

Action, Supposit, and Subject: Interpreting *Actiones Sunt Suppositorum*

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The claim that “actions are of supposits” appears numerous times, in this and other formulations, in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas.¹ Interpreters of Aquinas cite this thesis in discussions of Aquinas’s cognitive theory, his account of personal identity (including in the recent dispute between survivalism and corruptionism), and his Christology.² Alain de Libera, in his work

¹ I offer my gratitude to Kendall Fisher and Francis Feingold for helpful remarks on a draft of this paper. Special thanks are due to Therese Scarpelli Cory for suggesting numerous sources and for remarks on an early draft. My thanks also to Daniel De Haan, Michael Gorman, Thomas Joseph White, O.P., and Chris Hauser for helpful suggestions and criticisms in conversation. Latin texts of Aquinas are cited according to the *Opera omnia, iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P.M. edita* [Leon.] (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1882–), where available, with the following abbreviations: *Summa theologiae* [ST], *Quaestiones de quolibet* [Quodl.], *Compendium theologiae, Quaestiones disputatae de spiritualibus creaturis, Quaestiones disputatae de anima* [QDA], *Sentencia libri de anima* [In de anima], *De unitate intellectus*. In addition, I use: *Scriptum super libros sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi* [In sent.], vols. 1–4, ed. P. Mandonnet [Mand.] and M. F. Moos [Moos] (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–1947); *Summa contra Gentiles* [SCG], Leonine Manual Edition [Leon. Man.] (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1934); *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus* [De virtutibus], in *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2, ed. E. Odetto (Rome: Marietti, 1965); and *Quaestio disputata de unione Verbi incarnati* [De unione Verbi], ed. W. Senner, B. Bartocci, and K. Obenauer (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2011). All translations from the Latin are my own.

² For some recent appeals to this principle in these contexts, see e.g.: Daniel D. De Haan, “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affective Percepts,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2014): 411; Therese Scarpelli Cory, *Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge*

tracing the historical development of the modern subject, has proposed that Aquinas's use of this thesis helps to pave the way for the emergence of the "subject-agent," the self that is the subject of all cognitive activity.³ There is a tendency in the recent literature that cites this thesis to take its meaning for granted: recent readers of Aquinas such as Carlos Bazán, Jean-Baptiste Brenet, and Corey Barnes all take this thesis to mean that the supposit—the individual existent, the primary substance, or the person (where applicable)—is the subject of actions.⁴ De Libera himself offers "actions belong to subjects" as a translation of *actiones sunt suppositorum*, and he calls this thesis the "subjective principle of action."⁵ There is a uniform tendency, in recent literature on Aquinas, to transition quickly from the term "supposit" (or "person") to the term "subject," without fanfare.⁶

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105; Mark K. Spencer, "The Personhood of the Separated Soul," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 12, no. 3 (2014): 897; Richard Cross, "Accidents, Substantial Forms, and Causal Powers in the Late Thirteenth Century: Some Reflections on the Axiom '*actiones sunt suppositorum*,'" in *Compléments de substance: études sur les propriétés accidentelles offertes à Alain de Libera*, ed. C. Erisman and A. Schniewind (Paris: Vrin, 2008), 133–46; Michael Gorman, *Aquinas on the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2017), 19, 42, 135.

³ See: Alain de Libera, "Les actions appartiennent aux sujets: Petite archéologie d'un principe leibnizien," in *Ad ingenii acuitionem: Studies in Honor of Alfonso Maierù*, ed. Stefano Caroti et al. (Louvain-La-Neuve, BE: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Etudes Médiévales, 2007), 199–219, esp. 210–12; de Libera, "When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (2008): 181–220; de Libera, *Archéologie du sujet I: Naissance du sujet* (Paris: Vrin, 2007), esp. 51–59, 303–11.

⁴ B. Carlos Bazán, "The Doctrine of the Creation of the Soul in Aquinas," in *Philosophy and Theology in the Long Middle Ages: A Tribute to Stephen F. Brown*, ed. Kent Emery Jr., Russell L. Friedman, and Andreas Speer (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 533–34; Jean-Baptiste Brenet, "... *set hominem anima*": Thomas d'Aquin et la pensée humaine comme acte du composé," *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* 59 (2006): 91–94; Brenet, "Thomas d'Aquin pense-t-il? Retours sur *hic homo intelligit*," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 93 (2009): 240; Corey L. Barnes, "Aristotle in the *Summa Theologiae*'s Christology," in *Aristotle in Aquinas's Theology*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 192–95.

⁵ De Libera, "When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?" 181, 211; de Libera, "Les actions appartiennent aux sujets," 207; de Libera, *Archéologie du sujet I*, 51.

⁶ There is some precedent for this in Aquinas's own practice. See e.g. *ST* I, q. 29, a. 2, in which Aquinas distinguishes the meaning of *suppositum* and begins by appearing to imply its equivalence with *subiectum*: "Alio modo dicitur substantia subiectum vel suppositum quod subsistit in genere substantiae" ("In another way, a subject or a supposit that subsists in the genus of substance is called a substance").

According to its typical meaning in Aquinas's usage, the term "subject" (*subiectum*) picks out something that stands, in relation to that of which it is the subject, as potency to act.⁷ In this sense, a subject is something that is actualized, as by a formal principle. Given this, if we interpret "action is of the supposit" to mean that "the supposit is the subject of action," without fanfare, we can wander into interpretive difficulties. Aquinas holds that human intellectual activity is an operation that occurs through the soul itself rather than through any part of the living body. Although the operations of sensation and of vegetative life occur in and through bodily organs—parts of the living composite of body and soul—Aquinas insists that the intellectual power and its operation are in the soul alone "as in their subject."⁸ This might seem to contradict any claim that the human person, who is the composite of soul and body, is the subject of intellectual activity as an action. Recent interpreters of Aquinas reach seemingly contradictory conclusions about whether the human soul or the human person should be characterized as the subject of intellectual activity.⁹

Cf. *De unione Verbi*, a. 5, in which Aquinas speaks of both the "acting supposit" (in obj. 3) and the "acting subject" (in the *responsio*). The purpose of this study is to clarify in what sense an acting supposit is a subject, as Aquinas uses the term "subject."

