

Title: "A negative judgment on separation" or "A negative judgment on the negative judgment of separation"

It is a well-kept secret that Aquinas never refers to *separatio* in his discussions of metaphysical knowledge, only in one discussion of mathematical knowledge. He never refers to metaphysical separation when the question under discussion is metaphysical knowledge, only when discussing one question about mathematical knowledge (in q. 5, a.3 of his commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate). And that is the clue to understanding what he says there about separation and metaphysics.

The Platonists and Pythagoreans whom he is specifically addressing, as he explicitly states at the end of the body of the article, thought they could perform a *separatio* on the basis of mathematical knowledge alone. Aquinas replies that you need metaphysics to do the separation, to perform a *separatio*. This does not say that metaphysics is metaphysics because it uses *separatio*, but *separatio* is *separatio* because, when it occurs, it occurs in -- is one of the things that occurs in -- metaphysics. But since mathematics uses *abstractio* only, you can't get a *separatio* on the basis of mathematical knowledge. Rather, when you do get a *separatio*, you are doing metaphysics.

But to say that is not to define metaphysics by *separatio*. The most you can get out of this text by itself is that metaphysics, unlike the philosophy of nature and mathematics, sometimes performs *separatio*. In other words, metaphysics sometimes uses the *via negativa*, because that's the kind of "separatio" his opponents, the Platonists and Pythagoreans, were attempting. The *via negativa* sometimes occurs in metaphysics. This does not say that metaphysics is always using the *via negativa* or only uses the *via negativa*.

Perhaps Aquinas dearly believed that the whole of metaphysics was based on the "negative judgment of separation." Perhaps he considered that the most important idea he ever had.

But he does not say so in this text. To read beyond the *via negativa* in this text you must have a reason that comes from outside of this text. And of course, there is no other such text in Aquinas.

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The passage says one and only one thing: when judgments of separation from matter occur, it is metaphysics that makes them. They sometimes occur, and when they do, it belongs to metaphysics to make them.