

Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition

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Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition

The Philosophy of Being as First Known

By

Brian A. Kemple



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Cover illustration: “The Triumph of St. Thomas Aquinas over the Heretics” by Filippo Lippi and his assistant Raffaellino del Garbo, in the Carafa Chapel of the Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, Italy, c.1489–93. This narrow slice of Lippi’s “Triumph of St. Thomas” represents not only Thomas’ defense of the truth against its detractors, but also his willingness to engage with them and the importance of his thought for the whole world.

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To

Dr. Cicero Bruce, who taught me how to read.

Dr. Herbert Hartmann, who taught me how to think.

*All the faculty of the Center for Thomistic Studies, who taught me
that there is always something more to discover.*

*Dr. John Deely, who taught me to check my mirrors, but
most importantly, to look at the road ahead.*

*Wagner, Boyer, and Plaza,
for the many long conversations.*

*My mother, who taught me first,
and teaches me still.*

*And many others, too numerous to name, without whose support
I never would have come this far.*

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Escaping the Framework of Modernity

Illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit—that which first falls into the apprehension is being, which is included by the intellect in all else that it apprehends.¹ What does it mean to apprehend—and what is this being which is apprehended first?

Étienne Gilson writes in his first missive against critical and idealist philosophies, *Methodical Realism*, that the “epistemological” problem raised by the central question of modern philosophy, how it is that we know things outside the mind, “is posed in terms which, of necessity, imply idealism itself as a solution.”² Consequently, Gilson asserts that any attempt to produce a realist philosophy which includes a critical turn is inevitably condemned to the inescapable prison of idealism. Instead, he turns his focus to the primacy of the “real”—that is, extramental being, the substances which exist independently of human consciousness. Whereas some Thomists have attempted to found their theories of knowledge on a Kantian-influenced critique of knowledge and thereby *de facto* reduced the *primum cognitum* to an *a priori* and innately possessed concept, Gilson and others may have, on the other hand, been too quick to interpret the “being” of St. Thomas’ claim, that being is the first apprehended, to include nothing other than what is often called *ens reale*, being as it exists independently of any human understanding.

The Thomistic realism of the 20th century which developed largely on the basis of Gilson’s thought, while successful in overcoming modern philosophy and its problematic way of ideas, nevertheless flirts continually with the same error against which Gilson warned the Louvain school of transcendental Thomism:³ although they did not fall into the trap that one must establish how it is that we know before it can be shown that one knows things outside the

1 1271a: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.94, a.2, c.

2 Étienne Gilson 1935: *Le réalisme méthodique* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin). References are to the English translation by Philip Trower, *Methodical Realism: a handbook for beginning realists* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 21.

3 Among whom Gilson includes Mercier, Noël, Picard, Roland-Gosselin, and Marechal. Gilson 1939: *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin). References are to the English translation by Mark A. Wauck, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012). See *in passim*. Hereafter *Réalisme thomiste*.

mind, Gilson and his followers do seem to accept from modern philosophy an opposition of the objects of cognition, i.e., as either within the mind or outside of it, which implies as the sole solution to the problem of knowledge that the proper objects of knowledge are only those things that have their whole mode of being entirely independent of human cognition.⁴ While this approach succeeds in escaping the epistemological quagmire which follows upon taking knowledge of the extramental world as problematic, it does not fully explore the nuances of Thomas' own teachings on human knowledge. In other words, accepting that all objects of thought are either *ens reale*, as something existing outside the mind, or *ens rationis*, as something existing **only in the mind**, such that the two kinds of objects are mutually exclusive of one another,⁵ and

4 Cf. Gilson 1939: *Réalisme thomiste*, 205: "Here we discover the true realist meaning of the formula: *ens est quod primum cadit in intellectu*. With its first truth the intellect apprehends what is most profound in its object: the *actus essendi*." Note that an *actus essendi* is properly said only of that which has being in the substantial order. Cf. 1935: *Le réalisme méthodique*, 86–92, wherein my point is not explicitly stated, but is heavily implied by the distinctions which Gilson draws between realist and idealist epistemologies. See also Owens 1992: *Cognition: an epistemological inquiry* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press; Houston, TX: University of St. Thomas Center for Thomistic Studies), 34: "The first problem, then, is to discern what is actually the basic object upon which your cognition directly bears, whether upon externally existing things or upon internally present ideas and sensations. Upon that foundation the subsequent epistemology will depend." Ibid, 153: "The notion of an 'objective concept' does not fit very well into an epistemology in which real sensible things are the direct object of our intellection. Rather, the object of the concept is the thing itself as known in abstraction. In this way the human nature, the animal nature, and the vegetative nature of a perceived object are represented in separate concepts. They are represented apart from each other, even though in reality they are never found in separation from the really existent individual. The existence these objects have in separation from one another is accordingly cognitional existence. As abstracted they cannot be sensibly perceived or imagined, though they are always known in a sensible image. The notion of 'objective existence,' as contrasted with real existence, would seem wrongly to endow the abstracted nature with a kind of being in between cognitional and real existence." Also Klubertanz 1952a: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), 35–40. The common problem indicated by these texts is not that they **engage** the problem of modern epistemology in the framework of its own terms, but in rejecting the notion that ideas are the direct objects of our acts of understanding, there is an overreaction and overemphasis on the priority of the "real" as the object of intellectual activity. The consequence of this is that *entia rationis* are left without a sufficient account, not only in how they come to be known, but also in terms of how they are incorporated into many of the discursively formed concepts of the intellect.

5 See, for instance, the treatment in Joseph Owens' 1963: *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co.); references are to the University of St. Thomas Center for Thomistic Studies edition reprinted in 1985 (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame

interpreting St. Thomas through this exhaustive and exclusive division of objects, does not fully accord with the teaching of the Common Doctor. This opposition of *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, where the former deals with the reality of things themselves and the latter with those things which exist only within the psychological subjectivity of the individual mind, oversimplifies the nature of *res* and the “real” as well as the manner in which the cognitive faculties of the human being interact with the world, both according to the teaching of St. Thomas and in truth. Indeed, the term *ens reale* never appears once in the *oeuvre* of St. Thomas Aquinas; while this does not mean that there is not some truth to the idea connoted by the term, the stark division of modern philosophy between the mental and the extramental as objects of cognition is not to be found in Thomas.⁶

This approach to the objects of cognition, although it does result in a philosophical approach that avoids the ultimately solipsistic disaster of modern philosophy, nevertheless lends itself to reliance upon an oversimplified and at times insufficiently explained notion of abstraction, and, moreover, results in a conceptual framework inadequately equipped to deal with the emerging importance of relation as a mode of reality equiprimordial with substance.⁷ This

Press), 38–39, or, in the same work, in terms of first and second intention at 240: “The first intention bears directly upon the thing as it is in real being or in the imagination. The second intention bears only upon the thing as it is in intentional being in the intellect.”

6 Moreover, Thomas uses the term *res rationis* on more than one occasion (cf. c.1252/56a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.37, q.1, a.1, c.; 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.13, a.7, c.; i.1256–59: *DV* q.28, a.6, c., q.29, a.4, ad.12, and 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.5, lec.9, n.897), indicating that the formal *ratio* of truth (*DV* q.1, a.1, c.) does not necessarily consist in the *adequatio* of the intellect and a cognitively-independent thing. Cf. also Thomas Osborne 2010: “The concept as a formal sign” in *Semiotica* 179: 1–21, especially pages 11–12 for a discussion of how *entia rationis* can be objects of the intellect in a manner similar to *entia naturae*.

7 Cf. Joseph Ratzinger 1970: *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder and Herder), 132: “the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality.” Thomas Langan 1996: *Being and Truth* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press), 39: “*relation* is emerging as central. This is inevitable, given the finite mind that does not—as the divine Mind does—generate its own Word from itself but must find the stuff of its word given in a transcending reality. But it is not just our knowledge that is relational. The things themselves (including, of course, our own bodies) because they, too, are finite, and hence do not provide their own conditions, are caught up in webs of causality and other real relations, the basis of further networks of implication between abstract concepts. Only because real relations between things are visible to us and recognizable as such do we have a base for discovering the distinction between such real relations and those constructed imaginatively by the mind.” The importance of relation is the central thesis to Adrian Pabst 2012: *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids,

equiprimordially should not be misunderstood to signify that relation **exists** in a way independent of substances, but rather that the **mode** of existence of all substances other than God—and even in a certain sense **within** God, in the three Persons of the Divine Trinity—includes relation in its very nature.

If an interpreter of St. Thomas understands the *ens* which Thomas calls the *primum cognitum* to be only that which exists independently of cognition, and thus embraces only the subjective constitution of things, then that interpreter will be insufficiently equipped for dealing with the intellectually-discerned reality of many cognitively-dependent aspects of human life—the beings with which, indeed, humans are preponderantly engaged—such as the various offices required by civil government,⁸ the social significance of the civil recognition of the institution of marriage, the full meaning of what it is to be a professor, the purpose of public sporting events or cheering for a particular team, or the importance of fictional media. None of these things are **wholly** cognition-dependent, nor do they fall squarely under what John Searle has called “social reality”; but they are **what** they are neither without some cognitively-dependent contribution nor some social framework in which they can be developed.

While we cannot thoroughly explore these various cognitively-dependent aspects of life in this work, we do intend to establish a theory of knowledge, based in an investigation of Thomas’ claim that being is the first which falls into the intellect’s apprehension, which provides the groundwork for understanding social and otherwise cognitively-dependent aspects of reality (which are *entia rationis*) in a manner coherent with the understanding of beings of nature, things the constitution of which is cognition-independent (*entia naturae*, the term Thomas most frequently uses in opposition to *ens rationis*).

Whereas other schools of philosophical thought and other philosophers have taken beings of reason under consideration, they are at a disadvantage in doing so, inasmuch as they invariably segment human experience into

Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.). Cf. c.5 below for my own discussion of relation, including many other relevant citations.

8 For instance, when we say that a human being is a “judge”, as the magistrate in a court of law, what does this mean? Clearly, the judge is supposed to be proximately capable of rendering good judgment concerning the application of the law, and the accomplishment of this is the end towards which he is ordered *qua* judge. However, to be a judge, as an official either elected or appointed, is not just to be one who judges well, but one who is recognized as having the authority to pronounce judgments by the government and always to some extent by the general populace of the governed. In other words, the “judgeness” of the judge, as an office, although based in some way upon it, is not to be found in the subjective constitution or activity of the judge himself, but rather in the objective constitution given him through the way in which he is considered by others. Cf. 1.3.1.2.2.

disparate spheres or lack some metaphysical coherence. In the thought of St. Thomas, contrariwise, we can find the foundations for a systematic treatment which deals cohesively with the whole of reality, including both that which exists in cognition-independent subjectivity and that which emerges from the intersubjectivity of such beings, on the basis of what is meant by saying that being is first known and is that into which all concepts are resolved.⁹ This universal reach of the Thomistic theory of knowledge stands firm only upon the foundation of *ens primum cognitum*—if we cannot understand the first principle of all knowledge, then we cannot justify the claim to any knowledge.¹⁰

Therefore, what we propose to achieve in this dissertation is: to make a substantial investigation of the approaches of four important thinkers in the Thomistic tradition, namely Thomas Cajetan and John Poinsoot from the early commentary tradition, treated in the (1) **first** chapter, as well as Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, from the later tradition, in those places where they deal with the question of *ens ut primum cognitum* and the formation of intellectual knowledge, treated in the (2) **second** chapter. (3) **Third**, we seek to clarify the operation of the *intellectus agens*, first by surveying some of the most important texts where Thomas Aquinas speaks of the object of knowledge, and secondly by looking at the operation of the *intellectus agens* itself. (4) **Fourth**, we seek to elaborate on the continuous nature of cognized being by showing the interpermeation of so-called “real” and “mental” being in the discursive process of concept formation according to Thomas Aquinas. (5) **Fifth**, we will examine how relations, rather than substances or their accidents, though not independent of the substantial order, can help us to more clearly understand what is meant by *ens primum cognitum* than beings considered merely in their subjective constitutions. And (6) **sixth**, finally, we intend to establish the true nature of *ens primum cognitum*.

Prefatory Notes on Terminology

This book attempts both the saying of something new and the preservation of insights old: therefore, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, we need to clarify a few key terms which are used throughout the work. We are not,

9 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1, c.: “Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio suae metaphysicae.”

10 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.1, a.1, c.: “sicut in demonstrabilibus oportet fieri reductionem in aliqua principia per se intellectui nota, ita investigando quid est unumquodque; alias utrobique in infinitum iretur, et sic periret omnino scientia et cognitio rerum.”

however, employing terminology in a principally denotative sense; we are, here, inevitably entangled in various connotations of meaning, this being a work which operates through a long and complex history of philosophical thought. Therefore, we are not providing precise and exact determinations of isolated terms, a nearly impossible task—and the full significance of some of these terms will only become evident through their usage in the body of the text itself—but rather we are providing some initial clues as to how we have appropriated some terminology from various traditions, and where those appropriations might include some shifts in meaning.

Subject and Object, *Ens Naturae* and *Ens Rationis*

Few pairings are likely as important to this dissertation as these two. Following John Deely, we re-appropriate the distinction between subject and object which prevailed in the scholastic philosophical vocabulary, there being no contemporary English equivalent to their original meaning. That is, narrowly used, we hold to Deely's point that:¹¹

In the medieval understanding, far from being independent of finite mind, an “object” to be such had to be something present or presented to mind, whether or not it was, in addition to existing within awareness, a thing not dependent upon the mind for existing in its own right. Thus the later Latins, in contrast with the later moderns, had an “intuitive” grasp of the difference between a thing, *aliquid* or *res*, which exists whether or not anyone is aware of it, and an object, *objectum*, which cannot be as object outside of or apart from awareness.

More broadly, however, we use “object” to refer, instead, to anything considered precisely insofar as it is related to a power, whether that power is cognitive or not.¹² Since this book concerns itself primarily with **knowing**, such uses are rare.

Being an object, therefore, is a mode of being in contrast to the mode of being a subject; that is, where objectivity is due to a relation to another,

11 Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter), 15. See 9–16 of *Purely Objective Reality* for more on the perversion and subsequent reclamation of the terminology of “subject” and “object”.

12 Objectivizing as the “relating-to-a-power”, it would seem, is part and parcel of the broader semiotic nature of the entire physical universe.

subjectivity is due to intrinsic principles, namely, the nature and the *actus essendi*. Hence, we pair “subject” and “object” with *ens naturae* and *ens rationis*, the terms Thomas himself used to favor an absolute distinction between what exists independently of cognition, the order of subjective constitution, and what exists purely on the basis of a cognitive act, including the cathectic acts which may follow upon cognition, within the order of purely objective constitution. Oftentimes, therefore, we will refer to what is narrowly called “objective” as that which is “cognition-dependent” and what is subjective as what is “cognition-independent”.¹³

Ideoscopic and Cenoscopic

We take these terms ultimately from Jeremy Bentham, as mediated first by Charles Sanders Peirce and second by John Deely (who proposed the altered spellings from “idioscopic” to “ideoscopic” and “coenoscopic” to “cenoscopic”). These two terms, particularly as used by Peirce, can be of great use to clarifying between the methodologies of the “special” sciences which investigate phenomena according to particular facts, within particular domains and by particular means, and those which investigate phenomena according to the overall range and employment of natural reasoning alone!¹⁴

Class II is philosophy, which deals with positive truth, indeed, yet contents itself with observations such as come within the range of every man’s normal experience, and for the most part in every waking hour of his life. Hence Bentham calls this class, coenoscopic. These observations escape the untrained eye precisely because they permeate our whole lives, just as a man who never takes off his blue spectacles soon ceases to see the blue tinge. Evidently, therefore, no microscope or sensitive film would be of the least use in this class. The observation is observation in a peculiar, yet perfectly legitimate, sense. If philosophy glances now and

13 Deely has previously used the phrases “mind-dependent” and “mind-independent”, having recently abdicated them in favor of “awareness-dependent” and “awareness-independent”. However, since “awareness” connotes a current act of consideration, and it is not my belief that such a consideration needs to be occurring to the degree that the term “awareness” suggests for there to be **some** degree of existence in an objectively-constituted reality, I have opted for the more general “cognition-dependent” and “cognition-independent”.

14 Charles S. Peirce c.1902: “A Detailed Classification of the Sciences” in *Collected Papers* 1.241–2.

then at the results of special sciences, it is only as a sort of condiment to excite its own proper observation.

