershenov’s view, the latter is CT. (CT entails, but is not entailed by, Hershenov’s weaker view.)

Hershenov’s view denies WSP, and so should be rejected. CT does not deny WSP: CT claims that we humans become identical with our souls after we die, not that we are composed solely by them. So the problems of the previous section are wholly avoided. But should the hylemorphist endorse CT? I think not. First, I will counter Hershenov’s argument for his view (an argument that equally well supports CT), and second, I will offer an alternative hylemorphic view of the cerebrum transplant.

Hershenov’s argument pulls on us (in part) because we do tend to feel an intuition that we go where our psychology goes. But if my cerebrum is split in two during the operation, and then each half is transplanted in a different animal, my psychology will have gone in two directions. Which animal is me? (With which animal am I now contingently identical?) Both? That’s impossible. I can’t be more than one of them. But how could there be a principled way to say I’m this one, rather than that one? It can’t be that I’m one rather than the other. So it looks like I must be neither. But if that’s the case, I haven’t gone with my psychology. So why think I went with my psychology in the case where my whole cerebrum is transplanted? To put this another way, if the presence of my psychology in one new animal is evidence that my soul has gone to that animal, then the presence of my psychology in two animals ought to be evidence that my soul has split in two and has gone to both. But human souls don’t do that.

Further, think back to the operation where you’re meditating on the Pythagorean Theorem before, during and after the operation. There is high-level rational thought going in the detached cerebrum during the operation. Such thought can only be carried out by a thing that is or has a rational nature. When humans conceive universals—an activity I will refer to as ‘acts of understanding’—they do so by means of their rational soul. So if there are acts of understanding going on in the detached cerebrum then it must be that it is informed by a rational soul. However, hylemorphism holds that a detached cerebrum is not capable of understanding...
unless the soul goes along with it. So to describe the experiment as above begs the question. That is, if we say that the detached cerebrum is capable of performing acts of understanding, we’re already saying that it is informed by a rational soul, and hence that the soul goes along with the brain. But that’s what this is supposed to be an argument for.\textsuperscript{31}

One might say that it’s not a begging of the question, because the thought experiment simply draws conclusions from intuitions that are broadly shared: the fact that these intuitions yield results contrary to what the hylemorphism might expect is surprising, but hardly question-begging.

This would be a good reply if the experiment were placed in a different context. But in an argument meant to convince hylemorphists that they should accept a certain position, things are a little different. If one wanted to convince garden-variety materialists, for example, to accept the conclusion that we are contingently animals, then maybe it would make sense to use the intuition that our brains could continue to think deep thoughts without interruption. But when one is talking to hylemorphists, I don’t think that intuition should be relied upon: a hylemorphism who understands her hylemorphism simply won’t have the intuition that the detached cerebrum can continue to perform acts of understanding unless she also has the intuition that the soul goes along with the cerebrum. But if she has that intuition, the view that we are not essentially animals will follow immediately. For if I go with my cerebrum—which is clearly not an animal—then I can hardly be essentially an animal.\textsuperscript{32}

Note that I am not suggesting the hylemorphism is committed to the view that the detached cerebrum is not capable of any kind of thought at all. It may well be, though I expect it would be plunged into terrible darkness and confusion. Try to imagine a mental life without sensation or proprioception or any of the other stimuli that are constantly orienting you and structuring your consciousness. While it may be possible for the cerebrum to be stimulated artificially in such a way that it experiences quasi-sensations or memories, there’s no good reason I can think of to simply assume that it will be able to continue a line of thought while detached, and certainly not one that involves acts of understanding. This is a time when it is sensible to dig in one’s heels. Denying the capacity for distinctively human thought, or freedom, to the detached cerebrum is hardly ostrich metaphysics.

One might think that just by granting that there is the possibility of some kind of mental life, no matter how confused and episodic, I’m giving up the store. How could the cerebrum have a mental life, and yet not be a person? And if a person, who, if not you? The hylemorphic answer to this is simple: the detached cerebrum is not an individual substance of a rational nature, complete in the line of substantial perfection.\textsuperscript{33} As such, it is not a person, even if it has some sort of mental life.\textsuperscript{34} (A dog has some sort of mental life, too, and yet fails to be a person.)

