

**Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. “Concerning the Natural Intellect and the First Object Understood by it” in *Acta Pontif. Acad. Romanae S. Thomae Aq.*, Marietti, 1940. [Nova Series, vol. VI, Annis 1939-40, pp. 137-154.]**

In his last book, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, Etienne Gilson examines at length the position of many recent authors, who hold that Thomistic realism can be put forward as a “critical realism”, even in the modern sense of the term, in use since the time of Kant. These authors want, of course, to defend this view by beginning, not from intelligible being, which is what is known first by our intellect, but rather from the act of thinking itself, in the manner of Descartes.

Thus, Professor Gilson establishes a critique of the positions of Professors R.L.Noel, Fr. Picard, Fr. Roland-Gosselin, Fr. Marechal, himself returning to the position he thinks to be truly traditional amongst Thomists. According to this view, Thomistic realism cannot be called “critical” in the modern sense used among the idealists, but only in the sense that it is not a naive realism, but a philosophical one. Namely, a realism defended philosophically against the objections of the idealists, through a reduction to first principles and to being itself, which is the first intelligible object.

I do not see a notable difference between this position of Professor Gilson and the traditional position of Thomists, which I have defended many times in nearly the same way. However, as I have said elsewhere, it seems clear to me that Thomistic realism can be called critical, not in the misapplied Kantian sense often in use now, but in the true sense, insofar as it is defended by philosophical reflection. (Cf. the post-script at the end of the present article.) I do not insist on this, because it is more a question about the name or vocabulary.

In the first chapter and in the conclusion to his book, Professor Gilson examines what the nature of common sense is for Thomists, and how, for them, our intellect attains the first object known by it, and the actual existence of sensible things.

In these chapters Professor Gilson notes three points against more recent Thomists such as Liberatore, Zigliara and others who have recently written about common sense: 1) that they do not say explicitly enough what common sense is, whether it is the natural intellect itself or another special faculty, as Thomas Ried seems to have thought; 2) he says they often reduce common sense to the first common notions and to the first principles of reason which, at least in an inexact way, are known by all men; but then the proposition “God exists”, which is not, according to St. Thomas, self-evident with respect to us, would not be a truth of common sense, which is, nevertheless, difficult to deny. There is a similar difficulty with respect to the individual immortality of the soul, with respect to the promises and penalties of the future life, which seems, at least in some way, to be universally agreed to by people; and 3) finally, according to Professor Gilson, the more recent Thomists do not sufficiently determine how, according to St. Thomas, our intellect knows *exercised existence*, which is not a sensible thing apprehended by the senses, nor a quiddity apprehended by the intellect. cf. op. cit. 214-5.

\* \* \*

I would like to propose a brief response to these three questions. With regard to the first, we must note that what we discuss here, as is obvious, in no way concerns the sensitive faculty, or the internal sense which is called “the common sense”, within the imagination, which St. Thomas speaks of in *De Anima*, I, II, lect. 13, I, III, lect. 2,3, Ia, q. 57, a. 2.

In order to remove an equivocation, in his *Summa Philosophica* 8a ed., t. 1, p. 257 Card. Zigliara speaks in the chapter entitled *On the nature of common sense*, of the character and limits of common sense, saying “its judgments are derived from the inmost rational nature;...common sense is established from the truth evident to all; ... its judgments are metaphysically or morally certain, insofar as the objects of those judgments are experienced”. This author also maintains that whenever falsehoods are mixed with the judgments of common sense, e.g. about the unity of God, [the judgement of common sense] is denied on account of emotions and prejudices, to which all men subjected.

Moreover, we must note that within common sense, orators like Cicero, and moralists such as Seneca consider what pertains to their own proper studies and, likewise, so does the traditional

metaphysician in treating, e.g. of the first principles of reason as they are known by all, or also the theologian in treating of the faith of the simple faithful who do not have philosophical learning and who nevertheless, in adhering to the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Eucharist, use the common notions of nature, substance and person. Rather, the problem [of the nature of common sense] is set out for theologians with respect to the sense of all dogmatic formulas, which are proposed by the Church for all, without descending to the precision of this or that system of philosophy or theology.<sup>1</sup>

But, having supposed this, what should we reply to the three questions posed above?