Class III is Bentham's idioscopic; that is, the special sciences, depending upon special observation, which travel or other exploration, or some assistance to the senses, either instrumental or given by training, together with unusual diligence, has put within the power of its students. This class manifestly divides itself into two subclasses, the physical and the psychical sciences... Under the former is to be included physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, geognosy, and whatever be like these sciences; under the latter, psychology, linguistics, ethnology, sociology, history, etc. [Physical science] sets forth the workings of efficient causation, [psychical science] of final causation. But the two things call for different eyes. A man will be no whit the worse [a physical scientist] for being utterly blind to facts of mind; and if we sometimes find observation in a [psychical scientist], it will, unless by exception, be found not to be of a purely physical fact. Thus, a philologist may have a fine ear for language-sounds; but it is by no means pure physical resemblance which determines whether a given sound is or is not "the" Italian close o, for example, as it is naively called: it is psychical habit. In any simple physical sense the sounds not distinguished from that differ much more from one another than almost any of them do from sounds which would not be tolerated for "the" close o. So, this fine phonetic observation of the linguist is a knack of understanding a virtual convention. The two kinds of observation are different; but they do not seem to be quite so different as both alike are from the observation of the philosopher and the mathematician; and this is why, though I, at first, was inclined to give each of them equal rank with those classes, it has at length appeared certain that they should be placed a little lower.

This distinction of the methods or approaches to scientific consideration, while deserving of a rich expansion within the considerations of Thomistic theories of knowledge and metaphysics, is one which we indicate throughout the book but do not, for brevity, elaborate to any great length. Of fundamental importance is the realization that ideoscopic inquiry is both autonomous in regards to its own discoveries while ultimately unintelligible without some cenoscopic oversight.¹⁵

15 Cf. Maritain 1935: *La philosophie de la nature, essai critique sur ses frontières et son objet* (Paris: Téqui) in the English translation by Imelda C. Byrne, *Philosophy of Nature* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 33–5 wherein is posited a similar, though less explicit, distinction between the common use of natural reasoning and the experimental sciences

Concept, *Verbum Mentis*, *Species Expressa*

By and large, we will use these three terms interchangeably. While “concept” can refer broadly to anything “conceived” in the mind, be it intellectual or belonging to the interior sense powers of imagination, estimation/cogitation, and memory, we will principally and primarily use it as signifying the *verbum mentis* or *species expressa* which is the internal terminus of an intellectual operation.

The meaning of “concept” is one quite obviously, widely, and obscurely discussed in the history of Western philosophy. A summary discussion of its possible meanings, uses, and variations would encompass a lengthy book unto itself. Consequently, we approach the notion of a concept strictly from within the confines of the Thomistic tradition and following principally from the works of Poinset, Maritain, and our own discussion of the operations of the intellect (c.3) and the discursive process of intellectual discovery (c.4). An obstacle to be overcome progressively throughout the dissertation is the confusion between what the post-Thomas scholastics distinguished as the objective and the formal concept, i.e., between the thing-made-known and the means-by-which it is made known, between the *id quod* and the *id quo*. The essentiality of relation to concepts (c.5) plays a crucial role in this overcoming.

Ens ut Primum Cognitum and *Ens Primum Cognitum*

Though the full reason for the subtle distinction which we employ between these two terms will not become clear until the final chapter, the reader should be aware that they are used with slight differences: namely, that the form containing the preposition *ut* is used both to signify the object itself and to signify the distinction of *ens* as first known from other knowledge(s) of *ens*, whereas *ens primum cognitum* is used more generally to refer to the phenomenon of the first known considered indiscriminately as to the object and the subject knowing. This distinction runs in a way parallel to that between subject and object, between *ens naturae* and *ens rationis*; the sameness between the two signifies

as regards sensible objects of experience. See also Yves Simon 1943: “Maritain’s Philosophy of the Sciences” in *The Philosophy of Physics*, ed. Vincent Edward Smith (Jamaica, NY: St. John’s University Press, 1961), 25–39 and DeKoninck 1941: “Are the Experimental Sciences Distinct from the Philosophy of Nature” in *The Writings of Charles DeKoninck*, vol.1, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 443–456.

the overcoming of these distinctions, the unifying which brings coherence to the whole of human experience.

Influential Approaches to *Ens Primum Cognitum*

In a sense, there is no question more obvious, or more difficult, than that of being as first known. To the best of the author's knowledge, the claim that being is first among the objects grasped by the human intellect originates in the work of Avicenna, who asserts matter-of-factly in his *Kitab al-Shifa*, or *Metaphysics of the Healing*, that being is the first object grasped by the intellect.¹⁶ The claim of Avicenna is true; the lack of clarity wrought by lack of any elaboration and the context of his claim—within a treatise on metaphysics—are pernicious. Indeed, the relationship between *ens ut primum cognitum* and *ens inquantum ens*, being as first known and being as the subject matter of metaphysics, has elicited, and continues to elicit, no small amount of confusion among philosophers, particularly among Thomists.

Thomas Aquinas himself, while he did not do much to obfuscate the question, left it largely unattended, to the extent that his followers have often been confused themselves. These interpreters, both those in the Latin Thomism extending from Giles of Rome through John Poinsoot and those in the resurgent Thomism surrounding and following *Aeterni Patris*, have often unintentionally muddied the waters in their considerations of *ens*. Most generally, the danger for Thomists has been to conflate or subsume *ens ut primum cognitum* into *ens inquantum ens*.¹⁷ Given the inclination of all Thomas' philosophy towards

16 Avicenna i.1020/27: *Al-Kitab al-Shifa*, references to the English translation by Michael Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, I.5.1/22: "The ideas of 'the existent,' 'the thing,' and 'the necessary' are impressed in the soul in a primary way. This impression does not require better known things to bring it about."

17 As will be shown below at length in c.1–2, this is the case for Cajetan (albeit in a round-about manner), Gilson, and in some sense Maritain; for other instances, see Lawrence Dewan 2013: "First Known Being and the Birth of Metaphysics" in *Distinctions of Being: Philosophical Approaches to Reality*, ed. Nikolaj Zunic (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association; distributed by the Catholic University of America Press), 47: "Thomas sees the principles, precisely as known first of all and to all, as having the properly metaphysical character. This does not make the beginner a finished metaphysician, but it does mean that the principles of metaphysics are precisely those very first known principles, not some newly constructed conception of being resulting from the study of physics. If we did not start with metaphysical principles, no particular science would ever provide them."

ipsum esse subsistens, this confusion is understandable. Most especially is it understandable in the attempt to rip philosophy free of the epistemological quagmire of modernity characteristic of the resurgent Thomism, especially of the first half of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, in liberating speculative philosophy from the go-nowhere “way of ideas”,¹⁸ Thomism lurched into an intransigent metaphysical realism, lodging the human intellect in the essences of the “hardcore” reality of *res extra animam*.

This metaphysical realism, while not entirely inconsistent with Thomas, does seem to misappropriate his statements concerning the meaning of *ens* said as *primum cognitum*; an over-insistence upon overcoming modernity results in a metaphysicalizing of every instance wherein Thomas says *ens*. Re-examining the texts and ideas of Thomas himself presents a different picture: namely that the focus of Thomas’ vision indeed lights upon *ens* as metaphysically considered, but not exclusively. *Ens ut primum cognitum* is, for the Common Doctor,

Cf. Dewan 1980: “St. Thomas and the Ground of Metaphysics” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* vol.54, 146 and 153 (reprinted in 2006: *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* as “St. Thomas and the Seed of Metaphysics”: 35–46 [see 37–38 and 41]; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange 1946: *La synthèse thomiste* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer) in the English translation by Patrick Cummins, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (St. Louis, MO: Herder Book Co., 1958; republished by Ex Fontibus Co., 2012), 27–31; Robert J. Henle 1983: *Theory of Knowledge: A Textbook and Substantive Theory of Epistemology* (Chicago: Loyola University Press), 133: “It follows from these considerations that the **formal object of intellect as such**, and, therefore, of the human intellect as well, is Being *qua* Being, Being understood existentially.” John Wippel 2000: *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press), 40–44; Fernand Van Steenberghen 1946: *Ontologie* (Paris: Louvain Éditions de l’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie) in the English Translation by Martin J. Flynn, *Ontology* (New York: Joseph B. Wagner, Inc, 1952), 20: “At the beginning of our inquiry the object of ontology is the same as the *complete object of my actual experience*... Metaphysics, then, is a science which takes as its initial object any datum of experience whatever and, therefore, all the data of experience which are accessible or available to the metaphysician.” Louis De Raeymaeker 1947: *Philosophie de l’être. Essai de synthèse métaphysique* (Paris: L’Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de Université de Louvain, 1947) in the English translation by Edmund H. Ziegelmeyer, *The Philosophy of Being: A Synthesis of Metaphysics* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1954), 28–29; R.P. Phillips 1935: *Modern Thomistic Philosophy: An Explanation for Students, in two volumes; Vol. II: Metaphysics*, 160: “Being, then, though the first thing known, is also the ultimate term of all knowledge. It is the Alpha and Omega of the speculative reason.” Hilary Carpenter 1942: “The Ontological Roots of Thomism” in *Essays in Thomism*, ed. Robert E. Brennan (New York: Sheed & Ward): 84–100.

18 Cf. John Deely 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding. The first postmodern survey of philosophy from ancient times to the turn of the 20th century* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press), 485–607.

not the metaphysically real, but rather the cognitional grounding—tied to and dependent upon the metaphysically real, ordered towards a full intellectual grasping of that reality, but irreducible to it. Since Thomas' texts do not explicate *ens primum cognitum* directly, however, we must unfortunately have recourse to a diversity of issues, including both the operations of the *intellectus agens*, concept-formation, and the nature of relation as *esse ad*, to demonstrate the kind of experiential universality to be found in Thomas' doctrine. We can understand some of these issues better with the assistance of the more insightful Thomistic authors of the tradition.

Unfortunately, since the decline of the first Thomistic tradition, little insight has been achieved into the issue of *ens ut primum cognitum*.¹⁹ Modern philosophy handcuffed itself to the problem of how we know—rejecting the facile solution given by scholasticism through obstinately adhering to a fallacious framework of the problem²⁰—while analytic philosophy's

19 There has been plenty of scholarly consideration on the question, but little advancement in the way of philosophical insight, with rare exception. Much of this scholarly development has focused on Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus. See, for instance, Ludger Honnefelder 1979: *Ens inquantum ens: Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus*; Wouter Goris 2002: "Implicit Knowledge—Being as First Known in Peter Oriol" in *Recherches de Theologie et Philosophie Medievale*, vol.69: 33–65; 2011: "The Foundation of the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Some Remarks on the Medieval Transformation of Metaphysics" in *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* xxii: 527–557 (rife with additional citations to further scholarly progress in Europe); 2011: "Two-Staged Doctrines of God as First Known and the Transformation of the Concept of Reality in Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent" in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 85.1: 77–97.

20 Cf. Deely 1993: "The Primum Cognitum and Our Knowledge of Essences", *Semiotics* 1993, 39: "It was a very important and insufficiently understood insight of Latin scholasticism that the physical environment, insofar as it enters into the cognitive structure constituting an Umwelt, is of itself sensible but not of itself intelligible. Understanding itself, taking the materials of sensation and perception as its base, has to make that material actually intelligible. This it does by first seeing the whole material of perception—the objective world of Umwelt in all its parts—in relation to itself, over and above the relations to biological needs and interests which are already factored into the structure of the Umwelt by virtue of the biological heritage of the cognitive organism. Hence the objective world, seen in relation to itself, already consists of a mixture of mind-independent and mind-dependent relations structuring particular objects but undistinguished as such in the apprehension constitutive of Lebenswelt. Thus the first action of the understanding is to apprehend its objects in such a way that they *can eventually* be understood critically, and this is to apprehend the objective world under that mind-dependent relation which allows its contents to appear, truly or falsely, as present-at-hand and not merely ready-to-hand (as they appear to the animals which are not human)."

mathematically-inspired approach (one might say its mathematically-inspired myopia) has in many cases condemned it irredeemably to futile debates over logical and linguistic minutiae. Most phenomenologists, following Husserl, have entrapped promising beginnings in reductions to the psychological subject.²¹ Among this lattermost group, the phenomenologists, there stands however one figure who managed not only to avoid psychological subjectivism, but whose lifelong philosophical inquiry was dedicated to the problem of *ens primum cognitum*: namely, Martin Heidegger. Salient, for our investigation here, is that he sought the fundamental truth of Being (*Sein*) as an issue inexorable from both the intellectual capacities of the subjective constitution of the human person and the fact that beings (*Seiendes*) come to be known, not as two opposed subjects of inquiry, but as belonging to one and the same fundamental question.²²

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- 21 Cf. Edmund Husserl 1913: *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, I. Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, in the English translation by F. Kersten, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (Boston, MA: Kluwer Boston, Inc., 1983), especially 105–130. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1942: *La Structure du Comportement* in the English translation by Alden L. Fisher, *The Structure of Behavior* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963), 137f and 201f. One can find similar problems in Sartre's ethical position in *Existentialisme est un humanisme*. Cf. 2013: David Woodruff Smith <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>>, retrieved 2016 September 30 for a survey of historical and contemporary literature. By and large, the problem which persists is the myopic focus on the structures of human consciousness, specifically as constituted in some way separately from the world—thus, even when focused on the transcendental of the human being, many phenomenologists inevitably, and unintentionally, reduce the psychological subject to a *sui generis* self-contained unit.
- 22 Heidegger 1927a: *Sein und Zeit*, originally published in the *Jahrbuch für Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Forschung*, Band VIII, ed. E. Husserl (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006). English references in the present work are to the translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963). Hereafter sz; p.5 (German)/24 (English): “Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought. Inquiry is a cognizant seeking for an entity both with regard to the fact that it is and with regard to its being as it is. This cognizant seeking can take the form of ‘investigating’, in which one lays bare that which the question is about and ascertains its character. Any inquiry, as an inquiry about something, has *that which is asked about* [*sein Gefragtes*]. But all inquiry about something is somehow a questioning of something. So in addition to what is asked about, an inquiry has *that which is interrogated* [*ein Befragtes*]. In investigative questions—that is, questions which are specifically theoretical—what is asked about is determined and conceptualized. Furthermore, in what is asked about there lies also *that which is to be found out by the asking* [*das Erfragte*]; this is what is really intended: with this the inquiry reaches its goal....

What allowed Heidegger to succeed, to some degree, in his attempt to gain insight into the nature of *Sein* and *ens primum cognitum* was his altered approach to the consideration of human nature, i.e., to the most fundamental and defining aspect of the person, as “Dasein”: literally, “being-there” (or “there-being”). This characterization is not an attempt at philosophical anthropology or psychology, but an attempt to present thematically some understanding of the whole of the Being which is proper to man:²³

When, however, we come to the question of man’s Being, this is not something we can simply compute by adding together those kinds of Being which body, soul, and spirit respectively possess—kinds of Being whose nature has not as yet been determined. And even if we should attempt such an ontological procedure, some idea of the Being of the whole must be presupposed.

While the study of Heidegger is not central to this work, his influence will be continually felt, for his career was dedicated to an aim sympathetic to our own, and his core insight is of value to any inquiry after *ens*. Stated provisionally, Heidegger sought to avoid what he saw to be the perennial flaw of philosophers’ attempts at inquiry concerning the nature of *Sein*: namely, the reification of “Being” into a concept and, by avoiding this error, to find a thinking which could accomplish or bring to light in some way or another the Being by which beings are known.

Though Heidegger is an important influence on our thinking throughout, this is primarily a book written within the tradition of a living Thomism and under the sapience of Thomas Aquinas himself.

Objectively and Socially-Constituted Reality

Where Thomistic philosophy can and ought to develop further, in an organic manner on the basis of its own principles, and particularly for the sake of

“Inquiry, as a kind of seeking, must be guided beforehand by what is sought. So the meaning of Being must already be available to us in some way. **As we have intimated, we always conduct our activities in an understanding of Being. Out of this understanding arise both the explicit question of the meaning of Being and the tendency that leads us towards its conception.**” Emphasis added.

