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### The Knowability of Matter « Secundum Se »

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# The Knowability of Matter

## «Secundum Se»

### 1.—MATTER: VARIOUS ASPECTS AND VARIOUS PROBLEMS.

Matter is generally spoken of as an impediment to knowledge, since by nature it is pure potentiality. And rightly so. However, this aspect of matter's relationship to knowledge must not make us neglect the other fundamental aspect: matter is also an essential condition of man's knowledge. For the present, we will consider the first aspect, leaving the consideration of the second aspect for later.

In considering matter as an obstacle to knowledge, we must clearly distinguish two other aspects of matter. Matter may be considered first of all as one of two distinct principles intrinsically constitutive of mobile being. But if such a being is to be essentially one, it is necessary that matter should be pure potentiality. However, «*nihil cognoscitur in quantum est in potentia, sed solum in quantum est actu*». We immediately see then how the pure potentiality of matter raises the problem of the nature of its knowability, and of the various modes according to which it may be known by the various kinds of intellects that know it. We will begin with the consideration of these problems raised by the first aspect of matter. Later, we will deal with the second aspect of matter as regards knowledge. The object of knowledge considered will no longer be the distinct principle, Prime Matter, but beings constituted of matter. This matter will be considered not so much from the point of view of its pure potentiality, but rather as a principle of subjectivity existing in beings. This will raise the question regarding the consequences of matter, as a subjective principle, on the knowability and knowledge of beings so constituted. In that case, the principle considered will be the other well known adage: «*Unumquodque cognoscitur (et cognoscit) in quantum est immateriale*».

We take up now the consideration of the first aspect of matter: the knowability of Prime Matter as a distinct—and purely potential—principle of corporeal beings. Three questions may be raised in this consideration, and first of all, as regards the fact of our knowing prime matter so considered. But the answer is so obvious, it is so evident that we, and, a fortiori, God, do know Prime Matter, at least in some way, as a distinct constitutive principle of mobile beings, that we need not consider it any further. The problem does not concern the fact that we do know matter, but rather the nature of matter's knowability, and the modes according to which it will be known by different intellects. We will therefore turn all our attention to those problems.

But since the nature of matter's knowability depends not only on the nature of matter itself, but also on the modes of its being known, we must first see *how* intellects may attain matter. Once this is done, we can more easily determine the nature of the knowability of matter.

## 2.—MATTER: WHAT IT IS.

However, before considering any of the problems regarding matter and knowledge, we should first have no doubts regarding *what* matter is. Everything that follows is based on the very nature of matter. Because of its importance, we will briefly recall a few of the main considerations as given by John of St. Thomas.

We begin with «An sit et quid sit materia prima?» *Curs. Phil.*, Reiser, T. II, I.P., Q. 3, a. 1:

«Nomine materiae primae intelligimus illam entitatem, quae est capax recipiendi formas substantiales, in se vero nullam habet formam». (55b3)

And he briefly recalls the foundations for our assertion that there is such an entity (56a8):

«Dari autem istam entitatem, sic potentialem et informem, ex duobus principiis Aristoteles deduxit: Primo ex ipsa generatione substantiali, secundo ex eo, quod naturaliter ex nihilo nihil fiat. Et hoc secundum ex primo deducitur, quia si ex nihilo aliquid fieret, ita ut tota ipsa rei substantia ex nihilo fieret, hoc ipso non esset generatio, sed creatio, et corruptio esset annihilatio. Unde non requirerentur determinatae dispositiones ad determinatas generationes, sed eodem modo posset fieri lapis vel equus vel quaecumque alia res, quia si ex nihilo fit, ad nihil deserviunt dispositiones, ut determinetur magis ad unum quam ad aliud. Si autem fit ex aliquo, et id, quod fit, est substantia, eo quod generatio substantialis est, necessario supponit aliquod subiectum capax illius substantialis esse, quod de novo fit, et amittens esse, quod antea habebat, quia corrumpitur. Ergo de se neutrum illorum habet, et consequenter solum est in potentia ad utrumque».

Further on, he gives a brief explanation of two classical definitions of matter (58b6):

«Ex his deducitur explicatio definitionis materiae primae. Definatur autem dupliciter a Philosopho: Uno modo positive in hoc 1. libro textu 82: 'Materia est primum subiectum, ex quo aliquid fit, et non secundum accidens'. . . Secundo modo definatur materia prima negative 7 *Metaph.* textu 8, quod 'materia per seipsam neque est quid neque quantum, nec aliquid aliud quidpiam dicitur, quibus ens determinatur'. Cuius sensus est, quod materia non habet ex se aliquid determinativum essentiae seu naturae, sive in genere substantiae sive in genere quantitatis sive alterius generis, id est, caret omni forma determinante esse, et ut ibi explicat D. Thomas lect. 2., 'materia', inquit, 'non potest per se existere sine forma, per quam est ens actu, cum de se sit potentia tantum', ut amplius explicabimus in art. 3.»

More important considerations on the nature of Prime Matter are given in article 2, «Utrum materia prima ex se ita sit pura potentia, quod careat omni actu formali et entitativo?» (59a8) The answer given may be summed up by his conclusion (60a15):

«Sit unica conclusio: Materia secundum se est in potentia ad actum formalem et ad actum entitativum, ita quod non habet immediatum ordinem ad existentiam, sed mediante forma, cuius est prius susceptiva quam existentiae».

