

Dear Father Ashley,

I know we disagree but cannot identify the precise *reason* why, the *source* of the disagreement. The following is written in the hope that your reply, if you care to make one, might clarify that.

The issues here are not matters of anyone's personal psychology; so it doesn't matter what a person knows or believes about whether there are immaterial beings: statement (1) in my article. So let us talk about person D, who thinks immaterial existence would be contradictory.

Assume that D grasps the demonstration that "Whatever is human is risible." If so, he can reason "Whatever is human is risible. Al is human. Al is risible." That reasoning tells D something true about Al as a man, not as an animal or as living or as Greek or as a Democrat, etc. The last sentence holds whether or not D adverts to the fact that this reasoning tells him something about Al as a man, not as anything else; or even if he mistakenly thought that it did not tell him something true about Al as a man. For the proof that "Whatever is human is risible" shows that risibility is a proper predicate of human beings and human beings are the proper subject of risibility: Risibility is true of human beings and only human beings. So if D can grasp that demonstration, he is at least capable of grasping that the reasoning about Al informs him about Al as a man, even if D does not advert to that or even if he is mistaken about it when he grasps the reasoning about Al.

Now assume D can grasp Aquinas's argument that whatever exists has unity: statement (2) in my article; so he knows that whatever exists has unity. He then can reason, "Whatever exists has unity. Al exists. Al has unity." That reasoning tells him something true of Al, not as a man or an animal or a living thing but as a being. The preceding sentence would hold even if D did not advert to the fact that the reasoning tells him about Al as a being; or even if he mistakenly thought it did not. But in fact, if he understands the argument that every being has unity, he is at least capable of adverting to that fact. For the argument establishes that unity is a property of anything satisfying the description "something existing," rather than any other description that may also be true of anything satisfying this description.

So D is capable of knowing that unity is a property of whatever exists. Now since goodness, beauty and truth are co-extensive with being, whatever is good, beautiful or true also has unity, and whatever has unity also has goodness, etc.. But Aquinas's argument does not show that unity pertains to things as good, beautiful and true; it shows that it pertains to things as existents. For D might not know that goodness, etc. are co-extensive with being. Because of the problem of evil, D might even think it contradictory that whatever has unity has goodness. His mistake about the connection between unity and goodness would not mean that he does not grasp Aquinas's argument about unity; for that argument establishes the connection of existence and unity, not unity and goodness. It shows that unity belongs to things qua existing; it says nothing about the connection of existence and goodness or of goodness and existence, etc.

Likewise, even if it were true that whatever exists is material, Aquinas's argument about unity does not inform D of the connection of unity with materiality but unity with existence. It does not make him aware that unity pertains to things qua material but qua being, just as it does not make him aware that whatever has unity has goodness, even though the necessary connection between unity and goodness is true, while the belief that whatever has unity is material is not.

Since the argument does not inform him of the necessary connection between unity and goodness, if grasping that argument leaves him capable of denying that connection, a fortiori the argument certainly does not inform him of the false necessary connection between unity and materiality, no matter what his OTHER beliefs tell him about that false connection. D might mistakenly believe in that connection, but he need not advert to his mistaken belief, which he might have formed years ago and not considered since, when he grasps Aquinas's argument.

So D's personal psychology, his beliefs about the connection between existence and goodness, on one hand, and materiality, on the other, have nothing to do with whether the argument connecting existence and unity is an argument about being as material, as opposed to being as being.

It is possible, then, for D to recognize a distinction between arguments that inform us about *Al qua* being rather than *qua material* (or living, or animal, etc.), even if D thinks that all beings are material. The distinction would be defined by what terms are used in the syllogisms or, more precisely, on the INTENSIONS (the meanings, the objective concepts, the *rationes*) those terms are associated with in the arguments, rather than on their EXTENSIONS. We don't have to know whether terms referring to being as being have an extension beyond the material to know that their intension is not "extending beyond the material."

