

Immateriality and Intentionality

Gerard Casey

School of Philosophy

University College Dublin

gerard.casey@ucd.ie

http://www.ucd.ie/philosophy/staff/casey_gerard.htm

L'excellence de la Raison ne dépend pas d'un grand mot vuide de sens (l'immatérialite); mais de sa force, de son étendue, ou de sa Clair-voyance.

Julien de la Mettrie¹

La théorie de l'intentionnel joue un rôle essentiel dans une métaphysique réaliste. Seule, elle permet une explication cohérente de l'extériorité du monde et de sa connaissance par l'esprit de l'homme.

Andre Hayen²

One cannot go far in the reading of St Thomas Aquinas and other medieval writers without coming across a multiplicity of usages of the Latin term for 'being' or 'to be', *esse*, such as *esse intentionale*, *esse intelligibile*, *esse naturale*, *esse sensible* and so on.³ It is not always easy to appreciate the distinctions which these terms are intended to mark and if one is inclined to scepticism one might indeed suspect that these are distinctions without a difference. However, such a judgment would be both precipitate and incorrect. Even if the distinctions marked by such terms are not immediately perspicuous it is essential, if one wishes to understand and appreciate the thought of the medievals, that one come to understand them. Within the compass of a short paper it will not, of course, be possible to be comprehensive, so I shall investigate the notions of immateriality and intentionality with a view to clarifying their relationship.⁴ In so doing, I hope some light will be thrown

¹ *L'Homme machine* in *Œuvres Philosophiques* Volume I (Paris 1987), p. 65.

² *L'Intentionnel selon saint Thomas* (Paris, 1954), p. 13.

³ In the passage cited from the *Summa Theologiae* in footnote 17 below, the terms *esse intentionale*, *esse intelligibile*, *esse naturale*, *esse materiale* and *esse immateriale* all occur together in just seven lines of Latin.

⁴ This paper concerns itself with just a very small part of a large and interesting area of philosophy. In addition to the works cited in the body of the paper, readers interested in this topic may wish to consult some or all of the followings works: Robert W. Schmidt SJ, *The Domain of Logic according to Saint Thomas Aquinas* (The Hague, 1966); J. Peghaire CSSp, *Intellectus et Ratio selon S. Thomas D'Aquin* (Paris, 1936); Victor Kal, *On Intuition and Discursive Reasoning in Aristotle* (Leiden, 1988); Henry Veatch, *Intentional Logic* (New Haven, 1952); Irving Thalberg, 'Immateriality', *Mind* 92 (1983), 105-13; John N. Deely, 'The Ontological Status of Intentionality', *The New Scholasticism* 46 (1972), 220-33; Richard E. Aquila, 'The Status of Intentional Objects', *The New Scholasticism* 45(1971), 427-56; Mark McCarthy, 'Meaning and Intentional Objects', *Semiotica* 23(1978), 165-90; Christian Koch, 'The Being of Idea: The Relationship of the Physical and the Nonphysical in the Concept of the Formal Sign', *Semiotica* 66 (1987), 345-57; John Deely, *Introducing*

on what Bernard Lonergan refers to as ‘matters intermediate between metaphysics and psychology’.⁵

Why should we, or St Thomas for that matter, be concerned with these notions? The answer to this question for St Thomas (and for those of us who that without such concepts we will find it difficult to make sense of the fact of knowledge. Human knowing is so patently evident that we seldom if ever stop to think to think how strange it really is. Not only strange but, in cosmic terms, rare. And yet knowledge is an amazing phenomenon. So far as we know, in the entire material universe, only animate creatures on one small planet in an obscure solar system in a remote galaxy give any evidence of being able to know. And among these animate creatures only one kind gives evidence of having the capacity to be able to know that it knows. Trees do not know the world in which they live (at least so far as we know); still less do rocks and mud evince any interest in what is going on around them.⁶

The peculiarity of knowledge lies in its double aspect. It seems clear that when I know something, I am changed in some way—knowledge, then, involves a certain modification of the knowing subject. This modification, however, is of a special kind. When sunlight falls on the sunbather and the beach pebble, both alike are warmed but only the sunbather is aware of being warmed. Unlike all other accidental modifications of a subject, then, the modification of the subject which results in knowledge permits the subject to stretch out (*intendere*) towards something else other than itself.⁷ This directedness of knowledge towards something other than itself is often termed ‘intentionality’.⁸

Semiotic: Its History and Doctrine (Bloomington, 1982); Walker Percy, *The Message in the Bottle* (New York, 1954).

⁵ Bernard J. Lonergan S.J., *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame, 1967), p. xiv.6.

⁶ Referring to the three notions mentioned in the title of his essay ‘Intentionality, Immateriality and Understanding in Aquinas’, *Heythrop Journal* 30 (1989), 150-9, Stephen Theron says that ‘we tend to expect intentionality to prove the most difficult of these notions, immateriality to belong merely to the history of ideas, understanding to be no trouble at all. In fact understanding, the fundamental notion, is the most mysterious of the three’ (p. 150).