And the foundation given is clear (61b1):

«Et quidem ex hoc fundari potest ratio pro ista sententia, quia Philosophus in hoc libro, praesertim textu 69. et 70. investigavit naturam materiae primae ad similitudinem materiae artificialium dicens, quod materia se habet ad formas naturales sicut lignum vel aes ad formas artificiales. Et nos addere possumus, quod se habet sicut intellectus noster ad species et obiecta, ad quae in principio est in potentia. Videmus autem, quod lignum vel aes in genere artificiali nullam prorsus habent existentiam artificialem ante formam, et similiter intellectus noster nullum esse intentionale ante species. Ergo si materia prima ita se habet in genere naturali sicut materia secunda, v.g. lignum vel aes in genere artificiali, manifestum est, quod ita caret materia prima omni esse naturali sicut materia secunda omni esse artificiali».

### 3.—HOW DOES INTELLECT KNOW PRIME MATTER?

The question of the manner in which intellect attains Prime Matter is not a difficult problem if a problem at all. But the solution of it is of supreme importance in determining the nature of the knowability of Prime Matter. The question is purposely raised with regard to «intellect» in general, for in the solution we shall distinguish two different cases: intellect whose knowledge is posterior to its object; and intellect which is prior to its object.

We must distinguish two different ways by which matter can be known: directly, or by analogy. We of course take those two terms here as in opposition. And we purposely avoid the more obscure term «analogically». When we say «by analogy», we mean that the object is known through its resemblance with another object of knowledge. When knowledge is representative of an object without passing through the medium of such a resemblance, then we say that it attains its object directly<sup>1</sup>.

We may now consider the two cases mentioned above: the intellect which is posterior to its object, and that which is prior. We will begin with the consideration of the manner in which we ourselves actually know matter. We will show that since our knowledge is posterior to its object, we do not know matter directly, but only by analogy.

All our knowledge is derived from the senses: «nihil in intellectu nisi prius fuerit in sensu». We depend entirely on the action of the object operating on our senses. However, «Nihil agit in quantum est potentia, sed solum in quantum est actu». It will then be by their acts that corporeal beings will act on our senses. But the act of a corporeal being is its form, whereas its matter is pure potentiality. It will then be by their forms that corporeal beings will act on our senses: matter, pure potentiality, will be incapable of all activity. It follows then that we cannot have a direct knowledge of Prime Matter.

1. Direct knowledge here is opposed not only to knowledge by reflection, but also to knowledge by analogy. It is in that sense that St. Thomas uses the term in the many articles under consideration. We make this restriction of terms for the present problem, for we know that the term «direct» does not always mean «immediate», as John of St. Thomas points out: «At vero directe cognoscere contra ponitur ei, quod est reverti seu regredi supra principia ipsa cognitionis, ... Unde constat non esse iidem obiectum directae cognitionis et obiectum immediate attactum; nam etiam secundarium et mediatum obiectum directe attingi potest et sine reflectione, si ex parte principii elicientis non se teneat». (*Curs. Phil.*, T. III, IV P., Q. 10, a. 4, 323b30). At times St. Thomas will also use the term «immediately». (Cf. note 3 infra).

This is a reason always mentioned by St. Thomas when dealing with the knowledge of singular material objects. Since this knowledge depends on *how* an intellect knows, St. Thomas first shows that all direct knowledge of Prime Matter must be excluded as far as man is concerned. The reason given is always the inability of matter to act on the senses. It is stated especially in parallel passages of the *De Veritate* and the *Summa Theologica*<sup>1</sup>.

To select a few examples, we will consider first of all *De Veritate* 2.5: «Utrum Deus singularia cognoscat?» After showing how God knows matter directly, St. Thomas shows why we cannot have such direct knowledge of it:

«Illa enim (similitudo) quæ est in intellectu nostro est accepta a re secundum quod res agit in intellectum nostrum, agendo per prius in sensu; materia autem, propter debilitatem sui esse, quia est ens in potentia tantum, non potest esse principium agendi; et ideo res quæ agit in animam nostram, agit solum per formam; unde similitudo rei . . . est tantum similitudo formæ».

And when speaking of angelic knowledge, St. Thomas explains in the same way why we cannot know matter directly:

«Formæ enim quæ sunt in intellectu speculativo fiunt in nobis quodammodo ex activitate ipsarum rerum. Omnis autem actio est a forma; et ideo, quantum est ex virtute agentis, non fit aliqua forma a rebus in nobis nisi quæ sit similitudo formæ». (*de Ver.*, q. 8, a. 11).

And finally, when dealing with human knowledge, in *de Ver.*, q. 10, a. 4, he again repeats the same reason:

«In mente enim accipiente scientiam a rebus, formæ existunt per quamdam actionem rerum in animam; omnis autem actio est per formam; unde formæ quæ sunt in mente nostra primo et principaliter respiciunt res extra animam existentes quantum ad formas earum.»

Once we have established what is proper to the nature of matter, the reason given is clear: being pure potentiality, matter can exercise no direct causality with respect to knowledge. It will therefore be impossible for an intellect to attain matter directly, *if it depends on the activity of the thing known*. But we have precisely in these last words the whole explanation of the argument: it does not hold for intellect as such, but only for an intellect which is posterior to and dependent on the thing known. True, the fact that Prime Matter is incapable of acting on anything is based on the very nature of Prime Matter. But the fact that our intellect depends on the activity of the known is not based on the nature of intellect as such. It is an accidental condition referred to by St. Thomas by the words «in mente accipiente scientiam a rebus», *de Ver.*, q. 10, a. 4. Such a condition, of course, is not essential to intellect as such, as we will see later in speaking of the knowledge of separated substances. Since the reason given holds only for an intellect which receives its knowledge from things, we cannot conclude that direct knowledge of matter is impossible for intellect as such.

