Chapter 2
Two Treatises in One Volume: Kenelm Digby Between Body and Soul

Lodi Nauta

Abstract Almost at the end of The Two Treatises, Kenelm Digby had to conclude that his treatment of body and soul had not brought a contact between the two any nearer. This conclusion did not come as a surprise. From the start it was Digby’s intention to prove the spirituality and immortality of the soul by showing that the principles that govern the world of material bodies cannot explain the workings of the soul. In spite of such an unbridgeable gap between the two domains, however, Digby must of course admit that the soul acquires knowledge of the world of bodies (as well as of its own operations). This raises the question: Does Digby have the conceptual resources to bridge a seemingly unbridgeable gap after all? What makes this traditional question about the relationship between body and soul even more interesting in the case of Digby is his self-professed allegiance to the philosophy of Aristotle in spite of a dualism that comes close to that of Descartes. This article will analyze several tensions that arise from Digby’s attempt to synthesize several different elements developed in dialogue with contemporaries such as Thomas Hobbes, Descartes, his close friend Thomas White, and the Aristotelian traditions still very much alive in Digby’s time. Starting with Digby’s account of common notions, the article will study Digby’s account of the soul’s knowledge, locating it in the wider philosophical controversies of the time.

2.1 Introduction
Almost at the end of his work The Two Treatises, published in 1644, Kenelm Digby came to the conclusion that his treatment of body and soul had not brought a contact between the two any nearer: ‘I can find no possible meanes to linke them together: a vast and impenetrable Ocean, lyeth betweene the discoveries we have made on
each side of its shores; which forbiddeth all commerce between them’ (TT 414). This conclusion did not come as a surprise of course. From the start it was Digby’s intention to prove the spirituality and immortality of the soul by showing that the principles that govern the world of material bodies cannot explain the workings of the soul. The two belong to utterly different realms between which no ‘commerce’ is possible. The title aptly reflects Digby’s aim to convince his readers that only such a dualism can prove the immaterial and immortal nature of the soul: it is not One Treatise comprising two parts, but Two Treatises, though bound in one volume because the first on body must be seen as a preparation for the second on the soul.¹

Once we have understood the nature of bodies in terms of matter in motion explained along atomist and mechanistic lines, we also see that these principles and mechanisms do not apply to the soul, whose indivisibility stands in sharp contrast to the divisibility that is the axiom on which Digby’s analysis of body rests.²

In spite of such an unbridgeable gap between the two domains, Digby must of course admit that the soul acquires knowledge of the world of bodies (as well as of its own operations), so that there seems to be some sort of ‘commerce’ after all. The soul receives its information from the senses, processes this information and thereby acquires knowledge, but this simple statement requires further elaboration to understand how an immaterial soul, so utterly different from the world of bodies, builds up a truthful representation of that alien world.³ The role of the human body in interacting with the soul—a crucial issue for Descartes and his followers and critics—did not seem to occupy Digby very much: ‘Digby never took the problems raised by dualism seriously; for Digby, it seems evident and unproblematic that the immaterial and immortal soul is joined to its body and capable of interacting with it’.⁴ But this does not mean that he could regard the soul’s acquisition of knowledge of the world as unproblematic as well: since his whole project was to prove the immateriality of the soul on the basis of an examination of the soul’s operations such as apprehending, judging, discoursing and acting, he had to understand what it

¹The part on body is usually thought to have been written while Digby was in prison between November 1642 and July 1643; the part on soul was probably begun c. 1640; see Levitin 2015, 248 n. 94.

²On Digby’s atomism see Adriaenssen and de Boer 2019, 63: ‘An atom, in Digby’s vocabulary, is a minute portion of one of the elements that, though not indivisible in principle, does resist further division in practice. It is the mingling of elementary minima of this kind, he claims, that yields the mixed materials we find around us’. Yet, as Laura Georgescu has suggested to me, Digby articulated many anti-atomist arguments, e.g. against indivisibles; he might have been quite dissatisfied with atomism. This is however not the place to enter into this difficult issue.

³For Digby the senses are non-conceptual; they work purely by the principles of the body; by ‘information’ I therefore mean simply the data that the senses offer. As Digby writes: ‘Experience must be our informer in generall: after which our discourse shall anatomise what that presents us in bulke’ (TT 387).

⁴Garber and Wilson 1998, 839, with reference to TT 412 and 441–42. In the same History, Garber briefly discusses Digby’s position (Garber 1998, 769–71). In addition, we may note that Digby does not seem to make a distinction between the human body and other bodies: ‘the living creature being composed of the same principles as the world round about him’ (TT 294).
means for the soul, for instance, to apprehend a thing from the other side of the ocean, so to speak.

What makes this traditional question about the relationship between body and soul even more interesting in the case of Digby is his self-professed allegiance to the philosophy of Aristotle. John Henry has forcefully argued that Digby’s aim was to ‘provide philosophical underpinning for the Catholic doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul’ (Henry 2010, 51), an aim which led him to resort to Aristotle, since ‘Aristotelianism was one of the traditions of the Catholic Church’ (Henry 1982, 233). Since such an aim is not unique to Catholics, however, Dmitri Levitin has argued that Digby’s project ‘is better understood in the context of the long-term, cross-confessional debate within late Aristotelianism about the correct method for proving the soul’s natural immortality in the wake of Pietro Pomponazzi’s well-known attack on philosophy’s ability to offer such proofs’ (Levitin 2015, 246). According to Levitin, Digby’s aim was to provide such proofs without falling back on what Digby considered late-Aristotelian accretions that had corrupted the true doctrine of the Philosopher. We might expect Digby therefore to have offered an Aristotelian account of the acquisition of knowledge without these late-Aristotelian accretions, and this is indeed how Dorothea Krook seems to have understood him. She speaks of Digby’s metaphysics as ‘the classic Aristotelian synthesis of realism and conceptualism, worked out with admirable completeness and consistency’, the implications of which were developed by Digby with a ‘thoroughness, and impartiality, and a vivacity of interest’ (Krook 1993, 28). On the other hand, R. T. Petersson wonders whether Digby was perhaps not so happy with his dualism after all: ‘After the work was completed, there were intimations in his letters that Digby had difficulty in believing in a pure dichotomy of spirit and matter even with reference to his own life’ (Petersson 1956, 208). As Petersson claims:

> While asserting that a wide ocean separates the countries of body and soul, he is compelled at the same time to show that the separation is not wide. . . . The dualistic reality he describes is not quite comfortable to him, and, paradoxically, the more valiantly he tries to demonstrate the truth of it, the more successfully he suggests that reality is monistic after all. In other words, the harder he tries to separate bodies and souls, the more he seems to prove that they cannot be separated. (Petersson 1956, 208)

Whether Digby had become less confident in his dualism is difficult to tell. What is certain however is that Digby avoided reference to such a crucial Aristotelian notion of form not only in the treatise on body but also, more surprisingly, in that on the soul. More particularly, soul as the substantial form of the body is virtually absent from the Two Treatises, which makes the question how Digby could have believed that he was a truthful follower of Aristotle in bridging the gap between body and soul even more urgent. Can we see here what Krook called a ‘classic Aristotelian

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5 It is clear that for Digby there is no place for form in natural philosophy; see e.g. TT 344: ‘And where it our turn to declare and teach Logike and Metaphysikes, we should be forced to go the way of matter and of formes and of privations . . . But this is not our taske for the present’. However, form remains indispensable in metaphysics to account for bodily identity over time, particular in view of the resurrection. See Adriaenssen and de Boer 2019.
synthesis of realism and conceptualism’, and if so, was the synthesis indeed so consistent and comprehensive? Answers to these questions are likely to remain tentative given the richness of Digby’s work and his eclecticism, but they might also throw light on the bigger dimensions of his project, differently assessed by different scholars, e.g. on his position in the cross-confessional debate within late Aristotelianism mentioned above. The opening chapters of the *Two Treatises* turn out to be crucial: here Digby offers some programmatic claims that are relevant for understanding his account of the soul’s knowledge in the second treatise. We will therefore start with an examination of these chapters, focusing on common notions and reification of concepts before turning to the soul’s cognition; we will leave the soul’s afterlife, which is a major theme of the second treatise, in peace.