⁷ Jacques Maritain gives the following summary definition of knowledge: ‘Knowing appears to us to be an immanent and vital operation that essentially consists, not in making, but in being; to be or become a thing—either itself or other things—in a way other than by an existence that actuates a subject. This implies a union quite superior to the union of matter and form which together comprise a *tertium quid*, and it supposes that the known object is intentionally made present to the faculty thanks to a species, a presentative form. Finally, intellectual knowledge is accomplished thanks to a mental word or concept, a presentative form uttered by the intellect within itself, and in that form the intellect intentionally becomes, in terminal act, the thing taken in this or that one of its intelligible determinations.’ Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, (London, 1959), pp. 117-18.

⁸ William McDougall writes: ‘Intelligent activity implies not merely representations of objects or events . . . but also a mental reference to the object represented; it involve awareness of the object, thinking of the object, or, as we may conveniently say, thinking the object.’ *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution* (London, 1929), p. 45. While he admits that ‘we do not know, and probably never shall know or be able to

How is it possible for a being or mode of being to be of or about some-thing other than itself? As Anthony Kenny puts it: ‘What makes a picture of X to be a picture of X, what makes an image of X to be an image of X, what makes a thought about X be about X?’⁹ Kenny believes that ‘one of the most elaborate and also one of the most puzzling accounts of the harmony between the world and thought is Aquinas’ doctrine of the immaterial intentional existence of forms in the mind.’¹⁰

How does St Thomas’ theory work? According to Kenny, the connection between thought and reality is established by form. The form bicycle exists in an individual and material way (*esse naturale*) in the real bicycle; and in a universal and immaterial way (*esse intentionale*) in the mind. Because it is the same form (in some sense of ‘the same’) it makes the knowledge to be of bicycles rather than of automobiles; because the form exists in two distinct ways it allows the knowledge to be knowledge of bicycles rather than the production of an ethereal velocipede. Maritain puts it succinctly:

Another kind of existence must, then, be admitted; an existence according to which the known will be in the knower and the knower will be the known, an entirely tendential and immaterial existence, whose office is not to posit a thing outside nothingness for itself and as a subject, but, on the contrary, for another thing and as a relation. . . In virtue of that existence, the thing exists in the soul with an existence other than its own existence, and the soul is or becomes the thing with an existence other than its own existence. (*Degrees*, p. 114)

In the course of his article, Kenny discusses Peter Geach’s¹¹ and Bernard Lonergan’s¹² accounts of Aquinas on intentionality and he argues that neither author is entirely correct in his interpretation of Aquinas.¹³ According to Kenny, Geach takes Aquinas’ doctrine of intentionality to amount to the claim that a form individualised by matter is a constitutive principle of the thing in its physical existence outside the mind, while the identical form individualised in the intellect is a constitutive principle of the thing as it

explain, how a physical stimulus to a sense-organ or nerve evokes or results in a sensation, an idea or a representation’, he is emphatic in his insistence that ‘the essence of our mental life, in its aspect as intelligence, is not a mere succession of sensations, ideas, or representations of things, but a thinking of things’ (p. 56).

⁹ Anthony Kenny, ‘Intentionality: Aquinas and Wittgenstein’, in *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford, 1984), p. 61. Cf. Kenny’s earlier essay ‘Intellect and Imagination in Aquinas’ in Anthony Kenny (ed.), *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Notre Dame, 1976).

¹⁰ Ibid. Note the immediate connection which Kenny makes here between immateriality and intentionality although he goes on to say that ‘intentional existence and immaterial existence are not the same thing’ (p. 65).

¹¹ Peter T. Geach, ‘Form and Existence’ in *God and the Soul* (London, 1969).

¹² Lonergan, *Verbum*, pp. 147-51.

¹³ Kenny, *ibid.*, p. 66.

exists in the intellect. The problem with this interpretation, as Kenny correctly points out, is that in the intellect there are no individualised forms as such, but only universals.¹⁴

On the other hand, according to Kenny, Lonergan's interpretation distorts Aquinas' account by replacing identity of form with mere similarity. Lonergan does indeed speak of 'assimilation' in reference to species rather than of formal identity, seeming thereby to suggest that similarity somehow replaces identity. Furthermore, Kenny takes Lonergan's claim¹⁵ that Aquinas' understanding of the Aristotelian maxims (the sensible in act is the sensible in act; the intellect in act is the intelligible in act) has shifted in meaning from identity in second act to assimilation on the level of species to be a distortion of Aquinas' own position. Now while I have some sympathy with Kenny in his efforts to understand Lonergan on this point, and while it may not be perfectly clear what Lonergan means positively by this claim, it does not seem to constitute a denial of the formal identity of the knower and the known in the act of knowledge. Lonergan says:

The form of the knowing must be similar to the form of the known but also it must be different; it must be similar essentially for the known to be known; but it must differ modally for the knower to know and not merely be the known. Modal difference of forms results from difference in recipients: the form of color exists naturally in the wall but intentionally in the eye because wall and eye are different kinds of recipient; similarly, angels have a natural existence on their own but an intentional existence in the intellects of other angels. Thus, the negative concept, immateriality, acquires a positive content of intentional existence; and intentional existence is a modal difference resulting from difference in the recipient. (*Verbum*, p. 151)

Lonergan does not, *pace* Kenny, appear to be denying the identity of form and substituting mere similarity in its place. He is instead affirming the necessity for identity in difference and difference in identity. The identity is identity of form; the difference is one of modality of existence; on the one hand, *esse naturale*—on the other, *esse intentionale*. On this point, Lonergan's account seems to me to be close, if not identical, to the one which Kenny himself offers.

