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## MATERIALITY AND KNOWLEDGE

### I. OPPOSITION BETWEEN MATERIALITY AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE DOCTRINE OF ST. THOMAS.

IT is a well-known doctrine of St. Thomas that knowability is measured by actuality. Conversely, that nothing can be known in so far as it is potentiality. From this doctrine, a special problem arises regarding our knowledge of prime matter, a purely potential principle of being. Though we cannot doubt the fact that we do know prime matter, yet there is a very real problem regarding *how* we do so, especially if we speak of the knowledge of prime matter "secundum se." And the difficulties involved become more acute when we consider that St. Thomas explicitly both affirms and denies such a knowledge of prime matter "secundum se."<sup>1</sup> For Cajetan, it is a clear case: in the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas is correcting his previously held opinion of the *De Veritate*. But for John of St. Thomas, both statements, rightly understood, can and must be reconciled.

<sup>1</sup> *De Veritate* 3.5: "Et sic nihil prohibet materiae primae etiam secundum se ideam esse." *S. T. I.* 15. 3 ad 3: "Materia secundum se neque esse habet, neque cognoscibilis est."

However, it is not our intention here to enter upon that difficulty, since we have dealt with it elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> We rather propose to examine more thoroughly the various aspects of the doctrine that connects immateriality and knowledge. St. Thomas will ascribe knowability to form, actuality, immateriality; will deny it, of matter, potentiality, materiality. We propose to examine the several aspects of this general doctrine, seeking thereby a deeper understanding of the nature of knowledge. We may begin by considering those aspects as found in the works of St. Thomas, and pointing out in each, explanations that seem to be called for.

To begin with, we may be accustomed to more or less taking for granted that actuality is knowable; potentiality, unknowable. An explanation of why this is so will undoubtedly give us a deeper realization of the true meaning hidden in oft repeated formulas.

And when we speak of the knowability of complete *beings*, new aspects are revealed. We may, of course, isolate potentiality and actuality and speak of their respective knowability. But in nature, things are otherwise. Beings are a mixture of potentiality and actuality in varying degrees. Are we merely going to say that their actuality is knowable, but their potentiality not so? A most important doctrine of St. Thomas is that the more a form is immersed in matter, the less it is knowable. He will even say that forms in matter are unknowable:

Forma in materia existens non potest esse perfecte cognita ut intellecta in actu.<sup>3</sup>

Why should that be? Because a form is in matter, does it thereby cease to be a form, and knowable? Evidently, there is another aspect of opposition between matter and knowledge that we must consider. Material beings are termed knowable

<sup>2</sup> In *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, Vol. I, #1, pp. 103-118.

<sup>3</sup> *Quodlibetum* III. 20.

only in potency; separated substances are actually knowable, but in varying degrees; God is actually knowable in a way no creature can be. In other words, the degrees of knowability vary with the degrees of materiality. What does that mean? Is it to be explained merely by saying that there are varying proportions of unknowable matter, of potency, with knowable form, on actuality? A bottle of black ink is entirely black; a bottle of white ink, entirely white. Mixtures are more or less black or white according to the proportion of the two. Is the knowability of beings to be explained so simply?

It is easy to see that there is much more to the explanation than that. For instance, there is the whole doctrine of the necessity of abstraction.

Res materialis intelligibilis efficitur per hoc quod a materia et materialibus conditionibus separatur. Quod ergo est per sui naturam ab omni materia et materialibus conditionibus separatum, hoc est intelligibile secundum suam naturam.<sup>4</sup>

Why does the form have to be abstracted from matter, in order to become knowable?

And there is also an entirely different aspect yet to consider. So far, we have always considered matter, potentiality, as limiting *knowability*. But it is equally true that matter limits the *power to know* of a being. So much so, that a parallel of the various degrees could be drawn, corresponding to the various degrees of knowability.

Ex hoc aliqua res est intelligens quod est sine materia. . . . Oportet rem aliquam ex hoc esse intelligentem quod est sine materia.<sup>5</sup>

Quanto enim aliqua vis cognoscitiva est immaterialior, tanto est perfectior in cognoscendo.<sup>6</sup>

At the foot of the scale is prime matter, entirely incapable of knowing. The very idea of prime matter being capable of

<sup>4</sup> *I Contra Gentes* 47. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *I Contra Gentes* 44. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *In I Metaphysicorum* I. 6.

knowledge is so grotesque that St. Thomas does not seem to have taken the trouble to even mention it. But at the other extreme, Pure Act, God, not only is supremely knowable but also supremely knowing. So necessary is the connection between intelligence and actuality that St. Thomas, in the *Summa Theologica*, makes God's actuality the only proof of His intelligence:

Patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicujus rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva, et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis. . . . Unde cum Deus sit in summo immaterialitatis . . . sequitur quod ipse sit in summo cognitionis.<sup>7</sup>

And he will resume the same argument in his *Compendium Theologiae*:

Oportet igitur Deum esse omnino immunem a materia; immunitas autem a materia est causa intellectualitatis. . . . Est igitur Deus intelligens.