*1. Common Sense is nothing other than natural reason.*

I contend that, for Thomists, the nature of common sense is not a special faculty distinguished from the natural intellect, [rather] it is the *natural intellect* itself, which is also called *natural reason*. On this, as is obvious, there is a noteworthy difference between the doctrine of St. Thomas and that of Thomas Reid about this. For the Thomists who wrote about this matter, the nature of common sense is the natural intellect itself. Yet it is not bare, as a blank slate on which nothing is written, but rather as now possessing the first common notions and the first speculative and practical principles of reason, known in an inexact manner, with a natural certitude, yet founded on their evidence. Common sense does not even know [how] to find an exact and entirely universal philosophical formula of the principles of contradiction, identity, causality or even the principle of finality, neither does it manifest their subordination. Nevertheless, it uses these principles with a natural certitude, without which there can be no exercise of reason.

Thus, St. Thomas (I-II, q. 94 a. 2) in treating of the principles of natural law states:

As Boethius says in the book *De Hebdomadibus*, certain axioms and principles are universally self-evident to all. And propositions whose terms are known to all are of this sort: such as *every whole is greater than its part*; and *those things which are equal to one and the same are equal to one another*. ....However, in those things which are apprehended by men a certain order is found. For that which falls under the apprehension first is being [*ens*], the understanding of which is included in all things whatsoever that anyone

---

<sup>1</sup> For this purpose in 1909 I wrote the book: *Common Sense: The Philosophy of Being and Dogmatic Formulas*, cf. 4th edition, *Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1936*. -M. Gilson, *op. cit.*, p. 26, remarks in one note: "Naturally, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange is unable to find a single text from Aristotle or the great scholastics to cite in favour of common sense... The only one he cites is Cardinal Zigliara...why, if thier philosophy had always been the philosophy of common sense did the scholastics fail to realize it until after they had read Reid?."

Since we have said that the realism of Saint Thomas is conformed to the natural realism of common sense, [i.e.] explains it and justifies it, we intended to enounce a truth banal enough, i.e. one generally admitted. We have however in this work on common sense multiplied the texts of Saint Thomas, concerning the first object known by the natural intelligence, i.e., the being of sensible things, concerning the first notions, of the real definitions of man, of the soul, etc.: concerning above all the first principles and conclusions which are easily deduced before every properly philosophical research. To find these texts, it suffices to read the table of contents of this work.

It suffices also to glean over it to see (p. 431 of the latest edition) the refutation of the Scotist error (cf. p. 133) which founds the certitude of the first principles on the instinct of reasonable nature, and not on the subjective evidence of Descartes. When we were writing this book on common sense it was not in the least about people "who dress the perennial philosophy in the fashion of the day which passes" in the manner of Reid, who moreover is history now. Rather, on the contrary, it was above all about seeing how the simple faithful who do not have any philosophical training, [yet] can adhere to the truths of faith by utilizing the notions of common sense, notably the notions of nature, of substance and of person. For this to take place, it is necessary that these notions have an ontological value and even an analogical and transcendental value. Well before Reid, people were saying that common sense was an aptitude of intelligence to judge sanely of things; Cicero remarked about this from the point of view of natural reason. The aptitude to judge sanely is rather the good sense which is lacking to many; common sense is found above all in the natural adhesion to first principles. Cf. *infra*, p. 142 ss.

apprehends (i.e. either the knowledge of the vulgar or scientific or philosophical knowledge). Thus, the first indemonstrable principle is *that a thing is not affirmed and denied at the same time*, which is based upon the notion of being and non-being, and upon this principle all others are based, as the Philosopher says in book 4 of the *Metaphysics*, c. III ff.

However, just as being is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, the good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of practical reason, which is ordered towards deeds. For every agent acts for the sake of an end which has the character of a good. Hence, the first principle in practical reason is based upon the character of the good, that *the good is that which all things desire*. Therefore, this is the first precept of law, that *good must be done and pursued and evil must be avoided* and upon this all the precepts of the natural law are based...

This is, long before Thomas Reid, the best explanation and defence of the principles of the natural intellect or common sense.<sup>2</sup>

Rather as St. Thomas says in the same place: “Therefore according to the order of natural inclinations there is an order of the precepts of the law of nature... with respect to the conservation of a man’s life.. with respect to the union of man and woman... the education of children and similar things.... Also a man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in a society.”