1. Since these passages are so important for the present question and also for the following, we list the leading ones. With regard to: God: *Ia*, q. 14, a. 11; *de Ver.*, q. 2, a. 5; *I Contra Gentes*, c. 65;—Angels: *Ia*, q. 57, a. 2; *de Ver.*, q. 8, a. 11; *II Contra Gentes*, c. 10, a. 4; *Qdl. XII*, a. 11;—Separate soul: *Ia*, q. 89, a. 4; *de Ver.* q. 19, a. 2; *de Anima*, a. 20.

But if man may not know Prime Matter directly, another avenue is open to him: analogy. How this is realized is well shown by St. Thomas in his commentary on Aristotle's *I Physics*:

«Dicit quod natura quæ primo subiicitur mutationi, id est materia prima, non potest sciri per seipsam, cum omne quod cognoscitur, cognoscatur per suam formam; materia autem prima consideratur subiecta omni formæ. Sed scitur secundum analogiam, idest secundum proportionem. Sic enim cognoscimus quod lignum est aliquid præter formam scamni et lecti, quia quandoque est sub una forma, quandoque sub alia. Cum igitur videamus hoc quod est ær quandoque fieri aquam, oportet dicere quod aliquid existens sub forma æris, quandoque sit sub forma aquæ; et sic illud est aliquid præter formam aquæ et præter formam æris sicut lignum est aliquid præter formam scamni et præter formam lecti. Quod igitur sic se habet ad ipsas substantias naturales, sicut se habet æs ad statuam et lignum ad lectum, et quodlibet materiale et informe ad formam, hoc dicimus esse materiam primam». (*In I Phys.*, lect. 13, n. 9)

But if such is the case for man, it is altogether different in the case of intellect whose knowledge is prior to the thing known. We know that God must have direct knowledge of matter, since He is the Artisan of the whole being as to both, its form and its matter. The difference between His knowledge of natural beings and our knowledge of them is of supreme importance for this particular problem.

Our knowledge, dependent on the activity of the thing known, will be incapable of directly attaining inactive prime matter. But the inactivity of prime matter is no reason why God should be prevented from knowing prime matter directly, since His knowledge does not depend on the activity of the object.

«Illa quæ habent deficiens esse, secundum hoc deficiunt a cognoscibilitate intellectus nostri, quo deficiunt a ratione agendi; non autem ita est de intellectu divino, qui non accipit scientiam a rebus». (*de Ver.*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 12)

On the contrary, His knowledge of prime matter will most certainly be direct, since He is the cause of prime matter.

Now God's knowledge is the cause of things. All created beings are products of divine art as to all that they are. And any work of art, as such, must preexist in the mind of the artisan as an idea. Hence, all ideas which are principles of a thing are also necessarily principles of the knowledge of that thing:

«Quæcumque sunt principia essendi, sunt etiam principia cognoscendi». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 3, ad 7)

And such knowledge will necessarily be direct: just as a carpenter must have direct knowledge of the wood with which he is to make a table, insofar as the wood is matter of the table.

«Sed formæ rerum in mente divina existentes sunt, ex quibus fluit esse rerum, quod est commune formæ et materiæ; unde formæ illæ respiciunt et formam et materiam immediate, et non unum per alterum»<sup>1</sup>. (*de Ver.*, q. 10, a. 4, ad 3)

1. The meaning of the term «immediate» here evidently involves the meaning we have given to «directe», as is evident from the «et non unum per alterum».



It is easy to see then that God's knowledge will reach prime matter in a manner wholly different from the manner our intellect has of reaching it. Far from knowing prime matter by analogy, God will have a direct knowledge of it which will furthermore be the immediate principle of whatever matter is.

We conclude that angels too will know matter directly because, although they do not cause matter, they are not dependent for their knowledge on the activity of the thing known, but rather on the activity of the Creative Cause which is prior to the thing in itself. If angels receive knowledge of things from that source which is itself independent of all activity on the part of those things, they too therefore may participate in the direct knowledge of that source.

And such is the case. God himself immediately forms the intelligible species in the angelic intellect, which species are derived from His own «species rerum factiva», and not from the things in themselves. And that is the reason why angels can have direct knowledge of material singulars.

«Ad intellectum autem substantiæ separatæ perveniunt species intelligibiles quasi per viam compositionis: habet enim species intelligibiles ex assimilatione sui ad primam intelligibilem speciem intellectus divini, quæ quidem non est a rebus abstracta, sed rerum factiva. Est autem factiva non solum formæ, sed materiæ, quæ est individuationis principium. Species igitur intellectus substantiæ separatæ totam rem respiciunt, et non solum principia speciei, sed etiam principia individuantia». (*II Contra Gentes*, c. 100)

And even though the angels cannot participate in God's creative knowledge as it is creative, they can participate speculatively in that practical knowledge which is as such prior to things.

«Species quæ recipiuntur in mente angelica, sunt solum principia cognoscendi, et non sunt factivæ, sed exemplatæ a factivis». (*Quodlibetum* q. 7, a. 3)

«Quamvis formæ intelligibiles non sint creatrices rerum, sunt tamen similes formis creatricibus, non quidem in virtute creandi, sed in virtute representandi res creatas. Aliquis enim artifex potest tradere artem aliquid faciendi alicui, cui tamen non adest virtus ut perficiat illud». (*ibid.* ad 8)

Hence, the angelic intellect will also be free from all that follows from being dependent on the thing itself.

Such then are the various ways intellect has of knowing prime matter. Man, through analogy; God, and intellects capable of receiving species from God, directly. We must now consider our third question: What precisely is the *nature of the knowability* of prime matter?

