

sci.anthropology: Re: Angels and photons (Related languages (Re: A China–Sumer connection))

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**From:** Des Small (*des.small\_at\_bristol.ac.uk*)

**Date:** 03/10/05

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Jacques Guy <jguy@alphalink.com.au> writes:

> *Des Small wrote:*

>

>> *Jacques, look what you actually said: multiple angels in the same  
>> place at the same time. No heads of pins, in particular.*

>

> *Des, look what you wrote.*

You helpfully don't provide a quote.

> *What is a place? A dimensionless point? St Thomas writes that, for  
> an angel, the head of a pin is like a continent.*

You helpfully don't provide a quote.

> *A continent can accommodate, vulgarly speaking, an \_infinite\_ number  
> of pin heads. And a pin head, in turn, an infinite number of tiny  
> little "places". So, you ought to be able to house an infinite  
> number of angels on... anything whatever, as long as it has a  
> physical reality. Like... hey man, like a pin head!*

What I actually said was that it's trivial. So why are you explaining it to me?

>> *I would be very interested indeed to know the bibliographical details  
>> of this treatise*

>

> *I sympathise with you. It was in a coffer, in the unused room next  
> to my mine in Port–Orly when I was a guest of Father Linossier,  
> a PhD student trying to make sense of that horrid Austronesian  
> language, Sakao, which had decided to turn itself into yet another  
> holophrastic monster.*

Sigh. If anecdotes were sources, you'd be the finest scholar I'd ever come across.

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- > > *the "angels on the head of a pin" question is*
- > > *routinely used to mock scholastic philosophy*
- >
- > *That is not how I understood it then.*

Nonetheless. <[http://www.straightdope.com/classics/a4\\_132.html](http://www.straightdope.com/classics/a4_132.html)>

""""

D'Israeli goes on to say, "The reader desirous of being merry with Aquinas's angels may find them in Martinus Scriblerus, in Ch. VII who inquires if angels pass from one extreme to another without going through the middle? And if angels know things more clearly in a morning? HOW MANY ANGELS CAN DANCE ON THE POINT OF A VERY FINE NEEDLE, WITHOUT JOSTLING ONE ANOTHER?"

I have not been able to turn up the text D'Israeli refers to (my 17th–century files are just a mess), but it sounds like the work of some would–be comedian. Martinus Scriblerus (dimestore Latin for "Martin the Scribbler") is a pseudonym of a sort in common use among Enlightenment satirists, and THE QUOTED ITEMS ARE BURLESQUES OF ACTUAL TREATISES IN AQUINAS'S SUMMA.

""""

(Emphasis added.)

- > *I am an atheist. Yet I was struck by the intellectual worthiness of*
- > *that treatise, and that an infinite number .... and so on, follows*
- > *beautifully from the nature of angels.*
- >
- > *If, of course, and only if, you agree with that angel*
- > *hocus–pocus. But, let's face it, it's not so very different from*
- > *quarks.*

Did you learn that from a treatise in quarks you found in a filing cabinet in a basement with a sign on the door saying "Beware of the leopard"?

Des

used to be a physiciste, sort of