⁷ *Quaestiones disputatae de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 1, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod ratio formae opponitur rationi subiecti. Nam omnis forma, in quantum huiusmodi, est actus; omne autem subiectum comparatur ad id cuius est subiectum, ut potentia ad actum" ("To the first it must be said, therefore, that the notion of form is opposed to the notion of subject. For every form, as such, is an act; but every subject is related to that of which it is the subject as potency to act").

⁸ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 89: "Non solum autem intellectus agens et possibilis in una essentia animae humanae conveniunt, sed etiam omnes aliae potentiae, quae sunt principia operationum animae. Omnes enim huiusmodi potentiae quodammodo in anima radicanur: quaedam quidem, sicut potentiae vegetativae et sensitivae partis, in anima sunt sicut in principio, in coniuncto autem sicut in subiecto, quia earum operationes coniuncti sunt, et non solum animae: cuius est enim actio, eius est potentia; quaedam vero sunt in anima sicut in principio et in subiecto, quia earum operationes sunt animae absque organo corporali, et huiusmodi sunt potentiae intellectivae partis. Non est autem possibile esse plures animas in homine" (see note 34 below for English translation and discussion of the use of *coniunctum*).

⁹ See, e.g., de Libera, "When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?" 211: "What is the subject in man? It is certainly not his own soul. Soul is not even the subject of man's thought." See also Marilyn McCord Adams and Cecilia Trifogli, "Whose Thought is It? The Soul and the Subject of Action in Some Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Aristotelians," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85, no. 3 (2012): 632: "Thus, for Aquinas . . . the intellectual soul is also the proximate subject of intellectual functions. The fact that the intellectual soul is the form of

In addition to its purely anthropological application, whereby Aquinas claims that actions that are proper to the soul are nevertheless the actions of the human person, Aquinas also employs the thesis *actiones sunt suppositorum* in his discussions of the actions of Christ, the divine person who subsists in two natures. It is the divine Word who, according to his human nature, senses, understands, weeps, and suffers. Here too, the quick transition from the term “supposit” (or “person”) to the term “subject” may lead to philosophical difficulties. For if we identify the divine Word as the subject of his human action, does this mean that we are positing within the divine Word a potency that is actualized? Although this aspect of the question will not be my focus in this piece, the interpretation of *actiones sunt suppositorum* has major implications for Christology.

The purpose of this brief study is threefold: (1) to clarify the meanings of the term “subject” in Aquinas’s thought; (2) to examine in what senses the human soul and the human person should be characterized as subjects of intellectual activity; and (3) to show that *actiones sunt suppositorum* is consistent with the view that the human soul operates *per se* and is the sole “actualized-subject” of its *per se* operation. I will argue that, for Aquinas, the truth of *actiones sunt suppositorum* is founded upon the metaphysical unity of the person rather than upon a claim, foreign to Aquinas’s thought, that the person is the proximate actualized-subject of human action. At the very least, I will show that speaking of the human person as “the subject of intellectual activity” requires nuanced explanation, rather than being an expression whose meaning is so straightforward that it should be employed to explain the meaning of *actiones sunt suppositorum*.

Clarifying the Meaning of the Term “Subject”

Concerning the meaning of the term “subject” in Aquinas’s thought, de Libera offers the distinction between a subject-of-attribution and a subject-of-inherence.¹⁰ As I will use these terms, a subject-of-inherence is something that is, in reality, informed by something that inheres in it, existing in it and depending upon it. For example, a leaf is the subject-of-inherence of green as an accident. A subject-of-attribution is

some matter and the source of organic powers, does not keep it from being the immaterial proximate subject of understanding the way the visually empowered eye is a material proximate subject of vision.”

¹⁰ De Libera, “When Did the Modern Subject Emerge?” 194; de Libera, *Archéologie du sujet I*, 63–79. De Libera offers his own nuanced account of this distinction and some of its variations. I employ the terminology, but offer my own articulation of the distinction.

what is signified by the subject-term of a proposition. For example, a leaf is also a subject-of-attribution, just insofar as we can affirm that “the leaf is green.”

In some cases, something might be a subject-of-attribution without it being the case that what is signified by the subject-term is in fact a subject-of-inherence. An example of a *per accidens* predication will suffice: “the white is musical.” This can be true because the subject-term “white” signifies whiteness and refers to (supposits for) a man, who happens to be both white and musical. The man is the subject-of-inherence of both whiteness and musicality as accidents; his whiteness is not the subject-of-inherence of his musicality.

Having drawn this distinction between a subject-of-attribution and a subject-of-inherence, one is faced with two alternative situations when something is predicated of a subject. In some cases, the metaphysical reality corresponds in a straightforward way to the grammatical expression, and in other cases it does not. If the human soul is a subject-of-inherence with respect to its *per se* operation, this occasions the worry that *actiones sunt suppositorum* might mean that the supposit is merely a subject-of-attribution, by way of a linguistic convention such as synecdoche, without it being the case that such attribution corresponds to any noteworthy metaphysical reality. If “the human person understands” is true only because one is allowed (with certain qualifications) to attribute to a whole an accidental characteristic of its part—as we can say that Michael is blond because his hair is blond¹¹—then the claim that intellectual activity is “of the person”

¹¹ This example is in conformity with the principle given by Aquinas in, e.g., *In III sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 3, resp.: “Pars autem aliquando habet aliquam dispositionem quae nata est convenire toti; aliquando autem aliquam quae non est nata convenire toti. Sicut albedo quae inest capillis, potest etiam toti convenire; crispitudo autem ita convenit capillis quod nullo modo toti, vel alicui alteri parti. [Ergo] secundum dispositiones illas quae insunt tantum parti, denominatur totum simpliciter et proprie per dispositionem partis, nullo addito; sicut dicitur homo crispus. Sed quantum ad illas dispositiones quae natae sunt et toti et parti convenire, non denominatur totum a parte simpliciter, sed addita parte, ut cum dicitur albus homo secundum capillos; nec hoc proprie, sed figurative per synecdochen” (“But sometimes a part has some disposition that is naturally apt to belong to the whole; and sometimes [a part has] some [disposition] which is not apt to belong to the whole. Just as the whiteness which is in the hair can also belong to the whole [man]; but curliness belongs to the hair so that in no way does it [belong] to the whole, or even to another part. Therefore, with respect to those dispositions which are only in a part, the whole is absolutely and properly denominated by the disposition of the part, with nothing added; as a man is called ‘curly.’ But with respect to those dispositions which are naturally apt to belong to the whole and to a part,

