

The Inner Man as Substantial Form

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Abstract

When Descartes calls the mind an immaterial substance, he seems to break with the Aristotelian tradition in at least two ways. First, Aristotle calls the soul of a living being its substantial *form*, and this seems to conflict with its being a substance. Second, when Descartes characterizes the thinking subject as an *immaterial* substance, he seems to separate it as a distinct thing from the embodied human being, whereas an Aristotelian could simply say that the thinking subject is the human being itself. I will show that in both respects, Descartes does not differ as radically from Aristotle (and Aquinas) as one might suppose.

I will argue that according to Aristotle, the substantial form of a living being is not one of its properties, but rather *what* it is, and that it therefore is the living being itself in a certain respect. The substantial form of a thing is what it is when it actualizes its proper potential. Since the living being is a substance, its substantial form or soul is also a substance. Further, there is a clear, if metaphorical sense in which the talk of an inner and immaterial realm that figures in Descartes and Augustine refers to the “space” that extends between an ideal prototype and a real instance of the respective type. Since the Aristotelian substantial form of a living being is what it is when it fully actualizes its potential, there is a sense in which it may be called immaterial.

1. Introduction

Let me begin by making a few brief remarks about Descartes and then reveal the structure of my paper. The thinking subject of the Cartesian *Meditations* knows itself immediately as a thinking thing and only indirectly as a human being with a certain weight and other bodily features. For it is only the existence of a thinking subject that is beyond doubt, and not the existence of a human being with a body. Descartes infers from this in the Second Meditation that he knows himself, on the basis of the *cogito* argument, only *insofar as* he is a thinking subject (AT VII 27).¹ In a later explanation of this passage he adds that he did not intend to thereby reduce the subject of the *Meditations* to a mere mind. Rather, he writes that by adding the “insofar as,” he only wanted to qualify the manner in which the meditator knows herself in the Second Meditation. De facto, the meditator may well be a human being with certain bodily features, but this cannot be of any relevance in the Second Meditation. This is why it does not belong to the essence of a thinking subject. Descartes writes:

I have said on one occasion that the soul knows itself only in a qualified manner, *praecise tantum*, as an immaterial substance. And seven or eight lines further down I have said that one should not therefore take it for granted that nothing about the soul is corporeal, even though one does not know anything about this; in order to make clear that I do not intend a complete denial but only an abstraction from all bodily features. (AT IX 214–15)²

So far, Descartes only says that one can know and consider human beings in at least two different respects. On the one hand, one may consider them only insofar as they are thinking subjects, and in this respect, they are thinking

¹ This refers to volume VII of the *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Adam and Tannery, p. 27.

² For the translation of *praecise tantum* see John Cottingham, “Theology, Metaphysics, and Science,” in Cottingham, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, Cambridge University Press 1992, 236–57, p. 243.

things (*res cogitantes*). On the other hand, one may refer to them insofar as they are living beings with a material body. This is what Descartes does, for instance, in the Sixth Meditation, when he writes that it is “obvious that ... I as a whole, insofar as I am composed of mind and body, can be affected by bodies in several pleasant or unpleasant ways” (AT VII 81). Given this possibility of considering human beings in two different ways, however, Descartes seems to argue at least in the same Sixth Meditation that the immortal soul of a human being is an immaterial substance, and that all bodily substance is in some sense alien to it. When he makes this move, he seems to advance at least two claims that do not fit the traditional, Aristotelian picture of the soul. First, he calls the soul a substance, whereas according to Aristotle, the soul is the substantial *form* of the thinking subject. Descartes seems to hypostasize a form and to mistake it for a separate thing. Second, he says that although the mind interacts with the bodily world in mysterious ways, it is not itself a bodily thing. According to Descartes, the soul is not only an independently existing substance; it is also an *immaterial* one. It seems to be something inner and private that is not directly accessible to sense perception. In this situation, it must appear attractive to return to an Aristotelian framework, according to which the mind is the form of material beings that we may directly experience and encounter in our surrounding world.

The differences between the Aristotelian and the Cartesian conception of the human mind have often been emphasized. In the following, I will not yet pose the subsequent question which of the two alternatives is preferable. Rather, I will point out a possibility of understanding Descartes and Aristotle in a way such that the differences between their accounts turn out to be marginal. I do not wish to infer from this that in the end, Aristotle and Descartes say the same, and not even that what they say may be reconciled without much effort. However, it will turn out that the dividing line between Descartes and Aristotle does not lie where it is often supposed.

