

ZBIGNIEW PAŃPUCH

THE BODY-ORGANISM DIFFERENCE
AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN PARTICULAR SCIENCES
AND PHILOSOPHY IN UNDERSTANDING HUMAN PERSON

In my article, I cope with the plurality of sciences in general and specifically the human-related sciences which present different cognitive results. There is a difficulty in coordinating these sciences because of the difference in subsequent methods, aims and formal objects, whereas the material object of various sciences do not share this difficulty—in these sciences the real man exists as the only subject, with a definite and clearly determined substance. In consequence, these sciences produce different concepts of human being. Is it possible to coordinate or to reconcile these various information methods concerning human being, especially the methods of the particular sciences and philosophical anthropology?¹

This issue is particularly crucial in the general trend of searching for an interdisciplinary synthesis of knowledge concerning the human being. However, what can one do in order for this synthesis to not be a simple eclectic compilation (due to the varying methods and formal subjects of the particular arts and sciences as well as the various initial assumptions and points of departure)? It seems that one has to delineate an ontic framework, a basis for this sort of intellectual endeavor, a distinct type of sphere of interests or cognitive boundaries for particular domains of cognition. We are aware of the specific pressure that is exerted by biology, cognitive science, but also, for example, physics (and in the recent past logic) on philosophy, with philosophy thus taking into

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¹ More about methodological aspects of philosophical anthropology one can find in the “Appendix” written by Stanisław Kaminski: “Notes on the Metaphilosophy of Man,” in KRAPIEC, Mieczysław A., *l-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Marie Lescoe, Andrew Woznicki, Theresa Sandok, et al. (New Britain: Mariel Publications 1983), 363 nn.

account the state-of-the-art results of molecular biology or incorporating research of the brain into traditionally elaborated anthropological concepts if philosophy does not want to be called obsolete or unscientific. This “terror of biology” or other sciences is supposed to force philosophy to “adapt” and recognize the results of research as well as change previously elaborated philosophical concepts. In the case of the human being it seems that fundamentally the exact sciences examine various aspects of which philosophy calls corporeality in the broad meaning of the word. Science predominantly uses the concept of an organism.

The problem of the body and corporeality is obviously impossible to investigate without reference to the whole of man as the body comprises only one dimension. The other necessity is seeing the soul as a principle of the existence of the human being. A general understanding of the human being as composed of the soul and the body is to be worked out in the field of philosophical anthropology and only within a particular concept of the human being. During many philosophical discussions it has turned out that the realistic image of man contained in the integral anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas could be an adequate tool for resolving problems referring to particular aspects of corporeality.²

A general understanding of the biological organism is an object of science, but the notion of organism has been present in philosophy for quite a long time—since the ancient times.³ Thus, an outline of the problem appears, namely the distinction between the organism as an object of possible experience (fundamentally internal, but also external) and the body in the metaphysical sense, as a sub-ontic element of the human being.

So far the fact of the material corporeality of the human being in philosophical anthropology was explained by referring to the body. However, this term stems from the metaphysical theory of being compositions in which these anthropological compositions are sub-ontic and are not directly cognizable—either experimentally or intellectually. These aforementioned compositions can be discovered by the use of the reductive metaphysical method in explaining observable or experimental facts, i.e. in indirect elucidative cognition which seeks the essential (necessary) metaphysical reasons (i.e. causes)

² A presentation of the philosophically realistic concept of human being is the work of Mieczysław A. KRAPIEC, *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Marie Lescoe, Andrew Woznicki, Theresa Sandok et al. (New Britain: Mariel Publications, 1983).

³ A short historical presentation of the concept of the organism is present in an entry: Theodor BALLAUFF “Organismus,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 6, eds. Joachim Ritter, and Karlfried Gründer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), 1330–1336.

for the observed phenomena or real states of beings.⁴ In this sense the soul as a form organizing the matter of the body explains the specific existence of living organisms. But alone in itself the soul—from the metaphysical point of view—is not experienced in any kind of internal or external experience. Only in the Platonic and Augustinian traditions, where the soul is treated as a complete and perfect immaterial substance accidentally joined to the material substance, understood as the body, do thinkers traditionally speak about the soul and the body as the objects of experience.