So here is an alternative way for the hylemorphism to approach the thought experiment. Hylemorphists should hold that the detached cerebrum, which had previously been informed by your rational soul, receives upon detachment a form of cerebrum (whether this would be an accidental or a substantial form I prefer not to guess) in virtue of which it is able to perform, in a partial and badly damaged way,
some cerebrum-ish functions. When that cerebrum is successfully transplanted, it becomes informed with the rational soul of the receiving animal, which can henceforth use it in its own cognitional acts. I think this is what the hylemorphicist should say. It seems more consistent with St. Thomas’s views on understanding, and, to me, it just seems like a much more plausible story of the transplant. Bear in mind that my purpose here is not to show compellingly that my response to the transplant story is better than either Hershenov’s or CT’s, but only that it’s not worse.

Hershenov has other arguments in favor of his view (arguments which, again, serve equally well in support of CT), which I must address to complete my argument that hylemorphismists should reject a Hershenovian approach in either form. First, imagine that you want to claim you were once identical with a one-celled zygote. Many hylemorphismists do.35 (For the next few paragraphs, I will be speaking of hylemorphism slightly more broadly than in the rest of the paper. Here, I mean to take into account St. Thomas’s theory of material substances in general.) Hershenov argues that since cell division seems to bring about the end of the original cell and issue in two new cells, then the idea that we were once zygotes is hard to maintain unless we accept his claim that we are only contingently living animals. If we are only contingently alive, then the zygote can ‘die’ at division while we go on to become (contingently) two-celled animals, etc. So, he argues, we ought to accept his view that we’re contingently animals in order to preserve a claim about our origins that is dear to many.

But this seems to be a mistake. After all, zygote can very plausibly be taken to be a phase sortal. It picks out a certain period in the life of an organism. When the zygote divides, the animal doesn’t die: it simply gets rearranged.36 To make sense of this, notice that the hylemorphicist would claim there are not any actual cells in organisms.37 For a cell (an actual cell) is, plausibly, a substance. But so is an organism. And no substance can have substances as parts. Hence, no organism has any actual cells as parts. Instead, organisms have virtual cells. This is true for all of the parts of organisms. No organism has, say, a carbon atom (an actual carbon atom) as a part. Organisms have virtual carbon atoms as parts, to be sure. But no actual carbon atoms. Thus, (many of) the properties associated with carbon atoms are found grouped together in organisms, in such a way that we might be inclined to say that there are carbon atoms present in the organism. But the properties in question actually inhere in the organism, and not in carbon atoms. The subject of those properties is, directly, the organism itself— the one substance present. As St. Thomas puts it, elements are present in mixed bodies with their powers, and with retrievability, but not with their substantial forms. Any substance has only one substantial form, not multiple substantial forms. If an organism were somehow built up out of smaller substances—cells, or atoms, or molecules, or whatever—then it wouldn’t be a substance at all, but, rather, an aggregate.38

Now, with that point made, we can see that a zygote is not, strictly speaking, a cell at all: it is neither identical with an actual cell, nor composed by an actual cell. It is, rather, an organism with various properties in a certain sort of arrangement.39 Certainly, the process of cell division looks just the same in the zygote as in (say) the amoeba. But the amoeba is a very different kind of thing from the human zygote.
When the amoeba splits, the product is two amoebae. But when the zygote—a human being with one virtual cell—splits, the product is one human being with two virtual cells. The organism is developing exactly as it should: no zygotes are destroyed through cell division. Rather, young human beings grow through cell division. Of course, all these claims may be very controversial in the general philosophical and/or biological world. But among hylemorphists, at any rate, the virtual presence of the parts of substances is a widely-accepted notion, and it gives the materials for a full and satisfying reply to this first argument.