I believe that the views of Aristotle and Descartes on the human mind are not opposed in important respects, and I will argue for this in due course. But

note that even if this belief should not turn out to be justified, the result of my endeavours will still be that besides the points of view that are commonly taken to be Aristotelian and Cartesian, a further point of view may be taken that shares and merges important insights of both thinkers. Regardless whether anyone has so far held this point of view, its possibility will be of considerable relevance when it comes to the question whether to prefer the Aristotelian or else the Cartesian picture in a *systematic* discussion. If a compromise is possible, the alternative must be restated.

More specifically, it will emerge in the second and third section of this paper that Aristotle and Aquinas admit of a reading according to which the human soul is not a property or feature of the human body, but rather the human being itself in a certain respect. Further, it will be shown that the division between the outer, material world and the inner, immaterial realm that Descartes and Augustine like to draw may be understood in such a way that the inner corresponds exactly to the respect that an Aristotelian refers to when she talks of the soul of a human being. As I will explain, this respect is a normative one: both the inner realm and the substantial form of a human being refer to what humans can and should be, according to their specific potentials. The normative meaning of “inner” will be explained in the penultimate section of this paper, which will be followed by a conclusion.

2. Aristotle: The Soul as οὐσία *qua* Form

Aristotle says, on the one hand, that the soul is an οὐσία; that is, a separate substance. On the other hand, he also says that the soul is the form of a living organism. But the form of a living organism does not seem to be a separate substance. In *De Anima* B1, he explains how this apparent conflict may be resolved. He writes that he uses “οὐσία” in three different ways, and in one of its senses, the οὐσία may be taken to be a form (412a6–9). The soul of a living being is, accordingly, its οὐσία *qua* form. In the present context, it is of considerable importance to understand what an οὐσία *qua* form is.

It is often assumed that the οὐσία *qua* form of a thing is what scholastics have called its *substantial* form, in contrast to its *accidental* forms. An

accidental form is taken to be a property that attaches to its bearer contingently and not in all possible circumstances. Accordingly, the substantial form of a thing is taken to be a property or a bundle of properties that it possesses in all circumstances and not as a matter of chance.³ However, Aristotle emphasizes in *Metaphysics* Z13 that no primary οὐσία can be universal, such that it could be predicated of many subjects as of an underlying thing (1038b15–16). This implies that no primary οὐσία can be a necessary property, for a necessary property could in principle be predicated of more than one underlying thing. It seems to follow that the οὐσία *qua* form is either a particular property token (sometimes called “trope”) or not a *primary* οὐσία.

A further consideration, however, shows that Aristotle’s οὐσία *qua* form is not at all a property, attribute, or feature of a thing, neither universal nor particular. For the οὐσία *qua* form is the essence of a thing, and to specify the essence of a thing is to say *what* this thing is. The essence of a thing is specified in its correct definition; and as Aristotle argues in *Categories* 5, the definition of a thing does not apply to its properties. Unless the definition is *of* a property, what it applies to is a thing and not a property (2a19-34). For instance, we may define a certain animal as a mammal of such and such kind. This formula applies to instances of the respective species, but not to their form, their properties, features, or qualities. No property of a living being is a mammal. Conversely, the definition of a *property* does not apply to bearers of this property. Possession of a placenta is a property, but no mammal *is* the possession of a placenta. Although we define a thing by way of specifying its properties, the definition of a thing is thus not a definition *of* its form. It does not apply to its form, but (in some sense to be further specified) to the thing itself. If the definition of a thing applies to its οὐσία *qua* form, it follows that the οὐσία *qua* form of a thing cannot be a property of this thing; it must be the thing itself (in a certain respect).

For convenience, I will in the following stick to the term “substantial form.”

³ Cf. Aquinas *In De An.*, Marietti 1959, #224; Suárez, *Disp. Met.* 15, Opera Vivès vol. 25.

The reader should keep in mind that according to the view I diagnose in Aristotle, the substantial form of a thing is not a property or attribute of this thing but in a certain respect this very thing itself. The substantial form of a thing is *what this thing is*. Substantial forms, in this sense, do not attach to things as their properties or attributes. Forms that attach to things are called accidental (κατὰ συμβεβηκός): they are how the thing is, but not what it is.