On the basis of the simple similarity of these concerns—paradoxically—the body, understood as a metaphysical principle—a subontic element of the human being, explains experienced facts and the aspects connected with changeability, individuality, various determinations, and the modifications of the human being, its qualifications, and limitations in respect to space-time, as also physical interactions with different material objects. With this one must conclude that similarly as how the soul (in opposition to the claims of some authors) is not experienced, the body as a metaphysical principle (or element of being composition: matter/form) is not directly experienced. A similar claim can be found in works of so called “Warsaw School of Consequent Thomism.”⁵ Of course this may sound strange to the common man, with this being due to the difference between the metaphysical and the popular understanding of the term “body.”

From the realistic point of view, the only thing (object) that is experienced is a “whole” being as the first object of cognition and the subject or source of its own specific actions. This whole being appears in experience (both internal and external) just as a living and acting organism, i.e. the organized whole of different perceptible parts (the organs—internal and external—the instruments of this whole), which makes a visible structural and functional unity. Individual parts, i.e. organs, perform definite complex internal and external functions, along with the main metabolic activity, which we call life (in the biological sense). But from the metaphysical point of view it seems (with this being my proposition which I would like to especially stress) that **this whole**—consisting of its organic parts, all unified in systemic reciprocal dependencies and various relations—**is only accidental to the human substance.**

⁴ More about the concept and the methods of philosophical anthropology one can find in an entry: Andrzej MARYNIARCZYK, and Arkadiusz GUDANIEC, “Metafizyka człowieka w ujęciu Krąpcza,” in *Encyklopedia filozofii polskiej*, vol. 2 (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2011), 108–120.

⁵ This name denotes Warsaw circle of scholars cooperating with prof. M. Gogacz as a founder of the School established in former Akademia Teologii Katolickiej [Academy of Catholic Theology] – now Uniwersytet Kardynała Wyszyńskiego [Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University].

This human substance or human entity is a person. This substance consists of the immaterial soul—an incomplete spiritual substance, which in its function as the form organizes the primary matter in the body—the second sub-ontic element of the human entity. The soul and body are both unified and actualized by the specific act of existence—*esse personale*. In this way—along with the organized body—this substance becomes complete in its ontic structure. Here incompleteness means two things: that the human substance is not only a form—like in the philosophy of Aristotle—and thus the human substance is not only an effect of the consequence of organized matter (gr. *entelecheia*)—organized either with the influence of the organic powers of generation coming from parental organisms or with the influence of celestial bodies. The human soul in realistic (Thomistic) philosophy is a specific, independently existing substance with its own act of personal existence (*esse personale*). Secondly, this substance has an essential, necessary relation or function to matter, which by it is organized in the body which completes the whole substance in order to be perfect in its species.

This raises a general question about the nature of the relation between the substance and accidentals. But in this specific case of this “set of accidentals” constituting the human organism, the accidentals are subordinated (subjected) to the human substance which we call a human person. The organism exists in the human person and by it. (See Boethius’ traditional definition of the person—*Persona est individua substantia rationalis naturae*.)⁶

There is also the question of the specific nature of this existing substantial “composed monolith” (a composition of 2 subontic elements: the immaterial substantial soul and the material body—composed as a matter and a form). This is also the question regarding if the classical Thomistic formulation of *esse per formam* could or even should be changed into the *substantial esse personale* which makes this specific composed (materially and spiritually) human substance a subject of an accidental organism which is needed for this substance as the (paradoxically) necessary tool for performing (realizing) three main goals:

– By the human substance’s metabolic activity (general biological living processes) the constant presence of this rational and volitional i.e. *personal subject* is enabled in the world of material objects as also other living substances and the subsequent necessary interactions with them;

⁶ See especially Zbigniew PAŃPUCH, *Spór o cielesność. Analiza ujęć wybranych problemów u tomistów egzystencjalnych oraz propozycja wprowadzenia do antropologii filozoficznej rozróżnienia między ciałem a organizmem* (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2015), 190–198.

– By the human substance’s cognition-oriented biologic processes of corresponding organs, the human substance is enabled to have the intellectual cognition, which is the aim and end to which the biologic processes are organized and accustomed;

– By the human substance’s appetite-oriented biological processes of corresponding organs and even by the involvement of the whole organism, the human substance is enabled to have dynamic activity which is the tool for the performance of the acts of the will into the external world.