### 2.2 Common Notions and Common Language

From the opening chapters of the first treatise on body we may distill some important claims:

1. Science should ultimately be based on our common-sense view of the world.
2. The language of science is likely to contain a number of specialized terms but these cannot stray too far from the common language in which we express the common-sense view of the world.
3. Things are unities or wholes.
4. We perceive things not as wholes but as collections of qualities, aspects or parts.
5. While in a way unavoidable, such consideration of things as collections of qualities or parts can easily lead to a reification of these qualities, which is a dangerous step that has led to absurd notions in philosophy.
6. The soul does not know things otherwise than by the notions it has of them.

These claims hang together, though, as we will see, they do not necessarily make for an entirely consistent set. The first claim says that science should start from what is most obvious and common to us, and by ‘us’ Digby means ‘mankind in general’ (TT 5, 6). We all see an object as something extended, with a certain quantity, that is, as something that is divisible, from which Digby derives his definition of quantity as divisibility or the capacity to be divided. When asked what the place of an object is, everybody will point to that which immediately encloses it. Quantity and place belong to a set of common notions which we all share. Digby uses a number of words to characterize these notions: plain, easy, natural, immediate, primary, universal, and so on, identifying them with Aristotle’s ten categories as general headings under which our basic conceptions of place, time, quantity, quality and so on can be subsumed: ‘we should acquiesce and be content with that naturall and

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*For these claims see TT 1–6. More specific references will be given below.

*On quality see TT 8–15; on place, TT 6.*
plaine notion, which springeth immediately and primarily from the thing it selfe: which when we do not, the more we seem to excell in subtlety, the further we goe from reality and truth’ (TT 4–5). From these common notions scientists will proceed to build up their theories but these theories can never go against this foundation; they cannot prove the common people wrong in their most basic view of the world. Scientists ‘should refine and carry higher; not contradict and destroy the notions of mankind, in those thinges that it is the competent ludge of . . .: and the worke of schollers, is to explicate them in particular, and not to make the vulgar beleeve they are mistaken, in framing those apprehensions that nature taught them’ (TT 33). With an appeal to this common understanding Digby also argues for an absolute distinction between substance and quantity, so crucial to his philosophy:

For howsoever, witty explications may seeme to evade, that the same thing is now greater, now lesser, yet it can not be avoyded, but that ordinary men, who looke not into Philosophy, do both conceive it to be so, and in theire familiar discourse expresse it so; which they could not do, if they had not different notions of substance, and of the quantity of the thing they speake of. (TT 25)

Digby builds his own natural philosophy, in which concepts such as substance, quantity (divisibility), rarity and density, and motion play a key role, on our common understanding of the world. But in spite of terms like ‘ground’ and ‘foundation’ (TT 8), common notions do not seem to function as axioms of a deductive system. They can be used to check one’s own hypotheses with which they should be compatible. As Andreas Blank has argued: ‘Digby uses common notions as a criterion for the evaluation of hypotheses of natural philosophy’. The use of the Aristotelian concepts of rarity and density is a good starting point because these concepts are compatible with our common notions.

The critical side of the use of common notions is that they can serve as a curb on the vain, all too subtle speculation or empty theorizing (‘subtilizing’) that has no

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8 Blank 2007, 16: ‘Common concepts belong to the natural impressions the thing makes on us, and for this reason are as close to the nature of the thing as we can get’.

9 Krook 1993, 40, thinks that ‘Digby’s common people are evidently no more common than Johnson’s Common Reader was to be; if they were, it would be difficult to conceive how their notion of ‘quantity’ could be of any use to the physicist’. Digby must have in mind the cultured, well-educated layman of his time, with an interest in science and scholarship. This might be true of his readership but Digby’s point here is precisely that these notions are truly universal and natural, imprinted by nature in everybody’s mind and hence shared among ‘all kinds of people’ (or ‘every man living’).

10 Blank 2007, 15; they are explications of our everyday concept (cf. on quantity, TT 17). Blank suggests that Digby might be influenced by Gassendi, who employed the Stoic-Epicurean epistemology of common notions, though the texts cited were published after Digby’s TT. Another text, not quoted by Blank, is Gassendi’s Syntagma Philosophiae Epicuri, also published much later than TT where Gassendi writes that the method of doctrine or teaching ‘begins with Resolution, and proceeds by composition’, mentioning also clearness of language, clearness of division, avoidance of useless digressions, and the necessity of proceeding from the most common and essential elements to the more obscure; Syntagma Philosophiae Epicuri (Amsterdam, 1684, 22) But we know that Digby discussed an atomist argument of Gassendi’s before it was published; see Henry 1982, 215 n. 22.
connection with the world we experience. Science or philosophy should not become a game on its own. This also becomes clear when we look at the second claim listed above: Digby distinguishes between ‘two sorts of language’ (TT 5): a common language belonging ‘to all mankind’, and a technical language used by specialists. Just as common notions lie at the basis of every science, so common language, which is used to express our common notions, should be the starting point of every scientist: ‘the first work of schollers is to learn of the people, quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi, what is the true meaning and signification of these primary names’ (TT 8). The quotation, meaning ‘inasmuch as it is within the judgment, right and standard of speaking’, is from Horace’s *Ars Poetica* (line 71), and while Horace meant to defend usage as the prime criterion of correct speech, in early-modern times it was frequently adapted to defend the language of the common people versus the artificial, technical language of the scholastics.\(^\text{11}\) Digby realizes that scientists cannot do without some specialized terminology such as ‘sine’, ‘tangent’, ‘epicycle’, and ‘deferent’ (TT 5), and he himself had ‘to borrow from the Latine school’ because of ‘the scarcity’ of his mother tongue (TT 15).\(^\text{12}\) This language, ‘proper to schollers’, ‘is circled in with narrower boundes; and is understood only by those that in a particular and express manner have been trayned up unto it: and many of the words which are proper to it have beeene by the authors of it, translated and wrested from the generall conceptions of the same words, by some metaphore, or similitude, or allusion, to serve their private turnse’ (TT 5). The word ‘wresting’ gives a negative coloring to Digby’s statement, and in the same section he clearly uses the same word in a negative way: ‘Great errors arise by wresting wordes from theire common meaning to expresse a more particular or studied notion’ (TT 6). Digby has the technical terminology of the scholastics in mind, giving as example the term *ubi* (‘where’), a notion introduced to assign also a location to immaterial entities such as souls and angels (TT 7). Where exactly unacceptable ‘wresting’ begins and ‘acceptable borrowing’ ends, Digby does not say.