#### 4.—THE ROLE OF FORM IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF MATTER.

A genuine problem remains now in determining precisely the nature of the knowability of prime matter, or, since the problem is the same, the role played by form in the knowledge of matter. Let us first of all consider texts of St. Thomas and the attitudes of Cajetan and John of St. Thomas in order to grasp the difficulty that lies ahead.

The texts of St. Thomas which best illustrate the difficulty are to be found one in *de Veritate*, q. 3, a. 5; the other, in the *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 15, a. 3 ad 3. A juxtaposition of the two texts will reveal the apparent incongruity. In *de Veritate*, we read: «Et sic nihil prohibet materiæ primæ etiam secundum se ideam esse». While in the *Summa Theologica*, we find: «Materia secundum se neque esse habet, neque cognoscibilis est». The apparent opposition is sufficient to justify investigation.

And that there is a genuine problem may easily be seen by considering the attitudes of the great commentators. For Cajetan, it is clearly a case of contradiction: St. Thomas in the *Summa* is correcting his previously held opinion in the *de Veritate*. Therefore, no time is to be wasted imagining interpretations.

«In responsione ad tertium, adverte quod hic S. Thomas retractat dicta in *de Veritate*, q. 3, a. 5, et in *I Sent.*, d. 36, q. 2, a. 3.<sup>1</sup> *de idea materiæ primæ*. Nec oportet fingere glossas: quoniam medius terminus hic assumptus, scilicet quia *secundum se non est cognoscibilis*, expresse alibi dicta elidit, ut patet intuenti». (*In Iam*, q. 15 a. 3, n. 4)

According to Cajetan then, St. Thomas found the problem difficult to the point of finding it necessary to retract his previous position. We may note in passing that if such an authority as Cajetan believed that possible for St. Thomas himself, the question is certainly not to be treated lightly and is deserving of investigation.

The problem is further seen to be difficult by the fact that John of St. Thomas in no way agrees with Cajetan:

«Respondetur... Cajetanum in præsentī liquide tenere quod (S. Thomas) mutavit sententiam». (*Cursus Theologicus*, Solesmes, T. II, d. 21, a. 4, n. 31.)

On the contrary, John of St. Thomas will explain the apparent contradiction by distinguishing the different meanings of the expression «materia secundum se», as will be brought out later.

But before giving the solution of the problem, we must consider more closely the term «idea». It will be noticed that the texts of St. Thomas which raise the difficulty are taken from parallel treatises on divine ideas: *de Veritate* q. 3, a. 3, and *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 15. To state and solve the difficulty, we should first see the main divisions of ideas, especially from the point of view of practical and speculative knowledge. Another passage to be taken into account is that of *I. Sent.* d. 36, q. 2, aa. 1-3. Let us then examine the main divisions in the light of these three passages, and thus situate the difficulty more clearly and facilitate the solution. We insert a table to facilitate comparisons.

The divisions most relevant to our problem are most comprehensively treated in *de Veritate* q. 3, a. 3.: «Utrum ad practicam vel speculativam cognitionem spectent ipsæ ideæ»? First of all, practical and speculative knowledge:

1. We have corrected the reference.



## DIVINE KNOWLEDGE AND DIVINE IDEAS

- I. Actually (completely) practical..... Idea in strict sense,  
Exemplar.
- II. Virtually (formally) practical..... “ “
- III. Formally speculative, but radically practical  
(«Operabilium»)..... Idea in broad sense,  
«ratio vel similitudo».
- IV. Purely speculative («Non-operabilium»):
  - A. Of realities inoperable secundum se:
    - 1. Which are quiddities (inseparable accidents, generic and specific notions)..... “ “
    - 2. Which are not quiddities:
      - a. Substantial material forms..... “ “
      - b. Prime matter..... “ “
  - B. Of non-being, privations..... No idea.

«Aliqua... cognitio practica dicitur ex ordine ad opus... Quando vero nullo modo est ad actum ordinabilis cognitio, tunc est semper speculativa».

In turn, practical knowledge is either actually (completely) or only virtually (formally) so:

«Quandoque in actu, quando scilicet ad aliquod opus actu ordinatur... Quandoque vero est quidem ordinabilis cognitio ad actum, non tamen actu ordinatur».

With regard to this latter, we may note in passing that it is in some way speculative:

«Ratio illa procedit de cognitione illa quæ est practica virtute, non actu; quam nihil prohibet aliquo modo speculativam dici, secundum quod recedit ab operatione secundum actum». (ad 2)

In the same way, there are two kinds of speculative knowledge: of things which can be produced by the knowledge of the knower (and which may therefore be called radically practical), and of things which cannot:

«Uno modo, quando cognitio est de rebus illis quæ non sunt natæ produci per scientiam cognoscentis... quandoque vero res cognita est quidem operabilis per scientiam, tamen non consideratur ut est operabilis».

With regard to these latter two modes, we notice that their opposition and distinction are not based on the mere «operability» of the thing known, but on its operability *for such and such a knower*, «per scientiam cognoscentis». Some things of course, such as inseparable accidents, generic and specific notions, prime matter, are inoperable of their very nature because they cannot have a separate existence. Of such things, God does not even have a knowledge which we may call radically practical. But other things, such as natural beings, though inoperable for man, are operable for God. Of these, man's knowledge can be only purely speculative («speculativa tantum»), while God's is at least radically practical.

«Sciendum est quod aliqua scientia potest dici speculativa tripliciter. 1° Ex parte rerum scitarum, quæ non sunt operabiles a sciente; sicut est scientia hominis de rebus naturalibus...