In the *Contra Gentiles* (1.44), it is fourth of the many arguments given:

Ex hoc aliqua res est intelligens quod est sine materia. . . . Ostensum est autem supra Deum esse omnino immaterialem. Est igitur intelligens.

Before going on to see why all this is so, there is another important remark to make concerning the doctrine. Materiality, we said, impedes both knowability and knowledge. Immateriality is the source of both, the capacity of being known, and the power to know. But the virtue of immateriality, or actuality, does not stop there. It does not account for a mere capacity, even active. Because sensitive powers have a beginning of immateriality, they are capable of sensitive knowledge. Because we have a spiritual soul, we are capable of intellectual knowledge. These are "powers" to know, but that is all we conclude. Actual knowledge does not follow from these inferior degrees of immateriality: they will begin as pure potencies in

<sup>7</sup> S. T. I. 14. 1.

the realm of knowledge, to be actuated more or less as time goes on, even, in the case of the senses, reverting to pure potentiality. But the higher we rise above material conditions, the more a necessary connection is established not only with the power of knowing, but also with *actual knowledge*. So much so, that at the peak of immateriality—God's Pure Actuality—not only is the power of knowing entailed, but also the actuality of knowledge. And that, not merely for extrinsic reasons. St. Thomas makes it follow directly from the purity of the immateriality or actuality.

Cum igitur Deus nihil potentialitatis habeat, sed sit actus purus, oportet quod in eo intellectus et intellectum sint idem omnibus modis.<sup>8</sup>

The reason is evident, and it follows from what has been said previously. When that grade of immateriality is reached in which we have perfect knowability and perfect power to know, as is the case in God and angels, there must by the very fact be actual knowledge, since the union required between knower and known can be no more intimate than that existing between a thing and itself.<sup>8b</sup>

Res materialis intelligibilis efficitur per hoc quod a materia et materialibus conditionibus separatur. Quod ergo est per sui naturam ab omni materia et materialibus conditionibus separatum, hoc est intelligibile secundum suam naturam. Sed omne intelligibile intelligitur secundum quod est unum actu cum intelligente. Ipse autem Deus intelligens est, ut probatum est. Igitur, cum sit immaterialis omnino, et sibi ipsi maxime sit unum, maxime seipsum intelligit.<sup>9</sup>

Item. Ex hoc aliquid actu intelligitur quod intellectus in actu et intellectum in actu unum sunt. Divinus autem intellectus est semper intel-

<sup>8</sup> *S. T. I.* 14.2.

<sup>8b</sup> As to angelic knowledge, we conclude of course only to the actual knowledge of its own essence and of whatever may be known through that essence. God will have proper and perfect knowledge of all things through the knowledge of His own essence. Not so for angels, who will need superadded species. Cf. *S. T. I.* 55.1 ad 3.

<sup>9</sup> *I Contra Gentes* 47.2.

lectus in actu: nihil enim est in potentia et imperfectum in Deo. Essentia autem Dei secundum seipsam perfecte intelligibilis est, ut ex dictis patet. Cum igitur intellectus divinus et essentia divina sint unum, ex dictis, manifestum est quod Deus perfecte seipsum intelligat: Deus enim est et suus intellectus et sua essentia.<sup>10</sup>

We gather then, that there is much in the doctrine of St. Thomas on the relations between materiality and knowledge that requires explanation. So far, the exposition has been very superficial, the intention being only to suggest various familiar doctrines that would seem to indicate the need of a more embracing explanation to account for *all* the relations between matter and knowledge.

The most fundamental principle would seem to be, "Unumquodcumque cognoscitur inquantum est immateriale." It is not so much a question of matter and form, as of materiality and immateriality.

## II. THE ENTITATIVE AND INTENTIONAL ORDERS.

Materiality, then, and knowledge are in fundamental and radical opposition. Why is that so? The reason is clearly given in St. Thomas, and is developed at length by John of St. Thomas.<sup>11</sup> It lies, as we must expect, in the very natures of matter and knowledge. Or if we wish, in the opposition between the two great orders of being: the entitative and the intentional. The principles of receptivity in those orders will be radically different. In the former, the entitative, the principle of receptivity will be that of imperfection, of potentiality. In the latter, the intentional, the principle of receptivity will be entitative perfection, actuality. The former is found in all

<sup>10</sup> *I Contra Gentes* 44. 3.