The idea that science should be based on our common understanding of the world was of course not unique to Digby. Many philosophers in the seventeenth century believed that this common understanding was expressed by Aristotle’s philosophy, which, so these philosophers believed, had become obscured and defiled by later Aristotelians; hence, Digby and others were in search of the ‘real Aristotle’,

\(^{11}\) See e.g. Gassendi’s appeal to ‘the common and accepted manner of speaking (communis et protritus loquendi usus)’, in his *Exercitationes Paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos* from 1624, in *Gassendi 1658*, vol. 3, 151B. Humanists such as Lorenzo Valla and Juan Luis Vives frequently appealed to similar notions in their attacks on the language of the scholastics, also quoting the same line from Horace; see Nauta 2016.

\(^{12}\) In the introduction to his edition of TT MacDonald notes: ‘The New OED provides more than 600 quotations from his works. . .Many of these quotes are the earliest recorded instances of the word’s usage, and some of them are the only examples’, and Roland Hall ‘discovered twenty words in the Two Treatises which antedate the earliest dated entry in the OED’ (MacDonald 2013, 10). For a discussion of such borrowings in seventeenth-century English, with special attention to Robert Boyle, see Gotti 1996, 15–23.
even though the result was often a rather eclectic position. It is interesting to note that Digby raised the matter with Hobbes. In a letter from 1637 he asked Hobbes ‘whither you work upon the generall notions and apprehensions that all men (the vulgar as well as the learned) frame of all things that occurre unto them; or whither you make your ground to be definitions collected out of the deep insight into the things themselves’ (Letter 25 in Hobbes 1994, vol 1, 42–43). We do not know if Hobbes answered Digby but he could not have been satisfied with the way Digby had set out the possibilities. For Hobbes we should base science on definitions of our basic philosophical concepts such as magnitude, space and time, and these definitions, he says, “proceed from common understanding”, and depend ‘on the understanding of words, from observing how their meanings vary as the circumstances differ and what is common in all this variety of meaning; for the precise meaning of a word is that which is everywhere understood by it’. As Cees Leijenhorst summarizes Hobbes’s position (Leijenhorst 2002a, 51): ‘scientists are able to reach a communis opinio simply because ordinary language is based upon a pre-scientific consensus. In this respect, Hobbes’ theory of definition is based on common sense . . . [T]his common-sense attitude also inspires Hobbes’ critique of scholastic “insignificant speech,” which in his opinion deviates from the meaning terms have in ordinary language’. Though Digby’s common notions are not presented as definitions, they serve roughly speaking the same function, namely as starting point for the development of science.

2.3 Reification

The reason we have discussed common notions is the important role they play for Digby in curbing speculation, which can only lead to ‘useless cobwebbes or prodigious Chymeras’ (TT 2). At this point we must discuss in greater detail how, according to Digby, these chimeras arise, for this has everything to do with reification, a theme that will recur in Digby’s account of the soul. Reifications arise, says Digby, when people ‘confound the true and reall nature of thinges with the conceptions they frame of them in theire owne mindes’ (TT 2). But words, though serving ‘to expresse thinges’, refer only to the pictures we make of things in our own thoughts, ‘and not according as the thinges are in theire proper natures’. This is very reasonable ‘since the soule, that giveth the names, hath nothing of the thinges in her but these notions, and knoweth not the thinges otherwise then by these notions: and

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13 Mercer 1993, 33–67, 41 on the distinction between Aristotle and later Aristotelians, often made by early-modern thinkers; many were in search of the ‘real Aristotle’ (Mercer 1993, 61). See Mercer 1993, 53 on the revival of Aristotelianism in Oxford in the 1630s; see also in the same volume Southgate 1993, 110.
therefore cannot give other names but such as must signify the thinges by mediation of these notions’ (TT 2). These are important claims that require some comments.

First, we might distinguish two questions here: (i) Do words refer to things or concepts? and (ii) Do words reveal the true nature of things? The first issue was far from dead in Digby’s time. We find, for instance, Hobbes clearly taking a stance in this debate when he asserts that words refer only to our conceptions of things, not to the things themselves.\(^{16}\) Digby had raised this issue in the same letter to Hobbes, mentioned above, and here in the Two Treatises he clearly sides with Hobbes. The second issue was also a live issue in the seventeenth century; the general view was that words are conventional and do not signify in any natural way; there is no essential connection between word and thing, or as Digby elsewhere states: there is ‘no likenesse . . . with the thinges they signify’ (TT 400).

A second remark is that this passage defends what we may call a conceptualist position. The soul does not know the things themselves but knows them only through the notions it has of these things. In the treatise on the soul, Digby will have to qualify this claim, but here its function seems to be to criticize philosophers who reify their own representations of things. This is what Digby goes on to explain: sometimes, some philosophers either multiply things (e.g. qualities) where there is just one thing or conceive of many distinct things as one thing (the Platonic idea, the Scotist *haecceitas*, or the universal of which Digby says that it has a unity only in the mind) (TT 3–4). One of Digby’s fundamental convictions is that things are unities or wholes, a conviction which, as we shall see, is grounded in his account of apprehension. The apple is a whole but we see only partial aspects of it, viz. qualities like redness and roundness or a particular smell. To consider the quality in itself is not wrong but to reify this quality and project it onto the thing results in serious errors; again, Digby is close to Hobbes, who had formulated a similar position on abstraction and reification.\(^{17}\) At various places, Digby repeats this critique: we would populate the world with abstract entities such as qualities, categories such as time and place, points, lines and instants:

> For whereas he [Aristotle] called certaine collections or positions of things, by certaine common names (as the art of Logike requireth), terming some of them *Qualities*, others *actions*, others *places*, or *habitats*, or *relatives*, or the like: these his later followers, have conceited that these names did not designe a concurrence of sundry things, or a divers disposition of the partes of any thing, out of which some effect resulted; which the understanding considering all together, hath expressed the notion of it by one name. (TT 344)

Reification results in a spiritualization of the world of bodies, something which would jeopardize the soul’s unique status as a spiritual entity in a world of matter:

> [Philosophers] have imagined, that every one of these names had correspondent unto it, some reall positive entity or thing, separated (in its owne nature) from the maine thing or substance in which it was, and indifferent to any other substance; but in all unto which it is linked, working still that effect which is to be expected from the nature of such a *quality*, or *action*, etc. (TT 344)

\(^{16}\) On this debate see Leijenhorst 2002b, 337–68.