We may perhaps find an additional clue to Lonergan's meaning if we pay attention to an earlier passage in which he claims that Aristotle's account of knowledge by identity is, although correct, incomplete:

¹⁴ Geach's account has the merit of enabling the intellect to have direct knowledge of singulars without any need for converting to phantasms. This might in itself constitute part of a solution to the problem of knowledge but it could not be a solution according to the mind of St Thomas.

¹⁵ Lonergan, *ibid.*, p. 148.

Inasmuch as faculty and object are in act identically, there is knowledge indeed as perfection but not yet knowledge of the other. Reflection is required, first, to combine sensible data with intellectual insight in the expression of a *quod quid est*, of an essence that prescinds from its being known, and then, on a deeper level, to affirm the existence of that essence. Only by reflection on the identity of act can one arrive at the difference of potency. And since reflection is not an identity the Aristotelian theory of knowledge by identity is incomplete. (*Verbum*, p. 72)

It seems clear then that Lonergan is not denying the necessity of formal identity; he is simply questioning its sufficiency. In a footnote to the passage just cited, Lonergan adds the clarifying comment that ‘to the Aristotelian theorem of knowledge by immateriality Aquinas has to add a further theorem of knowledge by intentionality. The difference between the two appears clearly in the case of one immaterial angel knowing another immaterial angel without the former’s knowledge being the latter’s reality.’¹⁶

It is significant that Lonergan’s example is given in terms of angelic knowledge, for here the issues are conceptually clearer than they are in the case of human knowledge. Attempts to understand human knowledge are complicated by the form/matter composition of the human subject with the resultant two-tier epistemogenetic structures. The point of the illustration is that immateriality (which is the root of all knowledge) is not sufficient of itself to ground knowledge. If Raphael knows Gabriel, the mode of immateriality by which this knowledge takes place in Raphael is not the same mode of immateriality by which Gabriel exists in himself. The cognitive mode of immateriality is *esse intentionale*, the ontological mode of immateriality is *esse naturale*. St Thomas puts it thus:

One angel knows another by means of that angel’s species existing in his intellect. This species differs from the angel of which it is the similitude not as material being (*esse materiale*) differs from immaterial being (*esse immateriale*) but as natural being (*esse naturale*) differs from intentional being (*esse intentionale*). For an angel himself is a form that subsists in natural being, but not so his species, which is in the intellect of the other angel. There it has only intelligible being (*esse intelligibile*). Likewise, the form of colour has natural being (*esse naturale*) on the wall while it has only intentional being (*esse intentionale*) in the medium by which it is conveyed to the eye.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 72, n. 115. Cf. Mortimer J. Adler who, in ‘Sense Cognition: Aristotle vs. Aquinas’, *The New Scholasticism* 42 (1968), 578-91, rejects the whole notion of intentional beings.

¹⁷ *ST*, I, 56, 2, ad. 3: Unus angelus cognoscit alium per speciem ejus in intellectu suo existentem; quae differt ab angelo, cujus similitudo est, non secundum esse materiale, et immateriale, sed secundum esse naturale et intentionale. Nam ipse angelus est forma subsistens in esse naturali, non autem species ejus quae est in intellectu alterius angeli; sed habet ibi esse intelligibile tantum; sicut etiam et forma coloris in pariete habet esse naturale, in medio autem deferente habet esse intentionale tantum.

In a paper written some years ago on Thomistic angelology, I assumed that *esse intentionale* was a purely psychic mode of existence.¹⁸ Effectively, I took *esse intentionale* to be a lexical equivalent of *esse intelligibile*. However, while the passage just cited may seem to suggest the equivalence of *esse intelligibile* and *esse intentionale*, the illustrative example given at the end of the passage concerning the form of colour on the wall and in the transmitting medium would seem to indicate that intentional existence (*esse intentionale*) is not solely an intrapsychic mode of existence (and hence, whatever else it might be it could not be equivalent to *esse intelligibile*) but is something capable of being supported in non-psychic beings as well.¹⁹

John Peifer cites this passage and goes on immediately to claim that intentional existence ‘must be an *im-material* existence, for it is the existence a form enjoys in a cognitive faculty whose root condition is immateriality.’²⁰ But as the passage cited makes clear, intentional existence is also a mode of existence which a form can enjoy in the sensitive medium, and the sensitive medium is certainly not a cognitive faculty. St Thomas, in this passage, denies that intentional existence is natural existence. Only if the further assumption is made, that natural existence equals material existence, can Peifer’s conclusion obtain. I am not denying that Peifer may ultimately be right in his judgment that intentional existence must be immaterial existence (indeed I shall myself be concerned to argue that it cannot be simply material)—however, his attribution of that immateriality to cognitive faculties alone on the basis of this text ignores the crucial example.

It might be thought that this passage is an aberration, a rare instance of a careless use of examples by St Thomas. But this is not so. St Thomas expresses the very same idea in a passage from his Commentary on the *de Anima*:

But a spiritual change is that according to which a species is received in the sense organ *or in the medium* through a mode of intention, and not through a mode of natural form. For the sensible species is not received in the sense according to that being which it has in the sensible thing.²¹

¹⁸ An extensively revised version of this paper has since been published as ‘Angelic Interiority’, *Irish Philosophical Journal* 6 (1989), 82-118.