seems to be merely a claim about a permissible linguistic expression. This sort of concern can also be raised with respect to the role of *actiones sunt suppositorum* in Aquinas's Christology. If "the Son of God weeps" is true only because one is allowed by synecdoche to attribute the action of Christ's human nature to the divine supposit, then *actiones sunt suppositorum* might seem entirely compatible with—or even to be an expression of—Nestorianism.¹² When Aquinas cites the thesis that actions are of suppositis, however, he insists not merely that one is *permitted* to say that "the human person understands" or that "the Son of God weeps," but that these expressions are *more proper* than "the human soul understands" or "Christ's human nature weeps." It seems clear that the greater propriety of the former expressions must be grounded in something real, rather than being only a matter of a linguistic convention such as synecdoche.

What does Aquinas himself mean by the term "subject"? First, we can attribute to Aquinas the distinction between a subject-of-attribution and a subject-of-inherence. Aquinas affirms that something can be signified by the subject of a true proposition without it being the case that what is signified by the predicate inheres in it or actualizes it. For example, in the proposition "God is wise," God is a subject-of-attribution, despite the fact that divine wisdom does not inhere in or actualize God; rather, the divine wisdom is really identical with the divine essence, which is pure act. Aquinas observes that our normal way of understanding and speaking is proportioned to the things that we know through the senses, which are composites of matter and form, of potency and act. In most cases, the subject–predicate grammatical structure of our judgments is proportioned to the potency–act metaphysical structure of that about which we speak, as the grammatical structure of "the leaf is green" parallels the potency–act relation of the leaf and its greenness. The leaf is a subject-of-attribution

the whole is not denominated absolutely from the part, but with the part added [to one's denomination], as when a man is called 'white according to his hair'; nor is this [denomination] said properly, but only figuratively through synecdoche"). For discussion of the conditions under which the accidental characteristics of parts can be predicated of their corresponding wholes, see Gyula Klima, "*Libellus pro sapiente*—a Criticism of Allan Bäck's Argument against St. Thomas Aquinas' Doctrine of the Incarnation," *The New Scholasticism* 58 (1984): 212–17.

¹² For a criticism along these lines against Klima's defense of Aquinas's Christology, see Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 198n63, which cites Klima, "*Libellus pro sapiente*." Cross raises the concern that, without some metaphysical claim (such as the identification of Christ's natures as parts), Klima's "linguistic analysis will raise the suspicion of Nestorianism."

because it is a subject-of-inherence. But when we say that “God is wise,” we must deny what this way of speaking might seem to imply about potency and act in God, because God is pure act, and he is really identical with all of the perfections properly attributed to him.¹³ Something can therefore be a subject-of-attribution without being a subject-of-inherence.

Second, with respect to a subject-of-inherence, Aquinas distinguishes between a broad and a strict sense of the term “subject.” In the broad sense, anything that is related to something else as potency to act can be called the subject of that which is its act. For example, in this broad sense, prime matter is the subject of substantial form. In the strict sense, only something that is already a being-in-act can be called a subject. In this way, a substance is the subject of accidents that exist in it. Prime matter cannot be a subject in this strict sense, because it is in itself pure potency rather than a being in act: it actually exists only by the reception of the substantial form that actualizes it.¹⁴

Third, focusing on a “subject” in this stricter sense—a being in act in which something else exists—Aquinas distinguishes, in a text in his *Quaestiones disputatae de virtutibus* (q. 1, a. 3), three different ways in which a subject is related to its accident, in order to determine whether

¹³ ST I, q. 13, a. 2, ad 2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod intellectus noster non potest formas simplices subsistentes secundum quod in seipsis sunt apprehendere, sed apprehendit eas secundum modum compositorum, in quibus est aliquid quod subiicitur, et est aliquid non est. Ed ideo apprehendit formam simplicem in ratione subiecti, et attribuit ei aliquid” (“To the second it must be said that our intellect cannot apprehend simple, subsistent forms as they are in themselves, but it apprehends them according to the mode of composite [things], in which there is something which is subjected and something which is not. And therefore it apprehends a simple form according to the notion of a subject and attributes something to it”). Cf. *In I sent.*, d. 4, q. 2, a. 1, and *SCG* I, ch. 36.

¹⁴ *In II de anima*, lec. 1: “For by ‘soul’ we understand that by which a thing-having-life lives: whence it is necessary that it be understood as something existing in a subject, taking ‘subject’ here broadly, not only as some being in act is called a subject, in which way an accident is said to exist in a subject; but rather as prime matter, which is being in potency, is called a subject.” Cf. *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1: “Item proprie loquendo quod est in potentia ad esse accidentale dicitur subiectum, quod vero est in potentia ad esse substantiale dicitur proprie materia. Quod autem illud quod est in potentia ad esse accidentale dicatur subiectum, signum est quia dicuntur esse accidentia in subiecto, non autem quod forma substantialis sit in subiecto” (“Again, properly speaking that which is in potency to accidental being is called a subject, but that which is in potency to substantial being is properly called matter. But that what is in potency to accidental being is called a subject is indicated [by the fact] that accidents are said to be in a subject, but [it is] not [said] that a substantial form is in a subject”).

one of the soul's powers can be the subject of virtue. This is a difficult question because, as the third objection in this article observes, a power of the soul is itself an accident, and it does not seem that one accident can be the subject of another accident. Aquinas explains that a subject is related to an accident: (1) "as providing sustenance to it, for an accident does not subsist through itself, but is supported by a subject"; (2) "as potency to act, for a subject is subjected to an accident, as a certain potency to [something] active; whence an accident is also called a form"; (3) "as cause to effect, for the principles [of the] subject are the principles of a *per se* accident."¹⁵

Aquinas does not assert that every subject is related to all of its accidents in all three of these ways.¹⁶ In answering the question of whether a power of the soul can be the subject of virtue, Aquinas explains that one accident cannot be related to another as a subject in the first way, "unless perhaps it be said that insofar as [one accident] is sustained by a subject, it sustains another accident." But an accident can be related to another accident as a subject in the second and in the third ways, and in these ways a power of the soul can be the subject of a virtue. As regards the second way, Aquinas asserts that "one accident is related to another as a subject: for one accident is in potency to another." Aquinas then repeats that one accident cannot sustain another in existence, but "a subject is receptive of one accident by the mediation of another."