23 1927a: *SZ*, 48/74: “In der Frage nach dem Sein des Menschen aber kann dieses nicht aus den überdies erst wieder noch zu bestimmenden Seinsarten von Leib, Seele, Geist summativ errechnet werden. Und selbst für einen in dieser Weise vorgehenden ontologischen Versuch müßte eine Idee vom Sein des Ganzen vorausgesetzt werden.”

overcoming the chaos of thinking which prevails in the Western world today, is in addressing and appropriating, as fitting, the contributions developed out of the subjective turn initiated by Descartes. While some progress has been made—one thinks in particular of the personalism advocated by Maritain, Wojtyła, and Clarke—short of an adequate understanding of *ens primum cognitum*, as relating not only to the irreducibly subjective aspects of human life, but the necessarily trans-subjective relations to extra-subjective realities, a fully integral account of human experience cannot be given.

The need for such an account has been acutely felt, but not supplied, by thinkers of the 20th and 21st centuries. The advance of technology in these centuries has, undoubtedly, outpaced philosophical insight into the changes such development has introduced into society and the daily lives of human beings. A kind of “technological thinking” has taken sway, and many advance the idea that modern ideoscopic science will supply the structure desired. Philosophy, lagging behind and exhausted by viciously circular debates for which it is rightly lambasted, has been relegated to the inessential pursuits of human knowledge. By losing its own purpose, in no longer asking the questions most in need of answering, philosophical speculation has lost its grasp on the whole. Jürgen Habermas, for instance, says that, “Philosophy can no longer refer to the whole of the world, of nature, of history, of society, in the sense of a totalizing knowledge. Theoretical surrogates for worldviews have been devalued, not only by the factual advance of empirical science but even more by the reflective consciousness accompanying it”²⁴ and further that “philosophical thought... has surrendered the relation to totality”.²⁵

Contemporary philosophy, including Thomistic philosophy, has shown itself flaccid in the treatment of socially-constituted reality,²⁶ within which we

24 1981: *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns, Band 1, Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung* (Suhrkamp: Neuauflage, 1997). References are to the English translation by Thomas McCarthy, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985), 2.

25 1981: *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns, Band 1*, 3. Cf. Ashley 2006: *The Way toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame), 3: “Today students at the college or university level are faced with the serious difficulties of a knowledge explosion. This explosion has resulted in an extreme fragmentation of knowledge. It is increasingly difficult to use all this information to obtain a consistent worldview, or, as J. Ian H. McDonald calls it, a ‘cosmic vision.’”

26 While, traditionally, this has been termed “socially **constructed** reality”, we favor the adjective “constituted” for two reasons: (1) “construction” implies that such reality is entirely of an artificial nature, a presumption taken from a kind of Enlightenment-era assertion that nature and culture are entirely heterogenous; (2) “constitution”, as we detail in 5.1.2.1, falls into the Augustinian-Thomistic tradition of the threefold structuring of things

include various aspects of cultural and technological development as well as the relations between various branches of study.²⁷ Such reality cannot be fit within the framework of a traditional ontology exclusively focused on *ens* as the substantial *actus essendi*, for the *esse* of socially-constituted realities depends upon cognition, and, moreover, is constituted by *esse ad* rather than an act of *esse in*. The lack of a philosophically-sound approach to the issue of socially-constituted reality has resulted in many theories which can only be adequately described as unhinged. Because they have the perspective that there exists a stark segregation of objective and subjective constitutions—for instance, when the person is considered as the product of the psychological subjectivity of an individual (which product is itself something objectively-constituted), so as to be contrary to nature—these theories of socially-constituted reality have descended into an anarchical voluntarism.²⁸

(mode, species, and order), which, as we argue, applies equally to *entia naturae* and *entia rationis*.

- 27 Cf. Deely 1971b: *The Tradition via Heidegger. An Essay on the Meaning of Being in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger* (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague), 89: “Is there any need to point out that history, and with it, historical, cultural, social, and psychological determinisms are little more than strangers in the Thomistic house? Human solidarity, personality in culture, subconscious determinisms, creative intuition in art and poetry, the metaphysical character of motivation and meaning—all these are fundamental *data* of the human condition which find their primary basis in the mode of being human precisely not from the side of the *esse* of *existentia ut exercita* but from the side of the *esse* of *ens intentionale*, from the side, that is to say, of a *Daseinanalyse*.”
- 28 See, for instance, Vivien Burr 2015: *Social Constructionism*, 3rd edition (New York: Routledge); Diamond and Butterworth 2008: “Questioning Gender and Sexual Identity: Dynamic Links Over Time” in *Sex Roles*, 59.5–6, 365–76; Edward Stein (ed.) 1990: *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (New York: Routledge); West and Zimmerman 1987: “Doing Gender” in *Gender & Society*, 1.2, 125–151; Michael Foucault 1976–84: *Histoire de la sexualité*, vols.1–3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976–84), translated into English as *The History of Sexuality*, vols. 1–3 (New York: Random House, 1978–86) by Robert Hurley; Berger and Luckmann 1966: *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Random House). These theories have tended to center around the issues of gender and sexuality identity, as well as sexual practice. Social constructionism typically divides into weak and strong theories; among weak theories, we would further sub-divide into nominalist, anti-normative theories (more or less in continuity with David Hume) and emergentist or realist theories (such as that held by John Searle). Each form of weak social constructionism recognizes cognition-independent foundational elements upon which social realities are constructed; the nominalist/anti-normative theories deny that there are any natural organizations between these parts, but all such is imposed by the cognitive agent, whereas the emergentists/realists see some innate ordering upon which the social constructions are founded.

Despite the scarce consideration of socially-constituted reality within Thomistic philosophy, Thomism is uniquely qualified to treat of it: for to understand how things are socially-constituted requires that we first understand cognitive objectivity to have constitutive function, a truth latently contained in Thomas' doctrine of the *verbum mentis*. Further, to understand the constitutive function of cognitive objectivity, specifically of human beings, requires that we grasp the relationship between nature and cognition, a relationship which is at the foundations of genuine Thomistic theories of knowledge. Finally, Thomism has in its metaphysical science a notion of *ens inquantum ens* which reveals the intelligibility of the universe in both in its physical and in its psychical realities, thereby not only explaining how it is that social-constitution of reality is a real capacity for human beings, but is coherent with the overall ordination of the universe.

This potency of Thomism, however, idles on the sideline if Thomists consign their consideration of *ens primum cognitum* to the so-called metaphysically-real of *res extra animam*.²⁹

Thomas Aquinas: *Intellectus Agens, Verbum Mentis, Relatio*

The correct interpretation of Thomas Aquinas on the meaning of *ens primum cognitum* cannot be accomplished with a straightforward disquisition on the texts explicitly stating that being is the first known or first object of the intellect. Philosophy always endeavors to disentangle the genuine insights and advancements of previous generations from their associated and intertwined errors. Most often, this endeavor unfolds within the confines of some particular problem, or a specific branch of philosophical inquiry. Unfortunately, the

Strong theories of social constructionism propose that behaviors, identities, and traits of natural individuals are actually constituted through society itself. Cf. John Thorp 1992: "The Social Construction of Homosexuality" in *The Phoenix*, 46.1, 54–56.

29 Cf. Ashley 2006: *The Way toward Wisdom*, 49: "The achievement of modern thought has been to bring to attention the subjective aspects of human knowledge, which Aristotle and Aquinas certainly recognized, but to which, because of their concern to get right the objective elements of knowledge, they gave relatively little attention. While they placed problems in a dialectical context of opinion, they seldom touched on the way history and sociology color our view of the world, or on the way in which individual and social tendencies enter into its construction. The Transcendental Thomists have opened up such questions, and I am convinced that, if Thomism is to survive in our times, it must also deal with these issues."

errors committed are quite often due to the terms in which the problem is cast or under which the branch of inquiry is described—such as the so-called “epistemological” problem of modern philosophy, i.e., how there is certitude of knowledge, especially knowledge of the somewhat misleadingly named “extramental world”. This “epistemological” problem came not from some inherent difficulty in explaining the process of intellectual cognition, but rather from the unchallenged postulate that ideas within the mind are the mind’s object of knowledge. Something quite similar, though perhaps less obvious, has happened with the problem of *ens* inasmuch as it is the object of the human intellect. This problem is twofold: the first, how is it that humans can be said to know being; and the second, the meaning of this being that we are said to know.

In the Thomistic tradition, the first half of this problem, the knowledge of being, has been often dealt with by means of an abstractionist theory of intellectual knowledge which, while not ubiquitously incorrect, nevertheless operates on assumptions which need to be developed and explored so as to circumvent misunderstandings which may follow upon the terminology. The second half, the meaning of known being, has been dealt with most often by investigating the being in terms of essence and existence, act and potency, or substance and accident: i.e., the investigation has tried to give an answer to the meaning of this being primarily in terms of the metaphysical principles of substantial constitution. This approach leads, we contend, to a truncated understanding of the role of *ens primum cognitum* in human experience. This short-coming in the second half of the problem of being, the persistence of treating being as first known in traditional metaphysics, appears to follow upon the misunderstandings in the first half, in which knowledge of being is portrayed as preeminently constituted by the conceptualization of *entia naturae* as beings outside the mind.

This misunderstanding within Thomism may be partly excused, for many passages dealing with the proper objects of human intellection in the massive oeuvre of Thomas Aquinas seem to be at odds with one another (and, moreover, many indicate a metaphysical primacy suggesting that *res extra animam* are the sole proper constituents of understanding). Some of these passages state that the proper object of man’s intellect is the essence in a material being, or *quod quid est*;³⁰ others, that it is being, i.e., *ens, ens commune, ens universale,*

30 See, for instance, i.1259/65; *SCG* I c.85, q.5; *ibid.*, III c.41, q.3; *ibid.*, III c.56 n.5; 1266–68: q.17, a.3, ad.1; *ibid.*, q.57, a.1, ad.2; *ibid.*, q.84, a.7 and a.8; *ibid.*, q.85, a.5 and a.8. This is just a small sampling; there are many others.

ens intelligibile, or *verum* in the sense that *verum* is convertible with *ens*.³¹ The apparent contrariety of these passages, which are for the most part brief and often exist simply for the sake of clarifying some other point, appear difficult to rectify: for the essence in a material being is to be something limited and proper to a merely and inescapably finite order of being, and therefore, though not fully, capable of being adequately represented by a concept; whereas *ens* or intelligible being, while it might be encountered only in limited instances, is nevertheless in itself illimitable in the range of things to which it extends and defies reduction to any particular instance or even any kind of instantiation. Moreover, oftentimes when he states that *ens* is the object of the intellect, Thomas says that *ens* is the **first** object of intellectual apprehension, which seems contrary to the notion that *ens* is the subject matter of metaphysics, last in the philosophical sciences.

A true clarification of these passages requires an integral interpretation of a Thomistic theory of the concept as the means of intellectual knowledge. Thus while we maintain the outlines of a traditional Thomistic psychology—one of exterior and interior sense powers, the *intellectus agens* and the *intellectus possibilis*, the three operations of the intellect—we take an extended look at the process of intellectual concept formation. More specifically, we have found it necessary to examine the operations of the *intellectus agens*, the nature of its object—including relations—and the discursive process through which the intellect produces the expressed *species* through which it completes its knowledge.

It is our hope that the reader will be convinced that these means to clarifying the nature of *ens primum cognitum* will aid Thomism in the confrontation with socially-constituted reality while retaining the principles of both natural philosophy and metaphysics; that what we have modestly proposed within these pages will allow for a deeper understanding of and speculative insight into the coherence of human existence.

31 i.1259/65: *SCG* II c.98, n.9; *SCG* II c.99, n.2; 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.5, a.2, c.; q.55, a.1, c.; q.87, a.3, ad.1; q.105, a.4, c.; this is also not an exhaustive listing.

The Latin Thomists and *Ens Primum Cognitum*

While there is an absence of treatises devoted to the question of *ens ut primum cognitum*, there is no shortage of brief, summary, and implicit treatments. Indeed, nearly every Thomist—as well as every other scholastic—of the past seven centuries seems to have at least something to say about the notion that being is the first of our intellectual conceptions. A comprehensive survey of their writings would comprise several volumes. It is safe to say, however, that most recent Thomist thinkers have assumed *ens primum cognitum* to be nothing other than the grasp of *ens naturae*, of being as it exists in the order of subjective constitution. This assumption operates within a framework which presumes realism and idealism to be exhaustive and mutually exclusive possibilities for answering the question of human knowledge. While overcoming the self-created epistemological quagmire in which modern philosophy stranded itself, a pit of inescapable idealism, is a laudable achievement, it is nevertheless an oversight to assume Thomas' assertion that *ens* is the object first known by the intellect to be mean by *ens* nothing other than *ens naturae*. As we will see in chapter three, the texts of the Angelic Doctor do not support this assumption, and, moreover, the dichotomy between *naturae* and *rationis* as mutually exclusive incorrectly categorizes the objects and the process of intellectual knowledge.

Since we cannot examine adequately or fairly all of the great Thomistic thinkers of either the early or the later traditions (or even very many of them), we will limit the inquiry of this and the following chapter to four thinkers who provide both insight and context to the general problem. In this chapter, we will undertake an examination of the issue of *ens primum cognitum* as considered in the early tradition, particularly by two of the authors recognized as authorities on the thought of St. Thomas, Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534AD) and John Poinot (1589–1644AD). We will then proceed in the second chapter to an in-depth investigation of, in our estimation, two of the greatest (or at least most influential) Thomists of the 20th century, Étienne Gilson (1884–1978AD) and Jacques Maritain (1882–1973AD). Chapter three will begin by providing an analysis of the most important texts found within St. Thomas which clarify the principles used by the Common Doctor himself, so as to provide a more focused presentation of the meaning of *ens primum cognitum*, in consequence of which we might see where Cajetan, Poinot, Gilson, and Maritain, for all their insights, have certain oversights or lacunae in their treatments. Subsequent

portions (from c.3.2 onward) will attend to providing our own interpretation of the question. This approach is not willfully anachronistic, but rather one which attempts to develop a truly living Thomism, reading the tradition and Thomas himself as threads in a common garment.

Thus we take three texts of St. Thomas concerning *ens ut primum cognitum* as guiding principles for the book as a whole, including the evaluations of the Thomistic tradition given in this and the following chapter. The first is from *De veritate*, q.1, a.1: “Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens”—“That which the intellect first conceives as most knowable, and into which the intellect resolves all concepts, is being”. The second is from *ST* Ia–IIae, q.94, a.2: “Nam illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit”—“For that which first falls into the apprehension is being, which the intellect includes in everything whatsoever which it apprehends”. The third is from *In Metaphysicorum*, lib.4, lec.6, n.605: “in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens”—“In the first operation [of the intellect] there is something first, which falls in the conception of the intellect, namely this which I call being; nor is something able to be conceived by the mind in this operation, unless being is understood.” The resolution of all concepts into *ens*, signified in the *De veritate* text, and the necessary prerequisite inclusion of *ens* in all things apprehended, signified in the *Summa theologiae* and the *Metaphysics* commentary, are not taken to be in opposition to one another, nor to signify a change in Thomas’ thinking, but rather as indicative of a twofold priority belonging to *ens*, as what is first in both the orders of resolution and discovery.¹

1.1 The Early Dispute: Setting the Stage

While modernity’s idealism focused the question of *ens ut primum cognitum* upon the nature of the known as cognition-dependent or cognition-independent, quite a different dispute occurred among the scholastics. A comprehensive treatment of the nuances of this dispute, most especially as carried out with a great variety of distinctions between the Scotist school and the Thomistic school, as well as among the many thinkers who do not fall squarely into either camp, would be a lengthy work unto itself. We intend only to show the Thomistic response to the Scotistic position—one which denied that *ens* was

¹ Cf. 4.1.2 below.

the chronological first in the order of knowledge—and to see in what regard this might be helpful for understanding our own present situation.

We will begin therefore with a brief synopsis of Scotus' own teaching on the nature of *ens*, which serves as a foil for explaining the Thomistic position. Subsequently we will proceed with the teaching of Cajetan, spurred as it is by the Scotistic foil. Here we will focus upon 1) his distinctions in the kinds and order of knowledge and in the modes of abstraction, 2) the problematics intertwined with his doctrine of analogy, and 3) the difficulties justifying his approach in the light of our two guiding principles from St. Thomas. Consequently, we will turn to John Poinset, who provides 1) an adequate groundwork for dealing with the question of *ens primum cognitum* in his doctrine of concepts, which 2) allows us to see the germ of an answer, and finally 3) directs our attention to the need for a more thorough and systematic treatment of *ens primum cognitum*.