Similarly, St. Thomas shows in article 4 of the same question that the natural law is one among all men, namely, in this sense, “that with respect to the common principles of reason, whether speculative or practical, the same truth or rectitude is equally known to all.” But it is not so with respect to the conclusions, because minds are disturbed by perverse passions; thus: “formerly robbery was not thought wrong amongst the Germans”. From this the immutability of the natural law follows, founded upon human nature itself, having been ordered by the Author of nature to act according to right reason. (Cf. *Ibid*, a. 5 and 6) At the same time natural reason knows, with a moral obligation, our freedom and culpability after perverse action.<sup>3</sup>

Hence common sense is certainly established from the natural cognition of the first principles of speculative and natural reason.

2. *Common Sense or natural reason extends itself to conclusions which are easily deduced.*

Common sense even extends itself to conclusions which are easily, i.e. without philosophical training, deduced from principles and from the facts of common experience, as [it extends itself] to knowing the existence of God from the order of the world, or by force of the principle of causality. This is confirmed through Revelation, in *Wisdom* 13:1 “All men are foolish, in whom the knowledge of God is not present, for from the good things which they saw, they were not able to understand the one who exists, nor did they understand the maker though observing his works.” Again, in *Romans* 1:19, it is said of the Gentiles: “What was known of God was clear in those [things He had made]... ..so that they cannot be excused.”

The *natural understanding* [*ratio*] of more difficult things reaches to the immortality of the individual soul. Nevertheless as St. Thomas says at I, q. 75, a. 6 “Desire follows knowledge

<sup>2</sup> Common sense according to many Latin writers such as Seneca, Cicero, etc. sounds the same as a healthy mind, in contrast with *the insane, [for] being without a clear mind for a long time, is obviously to lack common sense*. But “a healthy mind” contains the seed of “healthy philosophy”. If Thomas Reid had said nothing different, he would hold a common sentiment, or that which common sense judges of itself.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, I, q. 83, a. 1: Whether a man has free-will. “I answer that, man has free-will, otherwise counsels, exhortations, precepts, prohibitions, rewards and punishments would be fruitless”. This is an argument from common sense, and next the Holy Doctor gives a metaphysical proof, by showing why a man acts by a free judgment, just as reason about contingent matters is open to the opposite.

[cognitio] in knowing things. But sense does not know being [esse], except here and now. But the intellect apprehends being absolutely and according to all time. *Hence everyone having an intellect naturally desires to exist always. But a natural desire cannot always be frustrated.* Therefore, every intellectual substance is incorruptible.”

Again, in order to show that offering sacrifice to God is of the natural law, St. Thomas says at II-II, q. 85, a. 1: “Natural reason prescribes to man that he is subject to some superior, because of defects, which he perceives in himself, in which matters he acts to be sworn and directed by some superior, and whatever that superior is, this is what all call God.”

Even many nominal definitions pertain to common sense, e.g. what men commonly understand by the name of substance, quantity, quality, motion, time, by the name of man, soul, etc. And as St. Thomas often notes, the “*nature [quod] of a name*” inexactly contains the “*nature [quod] of a thing*” or the real definition must be discovered through the division of the supreme genus and through an inductive comparison of the thing defined, with other similar and dissimilar things.

Thus natural reason contains many things in an inexact way, and it is difficult to determine its limits, because where inexact knowledge ends and distinct knowledge begins often is not easily apparent; and because the natural intellect is stronger in one matter than in another, and because its operation is impeded in diverse ways through perverse passions or, on the contrary, it is aided through the right religious traditions.

\* \* \*

### 3. *How our natural intellect knows exercised existence.*

Finally we must respond to the third problem of Professor E. Gilson; namely, recent Thomists do not sufficiently determine how, according to St. Thomas, our intellect knows actual existence, which is not a sensible thing apprehended by the senses, nor a quiddity apprehended by the intellect. (Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 214-215).

We must dwell upon this.

This question pertains to the problem *concerning the first object known by our intellect*, which we have treated many times for thirty years, often citing the classical texts of St. Thomas<sup>4</sup>, to which Professor E. Gilson also returns, *loc. cit.*

First, we must call to mind the common perception of Thomists about this matter.

For St. Thomas, the first object known by our intellect is *the intelligible being [ens] of sensible things*. Now being signifies *that which is*, for being is named from “*to be*”, and thus from the beginning of our intellectual life we conceive being [esse], or existence in an inexact way, even in the manner of a quiddity. But the *judgement of existence*<sup>5</sup> immediately follows, namely, concerning the exercised existence of such a sensible and individual object, which as sensible and individual is known *directly* by the senses and *indirectly* by the intellect “*as if through a certain reflection*” upon its own individual act, just as the intellect “converts itself to phantasms, in which it understands the intelligible species”, as was said in I, q. 86, a.1.