Now at this point, can we agree that in knowing (2) D knows a truth about being as being (as the last paragraph defines the phrase; or are we just arguing about definitions?) without knowing (1)? Assuming that we agree on that, we can also agree on this: Since D does not know (1), he does not know whether (2) belongs to a science distinct from the science that knows truths about being as material. D does not even know that such a science exists or can exist. But though D doesn't know (1) and so cannot know whether (2) belongs to a science that knows truths about being as material, he still knows a truth, (2) about "being as being," as I am using that phrase.

What is it, then, that we disagree about? To the extent that I understand you, I see different aspects in your position, and I am not sure which, if any, is more basic. One aspect concerns the fact that the existence of the immaterial is at most only a hypothetical possibility for D, and one that he cannot know not to contain a contradiction until he proves the existence of the immaterial. Another aspect is the view that before knowing (1), D can only use the concept of being as it is found in the analogates that are primary in his understanding (material substances and, secondarily, their accidents). To grasp (1), or in grasping (1), he must use analogy in a way that he not only has not but cannot use before knowing (1), a way required for knowing truths about being as being (where that phrase is perhaps defined otherwise than I have defined it).

Concerning the first aspect, we have already stipulated that D believes the existence of the immaterial would be contradictory. That would not prevent someone from asking D to hypothesize such existence, for the sake of argument, in order to see what would logically follow from it. For though D believes the hypothesis impossible, that would not prevent him from drawing conclusions from it as all of us do when we discuss propositions that we believe contradictory, for example, when we draw conclusions from it to show that they produce contradictions.

To show that a contradiction follows necessarily, D would have to use premises about being qua being (in my sense) that he already knows to be necessarily true. Someone might ask D whether, if there were an immaterial being, that being would have unity. Understanding Aquinas's demonstration of (2), D would say yes. D might go on to draw another implication showing that attributing unity to the immaterial would result in a contradiction and so showing that the existence of the immaterial implies a contradiction. But that reasoning would have to use the already known necessary connection between being and unity, or some other statement that we already know would have to be true of whatever we hypothesize to exist, as its premise.

(I happen to believe that Cantor fulfilled Aquinas's challenge of showing that an actually infinite multitude was impossible. He showed that contradictory consequences — e.g., that a whole would not be greater than its parts and that some infinities are greater than others --- follow from assuming an actually infinite multitude. But such contradictory conclusions only follow if known necessary truths about numeric quantity are used as premises.)

Now let's ask D to assume that an unmoved mover exists. He believes the hypothesis impossible, but that would not prevent him from drawing conclusions from it show to show that it is contradictory. Already knowing truths, like (2), about being qua being and also certain truths about being as material, D would be able to see that many — actually all, but let's only consider the weaker claim — of the conclusions shown about God in Questions 3 to 26 of the Prima Pars would be true if per impossible there were an unmoved mover. (E.g., if there were an unmoved mover its existence would have to be identical with its acts of knowing and loving, etc.)

There is nothing arcane about the preceding claim; it is even a matter of empirical fact. Atheists and agnostics have been reading the Prima Pars for centuries and have been able to demonstrate that they understand its claims by their discussions of them. That “knowledge” is only hypothetical. So, among other things, it does not inform them that there exists a science distinct from the science that talks about being as material. But the conclusion that they would have to draw is that the science that talks about being as material also knows truths about being qua being.

For they could understand that the conclusions of the Prima Pars follow necessarily from the assumption of an unmoved mover only by knowing that truths about being as being — for example (2) — used as premises to draw the conclusions in the Prima Pars are necessarily true. So they would know that those premises would have to be true of immaterial beings, if there were such, because those premises would have to be true of anything that was assumed to exist. And by grasping Aquinas's argument for (2), they would have SCIENTIFIC knowledge of the necessary connection between being and unity, even if they did not know that the knowledge belonged to a science distinct from the science that also knows truths about beings as material.

So the first aspect of your view, the fact that D does not yet know that the existence of the immaterial is not contradictory, is irrelevant to his ability to have scientific knowledge of truths about being as being. (I could, but need not, add that all necessary universal truths are “hypothetical” in the sense that essential connections do not require the actual existence of the subject to be true. They are true not because their subjects exist but because their opposites are

im-possible, i.e., their opposites could not be true of anything that exists. Cf. Maritain, Formal Logic, 227 ff.)

