1. Two Applications of Substantial Form

Physical. “substance … must be the cause of its accidents” (Aquinas, De ente 6.54-57); “all accidents are certain forms added onto the substance, caused by the principles of the substance” (Aquinas, SCG IV.14.3508); “an intellect cognizing the essence of a species comprehends through that essence all of the per se accidents belonging to the species.… Once the proper essence of a singular is cognized, all of its singular accidents are cognized” (Aquinas, Q. de veritate 2.7c).

Metaphysical: [Substantial forms, unlike accidental forms, give existence to the whole substance and to each of its parts.] “This is clear from the fact that both the whole and the parts take their species from it, and so when it leaves, neither the whole nor the parts remain the same in species. For a dead person’s eye and flesh are so-called only equivocally” (Aquinas, SCG II.72.1484).

2. Promiscuous Pluralism

A form for each species and genus to which a thing belongs (e.g., Ibn Gabirol, Fons vitae IV.3, V.34). Suárez: “this view is now antiquated and rejected as utterly implausible” (Disp. Meta. XV.10.4)

3. Unitarianism

Averroes. “it is impossible for a single subject to have more than one form” (De substantia orbis, ch. 1). Aquinas. “One must say, then, that a human being has no substantial form other than the intellective soul alone, and that just as it virtually contains the sensory and nutritive souls, so it virtually contains all lower forms, and that it alone brings about whatever it is that less perfect forms bring about in other things. And the same must be said for the sensory soul in brutes, and the nutritive soul in plants, and generally for all more perfect forms with respect to the less perfect” (Summa theol. 1a 76.4c).

4. Parsimonious Pluralism

• Ghent. Unitarian in all but the human case, and only two forms then (Quodlibet IV.13);
• Scotus. All living things have two forms (Ordinatio IV.11.3): soul + forma corporeitatis
• Ockham. Human beings have three souls (Quodlibet II.10-11);
• But cf. Jacob Zabarella (16C). [If more than one,] “why not four or a hundred or more?” (De rebus naturalibus 398).

5. Kenny’s Complaint

“It is not easy to know by what arguments, or even by the practice of what discipline, we are to settle the question of how many substantial forms there are in, say, a living dog” (Aquinas on Mind, p. 26).
6. The Unitarian Argument from Unity

Aristotle’s puzzle. “In the case of all things that have multiple parts, where the totality is not like a heap, but the whole is something besides the parts, there is some cause…. What is it, then, that makes a human being one thing? Why is he one and not many, for instance both animal and two-footed?” (Meta. VIII, 1045a8-16). Aristotle’s answer. A material substance is a composite of form and matter, or actuality and potentiality. So understood, “it is clear that there is no longer a puzzle, because one is matter, the other form.” (1045a29).

Aquinas’s argument, version 1. “It is impossible for there to be more than one substantial form in one and the same thing. This is so because [1] it is from the same source that a thing has existence (esse) and unity. But it is clear that [2] a thing has existence through its form. Hence [3] a thing has unity through its form. For this reason, [4] wherever there is a plurality of forms, there is not one thing simpliciter. — A pale human being, for instance, is not one thing simpliciter, and a two-footed animal would not be one thing simpliciter if it were an animal from one source and two-footed from another, as the Philosopher says” (Aquinas, Quodlib. 1.4.1c).

[Zabarella later describes this argument as “that which above all else is offered against this [pluralist] position, and which seems to have persuaded many” (De rebus nat. 398).]

Aquinas’s argument, version 2. “One thing simpliciter is produced out of many actually existing things only if there is something uniting and in some way tying them to each other. In this way, then, if Socrates were an animal and were rational in virtue of different forms, then these two, in order to be united simpliciter, would need something to make them one. Therefore, since nothing is available to do this, the result will be that a human being is one thing only as an aggregate, like a heap, which is one thing secundum quid and many things simpliciter” (Aquinas, Quaest. de anima 11c).

7. Scotus’s Reply

Per se unity requires not that the form inform something non-actual (prime matter), but only that it stand to its subject as actuality to potentiality (even if that subject is already actualized in some other respect).

A non-explanatory account. “If you ask why there is one thing per se in one case more than in another, I reply that just as, according to Metaphysics VIII, there is no question of why one thing is made from actuality and potentiality, except that this is actuality per se and that potentiality per se, so too there is no cause for why one thing per se is made from this actuality and that potentiality, either in things or in concepts, except that this is potentiality with respect to that, and that is actuality…. The same is likewise true for one thing per accidens: for this is this and that is that, and so this is actuality per accidens and that potentiality per accidens. So from this and that is made one thing per accidens” (Ord. IV.11.3.53; Wadding VIII:652-53).

8. The Cost of Unitarianism

The implausible unitarian claim: that generation and corruption go “down to prime matter.” Richard Cross’s false verdict: that a body remains the same through death is “a fairly safe empirical observation” (Physics of Scotus, p. 56). On the contrary, all we observe empirically is that qualitatively the same body remains through death. The question of numerical sameness is metaphysical.