Hershenov also offers the following very clever argument. According to St. Thomas, our ‘glorified bodies’—that is, the resurrected body in heaven—will not eat, drink, sleep or reproduce, as these are functions ‘pertaining to the animal life in man’.40 But biologists would be inclined to say that these are all functions essential to animals. Hence, after the resurrection, we won’t be animals. And hence, we are only contingently animals.41 Notice that here Hershenov is taking on not only defenders of the corruptionist view here, but also the other advocates of the survivalist view, according to whom we can be disembodied animals, and so, a fortiori, according to whom we can be animals that fail to eat and drink. In short, Hershenov appears to be pointing to a problem that hylemorphists in general don’t see as a problem. There’s a reason hylemorphists in general don’t see Hershenov’s observation as a problem. On the Aristotelian account of animality, the characteristic feature of animals is the power of sensation. As Aristotle says, ‘…it is the possession of sensation that leads us for the first time to speak of living things as animals; for even those beings which possess no power of local movement but do possess the power of sensation we call animals’.42 Another translation has it that ‘… an animal is such primarily by sensation’.43 St. Thomas glosses this by saying that Aristotle has it that ‘what primarily distinguishes animals is sensation’.44 And St. Thomas says that while sensation is common to all animals, ‘the complete animals like oxen and horses, have, along with sensation, the power to move from place to place; and finally some, i.e. men, have, in addition, mind’.45 But resurrected human beings will be able to sense, move, and think human thoughts.46 So they are animals.47 So those who accept St. Thomas’s view have a reply to Hershenov’s argument.

But Hershenov could press the issue. Aristotle claims (and St. Thomas seems to accept) that all living things must have the vegetative powers of nourishment (and the related functions of growth and decay) and reproduction: ‘Plants have none but the [vegetative], while another order of living things has this plus the sensory’.48 And, more starkly, ‘This [vegetative power] can be isolated from the other powers mentioned, but not they from it …’.49 Passages like these suggest that resurrected human beings’ powers of sensation and motion are not sufficient to make them animals, because resurrected humans do not meet a necessary condition of animality: having vegetative powers.

But the second passage from Aristotle continues: ‘… in mortal beings at least’. And St. Thomas glosses this by saying ‘this principle of feeding and growing can exist apart from other life-principles, but these cannot exist apart from it, at least in things subject to death’.50 But the resurrected human being is not subject to
death. So, it is quite plausible (though this is not a point he makes in the above passage in his Commentary on *De Anima*) that on St. Thomas’s view, the sensory and intellectual powers can exist separate from the vegetative powers in the immortal resurrected human.

A further worry that arises now, however, is the following: I have just claimed that perhaps what it means to say we are animals is significantly different from what a contemporary biologist would mean by making that claim. (Would a biologist accept the claim that some animals can exist without having nutritive powers?) So, on my account, we should say that humans are essentially animals *in St. Thomas’s sense*, while being only contingently animals *in a sense more congenial to contemporary biology*. Isn’t this a devastating weakness for this view?

In response to the question, I offer the following *tu quoque*. On Hershenov’s account of the cerebrum transplant, the removal of a cerebrum brings about the existence of a brand new animal (a cerebrum-less animal). Further, when the cerebrum enters the second animal, that animal dies, and a new animal comes to be. However, if we were to perform a similar sort of operation on a parrot, then we’d have the same parrots we started out with. Nobody would ‘go with the brain’. A parrot wouldn’t cease to exist when it got a new brain. The reason we might be thought to go with our brain, recall, is that the soul provides our capacities for freedom and rational thought, and if those capacities go along with the cerebrum, then we ought to think we went with the cerebrum. But the parrot’s soul does not confer any powers of freedom or rational thought. There is, then, no reason to think it went with its brain. That’s a funny result. Human organisms can be created via brain transplants, but other organisms can’t be, meaning we’re really very different from other organisms.

Now, I don’t mean this to be taken as an objection to Hershenov. As I said, this is a *tu quoque*. What has come out in my discussion of the animal nature of the resurrected human being is that some animals don’t perform any vegetative functions. This is odd, if we understand animality in a straightforward biological sense. But Hershenov cannot object to St. Thomas’s view on the grounds that it has funny biological consequences, for his view does, too. And it’s far from clear that his results are any less funny than St. Thomas’s.