Scientia igitur quæ est speculativa ratione ipsius rei scitæ, est speculativa tantum». (Ia, q. 14, a. 16)

Divine knowledge of things will be according to the four modes.

«Et secundum hos quatuor modos cognitio divina se habet ad res».

All things which at any time exist are known through actually (completely) practical knowledge:

«Quædam ergo cognoscit ordinando ea ad hoc quod sint secundum quodcumque tempus, et horum habet practicam cognitionem in actu».

If He considers possible beings by a knowledge ordainable to act, His knowledge is virtually (formally) practical; but if He considers them without reference to their «operabilitas», then He has formally speculative knowledge of possibles, or of «operabilia»,—a knowledge which is only radically practical.

But God also knows many things which cannot exist as such by themselves, e.g. generic and specific notions, inseparable accidents, prime matter. Of such, His knowledge is only speculative, not even radically practical. Taken in the given restricted sense, then, they are «non-operabilia». It is this purely speculative knowledge, we shall see, with which we will be mainly concerned. But before considering its more subtle subdivisions, we must first see the main divisions of ideas, and their coordination with the main divisions of practical and speculative knowledge.

We must first note that we should not consider ideas as coextensive with knowledge. Not all things knowable are capable of an idea, however broadly we may use the term<sup>1</sup>. We must remember that we speak of ideas in God as forms or patterns according to which He produces creatures.

«Et in hac significatione consuetum est nomen ideæ accipi, ut idem sit idea quod forma quam aliquid imitatur». *de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 1)

As a result, ideas may be considered as both: principles of knowledge and principles of being. But many things are known which have no being, e.g. privations, evil, negations. Though St. Thomas will certainly not deny God's knowledge of evil, he will deny any idea of evil:

«Cum similitudo attendatur secundum formam aliquo modo participatam, non potest malum similitudinem aliquam in Deo habere». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 4)

We must then distinguish knowledge of things capable of their own proper idea; and knowledge of things, such as evil, knowable only by means of another idea:

«A Deo cognoscitur (malum) per ideam boni oppositi». (*ibid.* ad 7)

As principles of being, ideas will more properly be called exemplars; as principles of knowledge, notions or similitudes:

«Ad utrumque se habet idea, prout in mente divina ponitur: et secundum quod est principium factionis rerum, exemplar dici potest, et ad practicam cognitionem pertinet; secundum autem quod principium cognoscitivum est, proprie dicitur ratio et potest etiam ad scientiam speculativam pertinere». (*Ia*, q. 15, a. 3)

1. We are taking the term «idea» here in the way used by St. Thomas, as explained in the chapter. Among modern authors, the term idea will be used as synonymous with concept and knowledge. In this very broad sense, of course, knowledge and idea might be coextensive.

From *de Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3, we see that exemplar and idea in the strict sense are identical:

«Exemplar . . . proprie loquendo, ad cognitionem pertinet quæ est practica habitu vel virtute». (ad 3)

This knowledge, therefore, is at least virtually (formally) practical.

It will be noticed, however, that in the *Summa*, St. Thomas uses the term «exemplar» in a more restricted sense. In the *de Veritate*, he clearly uses it to include virtually (formally) practical knowledge. For he pursues the text quoted by saying:

«Non autem solum ad illam quæ est actu practica: quia aliquid potest dici exemplar ex hoc quod ad ejus imitationem potest aliquid fieri, etiam si numquam fiat».

But in the *Summa*, he restricts it to actually (completely) practical knowledge alone:

«Eorum quæ neque sunt, neque erunt, neque fuerunt, Deus non habet practicam cognitionem nisi in virtute tantum: unde respectu eorum non est idea in Deo secundum quod idea significat exemplar, sed solum secundum quod significat rationem». (*Ia*, q. 15, a. 3, ad 3)

This restriction however is of minor importance and need not be insisted upon. No doctrinal consequences are involved.

Now since an idea which is a principle of being is also necessarily a principle of knowledge, but not vice versa, we could, more properly speaking, say that all ideas are notions, but only some ideas are exemplars.

«Vel magis proprie dicamus quod idea respicit cognitionem practicam actu vel virtute; similitudo autem et ratio tam speculativam quam practicam». (*de Ver.* q. 3, a. 3, in fine corporis)

Ideas then can be taken in a strict or a broad sense. In the strict sense, they imply causation of beings, and therefore can be said of knowledge which is practical, either actually (completely) or virtually (formally):

«Si ergo loquamur de idea secundum propriam nominis rationem, sic non extendit se nisi ad illam scientiam secundum quam aliquid formari potest; et hæc est cognitio actu practica, vel virtute tantum, quæ etiam quodammodo speculativa est». (*de Ver.*, q. 5, a. 3)

Speculative knowledge, not being knowledge «secundum quam aliquid formari potest», should not be called an idea. However, if we wish to consider an idea in the broad sense, as a mere principle of knowledge, then we may also use the term even for speculative knowledge.

«Sed tamen si ideam communiter appellemus similitudinum vel rationem, sic idea etiam ad speculativam cognitionem pure pertinere potest». (*ibid.*)

Since we have already seen that ideas in the strict sense, or exemplars, apply to both, actually and virtually practical knowledge, it remains to be seen to what kinds of speculative knowledge ideas in the broad sense apply. They will certainly not apply to negations, as we saw in the case of evil. If evil is known, as it certainly is, it will not be by a proper idea, but «per aliud», viz., by the opposite good.