1.1.1 *The Scotistic Foil*

To lay out his position on the question of *ens* as the *primum cognitum*, Cajetan looks to Scotus' c.1300 *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.2 as the point of departure. In his words, "The difficulty which stands between Scotus and ourselves consists in this: whether the first known by way of origin in the order of actual confused cognition is *ens* or the most specific species (*species specialissima*)."² To summarize the position of Scotus, there are three points which we need to explain briefly. Explaining these points will allow us to understand Cajetan's criticism. First, (1) Scotus considers *ens* to be an absolutely simple concept; second, (2) while Scotus considers *ens* to be a transcendental, his conception of transcendentalism is defined differently from that of Thomas; and third, (3) Scotus does hold *ens* to be the *primum cognitum*, but understands the appellation of "first known" to be inapplicable to the "way of origin".

2 Cajetan c.1493/95: *Commentaria in De Ente et Essentia*, ed. M.H. Laurent (Turin, Italy: Marietti, 1934), 4/(p.42 in the English translation by Kendzierski and Wade, [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1964], consulted in producing my own translations; hereafter *DE*): "Stat ergo inter nos et Scotum difficultas in hoc, an in ordine cognitionis confusae actualis via originis primum cognitum sit ens, an species specialissima." Cf. Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.2, (in the *Opera Omnia* edition prepared by the Vatican, 1950, volume III) n.73: "His praeintellectis, primo ponam ordinem originis in cognitione actuali eorum quae concipiuntur confuse,—et quoad hoc dico quod primum actualiter cognitum confuse, est species specialissima, cuius singulae efficacius et fortius primo movet sensum, et hoc, supposito quod sit in debita proportione praesens sensui." The interpolated textual note included in the 1950 critical Vatican edition reads: "sive sit audibile, sive visibile, sive tangibile. Quodcumque enim individuum fortius movet sensum, eius species prius cognita est cognitione confusa."

Concerning the first: (1) there is a fundamental difference between Thomas and Scotus on the conception of *ens*. In Thomas, as is rightly explained by Cajetan and Poinsoot, *ens ut primum cognitum* is a “most confused” concept, whereas Scotus claims that *ens* “is not able to be conceived unless it is conceived as distinct, because it has a concept absolutely simple”.³ To be an “absolutely” or “irreducibly” simple concept is to be one grasped through an act of simple apprehension and incapable of being resolved into any concepts more fundamental or prior—as, in contrast, “human” is grasped through a simple apprehension but resolvable into its genus and difference. *Ens* cannot be resolved into anything more fundamental or prior, and so it cannot be known confusedly—for it cannot have any parts fused together in its meaning.⁴

Concerning the second: (2) we can understand this proposed simplicity of *ens* more clearly by looking at the definition that Scotus has of *ens* as a transcendental:⁵

3 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I (all references are to the *Opera Omnia* edition prepared by the Vatican; Civitas Vaticana: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis), d.3, p.1, q.3 (v.III), n.80: “Ens autem non potest concipi nisi distincte, quia habet conceptum simpliciter simplicem”.

4 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.1–2, (v.III) n.71: “conceptus ‘simpliciter simplex’ est qui non resolubilis in plures conceptus, ut conceptus entis vel ultimae differentiae. Conceptum vero simplicem sed ‘non-simpliciter simplicem’ voco, quicumque potest concipi ab intellectu actu simplicis intelligentiae, licet posset resolvi in plures conceptus, seorsum conceptibiles.” Cf. Jan A. Aertsen 2012: *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor to Francisco Suarez*, 404. Note well the distinction to which Aertsen draws our attention, that Scotus does not posit that being itself, as the object known, is not without confusion; but rather that the knowledge that we have of being cannot be confused.

5 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.8, p.1, q.3 (v.IV), n.113–114: “Ens prius dividitur in infinitum et finitum quam in decem praedicamenta, quia alterum istorum, scilicet ‘finitum’, est commune ad decem genera; ergo quaecumque conveniunt enti ut indifferenes ad finitum et infinitum, vel ut est proprium enti infinito, conveniunt sibi non ut determinatur ad genus sed ut prius, et per consequens ut est transcendens et est extra omne genus. Quaecumque sunt communia Deo et creaturae, sunt talia quae conveniunt Deo, sunt infinita,—ut creaturae, sunt finita; ergo per prius conveniunt enti quam ens dividatur in decem genera, et per consequens quodcumque tale est transcendens...”

“Respondeo. Sicut de ratione ‘generalissimi’ non est habere sub se plures species sed non habere aliud supraveniens genus (sicut hoc praedicamentum ‘quando’—quia non habet supraveniens genus—est generalissimum, licet paucas habet species, vel nullas), ita transcendens quodcumque nullum habet genus sub quo contineatur. Unde de ratione transcendentis est non habere praedicatum supraveniens nisi ens, sed quod ipsum sit commune ad multa inferiora, hoc accidit.” Cf. Aertsen 1998: “Being and One: The Doctrine of the Convertible Transcendentals in Duns Scotus”, *Franciscan Studies* vol. 56, 47.

Ens is divided first into the infinite and the finite, rather than into the ten categories, because one of these divisions, namely “finite”, is common to the ten genera. Therefore, whatever belongs to being does so either indifferently to finite and infinite; or as it is proper to infinite being, belonging to it not as determined to a genus but as prior, and on account of this it is transcending of and outside every genus. For whatever things are common to God and creatures, are things infinite inasmuch as they belong to God; and as they belong to creatures, they are finite. Therefore, they belong first to “being” rather than to “being divided into the ten genera”, and on account of this, whatever their kind, they are transcendent ...

Just as the rationale of “most general” is not “to have many species under it”, but “to not have some supervening genus” (as the category “when”—because it does not have a supervening genus—is most general, despite having few or no species), likewise the transcendent is that which is contained by no genus whatsoever. For which reason, the rationale of transcendence is to not have a predicament supervening upon it, except *ens*, although it occurs that it be common to many inferiors.

Thus, being a transcendental for Scotus is defined negatively, rather than positively. It is not essential to the meaning of transcendence that the concept be found in all things, but only that it not be contained under anything else. Consequently, for a concept to be a transcendental does not necessitate that there be any measure of confusion in its nature, and *ens* can be both transcendental and *simpliciter simplex*.

Concerning the third: (3) what is first known by the “way of origin” or what is first “according to generation”—the point which Cajetan disputes—is opposed by Scotus to the order of perfection and the order of adequation or “precise causality”.⁶ In discussing the order of adequation, Scotus states:⁷

the first object of our intellect is being (*ens*) because there is a twofold primacy which concurs in it, namely of commonality and virtuality, for

6 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.2–3 (v.III), n.69–201; see n.69: “Ad secundum quaestionem dico quod triplex est ordo intelligibilium in proposito: unus est ordo originis sive secundum generationem, alius est ordo perfectionis, tertius est ordo adaequationis sive causalitatis praecisae.”

7 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.3 (v.III), n.137: “primum obiectum intellectus nostri est ens, quia in ipso concurrunt duplex primitas, scilicet communitatis et virtualitatis, nam omne per se intelligibile aut includit essentialiter rationem entis, vel continetur virtualiter vel essentialiter in includente essentialiter rationem entis.”

everything *per se* intelligible either essentially includes the meaning of being (*rationem entis*) or is contained either virtually or essentially by essentially including the meaning of being.

Thus it is a point of agreement between Thomas and Scotus that there is an adequate proportionality between the human intellect and *ens* as the object to which the human intellect is naturally ordered. However, Scotus denies that *ens* is first by the way of origin, despite the *rationem entis*' virtual inclusion in every being.

Summarily, then, we can say that for Scotus, *ens* is a distinct, transcendental concept, which admits of no mixture.⁸ It is absolutely simple, *simpliciter simplex*, and for that reason could not be the first known by the way of origin absolutely, but rather only first in the order of the origin of distinct cognition, for which Scotus argues in two ways. The first is that distinct knowledge requires each element of the thing known quidditatively to be distinctly known in itself. Since *ens* is the simplest concept, and the most common, it is necessarily included in the knowledge of all inferior quiddities. The second is that since, according to Avicenna, it is the task of metaphysics “to certify the principles of the other sciences”;⁹ it belongs to metaphysics to set out what is first distinctly knowable, i.e., the principles, and this it does through its study of being.

The dispute over the interpretation of the order of cognition arises from a statement of Aristotle in the first book of *The Physics*, namely, that knowledge begins from what is less known in itself but more known to us, i.e., the confused, the things that are “jumbled together”; whereas things more known in themselves are more “separated out.”¹⁰ Indeed, Poinsoot identifies this statement—along with difficulties in interpreting *Posterior Analytics*—to be at the root of the difficulty of understanding the teaching of Aristotle.¹¹ Whereas

8 Cf. Peter King 2003: “Scotus on Metaphysics” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, ed. Thomas Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press), 26–28.

9 Aertsen 2012: *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, 406.

10 Aristotle c.348/7aBC Φυσικῆ ἀκρόασις, references are to the English translation by Joe Sachs, *The Physics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), I.1, 184a33: “the natural road is from what is more familiar and clearer to us to what is clearer and better known by nature; for it is not the same things that are well known to us and well known simply. For this reason it is necessary to lead ourselves forward in this way: from what is less clear by nature but clearer to us to what is clearer and better known by nature. But the things that are first evident and clear to us are more-so than the ones that are jumbled together, but later the elements and beginnings become known to those who separate them out from these.”

11 Poinsoot 1633: *Naturalis Philosophiae Prima Pars*, vol.2, in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008), q.1, a.3 (i.e., *De primo*

for the Thomists, the first known, the most confused, the thing most “jumbled together” is *ens*, as Cajetan puts it: “Scotus posits this conclusion: the first thing known in actual confused cognition is the most specific species (*species specialissima*), the singular of which more efficaciously moves the sense”.¹² Cajetan then presents six arguments of the opposition for their position, summaries of which are invaluable in helping to understand the Thomists.

First, it is said by Scotus that natural causes are not impeded in the production of the first most perfect effect which they are able to first produce—as, without some impediment, a natural being will always act to the fullest extent of its nature. The agency involved in the acts of the intellect generally, including the first act of the intellect, is that of an unimpeded natural cause. Therefore, it follows that this agency results in the most perfect effect which it is able to produce. Presumably, Scotus takes the most perfect effect to be that which is most efficacious in making known some reality, and “such an effect is nothing other than the actual confused concept of the most specific species”.¹³ The proof given for this argument is that if the most perfect concept which the intellect could produce were of something common, then the intellect would never produce a concept of the most specific species, the latter being a more perfect or complete concept than that which is a concept of the common.

The second argument of Scotus is that the most universal or metaphysical terms are the last known *in ordine doctrinae*.¹⁴ If *ens* were the *primum cognitum* in the origin of concepts, then, Scotus argues, it would follow that metaphysics would be the first studied in the order of learning. That metaphysics is not the

cognito, hereafter, *DPC*) (R.II 20a9–14): “In ipso initio primi libri Physicorum ordinem nostrae cognitionis a communioribus ad minus communia proposuit Philosophis tamquam prooemiale tractatum horum librorum.” Ibid, (R.II 21a5–22): “Circa hanc doctrinam duplex insurgit difficultas: *Prima* contra aliquos, qui absolute hanc Philosophi doctrinam reiiciunt eamque contradictionis coarguunt. *Secunda* et gravior apud eos, qui hanc doctrinam admittunt, sed valde concertant in designanda mente Philosophi circa ordinem procedendi in cognition et determinando, quodam sit obiectum prius a nostro intellectu cognitum, an illud, quod est facilioris abstractionis, quia a paucioribus abstrahit, an quod est confusioris et plura sub se continet, an denique quod est fortioris impressionis ex parte sensuum, quatenus ab illis intellectus pendet in cognoscendo.”

- 12 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 4/42–43: “Scotus (I Sent., dist. III, q.2) ponit hanc conclusionem: Primum cognitum cognitione confusa actuali est species specialissima, cujus singulare efficacius primo movet sensum.”
- 13 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 4/43: “talis effectus non est nisi conceptus actualis confusus speciei specialissimae”. Cf. Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.1–2, (v.III) n.76.
- 14 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.1–2, (v.III) n.77.

first is obvious both from the authority of Aristotle and from the experience of learning; children clearly understand animals before they understand being.

Third, it is argued by Scotus that if *ens* were first in the origin of concepts, then the intellect would have to know all the predicates intervening between the most universal, the metaphysical term of *ens*, and the most specific of species, which predicates are many, and thus there would be a great interval of time between the knowledge of the two.¹⁵

Three arguments are also taken from Trombeta. The first of these is that what is easier to abstract is what is first known; the most specific species is easier to abstract; therefore, it is clear that the most specific species is what is abstracted first. As a confirmation, it is offered that abstraction is more easily performed from things similar to ourselves than to things dissimilar, and the most specific species are more similar to ourselves than something common and universal, such as being. Poinsoot seems to take this position to be a kind of summary or commonality latently present in the various arguments of Scotus.¹⁶ It does appear to at the very least correspond clearly to the first argument of Scotus, and it is not a far leap to discern it as implicit in the other two.

The second argument of Trombeta is that the universal first known by the intellect is the universal of that whose singular more forcefully moves the sense. Since the singular of the most specific species is that which acts most forcefully on the sense so as to produce a universal, it follows that the most specific species is that which is first known by the intellect. Poinsoot identifies an even stronger formulation of a similar argument, such that the singular itself as grasped in sense, and thereby moving of the intellect, is the first known; that is, that the singular is known by the intellect “through the mode of the singular”, *per modum singularis*, which opinion he says is to be found in Durandus, the Conimbricenses, Pereira, and Martinez.¹⁷

15 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.1–2, (v.III) n.78.

16 Poinsoot 1633: *DPC* (R.II 22b3–15): “Ceterum quidum desumunt primum cognitum ab eo quod facilius abstrahit intellectus. Facilius autem abstrahit, ut dicunt, naturam in species atoma, cuius singularis efficacius movet sensum nisi intellectus impedimentum aliquod habeat. Ita Scot. in 1. dist. 3, q. 2, quem sequitur eius schola, et alii etiam extra rem, ut notant Cominbricenses loco cit., q. 3, art. 2. Et sic naturam specificam putat Scotus esse totum actuale confusius cognitum.”

17 Poinsoot 1633: *DPC* (R.II 22a37–47): “Nam quidam desumunt primum cognitum nostri intellectus non penes potentialitatem et imperfectionem ipsius intellectus procedentis, sed penes fortius motivum ex parte obiecti moventis per sensum ipsum intellectum, et hoc est singulare. Ita Durandus in 2. dist. 3, q. 7 n. 7., Cominbric. hic super cap. 1. q. 4. art. 2., Pereira libro 3. Phys. cap. 16. et 17., Martinez hic super cap. 1. disp. unica q. 3.”

The third argument of Trombeta is that things more composite are known prior to things which are simple, and since the most specific species is the most composite thing known, it is clear that it is the first object of the intellect.¹⁸

What is common to each of these six arguments is the background outlined above, namely, that for Scotus, and his student Trombeta, *ens* is a transcendental but absolutely simple concept, included in other concepts, but including in itself none of them. To “being”, other concepts can be added—such as infinite or finite, created or uncreated; but it is not a concept which can be had confusedly, because of its absolute simplicity. Of itself, it has a signification which is indifferent to certain additions, but which includes or comes to incorporate none of them. The application of what is signified by the concept of *ens* to any other concept is an accretion of part to part rather than an amalgamation or resolution into one; for Scotus understands “resolution” to be into parts, rather than into something one. Thus, ***ens* is, for Scotus and his followers, a concept which can only be proper to metaphysics**, and cannot therefore be first known in the overall order of origin.

As we will now see, Cajetan’s response to the Scotistic position, though it repudiates the identity of *ens primum cognitum* with *ens inquantum ens*, is nevertheless given to some similar difficulties.