With respect to the notions of *inherence* (how an accident is related to a substance) and *substanding* (how a substance is related to an accident), then, we should distinguish between the aspect of inherence/substanding according to which a subject sustains an accident in existence and the aspect according to which a subject is actualized by an accident.¹⁷ I will call what is a subject in the former sense a sustaining-subject and what is a subject in the latter sense an actualized-subject.¹⁸ I will depend in what

¹⁵ *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 3, resp.

¹⁶ With respect to the third way, in particular, he refers only to *per se* accidents, also known as proper accidents or properties, and most interpreters have taken him to have in mind efficient causality when he says that the principles of the subject cause the properties; he does not advance the claim that a subject is the efficient cause of all of its accidents.

¹⁷ To be clear, I am suggesting that inherence and substanding are in fact complex relations in Aquinas's thought.

¹⁸ One might also call the actualized-subject a "receptive-subject," taking "receptive" broadly, such that any subject (a being in act) that is further actualized by an accident will be said to be the receptive-subject of that accident. My preference for "actualized-subject" has to do with my primary focus in this piece on the act of understanding, an immanent action. See, e.g., *ST* I-II, q. 51, a. 2, ad 1, in which Aquinas claims that an agent, as such, is not receptive. For other accidents, such as

follows on a threefold distinction between a subject-of-attribution, an actualized-subject, and a sustaining-subject.¹⁹

As indicated previously, the twofold distinction between a subject-of-inherence and a subject-of-attribution can present us with a dilemma: if something is not a subject-of-inherence, then it is merely a subject-of-attribution. But something can be a subject-of-attribution merely by a linguistic convention such as synecdoche, without expressing (or being grounded in) anything of metaphysical import. It is clear from Aquinas's discussion in *De virtutibus* (q. 1, a. 3) that an actualized-subject is not necessarily a sustaining-subject. This raises the question of whether something could be a sustaining-subject without being an actualized-subject. In what follows, I will attempt to show how the distinction between a sustaining-subject and an actualized-subject (that is, the distinction between these two aspects of substanding/inherence) may allow us to ground the propriety of attributing intellectual operation to the human person.

The Case of Human Intellectual Activity

Framing the Question

In order to frame the question about the meaning of *actiones sunt suppositorum* in its application to human intellectual activity, it is necessary to state a few of Aquinas's metaphysical claims that I will take for granted as background.

(1) We must distinguish, with Aquinas, between transitive and immanent action. Transitive action has its terminus outside of the agent, producing an effect distinct from the agent. The classic example of transitive action is a physical action such as heating: fire heats a stone, bringing it about that the stone possesses heat. Immanent action, by contrast, has its terminus within the agent; it remains within the agent and is the perfection of the agent rather than bringing about a perfection extrinsic to the agent. The classic examples of immanent action are cognitive operations such as seeing and intellectual understanding. In posing a question about the application

a quality like heat or a virtue (the sort of accident at issue in *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 3), to speak of what is actualized by these accidental forms as a "receptive-subject" would be appropriate without qualification. My thanks to Francis Feingold for his comments on this issue.

¹⁹ I have set aside the third of the ways in which a subject can be related to its accident in *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 3.

of *actiones sunt suppositorum* to the case of human intellectual activity, I am concerned with immanent action rather than transitive action.²⁰

(2) Aquinas recognizes action as one of the nine accidental categories of being. There has been some dispute among Aquinas's interpreters about whether immanent actions (such as understanding and sensing) in fact belong to the category of action. Several recent interpreters of Aquinas have defended the view that immanent operations do belong to the category of action. The more common view among Thomists historically is that immanent action—and the act of understanding in particular—is in the category of quality. I need only take for granted that an immanent operation is something inhering accidentally within the agent, whether this be according to the category of action or according to some other category. If action is something inherent and accidental, then this raises the question about the subject in which action inheres.

(3) There is a dispute among interpreters of Aquinas as to the status of accidental *esse* and its relationship with substantial *esse*. On one reading of Aquinas, Socrates has only one *esse*, the *esse totius*, encompassing both his substantial existence and his accidental existence. On this reading, substantial *esse* and accidental *esse* are only conceptually distinct, and the *esse* of Socrates-sitting-and-understanding would be, as R. E. Houser has put it recently, “the existence of the individual, whole creature, as manifested in one of its parts.”²¹ This reading of Aquinas has enjoyed the support of numerous Thomists, including most famously Étienne Gilson and Cornelio Fabro.²² By contrast, the reading of Aquinas that I will follow posits a real distinction between substantial *esse* and accidental *esse*, such that it is by one act that Socrates exists as a human being and by other really distinct acts that Socrates is sitting, or standing, or thinking. This reading of Aquinas has been defended carefully—and, I think, defin-

²⁰ For insightful recent discussion of transitive physical action (and the way in which an agent is the subject of such action) in Aquinas's thought, see Gloria Frost, “Aquinas' Ontology of Transeunt Causal Activity,” *Vivarium* 56, no. 1–2 (2018): 47–82.

²¹ R. E. Houser, “Avicenna and Aquinas: Essence, Existence, and the *Esse* of Christ,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 9, no.1 (2013): 16–17.

²² Étienne Gilson, “La notion d'existence chez Guillaume d'Auvergne,” *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 15 (1946): 89n1; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), 31; Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon s. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain, BE: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1961), 299–302.

itively—by Barry Brown and by John Wippel.²³

We can now pose the question about the meaning of *actiones sunt suppositorum* more clearly. If an immanent action, such as human understanding, is as an accident really distinct from both the essence and the substantial *esse* of the person, when it is said that this action is “of the supposit,” does this mean in every case that the person, as a whole, is the subject of that action? The answer to this question needs to be articulated in light of the various meanings of the term “subject” treated above.