<sup>11</sup> The principal passages of St. Thomas for this second aspect of the opposition between matter and knowledge are I. 14. 1 and De Veritate II. 2. Cf. the celebrated commentary of John of St. Thomas on *S. T.* I. 14. 1: *Cursus Theologicus* Disp. XVI, a. 1.

its purity in prime matter, which is purely a principle of subjective receptivity, in no way whatsoever a principle of intentional receptivity. The latter is found in all its purity in God, in no way a principle of entitative receptivity, Pure Act, and consequently also, "sequitur quod ipse sit in summo cognitionis." (1.14.1) Which leads to the strange conclusion that the more perfect a being is (entitatively) the more it becomes thereby capable of perfection (intentionally). It reminds us of the "For to him who has shall be given."<sup>12</sup> <sup>12b</sup>

We must then, go to the most important of Dualisms in the universe, the Dualism of Orders: the Entitative Order, and the Intentional Order.

Sciendum igitur quod res aliqua invenitur perfecta dupliciter.<sup>13</sup>

Hujusmodi autem viventia inferiora, quorum actus est anima, de qua nunc agitur, habent duplex esse. Unum quidem materiale, in quo conveniunt cum aliis rebus materialibus. Aliud autem immateriale, in quo communicant cum substantiis superioribus aliquiditer.<sup>14</sup>

The first of the orders, the entitative or natural, is that in which things possess the perfection proper to their natures, but a perfection which is limited to themselves, and deprived of the manifold perfections of beings outside themselves:

Uno modo secundum perfectionem sui esse, quod ei competit secundum propriam speciem. Sed quia esse specificum unius rei est distinctum ab esse specifico alterius rei, ideo in qualibet re creata hujusmodi perfectioni habitae in unaquaque re, tantum deest de perfectione simpliciter, quantum perfectius in aliis speciebus invenitur; ut cujuslibet rei perfectio in se considerata sit imperfecta, veluti pars totius per-

<sup>12</sup> *Mark* 4. 25.

<sup>12b</sup> We must not, however, conclude that God thereby gains through knowledge what He lacks entitatively. Creatures, being finite entitatively, may be said to acquire intentionally what they lack entitatively. But God, entitatively infinite, has nothing to gain by intentional becoming.

<sup>13</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *In De Anima*. 282.

fectionis universi, quae consurgit ex singularum rerum perfectionibus, invicem congregatis.<sup>15</sup>

Est autem differentia inter utrumque esse: quia secundum esse materiale, quod est per materiam contractum, unaquaeque res est hoc solum quod est, sicut hic lapis, non est aliud quam hic lapis.<sup>16</sup>

These manifold perfections, each in their own way, mirror the Divine Goodness from which they flow and which it is their aim to mirror.

Totum universum cum singulis suis partibus ordinatur in Deum, sicut in finem; inquantum in eis per quamdam imitationem divina bonitas repraesentatur ad gloriam Dei.<sup>17</sup>

It is the Creator's aim precisely to communicate His infinite Goodness:

Primo agenti . . . non convenit agere propter acquisitionem alicuius finis, sed intendit solum communicare suam perfectionem quae est ejus bonitas. Et unaquaeque creatura intendit consequi suam perfectionem, quae est similitudo perfectionis et bonitatis divinae.<sup>18</sup>

Even prime matter, in its own way, reflects, though ever so weakly, the Goodness of the Creator:

Inter partes etiam huius substantiae ex materia et forma compositae, bonitatis ordo invenitur. . . . Forma quidem erit secundum se bona. . . . Materia vero secundum quod est in potentia ad formam. . . . Materia . . . potest autem ex hoc simpliciter dici bona, propter ordinem ipsum.<sup>19</sup>

As we rise in the scale of beings, more and greater perfections of God are mirrored. But non-living substances, and even plants, will lack the perfection of knowledge, which will begin with animals and men:

<sup>15</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *In II De Anima* V. 283.

<sup>17</sup> *S. T. I.* 65. 2.

<sup>18</sup> *S. T. I.* 44. 4.

<sup>19</sup> *III Contra Gentes* 20.



Quia non possunt pertingere ad perfectionem cognitionis et intellectus, quam consequuntur animalia et homines.<sup>20</sup>

The perfection of causality itself is communicated:

Intendunt igitur res divinam similitudinem in hoc quod sunt aliorum causae.<sup>21</sup>

Necessarily, there will be divine perfections which it will forever be impossible for creatures to mirror. A creature will never be its own existence; though we do find creatures approaching that perfection as closely as they dare: the angels, who, though having a received and distinct existence, nevertheless possess it with absolute necessity.