1.2 Thomas Cajetan and the Doctrine of Being

In the background of Cajetan’s rejection of the Scotistic arguments is the former’s belief that *ens* is an analogical concept, in contrast to Scotus’ position that it is univocal. Although the Subtle Doctor presents a multitude of arguments in favor of this univocity, we will limit ourselves to what could be called the argument from certitude:¹⁹

18 For all three arguments of Trombeta, see Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 5/43–4.

19 Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* I, d.3, p.1, q.1–2 (v.III), n.27: “omnis intellectus, certus de uno conceptu et dubius de diversis, habet conceptum de quo est certus alium a conceptibus de quibus est dubius; subiectum includit praedicatum. Sed intellectus viatoris potest esse certus de Deo quod sit ens, dubitando de ente finito vel infinito, creato vel increato; ergo conceptus entis de Deo est alius a conceptu isto et illo, et ita neuter ex se et in utroque illorum includitur; igitur univocus.” Cf. Steven P. Marrone 1988: “Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus on the Knowledge of Being”, *Speculum* vol.63, no.1, 50–51; King 2003: “Scotus on Metaphysics” in *The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus*, 18; Douglas C. Langston

Every intellect, certain by one concept and doubtful by diverse concepts, has one concept by which it is certain, which is other than the concepts by which it is doubtful; the subject includes the predicate. But the intellect of the *viator* is able to be certain of God that He is being, while doubting whether He has finite or infinite being, whether He is created or uncreated; therefore the concept of being had of God is other than the concept by which [one doubts of His infinity or uncreatedness], thus both is from itself in neither of them, and [can be] included in either of them; therefore, it is univocal.

In other words, we cannot by one and the same concept have both certitude and doubt simultaneously. Thus, if we are certain that the concept of “being” can be said of God, then that concept of being is not the same whereby we conceive of infinite or finite, created or uncreated, since we may simultaneously have doubt as to whether or not they can be said of Him. These disjunctive options are, rather, further concepts to which the concept of being is indifferent. Were this not the case, then we could not have certitude that “being” is rightly said of God.

Against this, Cajetan desires to maintain (in an attempt ultimately to preserve both the intelligibility and incomprehensibility of the divine) that we know God through a concept of being which is itself analogical. This doctrine of analogical concepts, though not based in Cajetan’s treatment of the kinds of intellectual knowledge, is nevertheless understandable only if we first grasp the distinctions which he draws within cognition broadly—which are themselves immensely helpful—and so it is to these that we now turn.

1.2.1 *Cajetan’s Four Cognitions and Three Abstractions*

Cajetan begins his commentary on *De ente et essentia* by considering the object of intellect cognition, namely the universal, in two different respects; and he subsequently distinguishes four kinds of knowledge. The universal is considered either as a definable whole (*totum diffinibile*, roughly corresponding to what Thomas calls an “integral whole”, *totum integrale*²⁰) or as a universal whole (*totum universale*). In the background of Cajetan’s description of the

1979: “Scotus and Ockham on the Univocal Concept of Being”, *Franciscan Studies*, vol.39, 107. Langston presents two further arguments on 108. See also S.Y. Watson 1958: “Univocity and Analogy of Being in the Philosophy of Duns Scotus”, *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 189–206 *in passim*.

20 See 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3, c.

so-called universal is the solution Avicenna presents to the problem of universals in Book V, c.1–2 of his *Metaphysics*.²¹ The solution which Avicenna provides

21 Avicenna (i.1020/27: *The Metaphysics of the Healing*) begins V.1 by mentioning three ways in which something is said to be a universal: (1) first, what is actually predicated of many; (2) second, what is not actually predicated of many but can be; (3) and third, that the meaning of which does not preclude being predicated of many. Of the first, he gives as an example “human being”; there are many actually existing beings of whom we say “human”. Of the second, his example is the heptagonal house—which, being a rare configuration of a house, might only be said of one in actuality, but nothing within its meaning precludes there being many actualities of which it might be said; we could build many heptagonal houses. Of the third, that the meaning of which does not preclude predication of many, he gives as examples the sun and the earth. According to the cosmology of the time, there was only one sun and one planet of earth’s kind; but given a different cosmology, there would be nothing to prevent a multiplicity of each. All three of these ways of being a universal, Avicenna states (V.1.2–3), share a common meaning in the third: namely, the universal is that the conception of which does not make its predication of many impossible. Contrariwise, the particular is explained as that “whose very conception prevents its meaning from being predicated of many, as with the essence of this Zayd to whom one points. For [the essence] cannot be imagined except as belonging to him alone.” (*Metaphysics* V.1.3/149.) It is worth noting that essence is here predicated of the singular, Zayd.

In the common meaning of “universal”, it may appear that Avicenna is asserting that a universal is what was mentioned in I.5.9–10 as being the true nature or proper existence belonging to a thing which is other than the existence which is affirmed, i.e., its quiddity. For, if what it is to be a universal is simply to be that of which it is not impossible that it is predicated of many, then universality is not something which is necessarily attached to it: “The universal, then, inasmuch as it is a universal, is one thing; and, inasmuch as it is something to which universality attaches, it is [another] thing.” (*Metaphysics* V.1.4/149.) The definition of a universal is one thing, and that universal considered together with anything else is something else. Thus, when we make a consideration of a universal in terms of what it is, we are not actually considering it as having universality or as having particularity: “horseness” in itself is “horseness” alone. Likewise, “animality” in itself is “animality” alone. It is not universal in the sense of being predicated of many; and while its meaning **may** be predicated of many, in the act of such a predication neither “animality” nor “horseness” would be considered in themselves. When we consider a universal in itself, we are making what later thinkers, particularly the Latin medievals, would call an act of absolute consideration, one in which the object considered *abstrahit a quolibet esse*, abstracts from every existence (Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia* c.2). Indeed, to call such an object of consideration a “universal” is very much of a misnomer, for as considered in itself, it has no universality; universality, being predicated of many, is a further intention which is attached to the meaning of the object of absolute consideration, an intention which moves the so-called “universal” from a state of purely mind-dependent objectivity to a specific mode of existence. Nothing within the definition of a quiddity

to the treatment of universals has a rather significant impact on the treatment of concepts throughout Scholasticism.²² In particular, for our concerns here, when Cajetan discusses the “universal whole”, we find a strong impression left by the Avicennian doctrine.

1.2.1.1 *Totum Universale et Totum Diffinibile*

Cajetan proceeds to explain the meaning of these two terms—definable and universal whole—by a threefold difference between them.²³ The first difference is that the definable whole is based upon the actuality of the thing, whereas the universal is based upon a power (*virtutem*) or potency (*potestatem*).²⁴

necessitates universality or particularity, existence in the mind or existence in the soul. These are determinations which come about through some existence.

Thus, when Avicenna comes to the end of V.1 and the beginning of V.2, he is able to provide an explanation for how it is that one and the same nature or quiddity exists in the mind and in the concretely existing thing outside the mind; and thereby provide a solution to the problem of the one and the many. In the case of what exists independently of the mind, the quiddity exists as within some particular by its conjunction with existence in the manner befitting a form; in the mind, it exists as an accident with the possible attachment of universality, such that it is not impossible that it be said of many. This explanation also sheds light on an earlier argument of Avicenna, made in III.8.5, in which he explains how it is that knowledge is an accident. An objector states that it is impossible for the quiddity of a substance to exist as a substance under the configuration of the concretely existing thing outside the mind and yet to exist as an accident within the mind. Against this, Avicenna responds that “being a substance” is not part of the definition of a quiddity; and as such, the quiddity is neutral to whether it is a substance or an accident. This neutrality of the quiddity with regard to existence as a substance or as an accident, as in the concrete or in the mind, and as with universality or as with particularity, seems to imply strongly that any given quiddity, given all these possible determinations of it, is both a possible existence and the universal which *abstrahit a quolibet esse*.

22 It is our opinion that, while such is not necessarily true of Avicenna himself, many interpretations of the great Islamic philosopher led to a kind of Platonization of the doctrine of knowledge among the Scholastics—the effects being felt even in the work of Immanuel Kant. Arguing for this position, would, however, require a small book at the least.

23 Cf. Cajetan 1507: *Commentaria in summa theologicam. Prima pars*, vol.5, 338, n.7: “magis et minus commune possunt comparari diversimode ad invicem sub ratione totius et partis. Nam universale ut sic est totum, et minus universale est eius pars subiectiva; et tamen minus universale est totum definibile, et universalius est eius pars definitiva.—Et rursus, universalius et minus universale possunt comparari ad invicem absolute, puta animal ad hominem et e converso, non considerando in eis rationem aliquam cuiuscumque totius aut partis.”

24 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 2/40: “Primo quia totalitas diffinitiva fundatur supra actualitatem rei; totalitas autem universalis supra virtutem seu potestatem”.

The second difference between definable and universal wholes is that the definable whole is ordered to higher universals, if it has any; whereas the universal whole is ordered to lower ones.²⁵ The third difference is that the definable whole is naturally prior to the universal.²⁶

The first distinction tells us the most about the difference between the *totum diffinibile* and the *totum universale*. A “definable whole” is one which can be understood in terms of its constitutive parts, such that each part is related to or contained somehow within the whole.²⁷ Backlit, as it were, by the genus-species method of definition, a definable whole would be, for instance, something like “human being” as a universal concept not yet discerned with regard to its integral parts, or “rational animal” (as was considered to be the most suitable definition of a human being in the 15th century), a universal discerned with regard to its integral parts, insofar as these terms are understood as signifying actually present realities in an existing or concrete individual. Contrariwise, the universal whole, based upon a power or potency, is understood as apart from its actuality or the specification of an actual being; thus, for instance: “rationality”, “animality”, “intellectuality”, “equinity”, “humanity” or any such notion, considered separately from that in which it is found actually. The universal whole is, as its very name implies, that which applies to many, whereas the definable whole is that thing which can be broken into many parts. A universal whole appears to be, for Cajetan as it is for Avicenna, the object of absolute consideration, separated from any existential state: as a concept existing in the mind, it has universality, i.e., a predicability of many such that we can identify subjective parts of it; but as for what it is in itself, as for what belongs to its proper nature considered precisely as an object, it is itself alone and no other attribute applies.

25 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 2/40: “Secundo quia illa est in ordine ad superiora, si habet ea; ista vero est in ordine ad inferiora”.

26 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 2/40: “Tertio quia illa naturaliter est ista prior”.

27 Cf. Thomas Aquinas 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod pars aliqua dupliciter potest cognosci. Uno modo absolute, secundum quod in se est, et sic nihil prohibet prius cognoscere partes quam totum, ut lapides quam domum. Alio modo, secundum quod sunt partes huius totius, et sic necesse est quod prius cognoscamus totum quam partes; prius enim cognoscimus domum quadam confusa cognitione, quam distinguamus singulas partes eius. Sic igitur dicendum est quod definientia, absolute considerata, sunt prius nota quam definitum, alioquin non notificaretur definitum per ea. Sed secundum quod sunt partes definitionis, sic sunt posterius nota, prius enim cognoscimus hominem quadam confusa cognitione, quam sciamus distinguere omnia quae sunt de hominis ratione.”

Thus his second distinction, in that the definable whole is ordered to “higher universals” and the universal whole towards “lower universals”. Cajetan offers us no explanation as to his meaning by this statement, but it is readily presumed that he is thinking in terms of the Porphyrian tree: higher universals being those in ascent towards substance, the highest, and lower universals being those which signify a more intense specification, i.e., towards the ultimate or most specific species. Thus, knowledge of the definable whole, “human being” for instance, is ordered towards those higher universals in ascent of the Porphyrian tree—“animal”, then “living body”, etc.—whereas knowledge of the universal whole, “animality”, is ordered to the specifications which can fall under it.

Thus the third distinction follows, that the definable whole is prior in the order of origin to the universal whole. As we already noted,²⁸ Poinsoot states that there can be difficulties in the interpretation of Aristotle’s teaching about the order of origin in concepts, particularly in what seem to be conflicting texts from the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Physics*. Cajetan does not mention either of these texts until very late in his own treatment, but does draw our attention explicitly to *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3, where Thomas takes as an authoritative point of departure the order laid out in *Physics* 1.1. Thomas concludes here that, “Just as to know ‘animal’ indistinctly is to know animal insofar as it is animal, to know ‘animal’ distinctly is to know animal insofar as it is rational or irrational, i.e., to know ‘human’ or ‘lion’. Therefore it occurs first to our intellect to know ‘animal’ before it occurs to our intellect to know ‘human’, and the same rationale holds if we compare anything more universal to what is less universal”.²⁹

1.2.1.2 The Four Cognitions: Confused and Distinct, Actual and Virtual

In attempting to explicate Thomas’ notion of distinct and indistinct understanding of universals, Cajetan posits a general division of knowledge into two kinds, namely, the “confused” and the “distinct”, and within each of these, between the “actual” and the “virtual”. This subdivision leaves us with a fourfold schema of the kinds of knowledge: the actual confused, the virtual confused, the actual distinct, and the virtual distinct. Just as with the different universals, Cajetan explains these different kinds of knowledge by means of their differences from one another.

²⁸ See n.11.

²⁹ 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3, c.: “Sicut cognoscere animal indistincte, est cognoscere animal in quantum est animal, cognoscere autem animal distincte, est cognoscere animal in quantum est animal rationale vel irrationale, quod est cognoscere hominem vel leonem. Prius igitur occurrit intellectui nostro cognoscere animal quam cognoscere hominem, et eadem ratio est si comparemus quodcumque magis universale ad minus universale.”

Broadly, confused and distinct cognitions are distinguished from one another inasmuch as the confused does not result in a grasp of the clear formality of substances as they exist in themselves. More specifically, the actual confused knowledge grasps the definable whole, but without any of the distinctions whereby that thing is defined, i.e., without any penetration into the constitutive parts of the nature of the thing. In other words, it does not attain a “clear and resolute” possession of the *ratio formalis* of the substance so understood. The parts of the definition are in no way separated out from the whole which is to be defined, such that its principles or elements are grasped in themselves. By comparison, the virtual confused knowledge grasps some universal whole but does not compose this knowledge with the subjective parts. This term, “subjective parts”, is common to Thomas³⁰ and Scotus³¹ and here signifies all of the divisions found within a concept which entail what is signified by the concept. In other words, when we grasp “living body”, the subjective parts would be the more particular kinds which are “within” this universal: “animal” and “plant”. The subjective parts are in such a case each **intensionally** the universal whole, but not **extensionally**. For instance, what is signified by the concept of “dog” would include fully the meaning signified by “living body”, such that there would be nothing lacking to what is meant by the term—“dog” includes in its meaning something fully a body and fully living—but would not be equal to all of the various instantiations that there could be of “living body”, as “lion” or “rhododendron” would be equal in the intension of “living body” but distinct in its proper signification, and therefore extensionally, from that of “dog”.³²

30 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.3, q.1, a.1, ad.5: “Ad quintum dicendum, quod objectio procedit ex falso intellectu litterae: non enim est sensus quod ens creatum componatur ex finito et infinito sicut ex partibus integralibus, sed sicut ex partibus subjectivis...” Most often, the term is used in reference to the virtues (e.g., 1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.33, q.1; q.3; 1271a: *ST* Ia–IIae, q.54, a.4, ad.2; q.57, a.6, ad.4; 1272: IIa–IIae, q.48; q.50, etc.) but also appears in regards to definitions, sin, and the sacraments (e.g., c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.4, d.16, q.1, a.1, qc.3; d.24, q.2, a.1, qc.1; 1272/3a: *ST* IIIa, q.90; 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.5, lec.21, n.13; i.1269–72a: *In libros Peri Hermenias expositio*, [hereafter *In Perihermenias*] lib.1, lec.1, n.4; etc.).

31 Cf. Scotus c.1300: *Ordinatio* II, d.3, p. 1, q.2.

32 Cf. Thomas Aquinas 1272: *ST* IIa–IIae, q.120, a.2: “Pars autem subiectiva est de qua essentialiter praedicatur totum, et est in minus. Quod quidem contingit dupliciter, quandoque enim aliquid praedicatur de pluribus secundum unam rationem, sicut animal de equo et bove; quandoque autem praedicatur secundum prius et posterius, sicut ens praedicatur de substantia et accidente.” Animal, understood as a universal whole, is said equally of a horse and a cow, though there is an extensional difference between “animal” and “horse”; and *ens*, as a universal whole, is said unequally but without an intensional difference of substance and accident. This implies that subjective parts are intensionally the whole

Contrariwise to the confused knowledges, actual distinct knowledge does attain the *ratio formalis*, and therefore knows the substance most intimately, while the virtual distinct knowledge grasps the virtual presence of the universal whole together in a composition with the subjective parts which are that whole. We could therefore say that confused and distinct knowledge are distinguished ultimately by the lack of composition in the confused knowledge and a presence of composition in that which is distinct.