For this reason, Digby had explained right at the start of the preface to the Two Treatises that he had to treat of body first in view of ‘a current of doctrine that at this day, much reigneth in the Christian Schooles, where bodies and their operations, are explicated after the manner of spirituall things’ (Preface). This theme is picked up in the preface to the second treatise:

They turne all bodies into spirits, making (for example) heate or cold, to be of itself indivisible, a thing by it selfe, whose nature is not conceivable; not the disposition or proportion of the parts of that body which is said to be hoat or cold. (TT 352)

The same is true for ‘light, the vertue of the loadestone, the power of seeing, feeling, etc’ (ibid.). For Digby all these phenomena are just ‘dispositions’ of corporeal parts, working along mechanistic lines, which, if reified, become unexplainable, because they become ‘things that worke without time, in an instant’ (ibid.). Such a reification would amount to spiritualizing nature, something Digby wants to avoid at all costs, for spiritualization takes place elsewhere: in the soul. But before we turn to that, we must first return to the basic conviction just mentioned, that things are unities or wholes.

As we have seen, for Digby ‘Quantity or Biggnesse, is nothing else but divisibility’ (TT 9), but this does not mean that bodies actually consist of parts. In fact, he goes out of his way to prove that if parts were actually in their wholes, quantity would be composed of indivisibles (as the title of chapter 2, section 4 says), something which Digby denies: quantity cannot be composed of indivisibles; parts are not actually in it. As soon as we divide a whole into parts we no longer have a whole, and each part is to be considered a new whole:

Elles, feete, inches, are no more reall Entities in the whole that is measured by them, and that maketh impressions of such notions in our understanding; then in our former example, colour, figure, mellowness, tast, and the like are several substances in the apple that affecteth our several senses with such various impressions. It is but one whole that may indeed be cutt into so many several partes: but those parts are not really there, till by division they are parcelled out: and then, the whole (out of which they are made) ceaseth to be any longer; and the partes succeeds in lieu of it and are, every one of them, a new whole. (TT 10)

The comparison between measures like feet and inches and qualities like red and yellow might seem strange: it is indeed a matter of convention how we divide a thing up, e.g. in feet, ells, centimeters or whatever. But given the fact that we all see, if our senses function normally, the redness of the apple, this does not seem to be a matter of convention. But Digby’s point is probably that the redness is no more in the apple than its being measured in centimeters. Digby sees all these perspectives—to view a thing as a collection of parts or of qualities or of possible measures—as just that: perspectives, which should not be reified, for reification threatens the mechanist picture of matter in motion that characterizes the natural world. The conviction that things are ontologically unified things is thus combined with a conceptualist position according to which the soul knows things only by the conceptions it has of them—the reification of these partial conceptions lead to a world populated by entities which do not obey the principles of bodies Digby defends.
It seems then that Digby’s position requires something difficult from us. On the one hand we must understand things as ontological wholes or unities, on the other hand they only come to us, necessarily, in a fragmentized way, as a bundle of qualities or parts. In other words, to counter the idea that things are made up of self-existing, reified qualities or parts that produce effects independent somehow of the disposition and mechanistic behavior of its underlying matter, we must understand things as ontological unities. This insistence on the ontological unity is clearly motivated by Digby’s critique of the errors and absurdities he sees arising from a reification of all kinds of parts, qualities, notions or processes by the ‘perverters of Aristotle’ who ‘confound the first apprehensions of nature, by seeking learned and strained definitions of plaine thinges’ (TT 345). To the reader’s surprise, perhaps, Digby’s own natural philosophy is wholly written in the language of physical, minimal parts (i.e. insensible particles of matter, also called atoms), but this does not mean that Digby accepted the existence of parts prior to division: ‘partes are not actually in Quantity’ (TT 12) On the issue of the structure of physical continua Digby endorsed, as Holden has argued, the traditional Aristotelian doctrine of potential parts.18

At the same time, however, things do not come to us as unified wholes: they come to us in the form of several distinct qualities, parts, or aspects: ‘In the thinges, all that belongeth to them is comprised under one Entity: but in us, there are framed as many severall distinct formall conceptions, as that one thing sheweth it selfe unto us with different faces’ (TT 2). Language reflects this fact, for we ordinarily speak of qualities and parts. Hence, when Digby disqualifies the scholastic understanding of qualities, he also allows qualities ‘as they are ordinarily understood in common conversation’ (TT 40) and, similarly, ‘ordinary discourse’ about arms and eyes as parts of a body, is perfectly in order as long as we realize that such words are the product of the understanding: ‘Sense iudgeth not which is a finger, which is a hand, or which is a foote. The notions agreeing to these words, as well as the words themselves, are productions of the understanding’ (TT 13). Sense impressions do not come with a label: we provide that label, and that labelling, Digby seems to suggest, is conventional, dependent on our questions. Whenever we see an aspect of a thing—whether a color or a bodily part like a hand—it is our understanding that focuses on that aspect, using ordinary words like red, round, part, hand, eye, and as long as we do not reify that part our examination of only this part irrespective of the whole or other parts is unproblematic.19

It is probably too far-fetched to see here an adumbration of Locke’s distinction between real and nominal essences, i.e. between the level of invisible particles of matter and what we take the essence of a thing to be (e.g. gold) expressed in a

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18 Holden 2004, 96; cf. 53, 118–20, 125–26 and 141–42.

19 As already remarked, we may doubt whether the cases are entirely similar, even though Digby often mentions qualities in one breath with parts like hands and eyes: Parcelling a body into (conventional) parts seems not quite the same as perceiving qualities like colors or smells; while the words like ‘red’ and ‘round’ are of course conventional, the perception of these qualities is not, or at least not in the same manner as dividing a body into parts.
definition, dependent on our questions and interests. Digby is not talking about conventional definitions but tries, unlike Locke, to explain a vast range of natural phenomena. But it is interesting to see Digby, in a way not wholly dissimilar from Locke, insisting on the role of our understanding to categorize and name those aspects of reality, which at bottom is made up of matter. The question how the understanding does this must be examined now.

2.4 Identity and Difference Between the Soul and its Objects

As we have seen, Digby argued that the soul knows things only through the notions it has of them; these are essentially partial representations, and words refer to these representations, not to the things themselves. Reification of these aspects leads to grave errors in philosophy. This is not the whole story, however, for when we turn to his account of the soul as an indivisible, spiritual substance—which happens to be also the seat of knowledge—it looks as if this position is seriously qualified. The context in which this qualified position is developed is the following. In the first part of the second treatise Digby tries to prove the incorporeality of the soul by giving a series of arguments in order to show that things cannot be in the soul in their corporeal form, i.e. that apprehensions in the soul must be spiritual: ‘We must then allow, that thinges are there immaterially; and consequently, that what receiveth them, is immaterial: since every thing is received according to the measure and nature of what receiveth it’ (TT 394).\(^{20}\) In chapters 5 and 6 Digby talks about ‘general’, ‘universal’ and ‘collective apprehensions’, about apprehensions of ‘negations’ and ‘privations’, about ‘contradictory propositions’, about ‘propositions of eternal truths’, and so on, all to show that our mental apprehensions are of a fundamentally different nature than that of bodily things; the soul’s capacity to abstract from particularities, to generalize and universalize proves its indivisible, immaterial nature—these are all operations that cannot be explained by the ordering of dense and rare parts that characterizes the world of corporeal bodies.\(^{21}\) In view of our question about the unbridgeable gap that Digby sees between body and soul, we may now ask: How does the soul acquire knowledge of a world that is ontologically the opposite of it, and how does Digby envisage its role in the light of what he has said in the opening chapters of his work?