This conclusion is commonly accepted by Thomists, as it is defended in the same way by them.

In order to understand this we must carefully distinguish the first apprehension of a being from the subsequent judgement of the existence of a sensible individual thing. Although they occur in nearly the same instant, nevertheless there is a priority of the natural apprehension of a thing. Thus, I do not doubt it will appear, according to those texts of St. Thomas, that 1) *we apprehend* the intelligible being

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Le Sens Commun*, 4th ed. p. 34 ss.; 101 ss., 103 (concerning the accidentally sensible, with regard to the text of St. Thomas *De Anima*, 1.II, lect.13); 133, 137, 400-407. -*Dieu son existence et sa nature*, 5th ed., p. 149, 152, 167, 180, 187, in these pages we speak of accidentally sensible being and intelligible being per se, the first object known. - Again, *Le Realism de principe de finalité*, 1932, p. 209-237.: The first object of our intellect.

<sup>5</sup> This judgement of the exercised existence of such an object, e.g. milk, comes about not by apprehending, but by *composing* cf. I, q. 85, a. 5. This presupposes that our mind possesses first at least an inexact idea of existence.

of sensible things, and *the opposition between being and non-being*, which is expressed in the principle of contradiction, at least before the distinction between *I and not I* is explicitly known intellectually; 2) *thereafter we judge* of the existence of our individual act of knowledge and concomitantly of the existence of the knowing subject, or the *knowing being* (which could not be known as *a being* if there were not first an apprehension of a being); finally, 3) we judge concerning the existence outside of the mind of any sensible *individual thing* “through a certain reflection” upon our act. (Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 5 and q. 1, a. 9)

Thus, *in the first apprehension*, the intelligible being of sensible things is known, before we apprehend our own proper act of thinking through reflection. But, *in judgement*, on the contrary, we judge concerning the existence of our individual act of intellectual cognition, before we judge concerning the existence of an individual sensible thing outside the mind.

Thus, it is explained why, in this problem, some authors, namely metaphysicians, who pay greater attention to the *nature* of things than to facts, begin *from being* [*ab ente*] which falls first in the apprehension as the thing most known; while other authors, namely psychologists and idealists, who, like the empiricists and nominalists, pay greater attention to the *facts* of consciousness than to the nature of things, begin rather from the judgement of the existence of our act of thinking: the *cogito*.

*Concerning the first apprehension of being and its opposition to non-being*

Concerning this first apprehension the principle texts of St. Thomas are known by all, but perhaps it is not sufficiently known that [in this first apprehension] there is immediately an apprehension of the opposition between being and non-being, which is expressed in the principle of contradiction, and that this opposition between being and non-being is known prior to the distinction between I and not I. Further, this first apprehension precedes, by a priority of nature, the judgement of the existence of the knowing subject and of the sensible thing; such judgements would be impossible without these things.

St. Thomas says at I, q. 5, a. 2 “*being [ens] is what falls first in the conception of the intellect*, since according to this each and every knowable thing is insofar as it is in act: hence, being is the proper object of our intellect, and thus it is the first intelligible thing, just as sound is the first thing audible.” But the proper object of any faculty is that which is first attained by it and it [i.e. the faculty] attains all other things by reason of it [i.e. the proper object]; nay rather, according to Thomistic realism, if the intellect did not attain being first or from the beginning, it would never attain [to knowing] itself [illud] - St. Thomas says [this] again at I, q. 85, a. 3. Equally, in the *Contra Gentiles*, II, c. 83, it is said, “our intellect knows *being [ens] naturally and those things which are beings per se* inasmuch as [they are] of this kind, in this knowledge the notion of first principles is founded, as [one cannot] affirm and deny being [*esse*] at the same time (or the opposition between being and not-being), and other things of this kind”. Similarly at I-II, q. 94, a. 2 “that which first falls in the apprehension is being [ens], the understanding of which is included in all things whatsoever anyone apprehends.”

Equally, *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1: “that which the intellect first conceives as most known, and to which it reduces all concepts is being.”

But, by the name “being” [ens], as is said in many other texts, *that which exists* is commonly understood, or *at least what can exist*; in this way actual and possible being is distinguished. By way of further explanation it is said “*a being is that whose act is to be*.” And thus in the first apprehension of intellectual being, an inexact notion of existence is already possessed, in the manner of a quiddity, before the judgement of existence which would be “*by composing*” and by the word “*is*” or “*exists*”, which signifies the truth of a proposition (I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2).