Thus the first of the three distinctions which Cajetan gives between the actual and virtual confused knowledges respects the universal they consider: the actual confused knowledge views it as a definable whole, whereas the virtual confused considers it as a universal whole. The second distinction is that virtual confused knowledge can coincide with actual distinct knowledge, such that there can be an actual distinct knowledge of something—say, the *ratio formalis* of a particular animal species—simultaneous with the virtual confused knowledge of something belonging to animals or animality, considered as a universal whole: “the first confused knowledge [actual] allows within itself no distinct knowledge of the same object, whereas the second confused knowledge [virtual] allows within itself a distinct knowledge of the same object as a

only when there is a univocal predication; an analogical predication, such as with one of the transcendentals, has an intensional similitude but a distinction of degree, since one is necessarily posterior to and therefore dependent on the other. This sort of analogical predication seems to be at one and the same time both what is considered by Cajetan as an analogy of attribution (*per prius et posterius secundum rationem*), for the concept is said **properly of the first** (substance) and **by relation of the others to the first** (accidents, since they are dependent upon substance) and as an analogy of inequality (*per prius et posterius secundum esse*), for “being” is unequally “in” both substance and accidents; c.1493/5: *DE*, 37/80: “Nota secundo quod duplicia sunt analogata: quaedam secundum determinatam habitudinem unius ad alterum; quaedam secundum proportionalitatem. Exemplum: Substantia et accidens sunt analogata primo modo sub ente... Unde analogata primo modo habent nomen commune, et rationem secundum illud nomen secundum quid eandem et secundum quid diversam: per hoc quod analogum illud simpliciter, id est sine additione aliqua, de primo dicitur, et de aliis vero non nisi diversimode respiciendo primum, quod cadit in eorum rationibus sicut in exemplo de sano manifestum est.”; yet *ens*, it is to be noted, can also be said by an analogy of proper proportionality c.1493/5: *DE*, 38/81: “Ens analogice utroque modo analogiae dicitur de substantia et accidente.” Also, 1498: *De nominum analogia* c.2, n.11, “Ens enim quamvis formaliter conveniat omnibus substantiis et accidentibus etc., in quantum tamen entia, omnia dicuntur ab ente subiective ut sic, sola substantia est ens formaliter; cætera autem entia dicuntur, quia entis passiones vel generationes etc. sunt; licet entia formaliter alia ratione dici possint.” Cf. Hochschild 2010: *The Semantics of Analogy*, 103–105; 108–109; 112. We deal more fully with this problem below (1.2.2).

definable whole, inasmuch as such knowledge is not opposed to it”.³³ The third distinction between actual and virtual confused knowledge is that the actual confused precedes the virtual confused.

Distinct knowledges are said to differ, likewise, in three ways: first, that the actual penetrates the universal as the definable whole, whereas the virtual penetrates it as a universal whole—the same broad distinction seen all along between actual and virtual knowledge. Second, the actual distinct knowledge “allows within itself a virtual confused knowledge of the same object ... while [virtual distinct knowledge] does not”. Cajetan explains this by saying that “with the knowledge of animal with its species there cannot remain ignorance of animal in itself”.³⁴ In other words, if, with virtual distinct knowledge, we have grasped the subjective parts of “animal”, we cannot be at the same time ignorant of what “animal” signifies, while we can at the same time have an actual distinct knowledge of a particular species of animal and not yet grasp distinctly the universal whole of “animal”—in other words, we can have a virtual confused knowledge of animal and at the same time an actual distinct knowledge of dog (this is the correlate of the second distinction between the actual confused knowledges). The third distinction, following upon this, is that virtual distinct knowledge “bears within itself [actual distinct knowledge], but not conversely”.³⁵ That is, contained within the virtual distinct knowledge of “animal”, such that “animal” is joined with its subjective parts, is the actual distinct knowledge of the species of animal (e.g., “animal” + “two-legged”), but there cannot be a virtual distinct knowledge of animal contained within the actual distinct knowledge of “dog”.

Ultimately, we can divide the four kinds of knowledge thus, in accord with the definitions that Cajetan gives:³⁶

33 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 3/41: “quia prima nullam notitiam distinctam ejusdem objecti secum compatitur; secunda vero compatitur secum notitiam distinctam ejusdem objecti, in eo quod totum diffinibile utpote non sibi oppositam.”

34 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 3/41: “cum notitia enim animalis cum suis speciebus non stat ignorantia animalis in se”.

35 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 3/41.

36 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 3/41: “Now, because a privation is known and defined through what is positive, we must begin from what is distinct and say that actual distinct knowledge is that which penetrates what is actually found in the object. Actual confused knowledge is that which knows what is actually found in the object without penetrating it. Virtual distinct knowledge is that which penetrates the object according to what is virtually included in it. Virtual confused knowledge is that which does not perfectly know the object according to what is virtually in it.”

	Actual	Virtual
Confused	Grasps what is in a substance itself without penetration, i.e., without a clear and resolute possession of the <i>ratio formalis</i> (a definable whole).	Grasps what is virtually in substances, e.g., “rational”, without composing the grasped formality with the subjective parts (a universal whole).
Distinct	Grasps what is in a substance with penetration, i.e., a clear and resolute possession of the <i>ratio formalis</i>	Grasps what is virtually present in things themselves, composed with the subjective parts.

Cajetan subsequently explains that these four are coordinated in the following order: first, the actual confused knowledge, second, the virtual confused, third, the actual distinct, fourth the virtual distinct. The first knowledge, the actual confused, grasps what substance is, what body, animal, and all of the predications found descending along Porphyry’s tree are, but without penetrating to the *ratio formalis* in a way which perceives them clearly. The third knowledge, the actual distinct, grasps these *rationes formales* as they are in the substances with clear resolution as to the meaning, such that the integral parts are each understood as referring to the constitutive principles of the being. The second, virtual confused, does not compose the universal whole with its subjective parts, either inferior universals or individuals. The fourth, virtual distinct, grasps the universal whole together with its subjective parts, both inferior universals and the individuals in which they are found.

1.2.1.3 The Three Abstractions: *Totalis, Formalis, ab Singularibus*

Cajetan almost blithely asserts that *ens*, as the first by the way of origin of all our concepts, is grasped through an actual confused cognition. He gives no explanation as to what this means, except inasmuch as can be derived from the adjectives “actual” and “confused”: i.e., *ens ut primum cognitum* is not grasped as some object of absolute consideration, separated from the reality in which it is found, and neither is it grasped distinctly, with a penetrative look to the *ratio formalis*. It remains cloudy, however, what role *ens* so conceived plays in the life of the human intellect.

Perhaps, though, this role will be made clearer in the light of Cajetan's doctrine of abstraction, in which he distinguishes principally between *abstractio formalis* and *abstractio totalis*. The former is that which separates a form from something relatively material, as quantity from a body, and the latter that whereby a universal whole is separated from its inferior, subjective parts. They differ from one another in a fourfold way:

- (1) The two concepts are separated from one another entirely in *abstractio formalis*, so as to produce a concept of what is abstracted (the form) and a concept of what is abstracted from (the matter), whereas only one universal is abstracted in *abstractio totalis*, which includes that from which it was abstracted implicitly.
- (2) There is distinctness and intelligibility in *abstractio formalis*, because the concept of the form is a concept of actuality, whereas *abstractio totalis* produces a lesser intelligibility, including the confusion of potentiality.
- (3) The more abstract the object of *abstractio formalis*, the more intelligible it is in itself; whereas in *abstractio totalis*, the more abstract a thing is in itself, the more knowable it is to us.
- (4) The diversity of the speculative sciences (natural, mathematical, and metaphysical) are distinguished by *abstractio formalis*, and thus metaphysics is compared to natural philosophy not as the universal whole to one of its subjective parts, but as the formal to the material.

Thus it follows that each of the actual kinds of knowledge, both confused and distinct, are produced by a kind of *abstractio formalis*, whereas *abstractio totalis* is responsible for the two virtual knowledges. Now we can make clearer the meaning of Cajetan's conclusion that: "Ens concretum quiditati sensibili est primum cognitum cognitione confusa actuali".—"Being concretized in a sensible quiddity is the first thing known in actual confused knowledge".³⁷

Cajetan notes that *ens* can be the terminal object of the intellect in one of three ways: **first**, by what is known through *abstractio totalis*, such that *ens* is grasped as a universal whole (and thus results in a virtual knowledge); **second**, by what is known through *abstractio formalis*, such that *ens* is grasped according to a separation which results in the knowledge of its precise *ratio*, and is thus a metaphysical term, and indeed, the foundation of the metaphysical science. These two abstractions of *ens* are abstractions from species and genera; they separate out the meaning of *ens* from any possible differentiations of kind. The **third** abstraction is what Cajetan calls the "abstraction from

³⁷ Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 5/44.

singulars”, in which the object grasped is separated from all singular instances, but is not separated from the generic or specific quiddity of any instance. Thus, as a terminal object, what is known by the *abstractio a singularibus* is present in any quiddity which the intellect can conceive. It is in this way that *ens ut primum cognitum* is grasped.³⁸ That this is the first object of the intellect, Cajetan says, presupposes that “being is able to be known by an actual confused cognition”, for:³⁹

it does not belong to the rationale of actual confused cognition that the intellect understands the object according to one respect (*secundum aliquid*) and not know it according to another; but it suffices that the intellect is actually brought to the object itself, and not penetrate its actuality. Thus the rationale of actual confused cognition consists in this: that the intellect is brought to the object according to what is actually in it, not penetrating the object itself.

Thus, in such a cognition, there is no separated object known, but rather the concept by which the thing is known makes that thing objectively present, but only vaguely, to the intellect.

Cajetan therefore states that the most imperfect of all concepts is the first by way of origin. The most imperfect of all concepts is the actual confused concept of *ens* (*conceptus actualis confusus entis*); therefore, it is the first by way of origin. The major is proven for the more imperfect things are prior by the way of generation; the minor is evident because any other concept, since it adds to the concept of being, is more perfect than it, as the whole is greater than its

38 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 6/45: “scito quod ens sub triplici conditione potest terminare actum intellectus. Primo ut habet conditionem istam, quae est abstractio totalis, non dico a singularibus sed a speciebus et a generibus. Secundo modo ut habet conditionem istam, quae est abstractio formalis similiter a speciebus et generibus. Tertio modo ut neutram istarum conditionum habens, abstractum tamen a singularibus. Primo modo ens non est pertinens ad hanc quaestionem, quia ipsum ut sic est totum universale, nos autem loquimur de cognitione confusa actuali non virtuali. Secundo modo ens est terminus metaphysicalis: et forte adjuc viris doctissimis non innotuit. Tertio modo ens est primum cognitum, et nuncupatum est ens concretum quidditati sensibili: quia non est separatum aliqua dictarum abstractionum a quidditate specifica vel generica.”

39 Cajetan 1493: *DE*, 8/47: “non est de ratione cognitionis confusae actualis, quod intellectus intelligat objectum secundum aliquid, et secundum aliquid ignoret; sed sufficiet quod intellectus feratur in objectum ipsum actualiter, et non penetret ejus actualitatem, ita quod in hoc stat ratio cognitionis confusae actualis, quod intellectus feratur in objectum secundum id quod actualiter in eo est, non penetrando ipsum.”

parts. Thus, the actual confused concept of being is the most minimal of all intellectual concepts, and is that to which all other concepts are added. In his *De conceptu entis*, Cajetan claims that all subsequent concepts can be resolved into this most confused concept of *ens*, inasmuch as they are resolved into “quod est”, “[that] which is”.⁴⁰ In the same place, he claims that if one wants to resolve a substance into *ens*, then the substance is “resolved into the very nature of substance, since it founds existence [*esse*], which is most simple, and to which substance and the transcendentals add”.⁴¹

His explanation here is brevilouquent to the point of obscurity. Nevertheless, we can, on the one hand, identify the ghost of Scotus’ notion that *ens*, distinctly conceived, is that into which all others are resolved because it is *simpliciter simplex*. On the other hand, to explain how it is that Cajetan believes *ens* confusedly conceived is that into which all others are resolved can be explained only by considering (as succinctly as possible) his extensive doctrine of analogy.

1.2.2 *The Doctrine of Analogy*

It is arguable that the most central aspect to Cajetan’s understanding of *ens* as a concept confusedly known first and distinctly as metaphysical, is the doctrine for which he is most famous—namely, analogy. Recent scholarship has fairly convincingly shown that, while he may have taken his direction from the teaching of St. Thomas as a point of departure, Cajetan’s intent was not so much to expound the Angelic Doctor’s treatment of analogy as it was to provide his own—that his intent is not to develop the principal text of St. Thomas from *In I Sent.*, d.19 which speaks of analogy *secundum esse tantum*, *secundum intentionem tantum*, and *secundum esse et intentionem* but rather to respond to the Scotistic objections prevalent in his own time.⁴² The centrality of analogy to his thought is evident from the very first paragraph of the principal work, *De nominum analogia*: “Indeed, knowledge of [the analogy of names] is necessary, as without such knowledge, it is not possible to learn metaphysics, and many

40 Cajetan 1509: *De conceptu entis* (hereafter *DCE*), n.8/101: “Et si in conceptum confusum, quod est resolves, quod etiam est simplicissimum, cui etiam praedicta addunt”. The term “quod est” should not be translated “what is”, for, as we argue below (3.1.2), there is a rather distinctive meaning of “what” which is proper to “quid”—and translating “quod” as “what” only serves to confusel the issue.

41 Cajetan 1509: *DCE* n.8/101: “Et ut exercitatione resolutio monstretur, si substantiam in ens vis resolvere, si in conceptum distinctum entis resolutio quaeritur: resolveretur in ipsam naturam substantiae quatenus esse fundat, quod est simplicissimum, cui et addit ipsa substantia et addunt transcendentia”.

42 See Hochschild 2010: *The Semantics of Analogy*, 17–32; 37–38; 72–74. Cf. John R. Mortensen 2006: *Understanding St. Thomas on Analogy*, 69–71.

errors occur in other sciences from ignorance of it”.⁴³ As is well known, he then proceeds to distinguish three degrees of analogy, from the least to the most proper: inequality, attribution, and proportionality.

1.2.2.1 Analogy of Inequality

The analogy according to inequality is not, in Cajetan’s mind, properly called an analogy—for the name and the notion predicated are common, but what is signified is found according to an unequal “participation”. Clearly, this raises another issue far too significant to deal with here—namely, the role of participation in Thomistic doctrine—about which we can only refer the reader to other sources.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, it is a difficulty as to whether or not such a predication has any claim to the name “analogy”, even as an “abuse of vocabulary”,⁴⁵ as the differentiation between the things of which the analogical name is said seems to be in no way what is signified by a simple concept diversely representing, but only what is signified by a complex representation, whether this be a complex concept (and thus lacking a singular formal *ratio*) or a complex formed through judgment of *phantasmata* (which are not, it is to be noted, exclusively of the singular, but which include what Thomas calls the *experimentum*, a collation of various experiences into a kind of pre-universal).⁴⁶ The reason for unequal perfections is not on the part of the things signified which correspond to the concept whereby they are in some way the same; “living” is said equally of “live oak” and “horse” with no intensional distinction. In other words, what is signified by the concept of “living”, considered precisely as a concept, i.e., as a particular *quod* entitatively modifying the intellect, admits of no internal differentiation whatsoever; there are no intensional degrees of living, but it is rather a *sic aut non* predicate.⁴⁷ Certainly, the **manner** of living is different between a live oak and a horse, and therefore we can say that there is a potential extensional distinction in the predication; but such a predication is from

43 Cajetan 1498: *De nominum analogia* (*DNA* hereafter) c.1, n.1/p.3 in the Angelicum edition of 1943: “Est siquidem eius notitia necessaria adeo, ut sine illa non possit metaphysicam quispiam discere, et multi in aliis scientiis ex eius ignorantia errores procedant”.

44 See especially Robert Henle 1956: *St. Thomas and Platonism: A Study of the Plato and Platonici texts in the Writing of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff) and Rudi te Velde 1995: *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: E.J. Brill).

45 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.1, n.7/9: “Abusio tamen vocabulorum haec est”.

