

Objection 1. It would seem that we can understand many things at the same time. For intellect is above time, whereas the succession of before and after belongs to time. Therefore the intellect does not understand different things in succession, but at the same time.

Objection 2. Further, there is nothing to prevent different forms not opposed to each other from actually being in the same subject, as, for instance, color and smell are in the apple. But intelligible species are not opposed to each other. Therefore there is nothing to prevent the same intellect being in act as regards different intelligible species, and thus it can understand many things at the same time.

Objection 3. Further, the intellect understands a whole at the same time, such as a man or a house. But a whole contains many parts. Therefore the intellect understands many things at the same time.

Objection 4. Further, we cannot know the difference between two things unless we know both at the same time (De Anima iii, 2), and the same is to be said of any other comparison. But our intellect knows the difference and comparison between one thing and another. Therefore it knows many things at the same time.

On the contrary, It is said (Topic. ii, 10) that “understanding is of one thing only, knowledge is of many.”

I answer that, The intellect can, indeed, understand many things as one, but not as many: that is to say by “one” but not by “many” intelligible species. For the mode of every action follows the form which is the principle of that action. Therefore whatever things the intellect can understand under one species, it can understand at the same time: hence it is that God sees all things at the same time, because He sees all in one, that is, in His Essence. But whatever things the intellect understands under different species, it does not understand at the same time. The

reason of this is that it is impossible for one and the same subject to be perfected at the same time by many forms of one genus and diverse species, just as it is impossible for one and the same body at the same time to have different colors or different shapes. Now all intelligible species belong to one genus, because they are the perfections of one intellectual faculty: although the things which the species represent belong to different genera. Therefore it is impossible for one and the same intellect to be perfected at the same time by different intelligible species so as actually to understand different things.

Reply to Objection 1. The intellect is above that time, which is the measure of the movement of corporeal things. But the multitude itself of intelligible species causes a certain vicissitude of intelligible operations, according as one operation succeeds another. And this vicissitude is called time by Augustine, who says (Gen. ad lit. viii, 20,22), that “God moves the spiritual creature through time.”

Reply to Objection 2. Not only is it impossible for opposite forms to exist at the same time in the same subject, but neither can any forms belonging to the same genus, although they be not opposed to one another, as is clear from the examples of colors and shapes.

Reply to Objection 3. Parts can be understood in two ways. First, in a confused way, as existing in the whole, and thus they are known through the one form of the whole, and so are known together. In another way they are known distinctly: thus each is known by its species; and so they are not understood at the same time.

Reply to Objection 4. If the intellect sees the difference or comparison between one thing and another, it knows both in relation to their difference or comparison; just, as we have said above (ad 3), as it knows the parts in the whole.