¹⁹ On the point at issue St Thomas speaks of *esse intelligibile tantum* while in the illustrative example he speaks of *esse intentionale tantum*.

²⁰ John Peifer, *The Mystery of Knowledge* (New York, 1964), p. 60

²¹ Emphasis added. *In II de An.*, 14, 418: Immutatio vero spiritualis est secundum quod species recipitur in organo sensus aut in medio per modum intentionis, et non per modum naturalis formae. Non enim sic recipitur species sensibilis in sensu secundum illud esse quod habet in re sensibili.

Again, the contrast drawn is that between a natural mode of existence and an intentional mode of existence, not between a material mode of existence and an immaterial mode of existence.

From these passages it seems clear that not only is intentional being an intrapsychic mode of existence but that entities can somehow exist in an intentional form in the medium between object and organ. This, of course means that intentional existence is not, then, simply intrapsychic existence in a cognitive power but rather existence which is in some way (perhaps essentially) relatable to a cognitive power, either actually in that power or else in a medium between sensory object and sense organ.²²

With these passages in mind, let us try to determine in a preliminary way the interrelationship of these concepts. We are dealing with two sets of distinctions: on the one hand, the distinction between *esse naturale* and *esse intentionale*; and, on the other hand, the distinction between *esse intelligibile* and *esse sensibile*. *Esse naturale* is the objective, extramental existence which a thing possesses in itself and not as the result of being known (by any finite knower). *Esse intentionale*, on the other hand, is either intrapsychic existence in a cognitive power (sensory or intellectual) or else a mode of existence in a medium in some way relatable to a sensory cognitive power.

There is a crucial ambiguity in the use of the term *esse intelligibile*. In one sense of the term, *esse intelligibile* is simply whatever is the object of the intellect, that which is either immaterial itself or potentially so. In contrast to *esse intelligibile* in this sense we have *esse sensibile*: *esse sensibile*, the object of the senses, is material and corporeal and is therefore, as such, unintelligible. This distinction between *esse intelligibile* and *esse sensibile* drawn thus with respect to their objects is all on the *esse naturale* side of the *esse naturale/esse intentionale* distinction. There is, however, a second sense of *esse intelligibile* in which it connotes not the mode of existence of the object which is understood but the mode of existence of such objects in the understanding. Used in this sense, *esse intelligibile* falls on the *esse intentionale* side of the *esse naturale/esse intentionale* distinction.

Kenny claims that the coincidence of immateriality and intentionality take place only in respect of intellectual cognition and not in respect of cognition as such.

²² Maritain suggests that it may be necessary to admit an intentional manner of existing in orders other than that of knowledge so as to explain how the power of the artist passes, as it were, into the artist's brush through his hands. I shall make use of this passage when I come to develop the notion of supervenience below.

Intentional existence and immaterial existence are not the same thing. A pattern exists, naturally and materially, in a coloured object; it exists, intentionally and materially, in the eye or, according to Aquinas, the lucid medium. Gabriel is a form which exists immaterially and naturally in its own right; it exists immaterially and intentionally in Raphael's thought of Gabriel. The characteristic of intellectual thought, both of men and angels, is that it is the existence of a form in a mode which is both intentional and immaterial, (p. 65)

The distinctions embodied in this paragraph might be set out in the following way:

	ESSE NATURALE	ESSE INTENTIONALE
ESSE MATERIALE	Mode of being of material things	Mode of being of things in sense organ or medium
ESSE IMMATERIALE	Mode of being of immaterial things	Mode of being of things in intellect (<i>esse intelligibile</i>)

This is a very neat formulation, relating natural being, intentional being, material being, immaterial being and intelligible being. The only problem is that it appears to neglect some pertinent texts of St Thomas. St Thomas refers to the reception of form in the sense organ or in the medium as spiritual immutation: on Kenny's schema it is simultaneously intentional and material. But given that St Thomas considers the spiritual and the material to be contraries, it is difficult to see how the reception of form in the sense organ or the medium could be at once spiritual and material.

There is, then, something of a puzzle with the category created by combining intentional existence with material existence. It cannot possibly be material existence in the same way as we have material existence in the combination of natural existence with material existence. It would seem then that an entity need not be material or immaterial simply as such, but relatively material or immaterial *vis-à-vis* other things. Kenny seems to admit as much:

But intentional existence is not, as such, completely immaterial existence. The form in the eye lacks the matter of gold, but not the matter of the eye; it is an individualized form, not a universal. And according to Aquinas the redness exists intentionally not only in the eye but in the lucid medium through which I see it. (p. 73)

The problem here is that if, by virtue of these considerations, the form in the eye is not completely immaterial, neither is it, by virtue of the same considerations, completely material. This means then that in the schematisation, the relationship between *esse materiale* as *esse naturale* and *esse materiale* as *esse intentionale* is analogous rather than univocal, for the form of the gold as it exists in the eye does not inform the matter of the eye in

precisely the same way as it informs the matter of the gold. This is, presumably what St Thomas means by calling it spiritual immutation as distinct from natural form.