46 Cf. Deely 1971a: “Animal Intelligence and Concept Formation” in *The Thomist*, 35.1 (January): 43–93.

47 Note that a concept cannot help but also be a further *id in quo*, a “that on the basis of which” that necessarily provenates a relation; but here, we are focused upon the concept as it exists itself in the intellect.

factors **extrinsic** to what is signified by “living” considered precissively. The species of a genus are extrinsic to and therefore actually differentiate that genus, as it were, from “outside”, i.e., from some intellectual act of composition. The identification of one being as “more fully” realizing the extensional possibility of living is made on the basis of these extrinsic differentiations.

Indeed, this is the difficulty which lies at the heart of speaking of the “subjective parts” of “universal wholes”—it becomes easy to confuse the logical nature of these parts as they are understood with the constitutive reality of the subject itself. “Living” is not a distinct form existing in any way actually separate from the form of “perceptive” in a horse. No subjectively constituted being is composed from hypostatically united layers of formalities; “perceptive” is not an actually existing form distinctly existing within or on the basis of “living”.⁴⁸ For Cajetan to say that “the meaning of corporeity is not in inferior and superior bodies according to an equal perfection”⁴⁹ is itself a perversion of “the meaning of corporeity”, for “the meaning of corporeity” is in neither inferior nor superior bodies, or any bodies at all for that matter.⁵⁰

1.2.2.2 Analogy of Attribution

Much controversy exists over the interpretation of Cajetan’s second mode of analogical predication, the analogy of attribution. This controversy was, in particular, spurred by the late Ralph McInerny’s *Aquinas and Analogy*. McInerny’s criticism focuses upon what he calls “the tortured language needed to defend ‘an indefensible position’,”⁵¹ namely what Cajetan

48 As will become clear below in c.3 and 4, this way of speaking about the formalities of beings as understood by concepts is a result of an overexcitement for what is ultimately a *deus ex machina* doctrine of abstraction.

49 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*: c.1, n.4/6: “Non tamen secundum aequalem perfectionem ratio corporeitatis est in inferioribus et superioribus corporibus”.

50 In other words, saying that the “meaning” of anything is in concrete individual realities seems to introduce two problems: (1) it takes what is grasped by considering the existence which universals have in the intellect and transposes it into the things known, thereby committing what we might call the archetypal Platonic fallacy of believing that the things known exist in the mode whereby they are known; and (2) it suggests a plurality of forms in individuals, as though corporeality is a distinct actuality in things separate from the actualities of, for instance, animality or humanity.

51 McInerny 1996: *Aquinas and Analogy*, 20. For his earlier, but fundamentally similar, thought concerning analogy, see McInerny 1961: *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971). An interpretation which adopts and attempts to somewhat revise Cajetan’s position can be found in James F. Anderson 1949: *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1969).

says about the necessity of extrinsic denomination⁵² for all such analogical predication:⁵³

But it must be diligently attended to that this condition of this kind of analogy—namely, that it is not according to the genus of a formally inherent cause, but is always according to something extrinsic—is to be understood formally and not materially. That is, it should not be thought, on account of this fact, that every name which is analogous through attribution is common to its analogates such that it agrees with only the first [analogate] formally and with the rest by extrinsic denomination, as occurs in the cases of “health” and “medicinal”. For this generalization is false, as is clear with “being” and “good”; nor can it be had from the aforesaid, unless it is understood materially. But it must be understood from this that every name which is analogical through attribution as such, or insofar as it is analogous, is common to its analogates such that it agrees with the first formally and the rest by extrinsic denomination.

The language certainly is tortured and the criticism—that it “is simply not the case that [‘healthy’ and ‘being’ as analogous names] both involve extrinsic denomination”⁵⁴—is a fair one to make, though it may not in fact be accurate to what Cajetan is attempting to say. As Joshua Hochschild points out, the “reduplicative” clause, “every name which is analogical through attribution as such, or insofar as it is analogous”, seems to indicate that while things can all be called “being” by an intrinsic denomination, such that every thing is in some way or another formally “being” in itself, the denomination in cases

52 A denomination is the predication of some “what”, i.e., some *quid*, of a being. Intrinsic denomination signifies that the *quid* belongs to the thing from its substantial constitution, whereas extrinsic denomination signifies that it belongs to the thing by some relation. This belonging-by-relation can be due either to a *relatio realis* or a *relatio rationis*.

53 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.2, n.11/14–5: “Sed diligenter advertendum est, quod haec huius modi analogiae conditionis, scilicet quod non sit secundum genus causae formalis inhaerentis, sed semper secundum aliquid extrinsecum, est formaliter intelligenda et non materialiter: idest non est intelligendum per hoc, quod omne nomen quod est analogum per attributionem, sit commune analogatis sic, quod primo tantum conveniat formaliter, caeteris autem extrinseca denominatione, ut de sano et medicinali accidit; ista enim universalis est falsa, ut patet de ente et bono; nec potest haberi ex dictis, nisi materialiter intellectis. Sed est ex hoc intelligendum, quod omne nomen analogum per attributionem ut sic, vel in quantum sic analogum, commune est analogatis sic, quod primo convenit formaliter, reliquis autem extrinseca denominatione.”

54 McInerny 1996: *Aquinas and Analogy*, 20.

of attribution is nevertheless semantically one of extrinsic denomination.⁵⁵ Because what it means actually “to exist as an accident” necessitates “existing in a substance”, such that “the first analogate [substance] is placed in the definition of the others [the accidents]”,⁵⁶ Cajetan sees “being” as properly said of “substance” and extrinsically denominated of accident. In other words, the meaning of “being” is restricted here by the priority which substance has over accidents.

Clever though this solution is, it nevertheless falls victim to the same problem which plagues the “analogy of inequality”—namely, that this kind of priority and posteriority imports into the concept of being a distinction foreign to the concept itself: namely, the relative independence which is proper to a substance. Consequently, “being” is here not a simple concept signifying “being” *simpliciter*, but rather “being” + “the priority proper to substance” or “relative independence”.

1.2.2.3 Analogy of Proper Proportionality

The third kind of analogy in Cajetan’s system is that of proportionality, which term “philosophers transfer [from the relation of quantities] to every relation

55 Hochschild 2010: *The Semantics of Analogy*, 113: “A more charitable interpretation can be given to Cajetan’s claim here, an interpretation that confirms Cajetan’s consistent attention to logical or semantic, as opposed to metaphysical, concerns. According to Cajetan, ‘being’ is analogous both by attribution and by proportionality: an accident does have its own inherent being, but is also related to the being of substance, and *insofar* as an accident is denominated a being by analogy of attribution—that is, *insofar* as it is denominated a being *because* of its relation to the being of substance—it is denominated a being by extrinsic denomination.

“That is why Cajetan’s reduplicative clause is so important: ‘Every name analogous by attribution *as such*, or *insofar as so analogous*, is common to its analogates such that it agrees with the first formally and with the rest by extrinsic denomination.’ Again, ‘*insofar as all are called beings from subjective being as such*, only substance is formally being.’ As argued in the previous chapter, this is exactly the kind of qualification that is needed to ensure that the consideration of extrinsic denomination is properly logical and not metaphysical. Indeed, we can understand this as just an extension of Cajetan’s distinction between interpreting a relation *formally* as opposed to *materially*. Because the analogous term as predicated of the secondary analogates signifies a relation, and because a relation can be understood formally, we can understand formally the claim that the analogous term as predicated of the secondary analogates signifies by extrinsic denomination.” My interpretation is based upon the thesis of Hochschild’s work, that Cajetan is not concerned with the realities signified, but the method of their signification through words—that *De nominum analogia* is a **semantic** work (see especially Hochschild’s c.2, 33–46).

56 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.2, n.4/17: “primum analogatum ponitur in definitione caeterorum”.

of conformity, commensurability, capacity, etc., and consequently they extend ‘proportionality’ to every relational similarity”.⁵⁷ This transferal is accomplished in two ways. The first, to which Cajetan pays little mind, is the metaphorical, wherein the common name has one formal meaning which is “saved” in only one of the analogates. The second, which occupies the rest of *De nominum analogia*, is the “analogy of proper proportionality”, wherein the common name is “saved” in each of the analogates.

Cajetan’s explanation begins with the distinction between the univocal and analogical predication of things, namely:⁵⁸

that the things founding univocation are similar to one another such that the fundament of similitude in one is in every way of the very same rationale with the fundament of similitude in the other, so that the rationale of one includes in itself nothing which is not included in the rationale of the other. For this reason, the fundament of univocal similitude in both extremes abstracts equally from those extremes. The things founding analogy are similar such that the fundament of similitude in one is of a diverse rationale simply from the fundament in the other, so that the rationale of one does not include that which the rationale of the other includes. For this reason, it is necessary for the fundament of analogical similitude in neither of the extremes to be abstracted from those extremes; but they remain distinct fundaments similar according to proportion; therefore they are said to be proportionally or analogically the same.

Those things which are univocally the same have, to Cajetan’s mind, the same formality and the same rationale; the “animality” in a horse, dog, and human

57 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.3, n.24/25: “transtulerunt tamen Philosophi proportionis nomen ad omnem habitudinem conformitas, commensurationis, capacitatis, etc. Et consequenter proportionalitatem extenderunt ad omnem similitudinem habitudinum.”

58 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.4, n.33/32: “Unde inter univocationem et analogiam haec est differentia: quod res fundantes univocationem sunt sic ad invicem similes, quod fundamentum similitudinis in una est eiusdem rationis omnino cum fundamento similitudinis in alia: ita quod nihil claudit in se unius ratio, quod non claudit alterius ratio. Ac per hoc fundamentum univocae similitudinis, in utroque extremorum aequae abstrahit ab ipsis extremis. Res autem fundantes analogiam, sic sunt similes, quod fundamentum similitudinis in una, diversae est rationis simpliciter a fundamento illius in alia: ita quod unius ratio non claudit id quod claudit ratio alterius. Ac per hoc fundamentum analogae similitudinis, in neutro extremorum oportet esse abstractum ab ipsis extremis; sed remanent fundamenta distincta, similia tamen secundum proportionem; propter quod eadem proportionaliter vel analogice dicuntur.”

is known by one and the same concept which is abstracted from all of the instances in which it is found. Contrariwise, analogical similitude is founded not upon some common rationale found equally in each instance, but in that the quiddities proper to such things are each commensurately related to their “proper existence”. Consequently, it is this proportionality to something else found in each thing which founds the similitude whereby they are denominated analogical.

Furthermore, Cajetan claims that there is a distinction in the nature of the mental or formal concepts of univocals and analogues. While univocal concepts are perfectly adequated to their objects, analogical concepts require an **imperfect** concept whereby the foundational rationale of the similitude is known (i.e., of the analogue itself) and **perfect** concepts whereby the particular degree whereby the rationales of each distinct similitude are known (i.e., of the analogates insofar as they are analogous). Insofar as they are alike, these perfect and distinct concepts of the analogates represent one another; but because this “similitude is according to proportion alone, which has diverse rationales in the other fundamentals”,⁵⁹ there must be some adequate though imperfect concept which is, as it were, the umbrella over them all.⁶⁰

The trouble with Cajetan’s doctrine is not so much in that he considers the concept analogous—for, depending upon how this is meant, every concept is in a certain way analogous inasmuch as they all admit some differentiation in the mode of signifying—but rather in that his notion of the analogical concept is a chimera. A concept cannot be both one and multiple at the same time and (as a modification of the subjective constitution of the knower) in the same respect; how can a concept both signify the same thing and different things at once? What Cajetan is actually describing is, instead, different compositions of the imperfectly-representative concept and the (more) perfectly representative concepts—being and horse, being and human, being and substance, being and quality, etc.—wherein one of the integral parts of each newly-formed concept, being, is intensionally differentiated in each of these complex concepts, **inasmuch as it is composed** with the other integral parts. This is, indeed, the inclusion of *ens* in all subsequent intellectual apprehensions; but this does

59 Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.4, n.37/35: “Quia vero talis similitudo secundum proportionem tantum est, quae diversam rationem in altero fundamento habet”.

60 See Cajetan 1498: *DNA*, c.4, n.36–8/34–6 generally, but especially n.38/36: “Of the analogue and the analogates as such, there are necessarily many concepts perfectly representing them, and there is one concept imperfectly representing them. Nevertheless it is not as though there is one concept adequately responding to the analogous name and inadequately to the analogates, since, in truth, that name would be univocal.”

not result in some formally analogical concept of *ens*, only its analogical composition with diverse *rationes*.⁶¹

1.2.2.4 Difficulties in Cajetan's Doctrine

Even with this shift in what it means to talk about analogical understanding, we face nevertheless another difficulty in Cajetan's doctrine: namely, when Cajetan says that *ens* is analogical, in what sense is he speaking of *ens*? As it is confusedly grasped in the first act of intellection? Or as it is distinctly grasped, belonging to the study of metaphysics, by an *abstractio formalis*?

To some extent, Cajetan addresses these objections in the considerably later (1509) *De conceptu entis*; but his explanations to Francis of Ferrara serve, ultimately, to highlight the problems with his doctrine.

First, Cajetan brings up the transitivity of similitudes: if one thing is similar to another, then an image of the first is similar to the second as well. For example, if one man looks like another, and a reasonably good portrait of the first is painted, it will also bear a likeness to the second man. Cajetan further attempts to illustrate this by saying that every concept of a creature, since every creature in some way signifies a perfection that belongs, albeit in a different way, to Him, is in a sense a concept of God. Consequently, "since the proportionally one as such has singular members proportionally similar, it is necessary that [the proportionally one] likewise have one mental concept representative of that which is proportionally one",⁶² and thus a "concept one in number in the mind, according to subjective being, is one analogically according to representative being".⁶³ The examples given here, however, fall flat. Our own example, the painting which represents both men, is dealing not with universal conceptions but with materially individuated instances whose appearances are similar because they are understood through the same phantasmal *experimenta*:

61 In contrast to Cajetan is Chrysostom Iavelli c.1510: *In Libros Metaphysicos Aristotelis*, lib.4, q.1, 98: "Prima est ens in se praecise et absolute consideratum, dato quod haberet unum conceptum, qui possit convenire omnibus suis contentis non est univocum, nec aequivocum, nec analogum. Nam univocum non est, nec equivocum, nec analogum: nisi ut comparatur suis contentis, secundum unum aut plures conceptus, ut diximus supra. Haec enim est prima conditio. Sed ens sic consideratum in illo priori, non comparatur suis contentis, prius enim considero ens ut ens, quam ens ut substantia, vel accidens, ergo ut sic, non est univocum, nec equivocum nec analogum."

62 Cajetan 1509: *DCE* n.3/98: "quod cum unum proportionabilitate ut sic habeat singula membra similia proportionabiliter, oportet quod habeat etiam unum conceptum mentalem repraesentativum illius unius proportionabiliter."

63 Cajetan 1509: *DCE* n.4/98–9: "conceptus iste unus numero in mente, secundum esse subiectivum, est unus analogia secundum esse repraesentativum".

bald, round noses, beady eyes, found in both men and in the portrait. There is no transitivity of intellectual concepts involved; only what appears at the level of *phantasiari*. Cajetan's example—while it is true that every creature is in some way a representation of the Divine—fails because the similitude is unidirectional, meaning that creatures are similar to God but not that God is similar to creatures; and thus there is no transitivity of the concepts to one another.

Second, Cajetan says that this relating of things known, “objective concepts”, to a singular formal or mental concept whereby they are known according to a proportion, occurs in two modes: the first, where the analogue has a particular determinate nature to which the analogates are related, as, in his example, the concept of “bone” in a way represents “spine” inasmuch as they both support flesh (though a better example would be “bone” and “cartilage”) wherein the concept signified by “bone” signifies a particular nature determinately, i.e., what is distinctive to bones, and simultaneously signifies another nature, “spine”, implicitly. The second mode of signifying a proportion is alike to the first, except that it “occurs when the understanding robs the mental concept ... of that determinate nature which it represented and conceives some pronoun in the place of that nature, referring indeterminately to the natures founding the analogy”.⁶⁴

The ingenuity of Cajetan's second point in the solution to Ferrara's objections (the relating of objective concepts to formal concepts by differing proportions) is marred only by the fact that it rests upon entirely indefensible presuppositions. What Cajetan calls the “indeterminate” reference of a concept to its analogates is, in truth, either a synecdotal fallacy concerning the parts and whole of some elaborated concept, or the supposition of a generic concept in place of a previously more-determinate one. The latter case of a generic concept occurs in the instance where he suggests replacing a determinate nature by a pronoun—e.g., from “bone supporting flesh” to “what supports flesh”—for while such a pronoun may not signify this or that determinate nature, it does still signify a determinate kind of some sort, such as substance, action, or any of the other categories. The condition still determines whatever pronoun is used: the “what” of “what supports flesh” has to be the sort of thing which is capable of supporting flesh. Thus, the concept is still determined by the conditions under which it is being said.