Sunt enim quaedam in rebus creatis quae simpliciter et absolute necesse est esse.<sup>22</sup>

The infinity of perfection is what lies perhaps most beyond the possibility of creatures. Though separated substances may be said to have a certain infinity, in so far as their nature is not received in a limiting and determining potency, yet it can only be the infinity of their own essence. The necessary finiteness of creatures can have no remedy in the entitative order.<sup>23</sup> The creature would have to become the Creator. But if creatures are forever doomed to be cut off from some perfection in the entitative order, this imperfection will be remedied in the only way possible: by the intentional order. By knowledge, the knower becomes, intentionally, if not entitatively, the known. It becomes possible for creatures thus to approach in a way, the infinity itself of God. For through knowledge, they

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* Note that in the given passage, only the *power to know* is considered, as an entitative perfection. The consideration of the intentional aspect will follow.

<sup>21</sup> *III Contra Gentes* 21.

<sup>22</sup> *II Contra Gentes* 30.

<sup>23</sup> "Dans l'être de la nature, la chose créée subit la loi de la potentialité: elle n'est que ce qu'elle peut être: par la connaissance elle devient, à la lettre, ce qu'elle ne peut pas être." Yves Simon. *Ontologie du Connaître*. p. 58.

can possess all perfections not proper to their own nature, so that it can truly be said even of the soul of man, "Anima quodammodo omnia."

Unde ut huic imperfectioni aliquod remedium esset, invenitur alius modus perfectionis in rebus creatis, secundum quod perfectio quae est propria unius rei, in altera re invenitur; et haec est perfectio cognoscentis in quantum est cognoscens, quia secundum hoc a cognoscente aliquid cognoscitur quod ipsum cognitum aliquo modo est apud cognoscentem; et ideo in II de Anima dicitur, animam esse quodammodo omnia, quia nata est omnia cognoscere. Et secundum hunc modum possibile est ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat.<sup>24</sup>

Secundum vero esse immateriale, quod est amplum et quodammodo infinitum, inquantum non est per materiam terminatum, res non solum est id quod est, sed etiam est quodammodo alia. Unde in substantiis superioribus immaterialibus sunt quodammodo omnia, sicut in universalibus causis.<sup>25, 26, 27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> De Veritate II. 2.

<sup>25</sup> In II De Anima V. 283.

<sup>26</sup> This aspect of the amplitude of knowledge as a remedy for the imperfections of creatures, stated so beautifully by St. Thomas, will be found treated by Yves Simon, "Ontologie du Connaitre," p. 34 ff. Also in "Le Cosmos," by Charles DeKoninck, p. 134 ff., "Le Cosmos comme Elan vers la Pensée."

<sup>27</sup> When St. Thomas points out the intentional order as a "remedy" for the imperfections of creatures ("unde ut huic imperfectioni aliquod remedium esset"), we must not misunderstand the nature of this statement. There is no intention of giving the essential and unique "raison-d'être" of knowledge: the conclusions that would follow would be very strange indeed. It would seem that we should conclude that God, infinite perfection and therefore having no need of such a remedy, does not know. Elementary bodies, being most imperfect, most in need of such a remedy, would consequently have most perfect knowledge. In other words, it would seem that the more perfect a being, the less perfectly it knows. And yet, it is exactly the opposite that is true. The meaning then, is not that the "need of a remedy" is the root of knowledge. This can only be the immateriality of the being. The statement of St. Thomas, then, is perhaps best interpreted as a kind of subordinate final cause in creation. Necessarily, from the very nature of knowledge, a more perfect creature is capable of more perfect knowledge. But all creation as a whole finds itself "remedied" by the possession of knowledge. This cannot have been overlooked by God and must therefore have been intended by Him as one means of better attaining the primary end of creation.

### III. DETERMINATION OF THE ENTITATIVE ORDER; AMPLITUDE OF THE INTENTIONAL ORDER.

Pursuing the analysis of *De Veritate* II. 2—so important in this question—we notice that St. Thomas immediately proceeds to indicate the fundamental opposition between materiality and knowledge. And this from both aspects. First of all, the materiality of a being will impede its being known, or possessed intentionally by another being. And the basic reason is given: *because matter determines a perfection*. The material, or potential, principle which receives a perfection entitatively, determines it to be the perfection of this particular being. But to be known, it cannot be determined: it has to be able to become the perfection of other beings also. It will then have to be separated from matter in order to be such.