Even a property that attaches to a thing necessarily and in all conceivable circumstances is accidental in this sense. In contrast, the substantial form (= οὐσία *qua* form) of a thing is not accidental to it because it is not *attached* to it at all. As Aristotle tells us in *Categories* 2, the substantial form of a thing may be *said of* this thing, but is not *present in* this thing. For instance, we may predicate “man” of Socrates, but this does not mean that “man” is present in or attached to Socrates. When we predicate “man” of Socrates, we do not predicate it of an underlying thing. Socrates does not underlie “man,” he *is* a man. In contrast to a predicate denoting a property, “man” is a word that applies to Socrates as a whole.

One might argue that in any case, being an instance of a certain kind involves having certain properties. There might be a set of properties that all instances of a kind necessarily have, and in such a case the substantial form of a thing does seem to coincide with a certain set of properties. It is important to see that it is in any event wrong to identify the substantial form of a thing with a set of properties. First of all, there are cases in which the properties in terms of which a kind of thing is defined are not actually properties that all instances must have. Not all quadrupeds have four legs, not all human beings are rational, and not all hearts pump blood. To be a quadruped simply is not the same as having four legs, to be a human being is not the same as being rational, and to be a heart is not the same as to pump blood. Nonetheless, all these are defining properties of the kinds of things in question. Now if a quadruped does not necessarily have to have four legs in order to qualify as an instance of its kind, there is no reason to suppose that there must be any property that all instances of a kind must have in order to qualify as such. In fact, when we give a definition of a kind of thing, we do not list the properties that all of them must necessarily have. Rather, we specify what features the

typical instances of this kind have. There may be atypical instances, which lack some of these features; and there may accordingly be no set of features that all instances share, since all of them might be atypical in different ways. To classify something as a quadruped is not the same as saying that it has four legs. It is to say that to the extent that it does have four legs, it is a typical instance of its kind. If it loses one leg, it does not thereby cease to be a quadruped. It only ceases to be a typical one.

When we say what a three-legged quadruped is, we describe its substantial form: it is an instance of a kind of things that have four legs. As I have argued, this has no implications for the properties it actually has. Quadrupeds have four legs, this instance is a quadruped, and still it might have only three legs. That is, there may be a gap between a thing's substantial form and its actual properties. Things may fall short of their own substantial form.

Aristotle accounts for this gap by distinguishing between the substantial form and the matter of a thing. In *Metaphysics* H6 and Θ7, he identifies the distinction between formal and material οὐσία with the one between something that has a potential for being an instance of a certain type on the one hand, and what it potentially is on the other. For instance, a three-legged quadruped has (had) the potential for having four legs; such that something with four legs is what it potentially is, or would have been under more favorable circumstances. When we specify the οὐσία *qua* form of a thing, we say what it would mean for this thing to actualize its proper potential. That which has this potential is the οὐσία *qua* matter. The οὐσία *qua* form of a thing is *actually* what its οὐσία *qua* matter is *potentially*. For instance, the matter of which Socrates consists is potentially a human being. His substantial form is what his matter potentially is, namely a human being.

In *De Anima* B4, Aristotle tells us accordingly that the substantial form of a living being is its *perfection* (415b12-15). The substantial form of a thing is thus what a perfect instance of its type would be. This explains how a thing may fall short of its own substantial form. It need not completely actualize its potentials. The substantial form of a thing functions as a standard with a view to which one may determine whether this thing is fully developed and typical

or not. More precisely, the substantial form of a thing is something like a prototypical instance of its kind: It is what this thing is according to the definition of its type, and thus also what a typical instance of its type is supposed to be. Hence, the substantial form of an animal may also be taken to be an ideal and perfectly typical instance of its type. What Socrates is, a man, is at the same time that with a view to which we may determine what would be typical for him. On this basis, it should not come as a surprise that Aristotle calls the formal cause of a thing a *paradigm*, that is, an ideal exemplar of its kind (*Physics* B3, 195b26).

Therefore, the substantial form of a thing is *what this thing is* in two respects. First, it is the thing itself, considered with a view to its type-specific potentials. Second, it is that with a view to which one may judge whether a thing has realized its potentials, and in this sense, it may be what the thing is not. Socrates may fail to be *what a human being is* by failing to actualize his proper potentials.