The basic picture seems to be this. Based on my sense impressions I form an apprehension of an object, e.g. a knife (one of Digby’s favorite examples). Digby remains vague about the transformation of bodily impressions into spiritual apprehensions, and he admits that he does not know ‘by what artifice bodies are thus

\(^{20}\) MacDonald 2013, 27 summarizes the proofs in the introduction to his edition of the Two Treatises very briefly.

\(^{21}\) On these concepts in early modern philosophy, see the work by Nuchelmans 1998, vol. 1, 118–31.
spiritualized’ (TT 394). But once I have a full picture of a thing I might be said to have a ‘right apprehension’ of that thing, an apprehension containing its parts, qualities, function, effects, workings and so on; my apprehension of a knife is that it is ‘an instrument fitted to cutt such and such thinges, in such a manner’ (TT 356). As we have seen, at the beginning of The Two Treatises Digby had argued that we have ‘many severall distinct formall conceptions, as that one thing sheweth it selfe unto us with different faces’, and that the soul only knows a thing through these representations. He had criticized philosophers who ‘confound the true and real nature of things with the conceptions they frame of them in their own minds’. It might therefore come as a surprise to see Digby now arguing for a kind of identity between the soul and the thing apprehended while he had argued that the soul only knows things by way of these conceptions.

What then can we imagine, but that the very nature of a thing apprehended, is truly in the man who doth apprehend it? And that to apprehend ought, is to have the nature of that thing within ones self? And that man, by apprehending, doth become the thing apprehended; not by any change of his nature unto it, but by assumption of it unto his? (TT 356)

To the objection of those who want to speak only of a likeness in me, not of an identity, Digby answers:

we may conclude, that if the likenesse of a thing, which the obiection alloweth to be in our knowledge, do containe all that is in the thing knowne, then it is in truth, no more a like-nesse, but the very knowne thing it selfe ... [W]hen we apprehend anything, that very thing is in us. (TT 357–58)

Digby is not always very consistent in his formulations, speaking about the (very) thing, the (very) thing apprehended, or the nature of the thing, but the basic idea seems to be that my apprehension of a thing is the nature of that thing, and hence I may be said to ‘become’ that thing on having the right apprehension of it in my mind. Also elsewhere we find Digby using phrases like ‘the true and reall nature of thinges’, things as they are ‘in their own proper natures’ (in opposition to the images we frame of things), ‘the essentiaell and fundamentall being’ of a thing (next to its qualities, etc.) (TT 5), or the thing’s ‘essence’ (TT 373). Apparently, we can know the essence of thing after all, though the conceptualist position outlined above suggested that the soul only knows aspects of a thing.

What does Digby mean by the ‘nature’ of the thing? The talk of becoming the thing apprehended reminds us of a Thomist identity thesis according to which the form of a thing is identical to the intelligible species that represents the general nature to the intellect. This is of course not what Digby has in mind. He does not speak of form, let alone of intelligible species or the active intellect that abstracts

22 See e.g. TT 430 where he says that ‘our looking upon the phantasmes in our braine, is not our soules action upon them, but it is our letting them beate at our common sense; that is, letting them worke upon our soule’. Cf. also TT 401: ‘We may conclude out of this evident signe, that the impression is in the understanding not in its owne likenesse, but in an other shape, which we do not discover; and which is excitated as well by the name, as by the impression in a man that is used to the names’.
the general form, e.g. dog, from the phantasms of individual dogs. While not using the strong language of Thomas Hobbes who rejects all such terminology as the ‘insignificant speech’ of the schoolmen, Digby too does not see any role for such concepts and terminology. But the absence of the term ‘form’ is perhaps even more surprising.23 In explaining the world of corporeal bodies Digby had explicitly rejected ‘form’ as a helpful category but we might have expected him to introduce the term in a treatment of the soul. Digby, however, seems to regard his discussion of the soul as largely belonging to ‘experimental knowledge’. When he comes to treat of the soul’s immortality in chap. IX, entitled ‘That our soule is a Substance, and Immortal’ he writes: ‘Here we have passed the Rubicon of experimental knowledge’ (TT 415). Does he therefore regard a discussion of the soul’s immateriality, based on an examination of its operations, as ‘experimental knowledge’ rather than as, for instance, metaphysics? This is an issue to which we will have to return.

But if not form, what does Digby mean by such terms as ‘the very nature’ of a thing? Digby cannot mean of course the atomic structure of a thing, since this cannot be identified with the thing apprehended. When he talks about the right apprehension of a knife he speaks about ‘all the partes and qualities’, and also its ‘causes, properties, effects’, which suggests that the nature of a thing is all that we have come to know about that thing, summarized in a definition of the type quoted above (‘an instrument fitted to cutt…’). Since correction and improvement of our knowledge is surely possible, Digby cannot claim that such a definition is static.

This last point may also be formulated in a different way: if I become ‘the thing apprehended’, how do I know that my apprehension is the right one? Moreover, to say that my apprehension of a knife is the knife as apprehended comes close to a tautology. Yet we often find Digby saying that ‘by apprehension the very thing apprehended is by it selfe in our soule’ (TT 394). The phrase is ambiguous: it can mean the thing as apprehended (that is, my apprehension of it), or the thing of which I now have an apprehension. The first option seems clearly tautological: an apprehension is obviously a mental thing in my mind. Digby probably wants to say that the thing (of which I now have an apprehension) is the same as my apprehension.24 But to say that my right apprehension of a knife is the nature of the thing (or the thing itself) seems to require the existence of such a nature, independent of my apprehending it, unless Digby wants to say that the nature of a thing is the thing as apprehended such that there is no thing prior to the thing apprehended. As we will see below, the soul’s innate notions include ‘being’ and ‘thing’ by which we can experience something as a concrete thing. (See the next section.) At this stage, we

23 TT 344. See also TT 143; see note 5 above.
24 When discussing the soul’s knowledge in its disembodied state, Digby writes that knowledge in general (also in this life) is ‘nothing else but a Being of the object in the knower; from thence it followeth, that to know all things [in the disembodied state, LN] is naught else then to be all things’ (TT 430; italics in the original). But again this seems tautological: the being of a knife is in me when I know/apprehend the knife. Being is what a thing is; but if the being of a thing is what I think or have come to learn what it is (its parts, qualities, properties, effects, function, etc.), then we seem to end up saying that my apprehension of a knife is the apprehension of a knife in me.
can only say that such an interpretation is difficult to square with the terminology of the soul becoming one with the nature or essence of the thing.

It seems then that Digby has taken over some of the Aristotelian-Thomist language of the soul becoming identical with the form, without taking over the form itself. But if it is not a form, the nature of the thing must be the total picture we have of it (‘causes, properties, effects’, etc.), each aspect of the thing having been somehow spiritualized by the soul.