It should be stressed that:

1) Such an accidental structure (the human organism) is entirely dependent in existence to the substantial subject, yet such an accidental structure’s structure and functionality is necessary for the activity of the substance itself in the world. We could speak here—from the ethical point of view—about a certain dependence of this rational substance—a human personal being from this *organic* structure of the organism, but this dependence and determination is just accidental.

2) With the human organism’s structure entirely subordinated for the performing of main personal functions—intellectual cognition and acts of will: love, decisions, and more—it performs its life operations in the world—all of this being in the context of other materially existing objects in the material world.

3) These purely ontological facts or postulates can be completed with one additional remark: namely the point is that all of these actions or functions of the human being originate from its adequate powers or are regulated by them. The supreme and most important powers of the human being are the intellect and the will and since they are inorganic they are based in the human soul. The subject of the other powers is the entire human being (a compositum) which consists of the soul and the body. Among these powers there is a natural hierarchy and mutual interdependencies. All of these powers are ultimately subordinated to the intellect and the will since their functioning is connected to the essence of humanness and constitute the meaning of human life. Within the internal organic and sensual powers, however, there is a specific hierarchy, e.g. Thomas Aquinas already indicated that the activity of the power of a child’s conception or power growth are subordinate to the power of nourishing.⁷ Additionally, in this sense the activities of the organism seem to be autonomous, they are subject to the control of the powers and their natural hierarchy, ultimately

⁷ More about the order of human being’s powers one can find in the work: Paweł Milcarek, *Teoria ciała ludzkiego w pisamach św. Tomasza z Akwinu* (Warszawa: ADAM, 1994).

being subordinated to the intellect as well as the will and thus to the good of the person. The mutual interdependence of human powers and their influence on the functioning of the organism can constitute a separate domain of research, but this is also a fact which one must be aware of when conducting more detailed research on the organism.

Such an understanding of the organism and more precisely the described distinction between the organism and the body can determine the field of interest of philosophy and other sciences while simultaneously creating a bridge between them. The human organism could be the object of various forms of research in the field of particular sciences. But with this, scientists should not forget the metaphysical and existential *background* of the human organism. On the other hand, philosophers looking for the necessary causes of the human being have to take into consideration the necessary and specific set of accidentals (a human organism) and the particular knowledge of it provided by the scientists.

What are the other general postulates for interdisciplinarity

Such an understanding of the organism in relation to the human substance (a human person) opens perspectives for solving some anthropological issues (and in consequence—theological issues).

1) Human death does not need to necessarily be understood as the separation of the body and soul. Such a kind of understanding was inherited from Platonism, with this seeming entirely inadequate in the context of Neo-Aristotelian, Thomistic anthropology. We simply don't have an insight into the human's ontological structure and the possible changes which take place during the process of human death. In the context of the proposed introduction of the notion of the organism in Thomistic philosophical anthropology being the sole process which is experienced, one sees death as only the destruction (decomposition) of the biological organism. This makes it possible to avoid the unnaturally state of *anima separata* and the problems with the possible operations of the intellectual and volitional powers of soul, which apparently exist without the body after death (according to such a Neo-Platonic understanding), whereas the body is an essential and necessary metaphysical component of the human being and is necessary even for the performing of purely intellectual and volitional operations. This problem was also difficult to solve for St. Thomas Aquinas, who after much consideration proposed the supernatural solution: namely that God is coming with His Grace to help the human intellect

and will perform their natural actions in this (hypothetically) unnatural situation of the separation of the body and the soul.⁸

2) The problem of the beginning of human life could be reinterpreted in such a way that God creates not only the soul but also the whole human substance in the act of the creation of a new human being. The parents role is to provide not the matter of the body for the soul to be created (which was the proposal of St. Thomas Aquinas), but only the organic accidental hereditary determinations of this created human substance. Most probably, the parents are coming mainly with their DNA-code and other conditions accompanying the process of the becoming of the human being. They are altogether a parental, human part of necessary determinations, required for completing this process. The other processes come from the created *ex nihilo* by God's materially-spiritual human substance, which allows all accidentals proportional to this very human substance.