Intellectual Activity as the Human Soul's Per Se Action

As a final preliminary to discussing in what sense the human person is the subject of intellectual activity, it is necessary to clarify that, for Aquinas, the human soul does properly act in its own right in its intellectual activity. Here we should attend to an example frequently given by Aquinas, that heat does not heat; rather, what is hot heats, by virtue of its possessing heat as a form. Heat is thus only a formal principle by which its subject acts; it is not a form that acts in its own right. Aquinas usually cites this example, however, in order to *contrast* the case of heat, a material form that does not act, with that of the human soul, a subsistent form that acts in its own right.²⁴ For example, in the first article of his *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, Aquinas writes:

It is necessary that the intellectual soul should act *per se*, insofar as it possesses a proper operation lacking any communion with the body. And since every thing acts insofar as it is in act, it is necessary that the intellectual soul have an absolute existence *per se*, without depending on the body. For forms which have existence depending upon matter or upon a subject do not have a *per se* operation: for heat does not heat, but [what is] hot [heats].²⁵

²³ Barry Brown, *Accidental Being: A Study in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 253–65.

²⁴ For the distinction between material forms and subsistent forms, see *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2.

²⁵ *QDA*, a. 1, resp. Cf. *QDA*, a. 14, resp.: “Whence it is clear that the intellect has a *per se* operation, in which the body does not share. But everything operates insofar as it exists: for what has a *per se* existence operates *per se*. But what does not have existence *per se* does not have a *per se* operation: for heat does not heat *per se*, but [something] hot [heats]. So it follows, therefore, that the intellectual principle by which man understands has an existence surpassing the body [lit.: elevated beyond

The human soul's capacity to act *per se*, in its intellectual activity, is grounded in its possession of *per se* existence, of existence in its own right. The human soul surpasses the body, upon which it does not depend for its existence, and the human body participates in the soul's act of existence. As a form that subsists in its own right, the soul also has the capacity to operate in its own right.

Perhaps the most important text for determining Aquinas's view about the intellectual agency of the human soul and of the human person is found in a reply to an objection in the article of the *Summa theologiae* devoted to the question of the human soul's subsistence.²⁶ The second objection against the claim that the human soul is subsistent is motivated by a famous text from Aristotle's *De anima* (bk. I, ch. 4): "Everything subsistent can be said to operate. But the soul is not said to operate, since, as is said in *De anima* I, to say that the soul senses or understands is similar to saying that it weaves or builds. Therefore the soul is not something subsistent."²⁷ Aquinas offers a twofold response to this objection. As a first avenue of response to the objection from the *De anima*, Aquinas simply denies that this famous text expresses Aristotle's decisive view.²⁸ Aquinas adopts this same avenue of response in a parallel text in the *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, without adding the second response (the *vel dicendum quod* of the reply to the second objection in the *Summa* text).²⁹ Similarly, in his Commentary on *De anima*, on this famous text, Aquinas asserts that in this passage Aristotle is not expressing his own view, but is speaking suppositionally in response to interlocutors who think that understanding is a physical motion.³⁰

In the *vel dicendum quod* of the reply to the second objection, Aquinas continues:

Or it must be said that to act *per se* belongs to what exists *per se*. But sometimes something can be called a *per se* existent so long as it is not inherent, like an accident or a material form, even if it is a part. But that is called subsistent, properly and *per se*, which is neither

the body], not depending upon the body." Cf. *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2.

²⁶ *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2.

²⁷ *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, obj. 2. See Aristotle, *De anima* I, ch. 4.

²⁸ *ST I*, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2: "Aristotle said those words not according to his own opinion, but according to the opinion of those who said that to understand is to be moved; this is clear from what precedes [Aristotle's statement]."

²⁹ *QDA*, a. 15, ad 1.

³⁰ *In I de anima*, lec. 10.

inherent, in the aforementioned mode, nor a part. In this sense, the eye or the hand cannot be called subsistent *per se*; and consequently neither [can they be called] operative *per se*. Whence the operations of parts are attributed, through the parts, to the whole. For we say that the man sees by the eye and feels by the hand, otherwise than how something hot heats by [its] heat, since heat in no way heats, properly speaking. It can therefore be said that the soul understands, as the eye sees, but it is more properly said that man understands by the soul.³¹

To interpret this text correctly, it is necessary first to consider its context and the position adopted by Aquinas in the *responsio* of this same article. However one interprets the reply to the second objection, it cannot contradict the conclusion of the *responsio* that the human soul does operate *per se* and is therefore subsistent *per se*.³² To maintain consistency with this *responsio*, we must read Aquinas in the *vel dicendum quod* as distinguishing between (1) a more proper/strict sense in which only a whole substance subsists and operates *per se* and (2) a less proper/strict sense in which a part like the eye can be said to subsist and operate *per se*. Both of these can be distinguished from (3) the improper sense in which a non-subsistent form, such as heat, is said to act.³³ Aquinas does not here explicitly commit

³¹ *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2.

³² *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2, resp.: "Ipsium igitur intellectuale principium, quod dicitur mens vel intellectus, habet operationem per se, cui non communicat corpus. Nihil autem potest per se operari, nisi quod per se subsistit. Non enim est operari nisi entis in actu, unde eo modo aliquid operatur, quo est. Propter quod non dicimus quod calor calefacit, sed calidum. Relinquitur igitur animam humanam, quae dicitur intellectus vel mens, esse aliquid incorporeum et subsistens" ("Therefore the intellectual principle, which is called the mind or intellect, has a *per se* operation in which the body does not share. But nothing can operate *per se* except that which subsists *per se*. For to operate is only of a being in act; whence something operates in the mode in which it is. Accordingly, we do not say that heat heats, but [something] hot. It follows therefore that the human soul, which is called the intellect or mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent").