«Ex hoc ipso quod malum non habet ideam in Deo, a Deo cognoscitur per ideam boni oppositi». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 4, ad 7)

That case offers no special difficulty.

The term «idea» then, taken in the broad sense, will be used in reference to two kinds of speculative knowledge, that which is only radically practical, and that which is purely speculative. In the first group are all the «operabilia» when known by knowledge which is formally speculative. In the second, the non-operabilia such as generic and specific notions, etc.

«Si autem accipiamus ideam communiter pro similitudine vel ratione, sic cum diversa sit consideratio Socratis ut Socrates est, et ut homo est, et ut est animal, respondebunt et plures ideæ vel similitudines». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 8, ad 2)

Enough has been said now to permit us to proceed immediately to a first conclusion: Of matter alone, without form, there can be no distinct practical idea in any way whatever. In other words, any distinct idea of matter alone, without form, could for the most be purely speculative. We do not of course deny that there is a practical idea of matter in God: matter exists, and, therefore God must have a practical idea of it somehow or other. But we deny that there can be a *distinct* practical idea of matter alone, without form.

The reason is evident: matter alone, i.e., without form, is absolutely incapable of coming into being, since it has of itself neither an essential nor an existential act. It will be noticed that the essential requirement for a distinct practical idea is that its object be capable of a distinct production. That is the reason clearly given by St. Thomas to exclude a strict idea of prime matter:

«Sed tamen, si proprie de idea loquamur, non potest poni quod materia prima per se habeat ideam in Deo distinctam ab idea formæ vel compositi: quia idea proprie dicta respicit rem secundum quod est *producibilis* in esse; materia autem non potest exire in esse sine forma». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 5)

Why can there be no distinct idea of inseparable accidents?—Because they are capable of becoming only with the subject:

«Quædam enim sunt accidentia propria ex principiis subjecti causata, quæ secundum esse numquam a suis subjectis separantur; et hujusmodi una operatione in esse producuntur cum suo subjecto; unde cum idea, proprie loquendo, sit forma rei operabilis inquantum hujusmodi, non erit talium accidentium idea distincta, sed subjecti cum omnibus accidentibus ejus erit una idea». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 7)

And the same is true of genera:

«Genera non possunt habere ideam aliam ab idea speciei secundum quod idea significat exemplar, quia numquam genus fit nisi in aliqua specie». (*Ia*, q. 15, a. 3, ad 4)

But all distinct complete beings are capable of a distinct idea. And even separable accidents, since they are capable of a distinct production:

«Quædam vero sunt accidentia, quæ non sequuntur inseparabiliter suum subjectum, nec ex ejus principiis dependent; et talia producuntur in esse alia operatione præter operationem qua producitur subjectum... et talium accidentium est in Deo idea distincta ab idea subjecti». (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 7)

Since what we have said concerned only ideas in the strict sense, and therefore only knowledge which is either actually (completely) or virtually (formally) practical, we must add a word concerning ideas in the wide sense. For, some such ideas, we said, though formally speculative, may nevertheless be radically practical. But these two we deny of prime matter without form. All ideas of matter taken thus must be *purely* speculative. And that, for the very reason we have given. For that reason was taken from the very nature of prime matter: its pure potentiality, which makes it absolutely incapable of existence without form, or of a distinct production. Matter without form is in the class of «non-operabilia».

After this first conclusion, we proceed to the more subtle distinction of purely speculative knowledge. One fact has already been established: of the objects known through purely speculative knowledge, some are capable of an idea (in the wide sense); others, viz. privations, are not. It is the previous group with which we must now deal: that of the purely speculative ideas.

Of these purely speculative ideas, we may distinguish two kinds: those whose object is a quiddity, and those whose object is not a quiddity. For of things which cannot exist by themselves, some are nevertheless a determined quiddity. Among such we must enumerate inseparable accidents, generic and specific notions. But other things are not even quiddities: they are mere intrinsic principles of quiddities. Of these, we have two examples: substantial material forms, and prime matter.

That all the notions mentioned above are purely speculative ideas has been sufficiently established. Thus, neither matter nor material substantial forms are capable of a distinct practical idea:

«Idea proprie dicta respicit rem secundum quod est producibilis in esse; materia autem non potest exire in esse sine forma, nec e converso. Unde proprie idea non respondet materiæ tantum, nec formæ tantum; . . . » (*de Ver.*, q. 3, a. 5).

And the same reason clearly holds for the other notions mentioned.

It is the case of the distinct and purely speculative idea of Prime Matter that concerns us most. This is the crucial problem toward which we have been moving. The apparently conflicting texts of St. Thomas, the different interpretations of Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, center on the meaning of that idea. How is the nature of the idea to be explained? How are we to understand the expression «*materia secundum se*»?

The context of the expression «*materia secundum se*» clearly indicates that it means «matter without form». Now, this may be taken in three distinct ways, which will give rise to three distinct conclusions. We will establish this and then consider the explanation of the various texts of St. Thomas, as well as of the positions of the commentators.

First of all, *secundum se*, or «without form», may mean without form as a previously known medium of knowledge, in other words, directly, and not by analogy. In this sense, the conclusion is evident and has already been established: we cannot know matter *secundum se*, but God certainly can. In this first sense then, *secundum se* offers no difficulty: God can certainly know matter without this kind of mediation of form, which is proper to the human intellect informed by the things themselves.

In a second sense, matter *secundum se* may mean matter as to whatever reality it is in its distinctness and otherness from form. Matter is distinct from form, and this for a reason. Unlike privation, matter is a kind of positive reason apart from form. As a kind of reality, matter has its proper reason, has a kind of reason, and this real reason is other than that of form. Of this proper reason, we have a distinct idea in the sense that we have knowledge which represents matter, in a way, distinctly, that is, as being what is other than form. *Materia secundum se* then means matter as to whatever it is in its otherness and distinctness from form. In this sense then, God certainly has a distinct idea of matter *secundum se*.