**Conclusion**

The survivalist view faces serious objections, and the philosophical reasons offered in support of it are not sufficiently strong to support biting the bullet on those objections. If a hylemorphic account of personal identity is going to be defended—as it should be—it ought to be the corruptionist view.\textsuperscript{51}

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NOTES

1 See, for example, Johnston 2006; Koslicki 2008; Oderberg 1999, 2007.
3 For what I take to be close to the proper way to understand the claim that living things are composites of body and soul, see Klima 2002.
4 Those who interpret St. Thomas in this way include, for example, Stump 2003: 51–54, Stump 2006; Brown 2005: 120–124; Brown 2007; Moreland and Rae 2000: 201; and Oderberg 2007: ch. 10.
5 See Hershenov 2008. Hershenov doesn’t endorse this view. He is not a hylemorphism. What he argues is that if you’re inclined to hylemorphism, you should be inclined toward the view he presents.
6 Hershenov has told me in private correspondence that he does not mean for the position he defends to be committed to the claim that the persistence of the soul is sufficient for the persistence of the person. The reason for his hesitation is that because the person and soul are distinct (at least, the person is not essentially identical with the soul), it is perhaps possible for the soul to persist without the person persisting. However, as he also says, it is very difficult to see how to get that to go through, given the other aspects of his view. I do not think this point will have any impact on my arguments in this paper, so I will henceforth put it aside.
7 In my opinion, St. Thomas himself accepted the corruptionist account, and I’ve made that case elsewhere. See Toner 2009.
8 For some helpful moves towards making such a case, see Ross 1992; Oderberg 2008; Freddoso 2002.
10 Imagine an object composed of one proper part, which itself is composed by one proper part, which itself is composed by one proper part, and so on in an infinite chain of compositions. The first object has more than one proper part (assuming the transitivity of parthood), and none of them are identical with one another (that’s entailed by their being proper parts). But this model nevertheless doesn’t capture the intuition about parthood mentioned by Simons. WSP rules out such a model, however, for all of the proper parts in this imaginary series overlap, hence the disjointness condition is not met. For a very nice discussion of all this material, see Koslicki 2008: ch. 1.
11 The locus classicus for this is Summa Theologica (ST) I, 2, 1 obj. 2, but the claim is repeated at many places throughout his work. In citations to follow, I will use the abbreviation ST when simply referring to a passage, but the author-date system when citing a translation. In either case, I will cite by textual division, rather than page number. I will cite the Summa Contra Gentiles (SCG) (Aquinas 1955) in the same way. In other cases, I will give both page number and textual division.
12 That can be proved by the following text: ‘Thus, as soon as you know the nature of a whole and the nature of a part, you know immediately that every whole is greater (maius) than its part. The proposition God exists is of this sort. For by the name God we understand something than which a greater (maius) cannot be thought’ Aquinas 1955: 79 (SCG I, 10).
14 Aquinas 1920: 1, 10, 1 ad 3.
15 Ibid.: 1, 76, 8.
Aquinas 1955: 2, 72.
Cf. ST 1, 76, 8. The division is given as twofold in SCG 2, 72; but the threefold division is repeated in Disputed Questions on the Soul, 10 and On Spiritual Creatures, 4 (Aquinas 1949). Also worth consulting is Aquinas 1995: Book 5, Lesson 21.
For a nice discussion of this problem, see Olson 2001.
Aristotle 1941: 811 (Metaphysics, 1041b22).
The term translated as same is idem, which does not necessarily imply numerical identity. Things can be the same numerically, specifically, or generically. On this, cf. ST I-II, 67, 5 and Aquinas 1995: 654 (Book 10, Lesson 4). This ambiguity—together with his example—is what allows the possible interpretation that what St. Thomas is claiming is that the one element is the same as the whole only specifically, and not numerically. Still, even if it were granted that he is only claiming a whole is specifically the same as its one part, this doesn’t help. I give one reason for this in the text. But another reason is as follows. Even if we grant that a whole could be composed of only one part with which it is non-identical, we would be committed to attributing to St. Thomas the view that two things of the same kind can wholly overlap. Even contemporary defenders of co-locationism tend to reject such a bizarre view, insisting that co-located objects differ in kind (persons overlap with bodies, for example, and lumps of matter overlap with artifacts).
Aquinas 1920: I-II, 28, 1.
Aquinas 1995: 540 (Book 7, Lesson 16).
For some further considerations in favor of WSP, see Koslicki 2008: 167–168. On the other hand, as Koslicki points out, some very good philosophers are happy to reject WSP, including Kit Fine.
The further supplementation might take the form of a Proper Parts Principle, or a Strong Supplementation Principle. Cf. Ibid.
Though it has been argued that we should see, for example, the lump of clay as a part of the statue it constitutes. If so, then my conclusion in what follows comes all the more quickly. Cf. Koslicki 2008: 176–179.
For a leading example, see Baker 2000.
For this connection, see Williams 2005: 486. Indeed, as Williams points out, the only way in which the denial of constitution as identity does what Stump wants it to do is if she is using the terminology in this clearly mereological way.
For a defense of the view see, for example, Gibbard 1975.
It is common in these discussions for defenders of psychological continuity to claim that identity is preserved except in cases where the psychology branches. That is, when my whole cerebrum is transplanted, I go with it. If, however, my cerebrum is split, and both halves are transplanted, I go with neither. This view yields the claim that if my cerebrum is split, and one half is transplanted, and the other half is destroyed, I do go along with the half cerebrum that is successfully transplanted. It is very surprising, to say the least, that the fact that half of my cerebrum is destroyed can have the effect of allowing me to survive the operation. There are, of course, deep issues here that I will not go into. Suffice to say, for my purposes, whether my soul is transferred from one body to another cannot possibly depend on the wholly extrinsic matter of whether both halves of my cerebrum survive, or only one half does. In short, while the fission case is not decisive in some discussions of personal identity, it should be wholly decisive among hylemorphists.
To say the soul goes along with the cerebrum is to say that the body informed by the soul goes from being the size of a normal human, to being very small, to being the size of a normal human again. (I am supposing that B1 and B2 are normally sized.) So it is, in effect,
to say that you go from having lots of matter, to having a little, to having lots again, much
of which is different from the matter you started out with. But there’s no problem with
human bodies having just a little matter (as in very young humans), or with human bodies
having almost entirely different matter from one time to the next. So if she accepts that the
cerebrum can have human thought, the hylemorphist should claim that she goes along
with the cerebrum, and thus that she is only contingently an animal.