³³ One frequently cited text in which Aquinas articulates the principle *actiones sunt suppositorum* is *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 2, resp. In this text, we find an especially strong statement of the thesis: "Actiones autem sunt suppositorum et totorum, non autem, proprie loquendo, partium et formarum, seu potentiarum, non enim proprie dicitur quod manus percutiat, sed homo per manum; neque proprie dicitur quod calor calefaciat, sed ignis per calorem. Secundum tamen similitudinem quamdam haec dicuntur" ("But actions are of suppositis and wholes, but not, properly speaking, of parts, forms, or powers; for it is not properly said that the hand

himself to the claim that the human soul is a part in the way that the eye is a part; he only compares the human soul to a part like the eye, in that both can be said to subsist and to operate *per se* in sense (2), while only the whole substance or supposit operates in sense (1).

Having clarified that Aquinas holds that the human soul acts, properly speaking, but that there is a stricter sense in which only the whole human person operates, we can now turn to the question of what the subject of human understanding is, employing the distinctions drawn above between different meanings of the term “subject.”

The Person and the Soul as Subjects of Action

As indicated above, Aquinas indicates that the intellectual power and its activity are in the soul alone “as in a subject.”³⁴ But in what sense should we

strikes, but the man by [his] hand; nor is it properly said that heat heats, but fire by [its] heat. Nevertheless these things are said according to a certain similitude”). In this text, we find only the distinction between (1) the strict sense in which the supposit is said to act and (3) the improper sense in which heat is said to heat, although Aquinas gives “the hand strikes” as an example on the same level as “heat heats.” Since Aquinas clearly indicates in *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2 (and elsewhere) that the soul understands, properly speaking (in sense [2]), I do not think that *ST* II-II, q. 58, a. 2, a text concerned with the question of whether the virtue of justice can regard oneself, should be taken as the governing text for determining the agency of the human soul in its intellectual activity.

³⁴ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 89: “But not only the agent and possible intellect belong to the one essence of the human soul, but also all other powers, which are principles of the operations of the soul. For all powers of this sort are in some way rooted in the soul: some, indeed, such as the powers of the vegetative and of the sensitive part, are in the soul as in [their] principle, but in the composite (*coniunctum*) as in [their] subject, since their operations are of the composite and not of the soul alone: for a potency [belongs] to that to which the [corresponding] action [belongs]. But other [powers] are in the soul as in [their] principle and as in [their] subject, since their operations [belong] to the soul without any corporeal organ, and the powers of the intellectual part are of this sort. But it is not possible for there to be several souls in a man.”

Brenet has urged that it is necessary to distinguish between the *coniunctum* that is a bodily organ and the *compositum* of soul and body. As a terminological matter, Brenet seems to be correct about Aquinas’s use of *coniunctum* and *compositum*. A bodily organ is a “conjunct” of a power of the soul with the part of a living body that is organized so as to function as the instrument of that power; but the whole living body is the composite of the soul (as a substantial form) and matter. For Aquinas, the essence of the human soul, as a substantial form, is fully present in every part of the body; but the powers of the soul that have corporeal organs are only present in those parts of the body aptly formed for functioning as their respective organs. Aquinas’s real distinction between the essence of the soul and

take the term “subject” here?

Aquinas’s argumentation for the subsistence of the human soul makes clear that the soul is the actualized-subject of the intellectual power and, through this power, the actualized-subject of intellectual activity. Aquinas’s argumentation for the subsistence of the rational soul turns on the claim that the unlimited range of the object of intellectual activity precludes that the power by which intellection occurs should inform a bodily organ, because if the intellectual power were itself a bodily nature or a power employing a bodily organ as its instrument, this would impede its reception of the forms/natures of some bodies.³⁵ That is, the argument for the subsistence of the human soul is centrally concerned with what can be the actualized-subject of intellectual cognition, and the argument only succeeds if Aquinas is claiming that intellectual activity is in the soul alone as in its actualized-subject. If the living body or any corporeal part of the living body were the immediate actualized-subject of intellectual activity, then the object of intellectual activity could not be unlimited. But the living body, the composite of soul and body, is for Aquinas the human supposit or person. So it cannot be that the human person is, as a whole, the immediate actualized-subject of intellectual activity, as an accident.³⁶

the powers of the soul is essential for making sense of his position. All of this being said, Brenet uses the distinction between a *coniunctum* and the *compositum* to argue that, for Aquinas, intellectual activity is in the *compositum* as a subject and that, ultimately, the human soul is a *principium quo* of action rather than something that properly acts. Brenet’s principal evidence for this conclusion is the claim that *actiones sunt suppositorum*, and as indicated above he transitions readily from the claim that the supposit acts to the claim that the supposit is the subject of action. See Brenet, “Thomas d’Aquin pense-t-il?” 235–38, 240–43.

³⁵ *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2.

³⁶ This being said, the linguistic convention of synecdoche permits us in this case to transfer what is said of the part to the whole: I can say that the human person is actualized by the act of understanding, insofar as the rational soul, as a formal part of the whole substance, is actualized by that act. In a similar way, I can be said to be receptive of heat when one of my hands is warmed by a fire. It is a particular part of my body whose potency for receiving heat has been actualized; this is how it can be that one of my hands is warm while the other is cold. When we say that I (as a person) am receptive of heat when my hand is hot, we do not mean that I am receptive of heat immediately and as a whole. I contend that the same is true when we say that I, as a person, am actualized by intellectual activity as an accident: it is not the living body, the composite of body and soul, or any of its corporeal parts that stands to intellectual activity as potency to act, but nevertheless I can say that I am actualized by intellectual activity, insofar as my soul and my intellect are actualized by it. I do not wish to suggest, however, that the propriety of attributing intellectual operation to the human person is *merely* a matter of synecdoche; only

Neither the body (taken as a material part of human nature), nor the body-soul composite (the living body), nor any parts of the living body can be the actualized-subject of the intellectual power or of intellectual activity: none of these stand to the intellectual power or to intellectual activity as potency to act.

To generalize, we should identify the actualized-subject of a power for immanent operation as the actualized-subject of the corresponding operation. Aquinas advances a claim along these lines as a general principle, taken from Aristotle: *cuius est actio, eius est potentia*.³⁷ I take this to mean that a power belongs to the same actualized-subject as does the action resulting from that power. Understood in this way, this principle extends a thesis we encountered above from *De virtutibus* (q. 1, a. 3): something can be receptive of one accident by the mediation of another accident. In the case of the human soul, we should say that the human soul is the actualized-subject of the possible intellect, and by the mediation of the possible intellect, the human soul is the actualized-subject of intellectual activity.