«Et sic nihil prohibet materiæ primæ etiam secundum se ideam esse». (*de Ver.* q. 3, a. 5)

If there could not be such an idea of matter *secundum se*, matter could not be a reality distinct from form. And not only God, but we also have such distinct knowledge of prime matter. For whether the knowledge of matter is direct or by analogy, it is knowledge that attains matter in its otherness and distinction from form.

This case, it should be noted, is quite different from that of privation because, although privation too has its own otherness—and in this sense it may also be called knowable *secundum se*—yet, it cannot, as we have seen above, have a distinct idea in any sense.

Thirdly, an idea of matter *secundum se* might also be taken to mean an idea of matter without order to form. It is in this sense that an idea of prime matter *secundum se* is rejected in the *Summa*, Ia, q. 15, a. 3, ad 3:

«Materia secundum se neque esse habet, neque cognoscibilis est».

If we take «*secundum se*» in such a way, then our conclusion is a categorical denial of any distinct idea of matter *secundum se*: not only as regards our knowledge by analogy, but even as regards the direct knowledge of God. There can be absolutely no knowledge of matter *secundum se*, or without form, in this way.

We may distinguish a common and a proper reason why this is so. First, as regards the common reason, we call it common because it applies not only to prime matter, but also to many other objects of knowledge which cannot be known thus, *secundum se*. The reason, briefly, is that matter is a relative, and no relative can be understood *secundum se* in this sense. This reason will be found exposed and exemplified in *de Trinitate* q. 5, a. 3:



«Cum enim unaquæque res sit intelligibilis secundum quod est actu, ut dicitur *X Metaph.*, oportet quod ipsa natura, sive quidditas rei intelligatur vel secundum quod est actus quidam, sicut accidit de ipsis formis et substantiis simplicibus: vel secundum id quod est actus ejus, sicut substantiæ compositæ per formas suas: vel secundum id quod est ei loco actus, sicut in materia prima per habitudinem ad formam, et vacuum per privationem locati, et hoc est illud ex quo unaquæque natura suam rationem sortitur. Quando ergo hoc per quod constituitur ratio naturæ, per quod ipsa natura intelligitur, habet ordinem et dependentiam ad aliquid aliud, tunc constat quod natura illa sine illo alio intelligi non potest, sive sit conjuncta conjunctione illa qua pars conjungitur toti, sicut pes non potest intelligi sine intellectu animalis, quia id a quo pes habet rationem pedis, dependet ab eo a quo animal est animal: sive etiam sit conjuncta per modum quo forma conjungitur materiæ, sicut pars compositi, vel accidens subjecto, sicut simum non potest intelligi sine naso: sive etiam sint secundum rem separata, sicut pater non potest intelligi sine intellectu filii, quamvis illæ relationes inveniantur in diversis rebus. Si vero unum ab altero non dependeat secundum id quod constituit rationem naturæ, tunc unum potest ab altero abstrahi per intellectum ut sine eo intelligatur, non solum si sint separata secundum rem, ut homo et lapis, sed etiam si secundum rem conjuncta sint, sive ea conjunctione qua pars et totum conjungitur, sicut littera potest intelligi sine syllaba, et animal sine pede, sed non e converso: sive etiam sint conjuncta per modum quo forma conjungitur materiæ, et accidens subjecto, sicut albedo potest intelligi sine homine, et e converso.»

It is clear then, because of this common reason, that matter cannot be known *secundum se*, without form, as entering into the very constitution of the knowability of matter. For the total being of matter is ordination to form. But a proper reason will show yet more clearly the absolute impossibility of conceiving matter *secundum se*, without form.

And this proper reason is none other than the proper nature of Prime Matter: the fact that all that it is is potentiality of form. Matter is *purely* «habitus ad formam»; as to all that it is, it is appetite of form. Having grasped well this nature of pure potentiality we find that any idea of matter *secundum se* is in this sense inconceivable. When we say that matter is pure potentiality, we mean that to be matter is to be «ad formam». Hence, not only is matter «propter formam», but it is that «secundum hoc ipsum quod est».

We can now see that the two apparently contradictory passages of St. Thomas concerning the knowability of matter *secundum se*, far from being actually contradictory, represent two mutually inclusive views of the same doctrine. Indeed, matter is other than form, and distinct from form. But this by no reason makes it knowable *secundum se*. For, the otherness of matter, known *secundum se* in the second sense (otherwise matter could not be a reality distinct from form)—this very otherness, this proper reason of matter, cannot be conceived without form for the simple reason that its otherness, its very reason proper, is to be ordered to form. Its proper otherness includes «ordo ad formam». The «ratio» of matter is not an absolute «ratio». Matter has its «ratio materiæ» in its «esse ad formam».