This raises another question: In spiritualizing things (or rather its qualities), is the soul changing or transforming those things? Digby’s talk of identity and becoming identical with the thing (or the thing apprehended) suggests a negative answer. Things must remain the same, for otherwise the whole idea of the world somehow entering my understanding about which we make knowledge claims would fall through. The identity thesis (nature of a thing = my apprehension of that thing) would look dubious if things were to change on entering my soul. Digby confirms this when he says: ‘what cometh into the understanding of a man is in such sort received by him or ioyned to him, that it still retaineth its owne proper limitations and particular nature’ (TT 360). To build up knowledge out of propositions (‘enunciations’) and syllogisms, the notions that come in my understanding must remain the same, or in Digby’s somewhat loose terminology: ‘what affecteth a man, or maketh an impression upon his understanding, doth not thereby loose its own peculiar nature, nor is it modified to the recipient; the contrary of which we see happeneth perpetually in bodies’. Water that flows into a vessel loses its figure, but an impression does not lose ‘its own peculiar nature’ (TT 360).

On the other hand, in spiritualizing things, the soul does change them (and radically so) in accordance with a principle Digby refers to several times: ‘We must then allow, that thinges are there immateriall; and consequently, that what receiveth them, is immaterial, since every thing is received according to the measure and nature of what receiveth it’ (TT 394). Digby realizes that this conflicts with the requirement of his identity claim, viz. that things do not change on entering the soul: things ‘are so much changed by coming into the understanding and into the soule, that although on the one side, they be the very same things, yet on the other side there remaineth no likenesse at all between them in themselves as they are in the understanding’ (TT 396). He must admit therefore that the Aristotelian maxim that nothing that is in the intellect was not before in the senses ‘is so farre from being true. . .that the quite contrary followeth undenyably out of it, to wit, that nihil est in intellectu quod fuit prius in sensu’ (TT 396). What is in the soul cannot have been before in the senses, since the nature of the soul and its apprehensions are fundamentally different from the material that the senses deliver. It is a measure of his faithfulness to Aristotle that Digby tries to sell his view as not contradicting his great master:

Which I do not say to contradict Aristotle (for his wordes are true in the meaning he spoke them;) but to shew how thinges are so much changed by coming into the understanding and into the soule. (TT 396)
We thus see two opposite pulls in Digby (‘on the one side… on the other side’): an argument for an identity between the soul and the thing (or its nature), and an argument for the very opposite of an identity, viz. a fundamental difference. The second claim gains prominence in much of the later discussion: the soul turns things from divisible to indivisible, from multitude to unity, from temporality and spatiality to what lies outside time and space:

things which in themselves are many and consist in partes, do in the mind get an impartible nature; for tenne is no longer tenne, if it be divided: nor all, is all, if any thing be taken away.

In the same manner, though Philosophy teach us there be neyther pointes in biggenesse, nor instantes in motion or time, yet nature maketh us expresse all biggenesse by pointes, and all time by instantes, the soule ever fixing it selfe upon indivisibility. (TT 400)

To secure the validity of our knowledge claims, things cannot change on entering the understanding of the soul; on the other hand, their nature does drastically change. Perhaps we could save this apparent contradiction by distinguishing between the content and the form in which this content is carried. The content remains the same while the form changes from material sense impression to an immaterial apprehension, but Digby does not make such a distinction and much of what he says does not allow for such a neat distinction: spiritualization is not a matter of changing coats that leave the body unaltered.

One further aspect of this process of spiritualization has not yet been mentioned. The change is effected by the soul by applying its own native concepts to the apprehensions it has—concepts which are not derived from sense perception. This aspect seems to involve the sort of reification that Digby had criticized in the opening chapters of his work. This requires therefore some further discussion.

### 2.5 Innate Notions and the Soul’s Reifications

In spiritualizing things, the soul adds its own notions to them. In my apprehension of a knife I see that it exists, that it is a thing and that it is qualified in such and such a way. The apprehensions of its qualities ultimately derive from my impressions, but the first two are innate notions of the soul that makes thought, reasoning and all discourse possible.25 Digby speaks in somewhat eulogistic terms about the notion of being, which he calls the ‘foundation’, ‘roote’ or ‘principle’ from which all other

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25 See also TT 353–54 where Digby says that everything people do is built on the same foundation, viz. ‘a long chaine of discourses, whereof every little part or linke is that which schollers do call a Syllogisme; and Syllogismes we know are framed of enuntiations; and they of single or uncomposed apprehensions. All which actions are wrought by the understanding of a man’. According to Krook, this passage states that all knowledge is ‘a function of discourse or language’, a position she identifies as ‘Aristotle’s terminist logic or ‘logical nominalism’, with a ‘distinctly nominalist colouring, with interesting variations of hue’ (Krook 1993, 33). But ‘discourse’ in Digby often means thought/thinking, and while thought is expressed in language, they are not the same for Digby. Further, the division into terms, propositions, and syllogisms is quite traditional and does not say anything about a nominalist position.
notions are derived, and into which they may all be resolved (TT 358, 393). It is ‘an absolute and simple conception of it selfe, without any relation to ought else; and can not be described or expressed with other wordes, or by comparing it to any other things’. Only the word ‘is’ gives an intimation of it. But in adding this notion to what the soul apprehends, the soul does not change that thing. If being would change the notion of the knife, we could not state anything about it: ‘Being ioyned to an other notion, doth not change that notion, but maketh it be what it was before’ (TT 361). Next comes the notion of thing, which is less simple than being, since it is composed ‘of Being and of that what hath Being’ (TT 358) A knife is apprehended as something that has being. Finally, we have the apprehensions of how the thing is qualified, which Digby had subsumed under the Aristotelian categories of quality, place, time, relation and so on.

In the second treatise Digby elaborates on his account by introducing another seemingly innate notion, viz. of ‘respect or proportion’, which enables us to compare things (e.g. white things qua white, or a thing with the place it occupies) and to see things in relation to something else. Digby’s formulations vary somewhat and, on this point, are not always easy to understand, but the general idea is that ‘mans soule is a comparing power’ (TT 360), always comparing things to other things, such that our knowledge is ‘nothing else but respects or comparisons betweene particular thinges’ (ibid.). The ten categories are therefore called ‘respective’, for they categorize our notions which always make a reference to or make a comparison with something else; the various examples which Digby gives show that we must think of a very broad phenomenon: either an effect (fire causes heat), a similar quality (white things), shape (‘a certain disposition of one part of a body to an other’, TT 362), or a relationship (the whiteness of a wall); even substance has ‘a respect unto being’. Only being stands all by itself and does not express a relation. The notion of respect itself, which makes comparisons possible, is a kind of meta-notion, something which exists only in man’s understanding: respect is ‘a kind of tye, comparison, tending, or order, of one of those thinges to an other; and is no where to be found in its formall subsistence, but in the apprehension of man; and therefore it cannot be described by any similitude’ (TT 359–60). What Digby seems to mean is that we can see that one thing is like another (e.g. two white things) but that likeness itself (or respect or proportion), which enables us to make comparisons, exists only in man’s understanding.