Perfectio autem unius rei in altera esse non potest secundum determinatum esse quod habebat in re illa; et ideo ad hoc quod nata sit esse in re altera, oportet eam considerare absque his quae nata sunt eam determinare. Et quia formae et perfectiones rerum per materiam determinantur, inde est quod secundum hoc est aliqua res cognoscibilis secundum quod a materia separatur.<sup>28</sup>

If materiality opposes the being known of a perfection, it is also true on the other hand, to consider the other aspect, that it impedes the knower himself. To be able to receive intentionally, a being must be immaterial: for the more material it is, the more apt it will be to receive perfections not immaterially, but materially:

Unde oportet quod etiam id in quo suscipitur talis rei perfectio, sit immateriale; si enim esset materiale, perfectio recepta esset in eo secundum aliquod esse determinatum; et ita non esset in eo secundum quod est cognoscibilis; scilicet prout, existens perfectio unius, est nata esse in altero.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

The opposition between materiality and knowledge, therefore, will be found not only "ex parte objecti," but also "ex parte cognoscentis."

Et hujus ratio est, quia actus cognitionis se extendit ad ea quae sunt extra cognoscentem; cognoscimus enim ea quae extra nos sunt; per materiam autem determinatur forma rei ad aliquid unum. Unde manifestum est quod ratio cognitionis ex opposito se habet ad rationem materialitatis.<sup>30</sup>

From this, we see that the words "matter," "materiality" take on a new meaning. Their usual meaning concerns prime matter, a substantial potency. But it here takes on a wider scope, to designate any potentiality, any principle of receptivity in the entitative order. For that is what is precisely opposed to the principle of receptivity and communicability in the intentional order. If it is called matter, it is not surprising. For prime matter is that in which such a principle is found in all its purity. Prime matter, because a substantial potency, is nothing else but a principle of entitative receptivity. It can account only for entitative reception, and therefore for limitation, determination, and incommunicability of perfection. But matter as taken here becomes synonymous with potentiality, material cause; the word "materiality," with that condition of a being by which it is able to receive perfection in the same way as matter does, viz. entitatively.

Et hoc ideo quia materia, sumendo materiam non prout restringitur tantum ad materiam corpoream, sed prout dicit modum causae materialis receptivae rei et formae entitative, sive in rebus corporeis sive in spiritualibus, est principium restringendi et coaretandi formam.<sup>31</sup>

Likewise, the term "immateriality," though it might seem at first sight to be a mere negation of materiality (even in the wider sense given), is much more. It implies both: negation

<sup>30</sup> S. T. I. 84. 2.

<sup>31</sup> John of St. Thomas. *Cursus Theologicus*. Disp. XVI. 1. 12. 331b30.

and affirmation. A negation, of the said materiality. An affirmation, of the positive perfection of a being which places it above the mode of being of matter, and which enables it to become other beings intentionally. The importance of this positive aspect if immateriality is stressed by John of St. Thomas in his commentary on S. T. I. 14. 1:

Igitur nomine immaterialitatis in hac ratione D. Thomae intelligitur non solum purificatio a materia prout praecise dicit negationem seu carentiam illius, sed prout dicit elevationem supra modum materiae, quantum ad hoc quod est recipere alia a se. . . . Ultra istum modum recipiendi debet elevari res cognoscens, . . . et induere alium modum recipiendi quo possit sibi unire et conjungere etiam res alias quae sunt extra se, manentibus illis extra se entitative; quod utique non potest fieri in ipso esse entitative et materiali quo res sunt in seipsis, sed in quodam esse formali, id est, intentionali seu repraesentativo, quod vocatur esse immateriale ad distinctionem ipsius esse quo res existit in se entitative.<sup>32</sup>

And more precisely, further on:

Et ad id quod dicitur, an immaterialitas in praesenti sumatur pro sola negatione materiae vel pro aliquo positivo; respondetur quod sumitur pro aliquo positivo fundante negationem materiae et materialium condicionum, scilicet pro eo quod potest recipere aliud, non solum ut propriam formam, sed secundum quod est forma alterius.<sup>33</sup>

#### IV. APPLICATIONS.

These previous explanations, given in a general way as regards all beings, will become clearer when applied to specific groups. To avoid confusion, we will treat separately the two aspects: the passive, or capacity to be known; and the active, or power to know.

With regard to the first, or passive aspect, we have said that the more a being is material (potential, capable of entitative perfection), the less it is knowable. It is not surprising then that prime matter is unknowable. Its "pure potentiality,"

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* #10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

spoken of in connection with its unknowability. takes on deeper significance. Being pure potentiality, matter is purely a principle of subjective perfection: something may be communicated to it, but matter is utterly incapable of itself being communicated. And communicability is essential to knowability. Since form is the principle of communicability, as we have seen, it will be only by order to form therefore that matter will be knowable.