##### 5.—ST. THOMAS, CAJETAN, AND JOHN OF ST. THOMAS.

Before considering the apparently conflicting texts of St. Thomas, it might be well to consider an earlier text, *1 Sent.*, d.36, q.2, a. 3, ad 2:

«Ad secundum dicendum, quod cum materia prima sit a Deo, oportet ideam ejus aqualiter in Deo esse; et sicut attribuitur sibi esse, ita attribuitur sibi idea in Deo: quia omne esse inquantum perfectum est, exemplariter ductum est ab esse divino. Esse autem perfectum, materiæ non convenit in se, sed solum secundum quod est in composito; in se vero habet esse imperfectum secundum ultimum gradum essendi, qui est esse in potentia; et ideo perfectam rationem ideæ non habet nisi secundum quod est in composito, quia sic sibi a Deo esse perfectum confertur; in se vero considerata, habet in Deo imperfectam rationem ideæ; hoc est dictu, quia essentia divina est imitabilis a composito secundum esse perfectum, a materia secundum esse imperfectum, sed a privatione nullo modo. Et ideo compositum, secundum rationem suæ formæ, habet perfecte ideam in Deo, materia vero imperfecte, sed privatio nullo modo».

In this text, St. Thomas shows that there can be no perfect idea of matter *secundum se*, but only an imperfect idea. His purpose is to exclude a perfect *practical* idea of matter without form. Just as matter is only a part of the composite, so can the practical idea of matter only be part of a perfect practical idea. The first part of the text from *de Veritate*, q. 3, a. 5, expresses the very same doctrine as the *Sentences*:

«Nos autem ponimus, materiam causatam esse a Deo; unde necesse est ponere quod aliquo modo sit ejus idea in Deo, cum quidquid ab ipso causatur, similitudinem ipsius utcumque retineat. Sed tamen, si proprie de idea loquamur, non potest poni quod materia prima, per se habeat ideam in Deo distinctam ab idea formæ vel compositi: quia idea proprie dicta respicit rem secundum quod est producibilis in esse; materia autem non potest exire in esse sine forma, nec e converso. Unde proprie idea non respondet materiæ tantum, nec formæ tantum; sed composito toti respondet una idea, quæ est factiva totius et quantum ad formam et quantum ad materiam. Si autem large accipiamus ideam pro similitudine vel ratione, tunc illa possunt per se distinctam habere ideam quæ possunt distincte considerari, quamvis separatim esse non possint; et sic nihil prohibet materiæ primæ etiam secundum se ideam esse».

From what St. Thomas says in the *de Veritate*, we may show that the perfect idea of the *Sentences* is none other than the «idea proprie dicta (quæ) respicit rem secundum quod est producibilis in esse».

But what then is the «imperfect» idea of the *Sentences*? It is decidedly not the purely speculative idea of the second part of the text from *de Veritate*, although this latter is also, in the sense we have shown above, an imperfect idea, that is, imperfect with respect to the genus «idea» proper. The imperfect idea of the *Sentences* is a *practical* idea, it is precisely what John of St. Thomas explains in the *Cursus Theologicus*, T. II, d. 21, a. 4, n. 8:

«Materia prima si consideretur... ut subjecta et subordinata formæ, ideabilis est, sed ut contenta sub idea compositi, ut pars potentialis ejus, non autem ut distinctam ideam habens.»

This however, as we have just shown, by no means excludes a distinct *speculative* idea of matter, which St. Thomas establishes in the second part of the text from *de Veritate*. If he shows that such a distinct speculative idea is possible of «materia secundum se», his purpose is certainly not to exclude the order that matter has to form, but rather to show that matter is distinctly knowable in its otherness, in its being non-form, which nevertheless implies form as that to which it is ordered. «Illa possunt per se distinctam habere ideam quæ possunt distincte considerari». Clearly, «per se» is to be understood here in what we have called the second sense of «per se»: the otherness of the thing known.

The third text, we saw, is the one which, according to Cajetan, contradicts the *de Veritate*:

«Materia secundum se neque esse habet, neque cognoscibilis est». (*Ia*, q. 15,) a. 3, ad 3)

But from the explanations given above—which are furthermore in conformity with John of St. Thomas—the meaning should now be clear. St. Thomas here denies that matter is knowable in what we have given as the third sense of *secundum se*.

Thus we see that there is perfect consistency in St. Thomas' teaching on the nature of the knowability of matter, which is in perfect agreement with his consistent doctrine on the very nature of matter itself. This we might have known beforehand, since it must be held unlikely that *tantus doctor* should hold such a different opinion on a subject so important, without mentioning his change of mind, whereas, for matters of much lesser importance, he goes to the trouble of saying:

«Et hoc quidem mihi aliquando visum est. Sed diligentius considerans, magis videtur dicendum quod...» (*Qdl.* VI, q. 11, a. 19). «Utrum cæli cælum empyreum habeat influentiam super alia corpora».)

We thus adhere fully to the position of John of St. Thomas, who resolves the apparent incongruity in the texts of St. Thomas along the lines we have followed. His explanation is found in the article already quoted, n. 31:

«Ideo respondetur quod sensus D. Thomæ in utrisque locis non est contrarius, nec retractat in uno quod dicit in alio, quia procedit secundum diversas considerationes materiæ: quando enim dicitur materia secundum se, ly 'secundum se', vel potest appellare ipsam entitatem materiæ cum ordine quem includit ad formam, vel potest appellare statum materiæ qui est privatio omnis formæ. Et sub prima consideratione concedit D. Thomas materiæ secundum se ideam in illis locis quæ supra citantur; sub posteriori autem negat ideam materiæ secundum se in aliis locis quæ in probatione conclusionis citavimus: quia sub statu privationis materia non est producibilis, neque cognoscibilis ratione illius status. Et cum S. Thomas addit (in hoc articulo), quod neque potest cognosci secundum se materia, ly 'secundum se' intelligitur ratione status privationis formarum, et non respectus seu ordinis ad illas: ratione cujus non potest cognosci, nisi extrahatur ab illo, et consideretur sub ordine ad formam.»

And this suffices to show in what sense matter is knowable in itself, and in what sense it is not.

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