It is (metaphysically) possible that the pre-existing (or co-existing) presence of this substance is a general precondition of successful biological processes observed in (and connected with) the origin of the human being. Without the presence of this essential principle for this particular human existence from "the beginning," which the Catholic Church strongly stresses in its teaching about the existence of the human person "from the beginning"—from conception, the unification of the parental halves of DNA codes, the biological processes underlying the becoming of the human being would not really be human. Without this essential principle a created human being would be only metaphorically human in the sense that human genetic material comes usually from human parents. This this also concerns the discussion of so called "delayed animation"—the concept inherited from the Aristotelian understanding of the human being and the soul. In consequence, philosophers should in no way be subjected to the "terror of biology" or biologic data, which requests showing "the moment" of creation of any immaterial principle in an existing material subject—the developing human embryo—if the human being should be "a person from the beginning" of its existence.

3) In the case of organ transplantations, it seems that while they are still alive (functional), their organizing and animating principle remains still the same—i.e. ultimately the human soul—according to the famous statement of

⁸ More about this problem one can find in: Reet OTSASON, "Życie po śmierci ciała. Hipoteza anima separata. Refleksje filozoficzne," in *Spór o początek i koniec życia ludzkiego*, eds. Andrzej Maryniarczyk, Arkadiusz Gudaniec, Zbigniew Pańpuch (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2015), 337–358.

St. Thomas Aquinas in the I p. 76 q. a. 8 of his *Summa Theologiae*. Medical practice doesn't know of cases of the "assimilation" of organs into the organism of the person receiving the organ. From the point of view of medicine and actual science, this is simply biologically impossible. DNA and the structure caused by it of a transplanted organ will always be different and recognized by the immune system of an acceptor as a foreign matter with the acceptor's immune system consequently fighting against this donated organ as a perceived danger. This is the cause for the medical practice of continually giving the acceptors of organs medications which weaken one's immune system in order to prevent organ rejection. If then the donated organs are not assimilated, and their principle of the organization of matter remains the same as during the life of the organ donor, this simply means that, in spite of declared "brain death" and the following decomposition of the rest of the organisms of donors, in reality an organ's biologic life continues, but in a way it depends and is determined by the structure and natural function of particular transplanted organs. The only way to negate this statement would be to indicate another (metaphysically convincing) principle for the continuation of a transplanted organ's functions—that is the life of transplanted organs—as also the organizing principle of their matter into their structures. Primarily, both of these functions in natural conditions are fulfilled by the sole and main human soul.⁹

4) Human sexuality, so far understood as something accidental, could be considered as something essential because its role is not limited to the co-creation of a new human being, but contributes essentially to human fulfillment—happiness in the personal relations of a man and a woman. Moreover, the general structure of reproductive organs (and similarly of the whole organism) is ultimately rooted in the soul, which is immaterial. This raises the question of the possibility of the "sex of the soul."¹⁰ To introduce such a new concept to philosophical anthropology this would require a description similar to that of the organism in the terms of general metaphysics.

5) In the domain of theology the consequences of original sin are reduced to accidental changes, although they are very serious for humans. The resurrection of the body could not be achieved by the natural human forces of the

⁹More on this problem one can find in the article: Jacek M. Norkowski, OP, "Lekarz w służbie życia czy śmierci. Prawdziwa czy fałszywa alternatywa?," in *Spór o początek i koniec życia ludzkiego*, eds. Andrzej Maryniarczyk, Arkadiusz Gudaniec, Zbigniew Pańpuch (Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2015), 457–486.

¹⁰Proof of that thesis performed from the point of view of realistic philosophy is published in the article: Andrzej MARYNIARCZYK, "Is the Human Soul Sexed? In Search for the Truth on Human Sexuality," in *Studia Gilsoniana* 9, no. 1 (2020): 87–142.

soul, thus requiring the supernatural power of God, although this seems not to be the “restoration” of the body, but rather the body’s transformation in the process of death into a kind of “new organism.” But proper eternal life itself would then be an additional gift of God’s grace for those who will choose Him in the act of ultimate decision. But both of these issues would require more considerations of theological kind, which, although interesting, exceed the philosophical framework of this article.

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Summary

The article copes with a plurality of sciences in general and focuses in the human-related sciences, which present different cognitive results. There is difficult to co-ordinate them because of the difference in methods, aims and formal objects of sciences, whereas the material object of various sciences - the real man exists as the only subject, with a definite and clearly determined substance. In a consequence, they produce different concepts of man. Is it possible to co-ordinate or to reconcile these various information about human being, especially these from particular sciences with the philosophical anthropology?