The second aspect of your position is the view that to know (1), or in the act of knowing (1) the meanings of some of the terms we have up until now used in grasping truths must be modified according to a doctrine of analogy. But we have seen that D must ALREADY have a sufficient understanding of the meanings of the terms used in the Prima Pars to grasp that statements using those terms must be true of an unmoved mover, if there is an unmoved mover. So why would anything have to change with reference to D's understanding of those meanings when he additionally learns of the actual existence of the unmoved mover?

If analogy is involved in understanding those meanings as said of an unmoved mover, analogy must already be sufficiently involved to allow us to know what those terms would mean IF there were an unmoved mover, and so know what they would mean IF there is immaterial existence. Whatever modifications to the original meanings of those terms as used for material beings are necessary for understanding them as used of an immaterial being must be able to be made before we know the actual existence of an immaterial being. So what further modification, analogical or otherwise, need take place when we later learn the existence of an immaterial being?

Again, this is not an arcane point. Examples abound, and we should all hope they abound. The most common reason offered for atheism is that atheists KNOW that if there is an uncaused cause, he would have to be both all good and all knowing. They incorrectly also think that the conjunction in God of being all good and all knowing is contradicted by the existence of evil. But they are perfectly correct about the conjunction. So we should all hope that the later conversion of many who had been atheists because of evil did not alter their understanding of the terms that already allowed them to see that if there were a God, he must be all good and all knowing.

Since any modifications in meaning required to know the necessary truths justifying inferences like "If there is an uncaused cause, he has unity" or "If there is an uncaused cause, he is all good" must be able to take place before we know the existence of the immaterial, your point about alleged ambiguity is not relevant. But that is not the only reason it is not relevant.

For ambiguity to invalidate a syllogism, the ambiguity must take place within the syllogism itself. The fact that the use of a term in a syllogism may be ambiguous relative to some other use of the term outside of a syllogism cannot invalidate the syllogism. (It might cause someone to be subjectively confused about what he thinks the syllogism shows, but again, our debate is not about anyone's personal psychological history; it is about objective conditions for knowing.) So a claim of ambiguity on the basis of some theory, whether a theory of analogy or of anything else, is not sufficient. The presence of the ambiguity must be shown in the actual case.

There is no such ambiguity in Aquinas's argument for (2), nor in "Whatever exists has unity. X exists. X has unity." What we put for "X" doesn't matter. If we put God, X is something whose existence and unity are infinitely beyond that of anything else, actual or possible. But the minor premise and conclusion do not say anything proper to X's existence or unity. And when we prove that an uncaused cause exists, we do not yet know anything proper to it's existence or unity.

AFTER we have proven God's existence, the results of further syllogisms, the *via negativa* especially, will require us to modify our use of "exists" and "unity" even more than we may have been required to before we proved the existence of God. But my arguments above show that before we know that God exists, we would be capable of knowing that the conclusions of those further syllogisms would be true on the hypothesis God exists. And those arguments show that we could know that only by knowing necessary truths whose terms we knew or were capable of knowing before we know that God exists.

All of the above is implicit in my article, where I tried to be as succinct as I am verbose here. The first paragraph on p. 532 shows that before we prove the immaterial, we must have (i.e., understand) words whose understood meanings in fact include the immaterial in their extension; whether or not we know that their extensions include the immaterial. If having such words requires analogy already, so be it. After we learn of the actual existence of the immaterial, analogy might have to come into play further, but that would be a different question.

That paragraph argues that, if we didn't have such words, whether or not we know they extend to the immaterial, we couldn't ask the question whether there are immaterial beings or understand the question when posed. And if all the words we used to ask whether there is an immaterial such-and-such only include material things in their extension, all those question would have to be answered in the negative. (It would indeed be contradictory for the immaterial to exist!)