What of the sustaining-subject of human intellectual activity? This is, I think, the more difficult and complex issue. On the one hand, Aquinas's arguments also indicate that he regards the human soul as a sustaining-subject of intellectual activity. Aquinas concludes that the human soul must be subsistent, because only what subsists *per se* can act *per se*, and the human soul does act *per se* in its intellectual operation. Action must follow upon being; only what is can act. Is this not because action, as an accident, must be sustained in existence by something that subsists? As Aquinas puts it: "Nothing can operate *per se* except what subsists *per se*, because operation is only of a being in act. . . . On account of this, we do not say that heat heats, but [that] something hot [heats]. It follows therefore that the human soul . . . is something incorporeal and subsistent."³⁸ Furthermore, Aquinas holds that the human soul is incorruptible, capable of surviving the corruption of the living body, and he affirms that, in its separated state, the human soul will be capable of acting. Certainly, in the separated state, the human soul will be both the sustaining-subject and the actualized-subject of intellectual activity. Nothing would seem to prevent

the way in which the human person is an actualized-subject of intellectual operation is by synecdoche.

³⁷ *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 89; *ST* I, q. 51, a. 3; *QDA*, a. 19; *Quaestiones de spiritualibus creaturis*, a. 4, ad 3. For the source in Aristotle, see *On Sleep* 1.454a8–9. De Libera notes Aquinas's use of this principle and its source in *On Sleep*; see, e.g., *Archéologie du sujet* I, 50–59. Cf. Brenet, "Thomas d'Aquin pense-t-il?," 234–35.

³⁸ *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2.

us from saying that it is also the sustaining-subject of intellectual activity while it is united to the body.

On the other hand, although Aquinas holds that the separated human soul will be capable of intellectual acts, the separated soul's mode of understanding is different from its mode of understanding when it is united to the body. Aquinas holds that, when the soul is united to the body, the act of understanding is itself incomplete except through the turn to the phantasm.³⁹ Our intellectual understanding concerns natures that exist in sensible singulars, and it pertains to the understanding of such a nature to know it as something that exists in singulars. But it is through the senses rather than through the intellect that human beings know the sensible singular, and so human intellectual cognition is in a way incomplete except insofar as the act of understanding is simultaneous with acts by the inner senses.⁴⁰ Lacking the sense powers, the separated soul's natural knowledge will be imperfect, as it will not be by the soul's own intellectual light that the soul's understanding will bear on singulars.⁴¹ This is to say that the perfection of the soul's proper operation in fact depends upon the union of the soul with the body.

Furthermore, the human soul is both (1) something that subsists in its own right, existing *per se* so as to not to depend upon matter, and (2) the substantial form of the human body. It belongs to a substantial form to give existence to matter. The human soul does not cause a new, distinct act of existence when it causes the living body to exist: rather, it shares or

³⁹ For recent discussion of the meaning of the "turn to the phantasm" in Aquinas's cognitive theory, see Therese Scarpelli Cory, "What is an Intellectual Turn? The *Liber de Causis*, Avicenna, and Aquinas's Turn to Phantasms," *Tópicos, Revista de Filosofía* 45 (2013): 129–62. Brenet discusses the turn to the phantasm and employs this notion to argue that the supposit must be the subject of human intellectual activity ("Thomas d'Aquin pense-t-il?" 244–48). Brenet ultimately concludes that while the soul is the "subject-substrate" of the intellectual power, the composite, the human person, is the "subject-supposit of action." As Brenet acknowledges, his conclusion undercuts Aquinas's arguments for the subsistence and incorruptibility of the human soul ("Thomas d'Aquin pense-t-il?" 248).

⁴⁰ *ST* I, q. 84, a. 7. Patrick Toner has pointed to the fact that human intellectual cognition is always concurrent with and completed by sense cognition in order to respond to the "too many thinkers problem," which seems to arise if we affirm both that the human soul thinks and that the human person thinks; see Toner, "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Too Many Thinkers," *The Modern Schoolman* 89 (2012): 209–22. My interpretation of *actiones sunt suppositorum* will certainly occasion a concern about having posited "too many thinkers," but the brevity of this piece precludes a direct response to this difficulty.

⁴¹ *ST* I, q. 89, aa. 1 and 4.

communicates its own act of existence with matter, and the human body participates in the soul's act of existence. There is only one substantial act of existence in a human being, that which the human soul shares with matter so as to constitute the composite, the human person. The act of existence by which the human soul is the sustaining-subject of intellectual operation is thus the same act of existence that is, most properly, of the whole human composite, the person. Because of the unity of the existence of the human person, we must in fact say that it is the person's act of existence by which the human soul sustains its own *per se* operations. This is not to say that the soul depends upon the body for its existence; but Aquinas is willing to assert that "the soul does have a certain dependence upon the body, insofar as without the body it does not attain to the completion of its species."⁴² The soul, as a substantial form and as part of a corporeal nature, is ordered "not to mere existence, but to existence of this species. Therefore, although the soul can exist *per se*, nevertheless it cannot exist in the completion of its species without the body."⁴³ Given all of this, although it should be affirmed that the human soul exists *per se* and is a sustaining-subject of the act of understanding as an accident, nevertheless I think we can also say that the act of understanding, as the soul's proper operation, depends upon the human person's existence, so long as the soul is united to the body.

If the subject of an accident, in the strict sense, is the sustaining-subject and actualized-subject, then in this strict sense, it would seem that the subject of intellectual activity is, for Aquinas, the human soul. The human person does not, immediately and as a whole, stand to the act of understanding by a relationship of potency to act, and the soul, by its existence, sustains the act of understanding as an accident. I would suggest that, *if* we are to speak of the human person as the subject of intellectual activity, then this is insofar as the person is a sustaining-subject, in two respects. First, because the act of understanding is imperfect without concurrent sense activity, in a way the act of understanding depends upon the existence of the living body, through whose sensitive organs sense activity occurs. Second, and I think more fundamentally, the existence by which the soul sustains its operation is also the existence of the human person;

⁴² *QDA*, a. 1, ad 12: "Ad duodecimum dicendum quod etiam anima aliquam dependentiam habet ad corpus, in quantum sine corpore non pertingit ad complementum suae speciei; non tamen sic dependet a corpore quin sine corpore esse possit."