Now that we have briefly considered Digby’s discussion of the soul’s notions, we can now see where the process of reification comes in. In turning everything into a being, the soul cannot but reify things, including aspects of things. Whenever we think of something we turn it into a thing:

Every particular thing is in him, by being . . . grafted upon the stocke of Existence or of Being: and accordingly we see, that whatsoever we speake of, we say it is something: and whatsoever we conceive, we give it the nature of a thing . . . So that it is evident that all the

26 TT 359. Descartes counts being (être) as one of the primitive notions, e.g. in a letter to Elisabeth of Bohemia from 1643, in AT III 665.
negotiation of our understanding, tradeth in all that is apprehended by it, as if they were things. (TT 360)

Rather than being a regrettable bent of mind, reification is an essential feature of the soul’s operations. Much later, Digby gives the notion of substance—absent from the discussion of being, thing and respect—a special role to explain this feature. As soon as we think of something or of its qualities, we add the notion of substance:

And this is the reason, why we attribute the nature of substance to all our notions; if we see a thing blacke, or doe, or suffer, or be in a place, or in time; presently in our apprehension we conceive these modifications of the thing, like substances; and accordingly we call them by substantive names, Whitenesse, Action, Ubication, Duration, etc. Now the reason of this is because a substance. . . . is a fit and steady ground for the soule to fixe it selfe upon. (TT 400)

In other words, in order to think of the qualifications of a thing (quality, action, passion, time, place and so on) the soul gives them ‘the qualities of substance’ (TT 400), which give them a sort of stability for the soul to fix its gaze on. In order to think of white or place, we must see it as if it were a thing or a substance. Digby duly repeats the warning that we must not fall into ‘gross errors’ by doing so, but it remains pretty unclear how these errors can be avoided if this is such a fundamental trait of the soul’s operation. Digby might want to reply that this kind of reification is wholly different from the scholastic kind. He is not projecting aspects as reified substances onto things (e.g. saying that redness is a thing in the apple rather than the effect of a particular disposition of matter). He is simply considering qualifying aspects as things in themselves. But Digby’s scholastic opponent might just as well say that the soul on Digby’s account is precisely doing what this opponent also does in reifying things, for is Digby not identifying the soul’s apprehension with the real nature of things? And why else does Digby give the same warning in both cases? In any case, Digby does not seem to offer a clear criterion for distinguishing between correct and erroneous forms of reification.

In the passage just quoted we may note another aspect that is also not easy to reconcile with the claims in the opening chapters of the Two Treatises. As Digby argues, we think of qualifying aspects in terms of things, something which is reflected in our use of ‘substantive names’. There seems to be a parallelism between language and thought, and indeed such a parallelism is developed in a chapter entitled ‘How the notions of a substantive and an adiective are united in the soule by the common stocke of being’ (TT 367). Briefly put, Digby argues here for a parallelism between how apprehensions belong to one thing and how language is an expression of this variety and ordering of apprehensions:

And there is no doubt, but in the inward apprehension, there is a variety correspondent to the variety of wordes which expresse it; since all variety of wordes that is made by intention, resulteth out of some such variety of apprehensions. Therefore, since the wordes do import, that the thinges have a dependence the one of the other, we cannot doubt, but that our apprehensions have so too: which will be conceived best, by looking into the act of our mind, when it frameth such variety of apprehensions belonging to one thing, correspondent to the variety in wordes of an adiective glued unto his substantive; and attending heedfully to what we meant when we speak so. (TT 367)
The ‘glue’ or ‘tie’ between two or more apprehensions is provided by the notion of being (‘John is a human being’; ‘the flower is white’), expressed by the copula ‘is’, though Digby admits that a language such as Hebrew, lacking a copula, expresses the relationship in a different way by using a genitive. The parallelism between language and thought might seem to be a confirmation of the claim that Digby made at the beginning of the *Two Treatises*, viz. that words only refer to the pictures we have of things, not to the things themselves, a claim that was especially used as a weapon against those who ‘confound the true and real nature of things with the conceptions they frame of them in their own minds’. Words refer to our apprehensions or at least reflect the way in which apprehensions belong to the same thing (red and round to a tomato). But we might also argue that this parallelism does undermine that claim. By having identified the nature of the thing with our apprehension, we seem to have an access to the things themselves. Moreover, the soul has added its own notion of being to our apprehensions which have turned the latter into more than partial pictures of these things. The spiritualizing process has created the possibility of making propositions that tell us something about the world, not just about our apprehensions, even though that is the material with which the soul works. In the slightly polemical context at the beginning of the work, the claim that words refer only to our thoughts might have been a good move, but the development of the identity thesis according to which my apprehension of a thing is the nature of that thing (and hence that I become that thing on having the right apprehension of it in my mind) renders the claim perhaps less plausible.

### 2.6 Conclusion: Digby’s Contribution to the Post-Pomponazzi Debate

We have started with an examination of some important claims that Digby makes at the beginning of the *Two Treatises*, and which he develops in the second treatise on the soul. Digby’s position has revealed some tensions, which is not surprising given the aims of his project. On the one hand, he seems to emphasize the limitations of the soul’s knowledge: it only knows its own representations, subsumed under common notions, not the things themselves, a position he shared with many philosophers among them some late scholastics and Hobbes; some years later Locke would vigorously defend this position as well. But on the other hand Digby also asserts that the soul can know things directly by becoming identical somehow with the thing as apprehended or with the thing itself. As we have seen, Digby’s phrase the ‘nature of a thing’ does not refer to the underlying material structure, since this is

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27 TT 367. For Hobbes such a difference between languages shows that the copula does not have a meaning in itself, and that words such as ‘entity, essence, essential, essentiality’ that have arisen out of the copula mean nothing. People speaking a language without a copula ‘would be not a jot the less capable of inferring, concluding, and all kind of reasoning than were the Greeks and Latins’ (*Leviathan* 46, in Hobbes 1839, vol. 3, 674, Hobbes 2012, vol. 3, 1078–80).
not what the soul ‘becomes’ in spiritualizing things. Digby seems to have a different level of knowledge in mind when he speaks about the soul’s apprehensions (and the propositions and syllogisms that are derived from them). In view of his examples it seems to be the level of what we have come to see as the basic characteristics of a thing in terms of its qualities, actions, effects, e.g. a knife being ‘an instrument fitted to cutt such and such thinges, in such a manner’.

This leads to a second ambiguity in Digby’s position, for by spiritualizing the object of knowledge, the soul is said to radically change that object but at the same time to leave it precisely as it was, for knowledge claims about an object require a kind of stability in that object. A third source of tension follows from this process of spiritualization about which Digby remains understandably rather vague: in turning all aspects into things or substances (as Digby also writes), the soul ineluctably reifies these aspects so that they may become items in propositions, syllogisms and reasoning; on the other hand, this very process of reification was severely criticized by Digby in other philosophers who reifies qualities, the Aristotelian categories, and various processes in the natural world. Digby does not seem to think of two wholly different sorts of reification, and his discussion of the soul’s operation by which it reifies everything that comes into its understanding ends with the same warning as in the case of philosophers who fail to take enough care.

These tensions reflect a wider problem that Digby encounters in his positing two fundamentally different ontological domains while at the same time arguing for an identity between the soul and the thing’s nature. Digby seems to have formulated two starting points that point in different directions: On the one hand he insists on the unity or wholeness of things, on the other hand we can only see things as a collection of qualities, aspects, and parts as they ‘work different effects’ upon our senses. (TT 56) The unity seems to be restored by the spiritualizing activity of the indivisible soul, and yet at the same time the soul, in spiritualizing the object, reifies its qualities and aspects, conceiving ‘these modifications of the thing like substances’ (TT 400) In other words, his ontological commitment seems not easy to reconcile with the epistemological assumptions that underlies Digby’s account of our necessarily fragmentized way of knowing things.