Note that although Aristotle seems to have thought otherwise, this does not imply any *static* essentialism of natural kinds. There may be various and varying typical instances of a kind, and when a kind evolves, the standards of typicality that apply to its instances may change. However, when a mutation emerges for the first time, it can only be taken to be atypical. New standards for typicality can only emerge when this mutation is stable, such that there are reasons for distinguishing between typical and atypical forms.

How are we to interpret the doctrine of hylemorphism, then? Aristotle tells us that the soul of a living being is its substantial form. The substantial form of a living being is that with a view to which this being may be judged to be a typical or atypical instance of its kind. The substantial form of a living being is thus what it is, can and should be; it is what would be fully realized in a complete and typical instance of its type. If the soul of a living being is its substantial form in this sense, it is what this living being is (cf. *Met.* Z10, 1036a17). More precisely, it is this living being with a view to its perfection. This is why Aristotle can call the soul of a living being a substance. For clearly, if the soul is the living being itself in a certain respect, it is also a substance in a certain respect.

3. Aquinas: The Soul as the Human Being *qua* Human Being

Scholastics occasionally draw a distinction that seems to divide the subject matter in an inappropriate way. Suárez, for instance, distinguishes between substantial forms, which according to him “inform” matter, and so-called exemplary causes that he takes to be the paradigms from which things may be copied, and with a view to which a thing may be assessed regarding its completeness and typicality (*Disp. Met.* 15 & 25 respectively). But since the substantial form of a thing (its οὐσία *qua* form) is such a paradigm, these two should be the same.

On the face of it, Aquinas also seems to take the substantial form or soul of a human being to be an essential property of its body, and to add rather *ad hoc* that this special kind of property may also exist without the body whose property it is. On a closer look, however, the substantial form again turns out to be the human being itself in a certain respect. For on the one hand, Aquinas argues that it is not the soul that thinks but the human by virtue of having a soul: *intelligere est propria operatio hominis, inquantum est homo* (*Summa Theologiae* Ia 76,1). He also assumes, however, that *intelligere* does not depend on a bodily organ. Further, although the human intellect does not depend on the human body, it is not an independent substance. For otherwise, Aquinas argues, one could not say that *intelligere* is the proper operation of a human being. The reason is that no activity of a substance other than the human being itself can be proper to a human being (*QD De An.* 2 c.a.). Therefore, he claims, the intellect must belong to an immaterial substance, and this substance must be the soul.⁴ Since the human intellect does not depend on the human body, its activity cannot be an activity of the human body.

Aquinas seems to be inconsistent here, as it might be unavoidable for someone who tries to reconcile Aristotle with a Christian conception of the human soul. For one thing, it seems that he cannot simply declare that the human soul is a substance, if it is to be the substantial *form* of a substance.

⁴ He explicitly states that the human soul is an immaterial substance in *QD De An.* 21, c.a.: ... *anima enim, et quelibet incorporalis substantia ...* .

For another, the same argument as above should also apply to the relation between a human being and its soul. If the soul is an independent substance, it cannot be the soul that thinks, since then it would follow that thinking is not the proper operation of a human being. In the end, it would not be the human being that thinks, but only its soul.

On the basis of what has been said about the substantial form in Aristotle, however, a solution to this apparent dilemma is readily available. It is implicit in the qualification that Aquinas adds: *inquantum est homo*. For on the one hand, Aquinas claims that *intelligere* is the proper activity of a human being *insofar as it is human*, and on the other hand he assumes that *intelligere* belongs to the human soul. This simply implies that the soul of a human being *is* this human being insofar as it is human.

Now what is a human being insofar as it is human? Considering a concrete human being, we may distinguish what it is as a human being from what it is, but not as a human being. What it is as a human being is determined by the definition of its substantial form. Assume, for instance, that human beings are essentially rational. (This would not mean that all humans are rational, but that humans that are not rational are atypical and fall short of their own substantial form.) Assume further that the proper definition of a human being does not mention any specific weight or hair length. Then it follows that Socrates is rational insofar as he is human, but that he does not have his specific weight and hair length insofar as he is human.

It emerges that according to Aquinas, the soul is what Socrates is insofar as he is human. For on the one hand, it is the soul that thinks and perceives, and on the other, it is the human being, insofar as it is human, that thinks and perceives. Hence, the soul is a substance, to the extent in which the human being itself is a substance. But then, the soul is again not a property of a human, but the human being itself in a certain respect.