⁴³ *QDA*, a. 1, ad 16: "Ad decimumsextum dicendum quod principia essentialia alicuius speciei ordinantur non ad esse tantum, sed ad esse huius speciei. Licet igitur anima possit per se esse, non tamen potest in complemento suae speciei esse sine corpore."

and so it can be said truly that it is by the existence of the person that understanding is sustained as an accident.

Actiones Sunt Suppositorum and the Metaphysical Unity of the Human Person

If nothing else, the previous section should have made clear that speaking of the human person as “the subject of intellectual activity” requires nuanced explanation. Consequently, this expression should not be offered as if it is a clear explanation of the meaning of *actiones sunt suppositorum*. The distinction between actualized-subject and sustaining-subject has allowed us to articulate the thesis that the human person can be characterized as a sustaining-subject of intellectual operation, even if the soul alone is the actualized-subject of this activity. Here I wish to conclude with some additional evidence that Aquinas understands the force of *actiones sunt suppositorum* along the lines that I have outlined.

We have seen above that in the *Summa theologiae* Aquinas articulates the principle that the action of parts is attributed, through the parts, to the whole.⁴⁴ For Aquinas, the unity of the whole human person seems to be sufficient to account for the truth and the propriety of the claim that “this human being understands” (*hic homo intelligit*), even if understanding is the soul’s *per se* operation. The unity of the human person—the person’s unity of substantial existence—is a consequence of the human soul’s union to the body as its formal cause. Aquinas responds to a position that would assert that the soul is united to the body only as its mover rather than as its form with the following:

But if you should say that Socrates is not one thing absolutely, but one thing by the aggregation of mover and moved, many unfitting consequences would result. First, because each thing is one and a being in a similar fashion, it would follow that Socrates is not a being and that he is not in a species or genus; and furthermore, that he would not have any action, since action is only of a being. Whence we do not say that a sailor’s [act of] understanding is the understanding of the whole that is a sailor and a ship, but that it is the sailor’s alone. And similarly understanding would not be Socrates’ act, but only [the act] of the intellect using the body of Socrates. For only in a whole that is something one and a being is the action of the part the action of the whole: and if one should speak otherwise,

⁴⁴ ST I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 2.

he speaks improperly.⁴⁵

“Only in a whole that is something one and a being is the action of the part the action of the whole.” Action always belongs to what is, to a being. An accidental unity, a mere aggregate, does not act, properly speaking, because it does not have a singular substantial existence; but whatever has a singular substantial existence acts, and the action of the part can be the action of the whole. To be precise, by this statement Aquinas has identified substantial unity only as a necessary condition for the claim that the action of the part is the action of the whole.⁴⁶ But Aquinas also seems to recognize the substantial unity of man, which comes from the human soul as formal cause, as sufficient for the propriety of the statement that “this human being understands.” Thus he concludes in his *Quaestiones disputate de anima* that, “although the possible intellect is not a power founded upon any bodily organ, nevertheless the man understands formally by [the possible intellect], insofar as [this power] is founded upon the essence of the human soul, which is the form of the man.”⁴⁷ I have attempted to show that the identity of the human soul’s *esse* with the *esse* of the human person grounds the claim that the *per se* action of the human soul is most properly the action of the human person.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *De unitate intellectus*, ch. 3: “Sed si tu dicas, quod Socrates non est unum quid simpliciter, sed unum quid aggregatione motoris et moti, sequuntur multa inconvenientia. Primo quidem, quia cum unumquodque sit similiter unum et ens, sequitur quod Socrates non sit aliquod ens, et quod non sit in specie nec in genere; et ulterius, quod non habeat aliquam actionem, quia actio non est nisi entis. Unde non dicimus quod intelligere nautae sit intelligere huius totius quod est nauta et navis, sed nautae tantum; et similiter intelligere non erit actus Socratis, sed intellectus tantum utentis corpore Socratis. In solo enim toto quod est aliquid unum et ens, actio partis est actio totius; et si quis aliter loquatur, improprie loquitur.”

⁴⁶ “Only substantial wholes are wholes, the action of whose part is the action of the whole” is equivalent to “every whole, the action of whose part is the action of the whole, is a substantial whole.” Aquinas does not in this text commit himself to more than is strictly necessary to criticize the position to which he is responding.

⁴⁷ *QDA*, a. 2, resp.: “Dum intellectus possibilis non est potentia fundata in aliquo organo corporali; et tamen eo intelligit homo formaliter, in quantum fundatur in essentia animae humanae, quae est hominis forma.” Cf. *De unitate intellectus*, ch. 3: “Si autem dicas quod principium huius actus, qui est intelligere, quod nominamus intellectum, non sit forma, oportet te invenire modum quo actio illius principii sit actio huius hominis” (“But if you should say that the principle of this act, which is understanding, which [principle] we name the intellect, is not a form [of this man], it is necessary for you to discover [another] way in which the action of that principle should be the action of this man”).

⁴⁸ Although it is impossible to enter in detail here into the Christological impli-

In order to safeguard the claim that *hic homo intelligit*, that intellectual activity is “of the supposit,” it is not necessary to discard the view that understanding is the soul’s *per se* operation and is in the soul alone as in an actualized-subject. For Aquinas, the metaphysical unity of the person accounts for the truth and propriety of the claim that “this human being understands.” If we are to interpret *actiones sunt suppositorum* correctly, in its application to both human intellectual activity and to the case of Christ’s human action, it is necessary to be precise concerning the meaning of the term “subject.” It is right to insist that there is more, metaphysically, to the relationship between person and action than would be expressed if the person were merely a subject-of-attribution by synecdoche. This does not mean, however, that the person must be the subject of action as the immediate actualized-subject. In order to be an agent, a supposit need not be a subject in this typical sense. N.V

cations of the interpretation of *actiones sunt suppositorum* I am defending, the emphasis upon the importance of the unity of *esse* in the case of the human person finds a parallel, I would suggest, in Aquinas’s typical emphasis upon the unity of Christ’s *esse*.