And if, per impossibile, the human acquisition of meanings with immaterial extension required that someone first assent to the existence of the immaterial, still, that would not require him to prove that existence. Also, as soon as someone else merely believed in it, whether based on genuine revelation or not, they could explain the meanings to the rest of us without convincing us that they have any application, or even if we think it contradictory that they have an application. In fact, we couldn't think that contradictory unless we understood the meanings.

So the meanings of some of our words must already include the immaterial in their extension, whether we know it or not; and so we are capable of grasping any self-evidently necessary truths, if there be such, using those meanings before we know actual immaterial existence. And if there are no such truths, how will we ever prove the existence or anything else of the immaterial?

For example, to use analogy of attribution for God, we must already know necessary truths that use a meaning for "cause" that can non-contradictorily, whether we know it yet or not, be combined with that of "uncaused." AFTER we know that their meanings MUST be asserted of the same existent, we will have to greatly refine our concept of cause, starting from our original meaning, and analogy will no doubt be involved. But if meanings, like that of "cause," require analogy to be eligible for use in proving the existence of the immaterial, analogy had to be sufficiently in operation to permit proving that existence BEFORE we proved it.

The second paragraph on p. 532 notes that the only way to increase the extension is to decrease intension, to remove it, not to add it. What you are left with after you remove intension must be something that was there all along together with whatever intension has now been removed; otherwise, you'd be left with nothing. So to arrive at meanings that in fact extend beyond the

material --- whether we know that or not --- they must be included as part of our less universal concepts all along as, in the case of univocals, a genus is included in a species and is only logically distinct from the species. The logical superior must be included as part of what we know when we know the inferior, as we know what color is when we know what red is.

Analogy of attribution does increase extension differently. But whatever our FIRST logical superior(s) is, whatever must be included in what we know when we know anything else, it has to be left when we remove all other intension. Is being in a sense that includes immaterial being, whether we know it or not or whether we think it contradictory or not, that logical superior?

So far I have not done Aquinas the disservice of citing him as an authority, only as an example. But to bring this over-long discussion to an end let me cite his repeated statements (e.g., In Meta IV, L. 6; XI, L.4, etc.) that the being that is the subject “genus” for metaphysics is the being that is first known by the human intellect, is known to all, and is known when anything else is known. There is no way to interpret 605, for example, other than as saying that the principle of non-contradiction, which metaphysics studies, is known when any truth is known since knowing the PNC depends on the understanding of that which is first conceived by our intellect, being. There is no way to interpret 2210 other than as saying that the terms of the common principles are known to all men and are the reason the study of the common principles belong to first philosophy. (On “commonness” see the last paragraph of my article.)

So our first known logical superior, known when anything else is known, is the being metaphysics later studies qua being. And since we can arrive at the more universal by removing the less universal, we can form a concept of being adequate for metaphysics by removing such intensions as rational, animal, living, and material. And once we have that concept, we can grasp self-evident truths employing it and from them scientifically demonstrate other statements about being, like (2), that are true of immaterial being without any ambiguity (ambiguity relevant to our discussion, that is) even if we think such being contradictory.

Concerning *separatio*, Aquinas mentioned it only once, and then while discussing a Pythagorean-Platonic theory of mathematics; he NEVER mentioned it when discussing metaphysics. And the way he brings metaphysics into that discussion of mathematics need not be interpreted as saying more than “Judgments of separation from matter do sometimes occur, and when they do, contrary to Plato, they occur in metaphysics not mathematics.” Is it possible that he meant to say more than that? Perhaps. But that place gives no EVIDENCE that he meant more.

Likewise, when distinguishing metaphysics from the philosophy of nature, he gives no evidence that he meant more than that we need to know (1) to know whether statements about being as being belong to a distinct science from the philosophy of nature, not to know, in the case of every statement about being as being, whether it is true.

The burden of proof is on anyone who thinks Aquinas meant more than these two weaker claims about judgements of separation from matter. That burden is not and cannot be met by the fact that we may not yet know that immaterial existence is not contradictory or by a theory about ambiguities that do not appear in any of the pertinent syllogisms.