Cum enim unaquaeque res sit intelligibilis secundum quod est actu, ut dicitur X Metaph., oportet quod ipsa natura, sive quidditas rei intelligatur vel . . . vel . . . vel secundum id quod est ei loco actus, sicut in materia prima per habitudinem ad formam.<sup>34</sup>

If we consider now natures received in matter—and among such we must class even the soul of man in the state of union—we see that such natures, though acts and of themselves knowable, are nevertheless impeded from being known by their union with matter. The matter which receives them, receives them entitatively and therefore limits and determines them. Before being known, they must be separated from matter, made immaterial.

Similiter est etiam in cognoscibilibus: res enim materiales, ut Commentator dicit, non sunt intelligibiles, nisi quia nos facimus eas intelligibiles, sunt enim intelligibiles in potentia tantum; sed actu intelligibiles efficiuntur per lumen intellectus agentis, sicut et colores actu visibiles per lumen solis.<sup>35</sup>

Formae enim quae sunt in rebus materialibus aut in sensibus vel in phantasmate, cum non sint omnino a materia depuratae, non sunt intelligibiles actu, sed in potentia tantum; et ideo requiritur quod per actionem intellectus efficiantur actu intelligibiles.<sup>36</sup>

When we enter into the angelic world, we encounter "immaterial" forms, forms which are not received in a limiting and determining potency. By the very fact, they will be by their

<sup>34</sup> *De Trinitate* V. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *De Veritate* VIII. 9.

very nature knowable, even though inaccessible to our sense-locked intellect.

Angelus autem cum sit immaterialis, est quaedam forma subsistens et per hoc intelligibilis in actu.<sup>37</sup>

Similiter est etiam ordo in cognoscibilibus . . . ; sed res immateriales sunt intelligibiles per seipsas; unde sunt magis notae secundum naturam, quamvis minus notae nobis.<sup>38</sup>

But angels still have potentiality, and therefore cannot be classed in the same degree of "immateriality" as God. If "immateriality" meant a mere negation of corporeal matter, all angels and even God would be equal in that respect. The negation of corporeal matter is perfect in all spiritual beings.

Sed haec immaterialitas in spirituali natura generice sumpta est completa et perfecta, quia omni corporeitate caret.<sup>39</sup>

But since, as we have shown, "immateriality" means a negation not only of corporeal matter, but also of potentiality, God's knowability will be infinitely superior to that even of angels, since in God there is no potentiality whatsoever.

Quia igitur Deus est in fine separationis a materia cum ab omni potentialitate sit penitus immunis; relinquitur quod ipse est maxime cognoscitivus et maxime cognoscibilis.<sup>40</sup>

Let us now examine the second aspect of knowledge, the active, or the power to know. That, too, we explained, is based on immateriality in the sense that the power to receive entitatively, as St. Thomas says, would limit the power to receive intentionally, i. e. to receive a perfection which will remain the perfection of another being. We must begin then by removing such a power from prime matter. As we mentioned

<sup>37</sup> S. T. I. 56. 1.

<sup>38</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

<sup>39</sup> John of St. Thomas. *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus. Naturalis Philosophiae*. IV. 10. 3, 317a15.

<sup>40</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

before, it is absolutely inconceivable that prime matter have, in any way whatsoever, the power to know. The knowability of prime matter can be conceded in certain respects: analogically for us, and in other ways for God and angels. But in no way whatsoever can we concede the power to know to prime matter. That power must even be refused to many complete substances, even living.

In considering the various degrees of knowability, all material forms were classed in one order. Not so for the power to know. Non-living beings, and even plants, are so material that they can only receive materially, entitatively. We must rise above plants, to animals, to find the first and still imperfect power to receive intentionally. Below animals, beings are too material, too determined and limited, to have the sufficient amplitude required for knowledge.

Unde, manifestum est quod natura rei non cognoscentis est magis coarctata et limitata, natura autem rerum cognoscentium habet maiorem amplitudinem et extensionem.<sup>41</sup>

Et ideo, videmus, quod secundum ordinem immaterialitatis in rebus, secundum hoc in eis natura cognitionis invenitur: plantae enim, et alia quae infra plantas sunt, nihil immaterialiter possunt recipere; et ideo omni cognitione privantur.<sup>42</sup>

Plantae non sentiunt, cum tamen habeant quamdam partem animae . . . Causa igitur, quare non sentiunt . . . : et ideo non habent in se huiusmodi principium, quod potest recipere species "sine materia," scilicet sensum.<sup>43</sup>

Ratio est, quia omnis capacitas cognoscendi provenit ex una radice, nempe ex immaterialitate; quanto enim aliquid magis segregatum est a materia, magis aptum est fieri alia a se, non in ratione ipsa materiali et entitative, sed in formali repraesentativa.<sup>44</sup>

Passing on to the domain of spiritual natures, we find that not only are they, by their very nature, knowable, but also

<sup>41</sup> *S. T. I.* 14. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *De Veritate* II. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *In II De Anima* 24. 557.

