Aquinas’s account of the human soul is the key to his theory of human nature. The soul’s nature as the substantial form of the human body appears at times to be in tension with its nature as immaterial intellect, however, and nowhere is this tension more evident than in Aquinas’s discussion of the “separated” soul—the soul persisting in separation from matter after death and prior to the bodily resurrection. The worry is as follows: on the one hand, Aquinas explicitly claims that the rational soul is neither the human being nor a person. On the other hand, Aquinas claims that the soul retains intellective cognition even in separation from matter, and separated souls appear to have intentional states and first-person reference. If the separated soul is a person, but not the human person, it is difficult to see how a Thomistic metaphysical system could yield a coherent theory of diachronic personal identity. The earthly human person would not be identical to the soul-person who replaces it at death, which in turn would not be identical to the resurrected human person who replaces the soul-person at the final judgment.

In this paper, I consider two attempts to solve this problem: 1) Robert Pasnau’s defense of a Parfitian account of partial identity (according to which the soul’s continued existence entails that I partially continue to exist and will come fully back into existence when my soul is rejoined to matter) and 2) Eleonore Stump’s use of a modified constitution account to argue that, after death and prior to the bodily resurrection, the human being is constituted by the separated soul without being identical to that soul in such a way that the human being can survive the loss of one of its metaphysical parts—the body—so long as the soul survives. Unfortunately, I believe that neither of these proposals solves the problem satisfactorily. It’s not clear, in fact, that Aquinas’s account of human nature has the resources with which to overcome this difficulty as it stands; I conclude that the best solution to the problem involves modifying Aquinas’s account of human nature in a way that doesn’t require the existence of separated souls (because it involves, e.g., immediate bodily resurrection).