Cajetan in I, q. 2, a. 1, n. 8 said: “By *names* things are signified as *concepts*, but by *words* they are signified as *acts* [*exercitae*]. Hence the expression: ‘existence is not’, does not entail a contradiction; but the expression: what exists is not, does”. This is what St. Anselm did not consider sufficiently in his famous argument.

Therefore, from the considerations above, what is not and what is, for St. Thomas, the first object known by our intellect is firmly established. It is most certainly not the act of knowing or the “*cogito*” itself, nor the *thinking subject*<sup>6</sup>, nor is it the *divine being* known in an inexact way, as the ontologists said, nor even the *eternal ideas* as they exist in God. The texts of St. Thomas entirely deny this in explicit terms.<sup>7</sup>

But with St. Thomas, the first object known by our intellect is the intelligible being of sensible things, which is immediately apprehended by the intellect at the presence of a thing sensed. This is clearly expressed in a classic text often cited, *de Anima*, II, c. 6, lect. 13, ed. Pirotta, n. 396: where [the phrase] “accidentally sensible” is explained:

What is not known by a sense properly, *if it is something universal*, is apprehended by the intellect; yet not everything that can be apprehended by the intellect in a sensible thing, can be called *accidentally sensible*, but [only] *what is immediately apprehended by the intellect at the presence of the thing sensed*. For example, when I see someone speaking, or moving himself, I immediately apprehend through the intellect his *life*, hence I can say, I see that he is living. But if it is apprehended in the individual, just as when I see a coloured thing, I perceive *this man* or *this animal*, indeed an apprehension of this kind comes about in a man through the cognitive power, which is also called particular reason, since it compares particular intentions, just as the universal reason compares universal notions [rationum].

Thus, the *greatest of the lowest*, namely cognitive things, attains to *the lowest of the highest*; and indeed it does not attain this simply, because there is an immense distance between both, but it attains this *in a certain respect*, as the disposition of an inferior order attains the form of a superior order. On this point a certain obscurity will always remain for every doctrine which admits of distance *without measure* between sensitive knowledge, however much it is perfected, and intellectual knowledge. *A fortiori*, a similar obscurity remains in Kantianism on this point, [i.e.] in the schemata spoken of by Kant.

Hence, for St. Thomas it is certain that being, as the first thing known by our intellect *is not sensible through itself and on its own*, like colour, *nor is it sensible through itself and commonly*, like magnitude, but it is only *sensible accidentally*, and it is *intelligible through itself* which is immediately apprehended by the intellect at the presentation of a thing sensed.

Thus, when a boy knows milk or a sweet being through taste, as *sweet*, he apprehends milk as a *being*, or a sweet being as a *being*, i.e. as intelligible being. And in the same instant the boy apprehends, at least in an inexact way, the opposition between being and not being expressed in the principle of contradiction, before he knows intellectually and explicitly the distinction between I and not I. In addition, to the extent that the boy intellectually apprehends a sweet being as a being, and not

<sup>6</sup> Cf. I, q. 76, a. 5, “The intellectual soul, just as was said above, q. 55, a.2, according to the order of nature holds the lowest grade among intellectual substances, insofar as it does not have an innate knowledge of truth naturally, as the Angels do; but, it is necessary that it gather knowledge from divisible things through the senses.” Hence the proper object of the *lowest intelligence* is the least *intelligible thing*, to the likeness of sensible things. And also, the soul knows the relation to the sensible objects before knowing its own act and essence. Cf. I, q. 87, a. 1.

<sup>7</sup> He says at I, q. 88, a. 3: “Since the human intellect cannot understand immaterial creatures in the present state of life, as was said in the preceding article, much less can it understand the essence of an uncreated substance. Hence we must say simply that God is not the first object known by us.”

Note further the text at I, q. 84, a. 5: “When it is asked, whether the human soul knows all things in *the eternal ideas*, we must say that something is said to be known in two ways. In one way as the object known, just as when anyone sees things in a mirror, their images reflect in the mirror. And in this way the soul in the present state of life cannot see all things in eternal ideas; but the blessed, those who see God and all things in Him, do know all things in eternal ideas. In another way something is said to be known to someone, just as in the principle of knowledge... But, the intellectual light, which is in us, is nothing other than a certain participated likeness in the uncreated light, in which the eternal ideas are contained.”

as sweet, he knows being universally in predicating (not, of course, being universally in its essence and cause, which is God): and thus now he can know in an inexact way the principle of contradiction not only in relation to sensible phenomena, but in relation to being universally, although the boy has not yet abstracted being inasmuch as it is a being, from the genera and species of sensible things.