<sup>44</sup> John of St. Thomas. *l. c.* 317a15.



necessarily knowing. And that always because of their immateriality. As we already seen, all angels are necessarily equal in their not having corporeal matter. But "immateriality" is not merely negative. It is also indicative of the positive perfection by which they are able to become other beings intentionally. The more they possess that perfection, the further they can be said to be from matter and entitative reception.

Sed virtus operativa, lumen, quo fertur in objecta, non potest eiusdem rationis esse in omnibus, quia hoc non fundatur in sola immaterialitate seu praecisa carentia materiae, sed in actualitate maiori vel minori ipsius naturae spiritualis, quae tanto maior vel minor est, quanto magis vel minus accedit et assimilatur ipsi actui puro, qui est summa spiritualitas.<sup>45</sup>

The summit of perfection in knowledge is reached in God and that precisely because He is at the peak of immateriality. As John of St. Thomas notes, of all the arguments given to prove that God is intelligent, in *I Contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas chooses only the one from immateriality for the *Summa Theologica*. (1. 14. 1) The argument is succinctly put, in syllogistic form:

*Major*: Natures that do not know have restriction and limitation; natures that know, amplitude. ("Unde manifestum est quod natura rei non cognoscentis est magis coarctata et limitata. Natura autem rerum cognoscentium habet maiorem amplitudinem et extensionem.") The *reason* which led him to establish this major is taken from the very nature of knowledge: Beings which do not know have only their own form; beings which know, also the forms of other beings. ("Cognoscentia a non cognoscentibus in hoc distinguuntur, quia non cognoscentia nihil habent nisi formam suam tantum; sed cognoscentis natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius, nam species cogniti est in cognoscente.")

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 3, 317a32.

*Minor:* But restriction is from materiality; amplitude from immateriality. ("Coarctatio autem formae est per materiam: unde et supra diximus, quod formae secundum quod sunt magis immateriales, secundum hoc magis accedunt ad quamdam infinitatem.")

*Conclusion:* Therefore, beings will have the power to know according as they are immaterial. God, supremely immaterial, will be also supremely knowing. ("Patet igitur quod immaterialitas rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva, et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis . . . plantae . . . sensus . . . intellectus . . . Unde cum Deus sit in summo immaterialitatis (ut ex superioribus patet), sequitur quod ipse sit in summo cognitionis.")

There would seem to be a grave objection to this argument: there is a manifest vicious circle. In the words of John of St. Thomas:

In secundo modo petitur manifeste principium: quia est idem ac dicere, quod cognoscentia eleventur supra non-cognoscentia in hoc quod recipiunt formam rei alterius, non solum entitative et in esse rei, sed modo intentionali et cognoscibili: hoc autem est quod inquiritur, scilicet quid sit recipere formam modo cognoscibili; et solum ponitur differentia a non-cognoscentibus in hoc quod recipiant formas modo cognoscitivo, quod est supponere quod sunt cognoscentia, et quod differunt a non-cognoscentibus, per hoc quod cognoscentia sint cognoscentia.<sup>46</sup>

But the answer is best given by John of St. Thomas himself:

Ad primam difficultatem respondetur, quod D. Thomas in illa prima propositione, in quae ponit differentiam inter cognoscentia et non-cognoscentia, nec petit principium, nec assumit aliquid falsum; sed solum docet cognoscentia debere habere formam alterius, hoc est formam repraesentantem et trahentem ad se intentionaliter id quod est in altero entitative: nulli enim naturae nisi cognoscenti fieri potest representatio;

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<sup>46</sup> John of St. Thomas. *Cursus Theologicus*. Disp. XVI. 1. 4.

licet enim in tabula ponatur imago, vel in aere species, non ei repraesentat, licet illud subiectum informet. Et hoc non supponit D. Thomas, sed probat ex eo quod species cogniti est in cognoscente. Supponit autem D. Thomas tamquam per se notum ex ipse natura speciei intentionalis (sicut explicavimus supra) quod species, secundum id quod formale et essenziale est in ipsa, non solum debet informare ratione sui inhaerendo, sed vice objecti repraesentando et consequenter peculiari modo informari debent cognoscentia ab objectis, quam res non-cognoscentes a suis formis: quia cognoscentia debent habere formam rei alterius, id est, formam quae trahat ad se representative, id quod entitative est in altero, cum tamen res non-cognoscentes non informantur ab eo quod est in altero objective, sed solum ab eo quod est in se inhaesive. In hoc ergo non committit D. Thomas petitionem principii; neque istum peculiarem modum informationis supponit, sed probat ex ipsa natura et intima essentia rei cognoscentis.<sup>47</sup>

From the solution of the preceding difficulty, we are also enlightened on the meaning of "immateriality is the root of knowledge." If immateriality is called the "root" of knowledge, that cannot be in the strict sense in which, e. g. the nature of man can be said to be the root of his sensitive faculties. It is rather in the broad sense of a necessary condition without which there could be no knowledge, but a condition also which will infallibly be accompanied by the power to know and which may consequently serve as a sign, as a conclusive argument, of the existence of the power to know.