32 It would remain open whether to accept Hershenov’s own view, or CT. The
motivation for accepting CT, which is a stronger claim than Hershenov’s, would simply be
that CT avoids the denial of WSP, while Hershenov’s view does not.

33 Cf. ST I, 75, 2 ad. 1; and Disputed Questions on the Soul, I ad 1.

34 For a much fuller account of this, see Toner 2009.

35 There has been some controversy over what St. Thomas’s metaphysics would lead
him to say about this, if he were aware of contemporary biology. Robert Pasnau, for
example, has argued that St. Thomas would reject the notion that we were ever identical to
a zygote, in Pasnau 2002: ch. 4. His account has been rebutted (entirely convincingly, to my
mind) by Lee and Haldane 2003.

36 Hershenov also tackles the apparent lack of unity of the early organism, suggesting
that this lack of unity tells against the thought that we were identical to such a thing. On
this point, see Lee 1996: ch. 3.

37 See Bobik 1998: 120–126, which speaks of the virtual presence of elements in mixed
bodies.

38 For a full account of this that both explains and argues for the plausibility of the
view above, see Toner 2008.

39 Indeed, it is a multi-cellular organism (make sure you understand ‘multi-cellular’ in
the proper sense: that is, including many virtual cells as parts), because although it
currently has only one virtual cell as a part, it is natural to it to have many virtual cells as
parts. (Again, note that although the zygote may have but one cell as an integral part,
that’s not a violation of WSP, since it has at least the two metaphysical parts of form and
matter.)

40 ST, Suppl. 81, 4.

41 This is sort of an add-on to an argument he’s made about Purgatory in Hershenov

42 Aristotle 1941: 557 (De Anima 413b2).

43 Aquinas 1994: 80 (Book 2, Lecture 3).

44 Ibid., 83.


46 ST Suppl. 82, 4

47 In fact, as St. Thomas says, ‘life is essentially that by which anything has power to
move itself, taking movement in its wide sense so as to include the ‘movement’ or activity
of the intellect’ Aquinas 1994: 74 (Book 2, Lecture 1). The resurrected human being is a
living thing with sensation: animal in the full sense.

48 Aristotle 1941: 559 (De Anima 414a32).

49 Idem, 557 (413a31).

50 Aquinas 1994: 82 (Book 2, Lecture 3).

51 I discussed this paper at some length with David Hershenov, who was
extraordinarily generous with his time and efforts at helping me improve it, and in
giving me a very great deal to think about in future work. I also benefited greatly from
comments by David Oderberg. I thank both of them for their significant help with this
paper. Needless to say, neither may actually endorse anything I say here.

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