Hence, as Cajetan says, in the *Commentary on Being and Essence*, Preface, question 1: “the concrete being of the quiddity of a sensible thing is the first thing known by an actual cognition in an inexact way.”<sup>8</sup> For being is not yet abstracted from the quiddity of a sensible thing, it is not yet distinguished from the species, from the proximate genus, from the supreme genus of this thing; it is only abstracted from the individual. All Thomists agree on this proposition: when a boy knows milk as sweet through taste, he knows the milk as a being through the intellect. All these things pertain to the first apprehension of being, and the opposition between *being* and *non-being*, which is known before the distinction between *I* and *not I*.

*Concerning the judgement of the existence of individual sensible things*

But how is our intellect, immediately after, able to judge of the exercised and individual existence of such a sensible object, which is not known by it *directly*? This question will be answered according to the doctrine treated in I, q. 86, a. 1, that our intellect “*through reflection*” knows the nature and existence of its own individual act, which is materially derived from sensitive knowledge. Thus “*through a conversion to it*” one judges through the mode of composition, which is materially in this individual thing (apprehended by the senses as individual and as sensible, e.g. milk), [that] it is or exists.

But this explanation remains incomplete. If the apprehension of intellectual being and of the opposition of between being and non-being were not first, our intellect could not firmly judge of the existence of our thinking (it could say: Perhaps I think and do not think at the same time, I am and am not at the same time); as our intellect can strongly affirm: *I think* and judging of the existence of *the thinking subject*, or of *the thinking being*, it is necessary that he should first possess a notion of being and of the opposition between being and non-being. But next it can judge of the existence of an *individual* sensible thing outside of the mind (e.g. of milk) apprehended directly as individual and sensible by the senses; for it cannot judge of the existence of things outside of the mind unless it first possesses a notion of being and knows the existence of the mind.

And how does it judge of the existence of individual sensible things outside of the mind? St. Thomas answers in *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 5: “The mind knows an individual (material) thing *through a certain reflection*, namely just as by knowing its own object, which is any universal nature, *it returns to the thought of its own act*, and further to the species which is the principle of its act and further to phantasms, from which the species is abstracted”. (Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 9) But in order that one might judge of the exercised existence of this sensible individual thing, it is not necessary that one have a *direct* and immediate apprehension of this individual and exercised existence; because when one says, e.g. “this is milk”, the word “*is*”, just as it is distinguished from the name *being*, signifies the truth of a proposition or a composition: namely this milk is existing. That composition would be impossible if a true apprehension of intellectual being, which is named from to be, were not possessed, and if existence were not truly apprehended according to the manner of an abstract quiddity.

But our intellect can now say: “this milk exists in an exercised way”, thus it has a direct and immediate intellectual apprehension of individual and exercised existence. Thus we can also say, “God is”, although we do not have a direct and immediate apprehension of the existence of God as he is in himself, and which is identified with the divine essence.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Also John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Phil.*, Natural Philosophy, q. 1, a.3.

<sup>9</sup> Hence, St. Thomas says at I, q. 3, a. 4 ad 2: “*Being [esse]* is said in two ways: in one way it signifies the act of being; in another way it signifies the composition of a proposition, which is brought about by the mind joining the predicate with the subject (e.g. evil is in things, blindness is in this man). Therefore, taking being in the first way, we cannot know God’s

Thus it is that God in himself exceeds the natural apprehension of our intellect. But a material individual is within the direct apprehension of our intellect which is occupied with the universal; nevertheless our intellect by turning itself to sensible things, *indirectly* knows an individual sensible thing directly known by the senses, and it can, by composing, form a judgement of existence, e.g. the milk exists, or this man exists.

But, this judgement, which happens through the manner of composition, would be impossible, if our intellect did not first have at least an inexact true notion of existence, aa it has this in the first apprehension of real being [*entis realis*] which is said from being [*esse*].

\* \* \*

---

being, nor his essence, but only in the second way, namely, from effects we know that this proposition “God is” is true, just as “blindness is in this man”.