We can now also see that Digby’s professed allegiance to Aristotle is an important source of these tensions. To put it in a nutshell: he retains the Aristotelian language of the true nature of things with which the soul becomes identical without however accepting the notion of substantial form that had formed the basis of this identity in the traditional Thomist-Aristotelian account. To claim therefore that Digby’s metaphysics consists of an entirely consistent and complete ‘Aristotelian synthesis of realism and conceptualism’ (Krook 1993, 28) is therefore to miss the opportunity to understand these tensions as an indication of Digby’s admirable engagement with several philosophical developments in his time that he tries to combine into one comprehensive philosophy. The synthesis was rather a combination or juxtaposition of several different elements developed in dialogue with contemporaries such as Hobbes, Descartes, his close friend and colleague Thomas White—to mention just a few. As indicated, the so-called conceptualism was an issue he had briefly raised in a letter to Thomas Hobbes in 1637. To this position was
added a kind of realism to secure a direct contact between the soul and the nature of things, a position developed later by Digby’s follower John Sergeant against Locke.28 This also distinguished Digby from Descartes, with whom he shared otherwise much else including his view of the soul as an unextended thinking thing outside time and space, radically separate from the world of bodies that can be explained solely in terms of the principles of bodies Digby defends.29 And we should not forget the impact that late-scholastic authors had on him, even though he was critical of their confusing logic and metaphysics with natural philosophy, which was evident from their abstractions and reifications.30

These tensions offer, therefore, an interesting illustration of the eclecticism that characterizes the thought of many thinkers at the time but they should not detract from the consistent overall aim that drives Digby’s project: in order to prove the soul’s unique spiritual nature, the rest of the world has to be de-spiritualized. This might indeed be constructed, as Levitin has argued, as a late contribution to the Pomponazzi question whether the soul’s natural immortality can be proven by philosophy. Digby’s proof can then be seen as an answer to the materialist interpretation of the soul, famously championed by Alexander of Aphrodisias and developed in the Renaissance by Pomponazzi, who had claimed that natural philosophy cannot prove the soul’s immortality. Digby mentions these two authors alongside ‘the learnedest of the Peripatetike schoole’, who all will ‘rise up in maine opposition against this doctrine of mine: showing how in the body, all our soules knowledge is made, by the working of ourfansie, and that there is no act of our soule, without speculation of fantasmes residing in our memory’, and ‘that there is no reason to imagine other than that it perisheth when the man dyeth’.31 Digby however thinks that Aristotle’s work offers enough ammunition against this position though he does not try to support his view with much textual evidence, probably also because he admits that ‘the texts of Aristotle which remayne unto us, be uncertaine’.32 Against these peripatetics Digby argues that their axiom of the soul being dependent on phantasms for its knowledge is just part of the story. The other part consists in what

28 See Adriaenssen 2017, 198–220.
29 The soul’s knowing an object may be something outside time but the soul itself in its embodied state seem to be in time, since Digby argues that ‘time is then required betwixt her knowledge of one thing and her knowledge of an other thing’ (TT 430), which Digby contrasts to its knowledge of all things in its disembodied state.
30 Digby compiled a MS with scholastic texts, as reported by Joe Moshenska at a workshop on Digby in Groningen, January 2018. And in the late 1630s he was reading late scholastic authors as appears from a letter referred to by Levitin 2015, 247 n. 92. See Adriaenssen and de Boer 2019 for other examples of Digby’s debt to late-scholastic distinctions and discussions.
31 TT 428–29. Another source of mortalism and materialism that might have triggered Digby’s defense of the soul’s immateriality and immortality is Thomas Hobbes’s Elements of Law from 1640. This text, however, enjoyed a limited circulation, and if Digby started working on the second treatise in about 1640, Hobbes’s work was probably too late for him.
32 TT 431. See TT 443 for another example of a very general Aristotelian ‘axiom’ used by Digby to press home his point.
he calls the axiom that ‘Matter is for its form, and not the form for the matter’.\(^{33}\) This in itself is not an argument for the soul’s immortality, but for Digby the soul’s indivisibility implies its indestructibility. In this chapter he argues that the separated soul is an indivisible, active substance outside time and place, with complete knowledge of all things that were known incompletely in its embodied life; its ‘knowledge is being’ (TT 422–33). Its departure from the body is compared with what Aristotle had stated about the instantaneous illumination of the horizon; hence ‘it cannot be said, that we introduce a doctrine alien from the Peripatetic way of Philosophising, if we put a momentary effect or motion . . . to follow out of the course of mans life’.\(^{34}\)

So it seems correct to conclude that ‘Digby had interjected into the late Aristotelian debate over whether the immortality of the human soul was to be discussed in physics or in metaphysics by claiming that he was reviving the ‘true’ Aristotelian approach that worked from physics outwards to prove the soul’s immortality’ (Levitin 2015, 247–48). But given the strict demarcation of body from soul, that entailed a thorough de-spiritualization of the world of bodies, it is perhaps surprising to see Digby looking for support for his arguments about the immortality of the soul in Aristotle’s natural philosophical works. His treatment of the soul’s immortality must belong to metaphysics, as he himself seems to confirm when he says at the start of his treatment of the immortality of the soul that ‘we have passed the Rubicon of experimentall knowledge’ (TT 415), and the notions of form and matter, which make a fleeting appearance, are clearly metaphysical notions.

Digby had not therefore set himself an easy task. He wanted to rescue the spirituality and immortality of the soul out of the hands of mortalists and materialists such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, Pomponazzi, and perhaps Thomas Hobbes. But the new science that he had so enthusiastically endorsed and practiced, prevented him from embracing the metaphysical principles and apparatus on which many Aristotelian commentators had based their proofs of the soul’s immortality. They had corrupted Aristotle by reading his natural philosophy in a metaphysical way, reifying Aristotelian notions such as categories and qualities that should have been accepted only in a conceptual way. As we have seen, some of their idiom lingered on in Digby when he spoke about the soul becoming identical with the nature of the object or when he briefly (and perhaps reluctantly) introduced form and matter in his account of the soul. But given the strict demarcation of corporeal body and spiritual soul, and hence natural philosophy and metaphysics, an appeal to the so-called ‘true’ Aristotle was not so straightforward. But as medieval scholars already said: the authority has a waxen nose that can be bent in any desired direction. Digby was certainly not unique in pulling Aristotle’s nose, but there is no work from the first

\(^{33}\) TT 431. Levitin 2015, 249 n. 102 points out that Digby read this statement probably in Aquinas or a later scholastic source; in this wording it cannot be found in Aristotle.

\(^{34}\) TT 429. John Mair refers to the non-successive illumination of the horizon by the sun in his In Primum Sent. (1530), d. 1, q. 6, fol. 14ra-b, referred to by Kitanov 2015, 172.
half of the seventeenth century that exemplifies the attempt to combine Aristotle with the new science better than Digby’s Two Treatises does.35

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