A general understanding of the biological organism is of this kind that it is an object of science, but the notion of organism has been present in philosophy quite a long time—from the ancient times. Thus, an outline of the problem appears, namely the distinction between the organism, as an object of possible experience (fundamentally internal, but also external) and the body in the metaphysical sense, as an sub-ontic element of the human being. From the metaphysical point of view it seems (and that is my proposition or may be only a point mentioned anywhere by some authors, which I would like especially stress), that this whole—consisting of its organic parts, all unified in systemic reciprocal dependencies and various relations—is only accidental to human substance. This human substance—is a person. This specific “set of accidentals” constituting the human organism is subordinated (subjected) to the substance and exists in it and by it.

Such an understanding of the organism and more precisely described distinction between it and the body can determine the field of interest of philosophy and other sciences, and simultaneously create a bridge between them. Human organism could be a good object of various research in the field of particular sciences. But the scientists should not forget about metaphysic and existential *background* of the human organism. From the other hand, the philosophers looking for the necessary causes of the human being have to take in consideration this necessary and specific set of accidentals (a human organism) and the particular knowledge of it provided by the scientists.

Keywords: interdisciplinary sciences; human being; body; organism; philosophical anthropology.

RÓŻNICA POMIĘDZY CIAŁEM A ORGANIZMEM
JAKO POMOST MIĘDZY NAUKAMI SZCZEGÓŁOWYMI
A FILOZOFIĄ W ROZUMIENIU OSOBY LUDZKIEJ

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę wielości nauk w ogóle, ze szczególnym zwróceniem uwagi na nauki o człowieku, które prezentują odmienne wyniki poznawcze. Trudno jest je skoordynować ze względu na odmiennosc metod, celów i przedmiotów formalnych tych nauk, podczas gdy przedmiot materialny różnych nauk – realny człowiek – istnieje jako jedyny podmiot, o określonej i wyraźnie zdeterminowanej substancji. W konsekwencji tworzą one różne koncepcje człowieka. Czy jest możliwe skoordynowanie, czy pogodzenie tych różnych informacji o człowieku, zwłaszcza pochodzących z nauk szczegółowych, z antropologią filozoficzną?

Ogólne rozumienie organizmu biologicznego jest przedmiotem wielu nauk. Pojęcie organizmu jest obecne w filozofii dość długo – od czasów starożytnych. Pojawia się więc zarys problemu,

a mianowicie rozróżnienie między organizmem, jako przedmiotem możliwego doświadczenia (zasadniczo wewnętrznym, ale i zewnętrznym) a ciałem w sensie metafizycznym, jako subontycznym elementem człowieka. Z metafizycznego punktu widzenia wydaje się (i to jest moja teza, a może to być tylko punkt wspomniany gdzieś przez niektórych autorów, który chciałbym szczególnie podkreślić), że owa całość – składająca się ze swych organicznych części, wszystkich zjednoczonych w systemowych wzajemnych zależnościach i rozmaitych relacjach – jest tylko przypadłościowa wobec substancji ludzkiej. Ta substancja ludzka to osoba. Ten swoisty „zespół przypadłości” tworzący ludzki organizm jest podporządkowany (poddany) substancji, istnieje w niej i przez nią.

Takie rozumienie organizmu, a dokładniej rozróżnienie między nim a ciałem, może wyznaczyć pole zainteresowań filozofii i innych nauk, a zarazem stworzyć pomost między nimi. Organizm ludzki może być dobrym obiektem różnorodnych badań w zakresie nauk szczegółowych. Jednak naukowcy nie powinni zapominać o metafizycznym i egzystencjalnym podłożu ludzkiego organizmu. Z drugiej strony, filozofowie poszukujący koniecznych przyczyn bytu ludzkiego muszą brać pod uwagę ten konieczny i specyficzny zespół przypadłości (organizm ludzki) oraz szczególną wiedzę o nim dostarczaną przez przedstawicieli nauk szczegółowych.

Słowa kluczowe: nauki szczegółowe; człowiek; ciało; organizm; antropologia filozoficzna.