## Conclusion

Conclusion Now all these [proofs] would fall if the first object known by our intellect were a sensible phenomenon (e.g. sweet or white), or its subjective representation, or even the idea of being, or the idea of the knowing. The first object known by our intellect is not the idea of being, or the concept of being, but it is intelligible being itself expressed in a concept, and a concept, just as knowledge, has an essential relation to the being represented outside of the mind.

For this reason I have written [on this topic] since my 1909 the book, *Le Sens commun* (4th ed. p. 135, ss.), and in this matter I do not doubt, we fully agree with Professor E. Gilson.

Descartes and the modern idealists only want to admit a subjective evidence, because for them intelligence knows itself before it knows being. It takes its point of departure from the *I think*; but it will never conclude *I am* without surreptitiously supposing the ancient axiom: "the object of the intellect is being"; Kant and the phenomenologists saw this very well. It will be necessary then to content oneself with saying: *I think, therefore I am thinking*; and yet this is not certain. According to his proper principles, the idealist does not know the reality of his action, but only the representation he has made of it. Furthermore, since he knows this reality by consciousness, he would not be absolutely certain that it is really real, because he doubts the objectivity of the principle of identity, its value as the law of being, if the real can really be contradictory. If being is not the first and formal object of intelligence, intelligence evidentially will never attain it.... Finally, one will no longer even be able to say *I think*; the "I" at its bottom is fatally ontological; it will be necessary to content oneself with affirming impersonally that one thinks, as when one says, "it rains"; and yet this will not be certain, because it would be perhaps that impersonal thought was identical in itself with the non-thought. This is the old refutation of Cartesianism by the Thomists of the 18 century.<sup>th</sup> The point of knowledge is not the *I think*, it is being (to be) and the first principles which imply the principle of identity or of non-contradiction: That which is, is; that which is not, is not.

---

<sup>th</sup> Cf. Goudin, O.P., *Philosophia*, IV, P., disp. I, q. 1, ed. 1860, t. IV, p. 254: "If the mind places itself [and] even our *principle (of contradiction)* with all the others, *as a doubt*, the doubt will also be whether, *the thing that thinks is or is not*. For it would not be able to think and yet not be, if it were possible, the same thing would be and not be". Many of the Thomists since XVII s. make exactly the same remark with us among others: *La critique thomist de Cogito cartésian*, Estratto dal supplemento dal volume XXIX della "Rivista di Filosofia neoscholastica" Luglio 1937, Milano, p. 393-400.

In other words:

The formal object which is known by any faculty is that which is immediately attained by it and a faculty attains all other things by reason of its object. Therefore, if *intelligible being* is the formal object of the intellect, either it is attained by it immediately or it is not attained at all. And this seems to be the essence of realism itself, in opposition to idealism. Therefore, those positions are entirely irreconcilable; they differ radically right from the start, without any possibility of conciliation.

Thus, we fully admit what Professor E. Gilson says, *op. cit.*, p. 225, in treating of *being [ente]* and of the *act of being [esse]* as it is accidentally sensible:

In order for man to perceive being with his intellect, an existent must be given to him, an existent perceptible to his sensibility. Therefore, it would be incorrect to pose the problem only from the point of view of the existential judgement, for before we can affirm existence it is necessary to apprehend it. It would be equally incorrect, however, to seek the cause of our knowledge of the existence of some object in a *species intelligibilis* of actual existence. Whatever intelligible species the intellect is provided with it can only conceive universals. But the intellect is able to see being in the sensible objects we perceive... [tr. p. 205]

We also fully agree with Professor Gilson about what he says, *op. cit.*, p. 237 ss., concerning our knowledge of first principles, as they are laws of being.

Thus I do not doubt that we agree in substance, and, if we say that Thomistic realism can be called *critical*, indeed we do not understand this last word in the Kantian sense, but in the same sense as Professor E. Gilson, when he says on p. 38 that it is a *philosophical realism*, one which is able to be defended philosophically or through philosophical reflection. Thus, the realism proposed here is, in fact, not founded on a *kind of postulate*, but in the very evidence of being and of the first principles of being. As St. Thomas says I, q. 1, a.8: “In philosophical sciences, the lower sciences do not prove their own principles, nor do they argue against those denying the principles, but they leave this to a superior science; but the highest among these, namely *Metaphysics*, *does argue against those denying its own principles*, if the opponent concedes something; but if he concedes nothing, it cannot dispute with him, yet it is able to answer his arguments.” This is the true position of realism, which St. Thomas defends especially in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, IV, c. III ff and lecture V ff., where he defends the real

value of the principle of contradiction, as it is a law of being; but, were this removed, nothing would remain certain, not even the Cartesian expression “I think, therefore I am”.