There are two kinds of immutation, one natural, and the other spiritual. It is a natural immutation when the changing form is received in that which is immuted according to *esse naturale*, as heat in the thing heated; it is a spiritual change when the changing form is received in the thing immuted according to *esse spirituale*, as colour in the pupil, which does not thereby become coloured. So, the operation of the senses requires a spiritual immutation by which the intention of the sensible form comes to be in the sense organ. Otherwise, if a natural immutation sufficed for sensing, all natural bodies would sense when altered.²³

The editor of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa Theologiae* notes that ‘sense knowledge implies a non-materiality while yet being the act of an organ. It is intentional and psychic, even in its humblest forms, and not a physical reaction merely. The retinal image in the eye is not an “impressed species”.’²⁴

Now the question we have already skirted becomes acute. Is the intentional as such immaterial, or is it, as Kenny suggests, immaterial only in regard to intellectual cognition but not in regard to sensory cognition? To focus the discussion, I shall trace the course of a dispute on the nature and extent of immateriality in sensory cognition which took place in the late 1960’s between Mortimer Adler and John Deely.²⁵ The dispute focuses on whether or not sense-perception is immaterial.

In *The Difference of Man and the Difference it Makes*,²⁶ Adler had held that Aristotle and Aquinas do not try to establish the immateriality of the intentional as such but only the

²³ *ST*, I, 78, 3: Est autem duplex immutatio, una naturalis, et alia spiritualis. Naturalis quidem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato secundum esse naturale, sicut calor in calefacto. Spiritualis autem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato secundum esse spirituale: ut forma coloris in pupilla, quae non fit per hoc colorata. Ad operationem autem sensus requiritur immutatio spiritualis, per quam intentio formae sensibilis fiat in organo sensus: alioquin, si sola immutatio naturalis sufficeret ad sentiendum, omnia corpora naturalia sentirent, dum alterantur.

Cf. *ST*, I, 78, 1: ‘The lowest of the operations of the soul is that which is performed by a corporeal organ and by virtue of a corporeal quality. Yet this transcends the operation of the corporeal nature; because the movements of bodies are caused by an extrinsic principle, while these operations are from an intrinsic principle.’ (Infima autem operationum animae est, quae fit per organum corporeum, et virtute corporeae qualitatis. Supergreditur tamen operationem naturae corporeae: quia motiones corporum sunt ab exteriori principio; huiusmodi autem operationes sunt a principio intrinseco.)

²⁴ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London, 1970), Notes by Timothy Suttor, p.130, note b. Stephen Theron, in his otherwise excellent article, seems to be in error on this point. He asks ‘what in the sense faculty corresponds to the intelligible species in the mind?’ He answers, correctly, ‘the internal sense-image’ but then goes on, incorrectly, to identify this internal sense-image with the ‘retinal image, auditory vibration, etc.’ (p. 152). As we have just seen, St Thomas emphatically denies that natural change is sufficient to account for sensation.

²⁵ See Mortimer Adler, ‘Intentionality and Immateriality’, *The New Scholasticism* 41 (1967), 312-44; Mortimer Adler, ‘The Immateriality of Conceptual Thought’, *The New Scholasticism* 41 (1967), 489-97; John Deely, ‘The Immateriality of the Intentional as Such’, *The New Scholasticism* 42 (1968), 293-306; and Mortimer Adler, ‘Sense Cognition: Aristotle vs. Aquinas’, *The New Scholasticism* 42 (1968), 578-91.

²⁶ Mortimer Adler, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* (Holt, 1967).

immateriality of conceptual acts, such as judgment, conception, and inference (pp. 216-17). But as John Deely points out, whatever Aristotle may or may not have believed, St Thomas articulates and defends the nature and extent of the intentional as such precisely on the basis of immateriality. Thus, Aquinas claims that

Things which have souls have a twofold being. One, material, in which they are like other material things; the other, immaterial, in which they have something in common with superior substances.

The difference between the two kinds of being is this: in accordance with material being, which is contracted by matter, any given thing just is what it is and no more, as this stone is nothing other than this stone: but in accordance with immaterial being, which is broad, and, in away, infinite inasmuch as it is not terminated by matter, a thing is not just that which it is but is also other things, in a certain way. That is why all things are contained in superior immaterial substances, as in universal causes.

But in lower things there can be found two grades of immateriality. One grade is completely immaterial, and this is intelligible being. In the intellect things have being and are without matter and without the individuating conditions of matter and also without material organs. Sensible being is midway between the two (i.e. between purely immaterial being and purely material being). For in the senses, a thing has being without matter but not without the individuating conditions of matter nor without the corporeal organs. For sense is of the particular, intellect of the universal.²⁷

St Thomas explicitly states that there are two grades of immateriality in inferior things. One kind is entirely immaterial and this is intelligible being. It is in the intellect not only without matter but without the individuating conditions of matter, and without the assistance of corporeal organs. Sensible being is midway between the two, for, in the senses it has its being without matter, but nevertheless, not without the individuating conditions of matter, nor without the assistance of corporeal organs.²⁸ Deely adds that ‘not only are the intentionality of perceptual actuations and the intentionality of

²⁷ *In II de An.*, 282-4: Huiusmodi 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 aliquid.

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: secundum vero esse immateriale, quod est amplum, et quodammodo infinitum, in quantum 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.

