

13. HOW DO WE KNOW ?

Among the three categories of living things instances of two of them have a power of knowing in one way or another. These not only move themselves as to the *execution* of their acts, but also as to the *form* of their acts. These are animals (that is *brute animals*, instances of sensitive life) and men, *rational animals*. We will deal later with the difference in the two ways they have of knowing. What I want to deal with first is the one they have in common, knowing via the senses.

Here are our old friends, matter and form :

Material thing [*Form*,
is comprised of : [&
[*Matter*

Matter is what is determined : form is what determines, makes this lump of matter be this thing. Now knowers are distinguished from non-knowers (the plants) in this way, that as well as enjoying their *proper* form (the one that makes them be what they are, e.g, a kitten) they are capable of taking in, in some fashion, the forms of other things by means of sense powers with which they are equipped. The kitten *knows* the moth, the meat and the milk which is why, having been equipped by its Author with the appropriate powers, it moves itself to chase the moth, to eat the meat and to lap up the milk.



The forms of these various things do not stay with the kitten in the way that its proper form, *cat-ness*, stays with it. Once it has used them, it moves on to the many other things that make life as a kitten so exciting. The classical statement of how knowers know is spelt out by St Thomas as follows, *Habere aliquid in se formaliter et non materialiter*. That is, “to have something in self formally and not materially.” The forms of knowledge are had by the animal in a fashion fundamentally different from the manner in which it has its own form. So—

Form [*materially*
can be [or
had [
[*immaterially*

Here we spell out the differences in these two ways of having form.

	[physically	form makes it be <i>this</i> thing	
	[
	[<i>materially</i> ,	[subjectively	recipient appropriates form to itself
	[(as matter	[
Form	[has form)	[compositively	to produce this third thing
can be	[
had	[
	[<i>immaterially</i> ,	[supra-physically	not constituting it this thing
	[(not as	[
	[matter	[objectively	not appropriating form to itself
	[has form)	[
	[[non-compositively	not producing a third thing

These distinctions are fairly subtle, but I am hoping that by now you are beginning to understand how the mind is able to take some reality and analyse it, take it apart, to uncover its secrets.

The root of knowledge is immateriality. What do I mean by that ? The knower (the kitten, the boy or girl) must have some power to extract, as it were, the *immaterial* part of the thing it knows. And—something just as important—there has to be something *immaterial* in the thing in order for it to have something to extract ! I have mentioned the fact that primary matter is unknowable : we only ever find it united with some form or other. Because we never encounter it in the real, we can only arrive at its reality intellectually. Why is it unknowable ? Because there is nothing *immaterial* in it ; the immaterial element, *form*, is entirely lacking.

Do follows be. You cannot do the acts of a mosquito unless first you are (be) a mosquito. You cannot do the act of knowing unless first you are a knower. Something can only act in accordance with the nature it possesses. There is a fixed proportionality between the following—

natures powers acts ends

A mosquito possesses the *nature* of a mosquito which gives it the *powers* of a mosquito to do *acts* of a mosquito in order to attain the *end* of a mosquito. A dog possesses canine nature which gives it the powers of a dog to do the acts of a dog in order to attain the end of a dog. What, do you suppose, is the end of a mosquito ? It's a good question. On the Day of Judgement you will be able to ask the Almighty : 'Why on earth did you create mosquitoes ?' We do not know what it is that distinguishes one type of animal from another. We know they differ. We know dogs and cats and sheep and cattle all possess different natures, and we can identify the differences, but we do not know why.

The end of every brute animal (and that includes those brutes, mosquitoes) is to nourish and preserve its own life and to generate its kind. Now the fourfold proportionality applies to things that can know, like a cat, which has—

feline *nature* powers of a cat acts of a cat end of a cat