Although we know the sensible individual first through sense, we know the universal and the universal principle “something cannot be and not be at the same time” through the intellect prior to this claim: I am and I am not able to be and not to be at the same time.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Thomistic realism presupposes that *a genuine sensation* (as distinct from an hallucination and from an imaginary non-corporeal vision) cannot be without *a real sensation*, to which it is essentially related.

\* \* \*

#### *Postscript*

Msgr. Noel writes very justly in *La Revue Neoscholastique de Philosophie*, February 1940, p. 43 ff.:

For Liberatore, as for Zigliara and Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, common sense and philosophy proceed from the same rational faculty. But its order, spontaneous from one side, is, from the other side, systematic... It is very true that the "common sense" appears in the title of a work of Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, but in regard to the properly theological problem, [i.e.] the problem of the importance and of the sense of dogmatic formulas, which has been taken up by M. Edouard Le Roy. Inspired by M. Bergson, M. Le Roy has insinuated that dogmatic formulas, expressed in terms of common sense, only have, as common sense, a practical sense. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange was interested in showing that common sense is in the same line as the philosophy of being, which justifies it, without for all that depending on it in the least. No remark could have fallen more marvelously wrong than the tract let loose by M. Gilson (p. 26 in note): "When Bergson defined the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle the natural metaphysic of the human intelligence, he was speaking as a true philosopher; this is a formula profound--in a different manner however--than making it the natural metaphysic of common sense."

It is clear also, as Msgr. Leon Noel says, *ibid.*, p. 44, that Cardinal Zigliara classifies common sense among the extrinsic critiques of certitude, and does not in any manner search there for a foundation for philosophy (cf. T.M. Zigliara, *Summa Philosophica*, ed Paris Lyon, 1898, t. 1, p. 257 ff., 277-281, and also 290-292 on the fundamental critique, which is evidence).

---

<sup>10</sup>Ia, q. 85, a. 3: “The knowledge of individuals is prior to the knowledge of universals according to us, just as knowledge from the senses is prior to intellectual knowledge. But, *the knowledge of the more common is prior to knowledge of the less common* according to both sense and the intellect.”

We maintain also what we have said in *La Revue de Philosophie*, January 1931, "Thomist Realism and the Mystery of Knowledge" and later in *The Realism of the Principle of Finality*, 1932, p. 201 ff.:

Thomist realism is not only a naive realism of common sense, it is a methodical reason and even a critique--not in the abusive sense--but in the exact sense of this word. It is founded in effect on the examination of the value of knowledge, insofar as intelligence reflecting on itself knows not only its act, but knows sufficiently the nature of its act and its capacity for seizing its proper essential finality, which is to be conformed to things "in cuius natura est ut rebus conformetur" (St. Thomas, *de Veritate*, 1, 9). Why does the intelligence know its proper essential finality, its reason for being (*raison d'être*)? Because it has for its object being and its reason for being of things. On the contrary the sense of the view, having for object, not being as being, but the colored thing, does not know its proper finality, its reason for being. The truth is in it, but it does not know that it possesses it; but the intelligence knows the truth and it knows that it knows it.

Concerning the subject we have spoken about up above on the priority of the knowledge of being and of its opposition to non-being, in regard to the *I think*, someone has objected to us that the opposition of being to non-being is known by the principle of contradiction; for this principle is a judgment, and, for Saint Thomas, every judgment carried out by the knowing subject supposes that it [the subject] knows itself.

We respond: this is true above all of the reflexive more than the spontaneous judgment, and of the explicit judgment more than of the implicit judgment. Moreover, in the altogether first spontaneous knowledge of the principle of contradiction, there is a priority, not of time, we have said, but of the nature of knowledge of being opposed to the non-being of the *I think*. If one wishes to say that there is a priority of nature of the *I think*, this would not be simply, or in the order of formal causality or of the object and finality, but *secundum quid* in the order of material causality. In the same way, in the first desire of the good and the sovereign good, I desire first of all (the formal object) and I desire it for myself (subjectum cui).

This distinction is capital in the problem of knowledge, as in that of love. St. Thomas has often expressed it in this last problem, (I. q. 60, a 5, ad 2; II-II, 26, 3, a. 2; a. 13, ad 3), where he deduces: "and therefore in the order of love it is necessary that after God man should love himself the most".

---