Huiusmodi autem immateriale esse, habet duos gradus in istis inferioribus. Nam quoddam est penitus immateriale, scilicet esse intelligibile. In intellectu enim res habent esse, et sine materia, et sine conditionibus materialibus individuantibus, et etiam absque organo corporali. Esse autem sensibile est medium inter utrumque. Nam in sensu res habet esse sine materia, non tamen absque conditionibus materialibus individuantibus, neque absque organo corporali. Est enim sensus particularium, intellectus vero universalium.

²⁸ Cf. *ST*, I, 84, 2, where Thomas says that ‘the nature (*ratio*) of knowledge is opposed (*ex oppositio se habet*) to the nature (*ratio*) of materiality’. He goes on to say that ‘the more immaterially a thing receives the form of the thing known, the more perfect is its knowledge. Therefore the intellect which abstracts the species not only from matter, but also from the individuating conditions of matter, has more perfect knowledge than the senses, which receive the form of the thing known, without matter indeed, but subject to material conditions’. Cf. *In II de An.*, 24, 551-4.

conceptual actuations analogical, and not univocal, in the doctrines of Aristotle and Aquinas . . . but there is an immateriality which is proper to both these levels precisely as intentional, which immateriality is likewise . . . analogical and not univocal.’ In *The Difference of Man* Adler had accepted that intentionality is analogical (though he was later to retract this view in ‘Sense Cognition: Aristotle vs. Aquinas’) and Deely presses him to accept that the immateriality associated with these analogical intentionalities is similarly analogical.

Adler in his response to Deely admits his interpretative error and accepts that St Thomas was concerned to establish the immateriality of the intentional as such. He still, however, denies the immateriality of the *quo* of sense cognition. He tries to show the Thomistic position to be either untenable or self-contradictory. He distinguishes two positions which he calls, for convenience, the Aristotelian and the Thomistic. According to Adler these two positions agree in many points. For both the Aristotelian and the Thomist, the form of the thing known must be received in the knower without the matter of the thing known. The knower is a knower precisely because he can receive forms in this way. The form received is the *quo* of cognition, that is, it is that by which cognition is effected and not, as such, the object of cognition. The phantasm as the *quo* of sense cognition is indispensable to knowledge of singulars and the concept as the *quo* of intellectual cognition is indispensable to knowledge of universals. Finally, both positions agree that the sensible form is received in a power that is corporeal while the intelligible form is received in a power which is incorporeal.²⁹

Thus far, according to Adler, the two positions are essentially identical. Now we come to the difference (s). According to the Thomistic position the phantasm as the *quo* of sense cognition must be immaterial in a sense analogous to the immateriality of the concept as the *quo* of intellectual cognition. Two grades of immateriality are involved; one in which the *quo* is subject to the individuating conditions of matter, and another in which the *quo* is not subject to the individuating conditions of matter. In Adler’s opinion, there appears to be a contradiction here. It seems that the phantasm must be at once material and immaterial; immaterial if it is to be the *means* of cognition; and material if it is to be the means of cognition of the *singular*. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by distinguishing between the entitative being of the phantasm and the intentional being of the phantasm. Entitatively, the phantasm is an act of a corporeal

²⁹ One might have some reservations about the propriety of attributing corporeality to powers. Powers are capacities and capacities, while they may be located in and exercised through corporeal entities, are not themselves corporeal.

power (it would perhaps be better to say ‘a power exercised through a corporeal organ’) and as such is corporeal; intentionally, it is the relation between the knower and the known.

Adler admits that drawing this distinction may remove the appearance of contradiction, but he believes that it does so at an unacceptably high cost. How, for example, if this distinction is drawn, is one to account for the conditions of materiality still attaching to the sensitive *quo* in its intentional being? If to be intentional is to be as such immaterial, why should the conditions of materiality attach to phantasm in its intentional being?

Adler raises this point only to drop it as not being immediately relevant this concerns. In my opinion, however, it is precisely the point that needs to be discussed, for the distinction between the entitative and intentional being of the phantasm, or between its physical ground and its function, is the key to the solution of the problem. Instead Adler proceeds to refute Deely’s conception of what intentional being is, namely, some kind of intersubjective entity. Adler flatly denies that there can be such a thing as intentional being in this sense. ‘There is ... no inter-subjective mode of being; for everything that exists either is a subject (i.e. a substance) or in a subject (i.e. as an accident). This amounts to saying that if intentional being must be identified with inter-subjective being in order to distinguish intentional from entitative being, then there are no intentional beings—no existent nonentities.’³⁰ I find myself in complete agreement with Adler on this point.

Adler rejects the charge that without the notion of intentional being we would be unable to explain the phenomenon of knowledge, pointing out the agreement between the Aristotelian and Thomistic positions in the areas listed above. He claims that the distinction between entitative and intentional being need not be postulated in order to account for knowledge. Again, I can agree with Adler here if what he is rejecting is Deely’s intersubjective account of intentional being.

Adler now proceeds to give his own positive account. While the phantasm is entitatively corporeal and the concept is entitatively incorporeal, they are both intentional for the same reason, namely, that they are the acts of cognitive powers. The form received in sense cognition is immaterial only in the sense that it is received in the sensory power without the matter which it informed *in re*. It is only in this sense that it is

³⁰ Mortimer Adler, ‘Sense Cognition: Aristotle vs. Aquinas’, 582.

immaterial. The phantasm exists as a *quo* in another kind of matter, ‘a kind of matter that disinvested with cognitive power and so can be called “cognoscitive matter”.’