It may still be difficult to see how Aquinas can claim that the soul of a human being may exist without a human body. Presumably, this amounts to the claim that the human being, insofar as it is a rational being, may do without its body. This, however, is very close to what Descartes says. For when Descartes claims that the soul of a human being is an immaterial

thinking substance, he basically says the same. If it is essential to a human being to be rational, Aristotle and Aquinas must agree that the soul is a thinking substance, namely a human being insofar as it is capable of thought. There is nothing unaristotelian about the claim that the soul is a substance.

If there is any important difference between Descartes and his predecessors it seems to be that for Descartes, the soul does not at all depend on the body in order to be what it is, whereas the scholastics usually call the *anima separata* an incomplete substance. According to the scholastics, even if humans may be considered only with respect to their substantial form, they need a body to fully actualize their proper potentials, and this is why there will be a resurrection of the body. Descartes does not openly speculate about resurrection, but he seems to think that humans may be complete substances without a body.

Such a claim is at least commonly attributed to Descartes. Whether he actually holds this doctrine is not clear, since he writes to Regius that the soul, when separated from the body, is *not* a complete substance, and that the human being is an *ens per se* that is not composed of two independent substances (AT III 493; Cf. AT VII 228). This may be a concession to catholic doctrine. Within Cartesian metaphysics, however, there is also a good reason why a human being cannot be composed of two independent substances: there does not seem to be a clear difference between different particular material substances in the Cartesian worldview. Strictly speaking, there is only one extended substance, and this is the whole material world (AT VIII A 52). This means that strictly speaking, the human body can only be a part of a substance and not a substance itself.⁵ There is no such thing as a particular, clearly individuated material substance that could be attached to a human soul such as to yield a particular human being. Rather, the human body can only be individuated as that part of the extended world that is directly governed and shaped by the soul (AT IV 166–67).

⁵ For a discussion see Paul Hoffman, “The Unity of Descartes’ Man,” *Philosophical Review* 95(3), 1986, p. 338–70

That it is difficult to ascribe the view to Descartes that a complete human being consists of two particular substances is another reason for considering the alternative reading I suggest here: that the isolated thinking subject is an incomplete *human being*; that is, a human being that is not considered or not present in all its respects but only with regard to her essential form. The living human being that interacts with the world by imagination and perception, in contrast, is a complete human being, considered and present in all its relevant aspects. Note further that even if Descartes should claim that humans may be complete substances without their bodies, this would still not constitute a radical break with the Aristotelian tradition. For even Aquinas assumes that humans do not necessarily depend on their bodies for their existence, since he also assumes that the soul somehow survives the period between death and resurrection.

At any rate, however, it seems that this does not licence Descartes' further claim that the soul of a living being is an *immaterial* substance. If the soul of a living human being is that human being itself (in a certain respect), and if that human being is also a material being, the soul should not be called immaterial. When Descartes calls the soul of a living human being an immaterial substance, his break with the tradition appears to be obvious. In order to see whether and to what extent he remains Aristotelian in this respect we must ask what it means for a substance to be immaterial.

4. Interiority

For Descartes, the immaterial is also the inner, since the material world is the same as the outer world. I will therefore elucidate the meaning of "immaterial" by discussing the distinction between an inner and an outer realm. It should be obvious that in this context, "inner" cannot refer to some place within the material world, since the soul is not supposed to be an extended thing that would occupy a specific place among other extended things. We need to take the term "inner realm" as a metaphor. But what is this metaphor supposed to express? This question is best tackled by considering Augustine, who is a master in its use.

For instance, Augustine likes to talk about what he calls the Inner Man. He

takes this concept from St. Paul, who probably took it from elsewhere.⁶ In the figurative language that both Paul and Augustine use, the Inner Man comes into being when a Christian is baptized.⁷ This cannot mean that inside a human being, another human being literally comes to be. The Inner Man is best understood as a personification of what actually comes into being when a man is baptized: certain ties to the community of Christians, certain standards, rules, and obligations. The Inner Man appears to stand for the ideal of a man that one subscribes to by getting baptized.