Et ita purificatio ab isto modo materialitatis, et elevatio super illum, dicitur modus immaterialitatis: qui conduit ad hoc ut forma existendo in altero entitative, possit esse sua repraesentative; et hoc est proprium cognoscentium. Unde, ex tali modo immaterialitatis optime probatur cognoscibilitas, *tamquam ex ratione quadam et condicione necessario requisita ad cognoscendum*, et distinguente cognoscentia a non-cognoscentibus.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* #14.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* #12.

## V. THE HIERARCHY OF BEING IN THE UNIVERSE.

To what has been said so far, we may add a note on the hierarchy of beings in the universe. It is well known that St. Thomas speaks of such a hierarchy in innumerable texts. The universe is pictured as an ascending scale of beings, from prime matter to God. Such a hierarchy will be pictured from several points of view. From pure potentiality to supreme actuality; materiality, to immateriality or spirituality; weakest form of goodness, to infinite goodness; imperfection, to perfection; infinite in potency, to infinite in act; etc. The apparent continuity or movement in such hierarchies of course, must be understood only as dialectical. There is an infinite difference between the hierarchies of St. Thomas and Hegelian Becoming, or the mad Marxian materialistic evolution. For all beings are necessarily specifically distinct and any passage from one to another will remain dialectical if we are to preserve the principle of contradiction.

But from what has been said, we may perceive the close connection of the various points of view. Since knowledge is based on immateriality, the hierarchy of beings may justly be considered as well from the point of view of knowledge as of materiality. We have noted that immateriality must be taken both negatively and positively. This is well brought out by St. Thomas in one of his most celebrated descriptions of the hierarchy of beings, that in *Quaestio Disputata De Anima VII*. Grades must be considered from the point of view of a principle.

Ubiqumque enim est diversitas graduum, oportet quod gradus considerentur per ordinem ad aliquod unum principium.

But we have two principles. First, the negative, or imperfection of matter, from which beings recede in a growing scale of perfection.

In substantiis igitur materialibus attenduntur diversi gradus speciem diversificantes in ordine ad primum principium, quod est materia; et inde est quod primae species sunt imperfectiores; posteriores vero perfectiores . . .

But from the point of view of the second, or positive, principle, Supreme Perfection, beings will gradually fall away in a descending scale becoming more and more imperfect.

In substantiis vero immaterialibus ordo graduum diversarum specierum attenditur, non quidem secundum comparisonem ad materiam, quam non habent, sed secundum comparisonem ad primum agens, quod oportet esse perfectissimum; et ideo prima species in eis est perfectior secunda, utpote similior primo agenti; et secunda diminuitur a perfectione primae et sic deinceps usque ad ultimam earum.

We may note in passing that the "degradation" spoken of by St. Thomas ("et secunda diminuitur a perfectione primae") if taken as implying movement, must imply only a dialectical movement, and not a movement "in rerum natura," as noted above.

That brief description of the hierarchy of beings in the universe makes a fitting summary of what we have said regarding the principle "*Cognitio sequitur immaterialitatem.*" Prime matter, at the foot of the hierarchy, unknowable because purely a principle of entitative reception. The merely potential knowability of material forms, due to their union with that same prime matter. The knowability of separated forms due to their complete separation from prime matter, yet suffering some imperfection due to a condition truly called "material" even though it is not that of prime matter: viz., the capacity to receive entitatively. At the summit, God, completely pure not only of prime matter, but even of all materiality: in God, no capacity for entitative reception but on the contrary infinite Perfection, Pure Act, and therefore supreme knowability.

And the capacity to know, likewise, grows proportionately.

For the capacity to receive intentionally, or immaterially, is the opposite of the capacity to receive entitatively. In the senses, dim beginnings of immateriality in so far as forms are received without matter, though still in material organs. In the intellect of man, reception of forms not only abstracted from matter, but also received in an immaterial faculty. In separated substances, an ever increasing recession from materiality by an ever increasing power to receive intentionally. And finally, in God, the summit of all knowledge: "in summo cognitionis" . . . "cum sit in summo immaterialitatis."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> S. T. I. 14. 1.