So, if it is immaterial in that it is separated from its matter *in re*, it is material in that it exists in another kind of matter. The concept, by contrast, is doubly immaterial; immaterial by abstraction from the material conditions *in re*; and immaterial in that it exists in a power which is not material. In regard to its mode of being, the phantasm is wholly material, while in regard to its mode of being the concept is wholly immaterial. In regard to their being received without the matter of the entity known, both phantasm and concept are immaterial. This distinction suffices to explain the data. No postulation of different kinds of being is required.³¹

In all of this, Adler sees himself siding with what he takes to be the economical Aristotelian position as against the more expensive Thomistic position. However, as is well known, Aristotelian exegesis is not simple. In interpreting Aristotle one can go two ways. If one takes a physicalist interpretation of □ as the norm and interprets the discussion of the reception of form without matter in *De Anima* II, 12 in that light, then one will have insuperable problems understanding Aristotle’s account of the intellect. One might even go so far as to call the Aristotelian doctrine of the intellect ‘a museum piece’ as does a recent translator.³² If however, one takes Aristotle’s account of the intellect as normative, then one can interpret this account of □ ; in *De Anima* II, 12 more benignly, which is indeed what St Thomas does in his commentary.

Aside from the fact that the notion of cognoscitive matter is intrinsically obscure, Adler’s concerns can be met without denying the need for *esse intentionale*. Adler’s concerns seem to be prompted by what he sees as an unnecessary multiplication of entities in the same order of being, a concern which is fueled by Deely’s doctrine of intersubjective being. But the distinction of *esse intentionale* and *esse naturale* is not (or need

³¹ Adler has a point. Much of the difficulty in comprehending discussions on these topics results from taking the term ‘immaterial’ and its synonyms and antonyms as being simply univocal. It is quite clear, however, that the contrary terms, ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’, can be used simply in a contrastive fashion rather than as having an absolute significance. ‘Something is said to be immaterial if it is less particular, more generic, or on a logically higher plane than whatever is said to be material with respect to it. In other words, it here functions as an essentially relational and contrastive term.’ (Eike-Henner W. Kluge, ‘Immateriality and Perceptual Awareness’, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 52 (1978), 135.) Kluge makes this remark in the course of distinguishing two basic uses of the term ‘immaterial’. The one I have just cited she calls its logical use; another use, which she calls qualitative, is ‘superficially more prosaic in that it seems to center in the simple claim of qualitative difference between the corporeal and the mental realm.’ 135. Cf. Ernan McMullin, *The Concept of Matter in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, (Notre Dame, 1963); and *The Concept of Matter in Modern Philosophy*, (Notre Dame, 1963). See also Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 143, on the analogy of matter.

³² Aristotle, *De Anima* (translated with an introduction and notes by Hugh Lawson-Tancred), Penguin Books, 1986, p. 92.

not be) characterised as a distinction between two entities in the same order of being. While the relationship of intentionality supervenes upon physical being (material or immaterial) and cannot subsist apart from such physical support it is not itself a physical entity. It is something over and above whatever, as it were, carries it. Intentionality can supervene upon a physical and material medium (*in medio deferente*) or organ, or it can supervene upon a physical and immaterial concept. It would seem then not to be a really distinct mode of being but rather a formally distinct mode of being of cognitive objects and operations which is physically dependent on a carrier.³³ This view of things is borne out by Maritain:

The concept in its entitative role and as modification of the subject and the concept in its intentional role and as formal sign are not two distinct things (indeed, intentionality is not exactly a thing-in-itself but, rather, a mode). These are two formal aspects or two distinct formal values *of the same thing*, [emphasis added] the intentional role being of importance only to knowing, the entitative function, to the being of nature (in this case, of the soul itself). ... As thing or entity, the concept is an accident, a quality or modification of the soul; but arising, as it does, within the soul as a fruit and an expression of an intellect already formed by the *species impressa* . . . this quality, this modification of the soul which is the concept, has ... the privilege of transcending the entitative, informing activity it exercises and of being present in the faculty after the manner of a spirit. . . . Thus, the concept exists in the intellect not only in an entitative manner and as an informing form, but also as a spiritual form, not absorbed in actuating a subject so as to form a *tertium quid* with it, and therefore actuating, on the contrary, or rather, terminating, the intellect intentionally and in the line of knowing, in that it expresses the object and renders it transparent, (pp. 125-6)

Thus understood there is nothing essentially mysterious about intentionality or at least, nothing more mysterious than, say, colour which is supported by a physical medium yet is actualised only in the presence of an entity with a suitable receptor.³⁴ In *The Degrees of Knowledge* Maritain has a fascinating section which is meant to be illustrative of the necessity of the intentional not only in the cognitive order but in other orders as well. He gives the example of the painter. Everything on the canvas is caused, in one sense, by the brush yet it is obvious that the brush is only a carrier, as it were, by means of which a causality superior to that of the brush is borne. If you look for art in the brush you will not find it; you will find just wood, hair, and paint.