In some passages, Augustine also combines the metaphor of the “inner” with the distinction between having sense impressions and possessing knowledge. For instance, when he talks of “inner sight,” he refers to knowledge, and “inner hearing” is, for him, understanding (*Tract. in Ioann.* 26,7). Someone who knows and understands is not only in the possession of sense data but also knows how to assess this data with respect to its truth and accuracy. We see again that the metaphor of the “inner” alludes at the standard with a view to which something is to be evaluated. The Inner Man stands for the standard with a view to which a baptized Christian is to be assessed, inner sight and hearing refer to the standards that apply to the interpretation of sense data. Augustine further writes that when the Inner Man hears a word, he does not hear it in any particular language (*Tract. in Ioann.* 6,10). Rather, in hearing a word he immediately grasps its meaning, and this meaning must be independent of any particular language, since it is what should remain intact in a good translation. Conversely, every interpretation of an utterance is to be evaluated as correct and accurate with a view to the “inner word.” Again, what the Inner Man hears when he hears a word is the standard with a view to which any interpretation of this word is to be assessed. Hence, Augustine generally uses the metaphor of the inner in order to refer to the standards that apply to humans, sense impressions, and

⁶ Cf. Hans Dieter Betz, “The Concept of the ‘Inner Human Being’ (ὁ ἔσω ἄνθρωπος) in the Anthropology of Paul,” *New Testament Studies* 46(3), 2000, 315–341.

⁷ Cf. for Paul *Romans* 6,4–10; for Augustine e.g. *Tract. in Ioann.*12,7.

interpretations of utterances. But why does he choose this metaphor? What is it about the inner that is suitable for bringing out what he wants to say?

Consider the contrast between internal and external extended space. In one sense, it is not possible to go beyond all such externality. For when one leaves a certain region in space, this only means that one crosses a border towards another one of these regions, such that what was formerly internal is now external and vice versa. What is external as seen from here is internal as seen from there. This nexus of locations, in which every location is external to another location, is what Augustine and Descartes call the extended, material world: the *regio dissimilitudinis* or *res extensa*. When Augustine and Descartes use the metaphor of the inner, they refer to the opposite of all extension. In the Augustinian inner realm, where the Inner Man knows, understands, and perceives meanings, there is no inner or outer in the spatial sense. It is thus important to understand the possibility of a realm that is structured in some sense, but not extended in space.

In book VII of his *Confessions*, Augustine writes that for a long time, he was unable to imagine any such realm. Instead, he was convinced that everything that exists must be extended in space. He realized that there may be something that is inner in the sense of not being extended in space at all only when he read neoplatonic philosophers (VII,9,13). Encouraged by these writings to withdraw into himself, he reports, he entered his own interiority and began to see with the eyes of the mind. This, again, is metaphor; but it is important to note what Augustine claims to have seen. He writes, for instance, that he saw that only because it is not extended in space, the truth is not nothing (VII,10,16). The truth is thus a paradigmatic example of something that can only be seen in the interior realm.⁸ If one mistakes it for something material, one will never understand what it is. And again, the truth is a

⁸ Cf. Elizabeth Anscombe, "Analytical Philosophy and the Spirituality of Man," in *Human Life, Action and Ethics*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally, Imprint Academic 2005, p. 15: "The immateriality of the soul consists at bottom in the fact that you cannot specify a material character or configuration which is equivalent to truth."

standard with a view to which things are assessed.

But what does it mean that the truth is “interior”? It *could* mean that it is located in the mind of a thinking subject. However, the truth cannot be located in a mind such that its existence would depend on the existence of this mind. There is only one truth for all minds, and even if there were no minds, it would still be *true* that no mind exists (*Soliloquia* II,2). In any case, Augustine cannot want to say that the truth depends on a particular human mind for its existence, since he often identifies God himself with the truth (e.g. *Confessions* X,41,66). It would follow from this that God is located in a human mind.

Now it is interesting to see that in some sense, Augustine does indeed claim that the truth is located in his own mind. He writes that he saw the truth within himself; but since it cannot be *exclusively* within himself, he adds that at the same time, he saw it *far above* himself. Figuratively speaking, there is something within himself that at the same time transcends his limits. This picture expresses the intuition that the inner realm is the realm of standards that apply to items such that these items are subject to or *underlie* the standard. The standard is above them, but not in a spatial sense. God, taken to be the personified truth, is the standard that applies to whatever may be true or false.⁹

When we now take into account that book VII of the *Confessions* is not primarily concerned with the nature of truth, but with the nature of evil, we see how the pieces fit together. For the paradigmatic evil is sin, and Augustine defines sin as consciously falling short of an appropriate standard.¹⁰ The sin of Adam was to freely and consciously violate a standard that he was obliged and able to satisfy; and as a consequence we are all condemned to fall short of certain standards that apply to ourselves even if we honestly try not to. This

⁹ Cf. Stephen Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, Cambridge UP 1998, p. 140:

“... now he has perceived God as incorporeal by conceiving him as the immutable standard by which the mutable mind judges and is judged.”

