According to Thomas Aquinas, it belongs to metaphysics to study separate substances—not as its subject matter, but rather as the principles or causes of its subject, which is *ens commune*, or Being-in-general. In considering Thomas’s metaphysical account of separate substances, scholars have understandably focused much of their attention on God, in particular examining Thomas’s arguments for the existence of God. Significantly less attention has been paid to his arguments for the existence of those other separate substances, which he calls “angels.” Not surprisingly, what

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little attention that has been paid to these arguments has focused on their philosophical strength. In the terms of the medievals, scholars have asked whether these arguments are “demonstrative,” apodictically concluding to the existence of angels; or whether they are merely “probable,” showing merely the plausibility of this conclusion without certainty.

The general consensus among scholars is that these arguments are not in fact demonstrative, a view with which I am sympathetic. What I have found curious, however, is that most of these scholars have been so quick to judge the strength of Thomas’s arguments that they have neglected to consider a more basic question: namely, what Thomas himself considers the strength of his own arguments to be. It is this interpretive question

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3 The most critical scholar of Thomas’s arguments is Bazán, who dismisses all of them either as based upon an outdated Aristotelian astronomy, or as theological arguments “whose consistency and logical value are put into question” (“On Angels and Human Beings,” 47). Although I am sympathetic with some of Bazán’s logical critiques of these arguments, I disagree with his assessment that any are intended as theological arguments; moreover, I disagree with his ultimate conclusion that “Since there are no philosophical proofs that separate substances exist, their notion should be excluded from philosophical discourse” (ibid.). In contrast to Bazán, both Maritain (*Degrees of Knowledge*, 234) and Owens (*Christian Metaphysics*, 330 note 1) take a more sanguine view, identifying some of Thomas’s arguments as possessing a high degree of probability, but both hold that the existence of angels is not demonstrable. Collins concludes that no single argument offered by Thomas is absolutely demonstrative on its own, but notes that all of his arguments can be taken together as a single comprehensive proof. In this way, Collins maintains, they are “sufficient to establish rationally the existence of angels for a mind [such as Thomas’s] that was imbued with the hierarchical view of reality and that was fortified by the deliverances of Christian revelation” (*Thomism*, 189, 192–93). Gilson takes a stronger view, noting that “angels are creatures whose existence can be demonstrated. In certain exceptional cases they have even been seen. To disregard them destroys the balance of the universe considered as a whole” (*Thomism*, 189, 192–93).

4 Zammit concludes that some of Thomas’s arguments are intended to be demonstrative and succeed at being so (“De existentia substantiarum intellectualium,” 523). Presumably, Gilson thinks that Thomas himself intends some of his arguments to be demonstrations, though he does not say so explicitly (*Thomism*, 189, 192–93). More recently, Blanchette has noted that some of Thomas’s arguments are “proposed as universally valid” (*Perfection of the Universe*, 280); Suarez-Nani has emphasized that these arguments are intended to show the necessity of the reality of angels (*Les anges et la philosophie*, 29); by contrast, Bazán maintains that none of Thomas’s arguments are intended to be philosophically demonstrative (“On Angels and Human Beings,” 47, 49, 56–59, 79–80).