³³ Lonergan agrees that there is a sensitive apprehension of the universal in the particular without which it would be impossible for the intellect to reach the abstract universal (p. 30). If it were true that the sense apprehended the particular and only the particular and in no way touched on the universal, it would simply not be possible for such sensitive apprehension to be the material cause of our knowledge of the abstract universal. On this point Lonergan is in essential agreement with Adler who makes a very similar distinction in the context of the differentiation of animal and human cognition.

³⁴ Compare the account of perception which Plato gives in the *Theaetetus* (155D-157E; and which he never repudiates.

Examine everything entitative about the medium that transmits sensible quality and you will only find the properties and movements—the wave movements and others—that the physicist sees in them. You will no more find quality there than you will find the soul under a scalpel. Yet quality passes through it, *secundum esse intentionale*, since the sense will perceive it when the wave or vibration reaches the organ. It is like a dream of a materialistic imagination to want, with Democritus, to have quality pass through the medium entitatively, or, since it is not there entitatively, to deny, with the votaries of modern ‘scientism’ that it could pass through it at all. (*Degrees*, 114-15)

Let us take another example. Suppose you go into a record shop and ask for Scarlatti’s Harpsichord Sonatas. You are given a circular piece of metal-coated plastic enclosed in a plastic case. In what sense have you been given Scarlatti’s Harpsichord Sonatas? Sonatas are not, as such, purely physical objects—whereas what you have just bought is, or appears to be. In its purely physical capacity the disc you have just purchased can be used as a makeshift Frisbee, or as a thing to put your cup of coffee on, or as something to be mounted over the fireplace and admired. However, if it is placed in the appropriate equipment which is then operated, the disc will generate electronic signals which, if converted into air waves by the appropriate movement of corrugated circular pieces of cardboard will, if a sentient being is within a certain delimited range, result in the hearing of music.

What should strike one about this account is the number of ‘its’ which appear in it, the number of conditions which have to be satisfied. The hearing of the Sonatas only comes about if all these conditions are satisfied. Does this mean that the Sonatas are not actually in the piece of metal-coated plastic? Yes—they are not actually there. But there is a difference between this piece of metal-coated plastic and another in that one will, if all the conditions are satisfied, produce Scarlatti’s Harpsichord Sonatas while the other will not. The music is, therefore, virtually present in the plastic, that is to say, the plastic has the power to produce them in the appropriate circumstances.³⁵

What is also striking about the example given is the number of levels of supervenience which occur. The electronic supervenes upon the physical; the mechanical supervenes upon the electronic; and the auditory supervenes upon the mechanical. Scarlatti’s Harpsichord Sonatas can be said to be there on all the various levels, yet it is only on the final level that they attain a fully actualised status. Since their existence at the various other levels tends towards this fully actualised status, the virtual mode of existence at

³⁵ This explanation of supervenience is not unlike Locke’s account of secondary qualities. See *An Essay on Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter VIII, section 23.

these levels may be said to be intentional. The music is carried by a variety of physical, electronic, mechanical conditions.

Similarly, meaning in language is supervenient upon a complex system of materially perceptible signs. It takes an effort of the imagination to realise this although it is immediately evident to us when we hear a completely foreign language being spoken for the first time.

If we call to mind the old Scholastic tag ‘the sense in act is the sensible in act’ we can see that it is validly convertible, that is ‘the sensible in act is the sense in act’. We can generalise this principle in the following way; the (passive) powers embodied in physical energy interchanges can be realised only in their assimilation by the (active) powers of the appropriate receivers.

Another Scholastic tag runs ‘whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.’ An appreciation of this point will, I believe, solve Adler’s puzzle as to why the conditions of materiality should attach to the sensitive *quo* of knowledge which is immaterial. Cognitive capacities are not physical things. Even our sensory cognitive capacity is not such a thing. However, it is exercised through a corporeal organ and in its operation is conditioned by such exercise.

The primary sense organ is that in which such a potentiality $\square\square\square\square\square\square$ resides. These are then the same, although what it is for them to be such is not the same. For that which perceives must be a particular extended magnitude, while what it is to be able to perceive and the sense $\square\square\square\square\square\square$ are surely not magnitudes, but rather a certain principle $\square\square\square\square$ and potentiality of that thing.³⁶

It is important to be clear as to the significance of the ‘im’ in ‘immaterial. According to Yves Simon, when we speak of immaterial existence in connection with knowledge what is signified by the term ‘immaterial’ is the form’s emancipation from matter with respect to the conditions which matter imposes on form when that form is a constitutive principle of a real being. The immaterial existence of form involved in sensitive knowledge can be misunderstood in two ways: first, if it is not realised that despite its emancipation from matter in some respects, the form still retains the individuating factors consequent upon materiality; and second, if the distinction is not grasped in such a way as to allow for the existence of a thing in itself and its existence in knowledge. ‘To

³⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima* 424 a 24-8, trans. D. W. Hamlyn, (Oxford 1968).

obviate these misunderstandings it is advisable to employ the term intentional existence, a term fashioned by scholasticism to capture an insight of Aristotle and which signifies the existential modality which a thing takes on in awareness.³⁷

Is intentionality then, as such, immaterial? Yes—in that it is a mode of being which supervenes upon a material base and which can be actualised only in the presence of a being with an immaterial receptive capacity.

³⁷ Yves Simon, *Introduction à l'ontologie du connaître*, p. 17.