¹⁰ Phillip Cary, *Augustine and the Invention of the Inner Self*, Oxford UP 2000, p. 108.

situation is peculiar to man, and Augustine explains it by reference to the fall. It is the situation that he experiences when he looks up within himself. He is subject to a standard that he cannot reach up to.

Augustine discovers the nature of evil as well as the nature of truth by coming to understand that not everything is extended, and that there are things that go beyond all extension and materiality. What he comes to see is the possibility of a non-spatial distance. Humans do not satisfy the standards that apply to them, and in this sense, they are at a distance from their paradigm. When Augustine uses the epithet “inner” in its metaphorical sense, he refers to the space that opens up between a standard and something that falls short of it. We may metaphorically speak of a *distance* between paradigm and copy, and of a *space* that is structured by such distances, provided we do not take these expressions in their spatial sense. The Inner Man marks the place in inner space where a baptized Christian is supposed to be. This cannot mean that the Inner Man is located anywhere in real space; but it also does not mean that the Inner Man is only an abstract form or idea. Our distance to this ideal man is not spatial and not purely abstract; it is a very real and concrete normative distance. The Inner Man is not “inner” because he only lives within a realm of abstract notions, but because the distance between him and ourselves is a normative, non-spatial distance.

I conclude that the metaphor of the inner realm as we find it in Augustine and Descartes should be understood as referring to the normative distance between a standard and its ideal case on one side, and an actual and imperfect instance on the other. The inner realm is structured by these distances. When Descartes withdraws within his own mind, he is also concerned with the inner realm in this sense. He seeks to enter the realm of thoughts that are only what they are insofar as they are subject to certain standards of truth, coherence, and accuracy. Among the non-spatial relations and “distances” that may be found here is the one that Descartes is famously worried about: the distance between mere opinion and true knowledge.

5. Conclusion

We have seen two things now. First, the substantial form of a living being is

what this living being is and can be according to the definition of its type. The substantial form of a thing is not one of its properties. It is this thing in a certain respect, considered with a view to what it potentially is and what a prototypical instance of its type would be. The substantial form of an item is what its definition describes: a prototypical instance of its kind.

Second, we have seen that the metaphor of the inner realm, as we find it in Augustine and Descartes, refers to the normative distance between a standard and a real instance that is subject to this standard. The standard quite naturally takes the form of a prototypical instance: the truth is God, who is the ideal subject of knowledge, and the meaning of a sentence is a further sentence that may be perceived by our “inner senses.” The standard is exemplified by a paradigmatic prototype, and the inner realm is where these prototypes live.

When we now attempt to apply the metaphor of the inner realm to the relation between a living being and its substantial form, we should say that the substantial form of a living being is at a normative distance from any concrete instance, since it is the paradigm with a view to which the concrete instances may be judged to be perfect, typical, or atypical instances of their kinds. The substantial form of an animal relates to a real animal in the same way in which the Inner Man relates to a baptized Christian. That is, we might call the substantial form of an animal the “Inner Animal.” By the same token, the substantial form and soul of a living being that is essentially rational should be referred to as an “Inner Thinker.” Now since the realm of the inner is beyond all spatial externality and extension, and since Descartes identifies space and material body, we may as well refer to the substantial form of an essentially rational being as an “immaterial thinking substance.”

Hence, that Descartes calls the soul an immaterial thinking substance does not in fact constitute a break with the Aristotelian tradition. Even though he puts it in quite different terms, what he calls an immaterial thinking substance is nothing but the substantial form of an essentially rational being. Since the soul of a human being is the human being itself considered in a certain respect, it is not wrong to call it a substance, and given that “immaterial” refers to the normative difference between what a thinking being can and should be

and what it actually is, it may also be referred to as an immaterial substance. That the substantial form of a human being is immaterial does not mean that it does not have a body, but only that it sets the standards according to which this human being may be assessed insofar as it is human, and which it may fall short of.