64 Cajetan 1509: *DCE* n.5/99–100: “Contingit autem hoc, cum intelligens mentalem conceptum... expoliat ab illa determinata natura quam repraesentabat, et loco illius naturae concipit pronem aliquod, referens naturas fundantes analogiam indeterminate.”

The synecdotal fallacy occurs when we say that “bone”, in determinately signifying its own proportion to “supporting flesh”, indeterminately signifies “cartilage”, in the latter’s similar proportion to “supporting flesh”; for the determinate nature of bone could not be constituted solely by its proportion to supporting flesh. As Cajetan himself admits, proportion is a kind of relation, meaning that, even if the proportion of bone to the support of flesh is an integral part of the concept of bone, that proportion known as integral is part of a composite, complex concept, which, if that concept signifies—in any way whatsoever—any other proportion, it does so **separately from that composition or integration**. If we say that the proportion of bone to supporting flesh is alike to the proportion of cartilage supporting flesh, we do so on the basis of those integral parts of the two compositions, as **separate** from the wholes of which they are parts—not on the basis of the composite wholes themselves.

In short, by a synecdotal fallacy, Cajetan takes the formal object of an integral part of some complex concept and attributes its signification to the whole. We can see this also in the second question of his commentary on *De ente et essentia*, where he states that:⁶⁵

ens signifies one formal concept common in the representing of substance and accident, God and creatures ... [but it also] signifies, as an objective concept, something really found in every genus, distinct from the proper objective concepts of each genera, which expresses no grade above the generic, specific, and individual natures.

In other words, the formal concept—existing as a certain *quod*, a determining accident of the *intellectus possibilis*—has no differentiation in itself; but the objective concept, the terminus of understanding, is where we find the differentiation making the concept of *ens* to be analogical. The problem here, in the supposed analogicity of the concept of *ens*, is not, as in the case of “bone” and “cartilage”, one of integral parts and conceptual wholes, but rather one of formal and material objects; that is, of what is signified by the formal concept and that in which the signified is found. Just as we cannot validly say that the proportion of similitude between two integral parts, the same in themselves, makes analogical the relation between the two wholes, neither can we say

65 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 25/67: “Ens significat unum conceptum formalem communem in repraesentando substantiae et accidenti Deo et creaturae... Ens significat ut conceptum objectalem aliquid reale inventum in omnibus generibus distinctum secundum rationem a propriis conceptibus objectalibus omnium generum, nullum gradum supra naturas genericas, specificas et individuales exprimens.”

that the similitude between the formal object, considered separately from two or more material objects, causes an analogical proportion between either of those objects as wholes, neither in themselves nor in our understanding of them. Rather, it is the justly applicable predication of what is signified by the formal concept of *ens* to the concepts of other things, admitting of intensional differentiation, which results in the analogical proportion of our knowledge stemming from *ens ut primum cognitum*.⁶⁶

1.2.3 Conclusion

How does this impact Cajetan's understanding of *ens ut primum cognitum*? As we have seen, he proposes in *De conceptu entis* that all things are resolvable into *ens* as had by an actual confused concept inasmuch as they are replaceable by an indeterminate pronoun. But, as we have just demonstrated, this replacement by an indeterminate pronoun nevertheless confines one to the kind of limitation and signification common to the categories. Indeed, for Cajetan, **there is no being before the division into the categories**, neither being understood as grasped by an actual confused cognition, *ens ut primum cognitum*, nor being understood distinctly, *ens inquantum ens*. This is evident from his twofold assertion that the *abstractio a singularibus* whereby we know *ens ut primum cognitum* does not abstract from species and genera, and that the *abstractio formalis* whereby we know *ens inquantum ens* does not abstract from the categories. What results is, that although Cajetan notes and distinguishes between knowledge according to wholes and knowledge of parts, he posits a perfection of the knowledge of a whole by an accretion of parts; *ens ut primum cognitum* is not a whole within which parts are subsequently determined, but **merely** a foundation upon which further concepts are laid, to which they are added.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the importance of Cajetan's contributions should not be understated. His distinctions in the orders of cognition are immensely helpful when it comes to our own discussion of the discursive nature of concept formation and the relation of concepts to *ens primum cognitum* and

66 Conversely, it is the different presencing of *ens*—the degree of actuality possessed, one might say—between different beings as they are in themselves and subsequently known by us, which allows for an analogical predication of *ens inquantum ens*.

67 Though somewhat tangential to our main point, we see this especially in Cajetan's treatment of the universal whole—or more particularly, what is **absent** in his treatment; for, much as does Avicenna, Cajetan gives us no indication as to the proper location or nature of things so conceived. In contrast, as we will see momentarily, Poinsot provides a solution which both prevents any sort of Platonizing of conceptualization while maintaining the intentional character of the concept.

ens inquantum ens. Moreover, while we have disagreed with his particular approach to the designation of concepts as analogical in themselves, we have gleaned an important and helpful insight in that process: namely, that some concepts repudiate analogical predication, while others do not, inasmuch as in some compositions an integral part may or may not admit of intensional differentiation in respect to the object.

Ultimately, we have found a need for a better understanding of the nature of concepts themselves, and especially the concept of *ens primum cognitum*; and for this, we turn to a thinker greatly influenced by Cajetan's work, John Poinsot.

1.3 John Poinsot, the Nature of Concepts and *Ens ut Primum Cognitum*

As has been well-documented by the relatively few recent scholars of John Poinsot, the role of the concept as a formal sign is central to the Iberian Thomist's philosophy.⁶⁸ The intellectual concept, alternatively called the *verbum* and the *species expressa*, is posited as a necessary terminus within the intellect—as the terminus of the productive act whereby understanding occurs—for two reasons: first for the fecundity of the power of knowing, and second on account of the uniting of the object to the power. For the fecundity of the power, Poinsot says that:⁶⁹

it is from the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks, and so a concept is called a word, inasmuch as it is expressed and formed by the power for manifesting those things which are known. For the understanding naturally seeks and breaks out in manifestation; and such an expressive manifestation is called an expression or interior discourse, and the word itself is a form of specification or some likeness expressed and spoken.

68 Poinsot 1632b: *TDS*, 240–253 (*Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, Reiser, I 702a38–707b23). For recent scholarship, see, for instance, Maritain 1959: *DK*, 119–128; Peifer 1952: *The Mystery of Knowledge*, 171–179; Deely 2007: *IS*, 60–63; Osborne 2010: “The Concept as Formal Sign” in *Semiotica* 179, 1–21; Deely 2007/8: “The Quo/Quod Fallacy in the Discussion of Realism” *in passim*.

69 Poinsot 1632b: *TDS*, 242/14–23 (R.I 702b19–30): “*Propter fecunditatem* quidem, quia ex abundantia cordis os loquitur, et sic verbum dicitur conceptus, quantenus exprimitur et formatur a potentia ad manifestandum ea, quae cognoscuntur. Naturaliter enim intellectus manifestationem quaerit et in eam prorumpit; et talis manifestatio expressiva vocatur dictio seu locutio interior, et ipsum verbum est species seu similitudo aliqua expressa et dicta.”

In other words, subsequent to the reception of *species impressae*, there comes, at some point, an abundance in the one possessing these *species*, an abundance which terminates in something else, something new, on the basis of which others are known. Intellectual engagement commissions not only relations wherein human beings are passive recipients, but also urges the active forming of relations—through acts subsequent to those whereby the intellect receives, it breaks forth in a cognitive efflux. This is the forming of the word, to which we will more fully turn our attention in Chapter 4. For now, let us note along with Poinsett that we are not merely passive or receptive in the interaction with things known, but we give to them our own expression or interpretation, so as to manifest them to first to ourselves and secondly, through species-specifically-human communication, i.e., linguistic communication, to others. It is not enough for us to receive; we must instead give some intelligibility proportionate to ourselves. Nothing in what we receive from the thing as it is independently of cognition is enough to constitute it an intelligible object for the intellect. Rather, the actual grasp of the thing under its objectization requires an activity of the intellect subsequent to and in at least some measure independent of the passive operation whereby specification is received. In other words, it is not of the nature of the intellect to be **merely** passive or **merely** receptive, but it must issue forth into some manifestation proper and proportionate to its own activity.⁷⁰

70 Consider, for instance, the enormous number of impressions made upon us of which we are not aware. In many ways, these impressions are simply ignored; others are acted upon but without conscious awareness of the nature of the formal object—that is, they are assumed within a context wherein they are not explicitly distinguished one from another and yet the reaction against or action towards them is nevertheless based upon some impression and subsequent expression of them which remains as yet incomplete or inchoate, an impression which fails to attain an elaborated expression of them as something formally distinctive from their surroundings. For instance, two fruits could appear very similar in shade, such that one is only slightly darker than another, but is so consistently. The one fruit could be healthy for an animal to eat, and the other cause digestive ailments. Even if this was the only distinction between the two, an animal could, without an explicit assertion of the difference between the two, recognize this difference, and judge accordingly. This is, indeed, a parallel to what Poinsett describes as the distinction between ultimate and non-ultimate concepts—if we extend here the term concept beyond the intellectual to include the conceptual function of *species impressae phantasiae*, products of the interior sense powers' combined act, *phantasiari*, just as intellectual concepts are the *species impressae intellectus*, products of *intelligere*—as a kind of midway point between the impression of *species* and a properly terminal expression (cf 1632b: TDS, 334–340 [R.I 746b15–749b47] *in passim*—note that, as we will argue below [in both

The *species expressa* is also necessary with regard to the accomplishment of an actual unity between the knower and the known. Thus:⁷¹

On account of necessity for an object, on the other hand, the concept is posited so that an object would be rendered united to the power in the rationale of a known terminus and be present to the power [and this necessity is twofold] ... Either because the object is [physically] absent and the knowledge cannot be terminated at it, unless it be rendered present in the rationale of the terminus ... or ... [because] it is necessary to posit the concept within the power in order for the things known or objects to be rendered proportioned and conformed to the power itself.

3.2.2 and 4.2, especially 4.2.4], in regards to *material* individuals, there are never truly ultimate concepts).

It is nevertheless demonstrable—and has often been demonstrated—that our explicit, expressed, and formed concepts have a determinative effect on our conscious perceptions. Until the distinctions between things, such as colors, are clearly articulated and expressed by us individually, we are often unaware of their differences. Guy Deutscher (2010: *Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*, 217–232) details, among others, an experiment run in 2008 (220–226) wherein speakers of Russian, in which there are distinct words for light blue (*goluboy*) and dark blue (*siniy*) were compared with speakers of English in distinguishing between three squares of blue, wherein two were of the same or very similar shades, and one was the “odd square out”. The test takers were to identify which two squares were closer in shade. If two of the squares were dark blue (*siniy*) and the odd square out was light blue (*goluboy*), there was little hesitation for the Russian speakers. But if the odd square out was one of two shades of dark blue, it took longer for the Russians to make the correct choice, whereas English speakers had no such difficulty, and made the choice in each case without any difference in how long they hesitated.

Deutscher, evidently unfamiliar with the conceptual tradition of scholasticism, attributes this (unfortunately) to merely linguistic differences. Even the subtitle of his book—*Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*—betrays the insufficiency of a merely linguistic distinction, for if the convention of a word alone were enough to cause a perceptual differentiation, then we would have no commonality on any of the things signified by diverse linguistic terms. Rather, what language demonstrates to us, and what it can contribute to by means of its own diversification, is the distinctions of things as mediated by concepts, *species expressae*.

71 1632b: *TDS*, 243/1–3, 7–10, 19–22 (R.I 702b31–64; 39–42; 703a6–9): “*Propter necessitatem autem obiecti ponitur, ut obiectum reddatur unitum potentiae in ratione termini cogniti et ei praesens sit [et ipsa necessitas duplex est] ... Vel quia obiectum est absens et non potest terminari cognitio ad ipsum, nisi in ratione termini reddatur praesens... vel... [quia] oportet ponere conceptum intra potentiam, ut res cognita seu obiecta reddatur proportionata et conformis ipsi potentiae.*”

On the one hand, in the case of objects which are in themselves (as cognition-independent entities) absent from our intuitive awareness, we need the *species expressa* in order that the object be present to us in our awareness or consciousness. While it is for the self-concern with its own well-being that the alloanimal (or non-human animal) employs the *species expressa phantasiae* of an absent object, human animals are capable not only of this but also of making an object present simply for the sake of our own intellectual attention. On the other hand, even objects which are immediately present to us, in themselves and as before our senses, and even as somehow grasped intellectually, perceived in their intelligibility, are not in themselves proportioned to the intellectual power.⁷² As grasped merely through *species impressae intellectus*, they are not yet actually understood and thus not actually united, as terminal objects, to our intellects, but need instead the proportionate formation given them in the *species expressae*.

The value of this explanation, not only for evitating the self-caused epistemological quagmire characteristic of modernity, but also for bringing light to the reality of human understanding has not yet been fully explored. The manner in which concepts signify their objects to a knower allows us insight not only into the nature of the concepts, nor only of the objectivized things, but into the nature of objectivization itself.

Thus, before we can come to a consideration of the concept whereby *ens* is made *primum cognitum*, and thus something known and united to the human intellect, we need to consider the objectivity constituted by concepts in general.

1.3.1 *Objectivity and Conceptualization*

Between the *species impressa* and *expressa* of the intellect, there is this one truly crucial difference: nothing is made actually known by the *species impressa*. That is not to say that it does not contribute to the formation of knowledge, or that the *species impressa* is not some means which results in knowing—but the mere presence of a *species impressa* in some *intellectus possibilis* does not make that intellect to actually know anything at all. This occurs even in the reception of *species impressae sensatae*; how often are physical phenomena received, but not actually perceived? How often do we see things—their color, their shape, their position—but not see them as they are or for what they are?⁷³

72 Nor, for that matter, to the cogitative/estimative power of interior sense; nothing about the impressed appearance of a snake makes it proportionally known to us as a danger, but only by our formed expressed species is that cognition attained. Misjudging the danger of it is due to an ill-formed *species expressa phantasiae*.

73 Cf. Heidegger 1925: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, 36–48 in the English translation by Kisiel, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* for a similar phenomenological approach.

Oftentimes, we become aware of the reality previously unperceived not only when it is present to us, but in recollection while it is absent, as when we recall where we left our keys or the color of someone's shirt.

Thus, only the *species expressa* is a concept, i.e., what the intellect (or the interior senses all together) conceives—what it grasps, takes in, and fecundates—for itself. It is consequently a terminus of the operation of the intellect, but **not an intentional** terminus. Rather, in the order of *esse intentionale*, it is a fundament whereby the knower is related to the known, such that what is known is the objective terminus. Therefore, we must look first (1) at the relationship between the *species impressa* and the *species expressa*, second (2) at the relationship between *species expressa* and the object, and third (3) at the distinction between intuitive and abstractive awareness.

1.3.1.1 The Relationship between *Species Impressa* and *Expressa*

The first thing which we must note, in looking at the relationship between the *species impressa* and *expressa*, is the causal relationship between phantasms and intellectual cognition that Poinsoot explains. The determinations present within material beings, their particular actualities, which become present preintellectually in the *phantasmata* of interior sense, serve to give rise to the intelligibility of the things, inasmuch as the possible intellect is in itself something undetermined.⁷⁴ These *phantasmata* are already, in some way, abstracted from the material conditions of that which they serve to make preintellectually known.⁷⁵ Poinsoot explains this being separated from the material conditions of subjectively-constituted individuality as constituting in the phantasm a power which “is neither corporeal nor incorporeal, but a power towards the incorporeal”.⁷⁶

74 Gilson also highlights this feature of a Thomistic theory of knowledge, as is shown below in 2.1.2.1. Cf. Guagliardo 1994: “Being-As-First-Known”, 379: “What the phantasm contains and upon which the intellect depends is a determinate species potentially but not actually intelligible. In this the phantasm ‘concurrs’ with the agent intellect in producing a similar determinate intelligible species in the possible intellect.”

75 Thomas Aquinas 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.84, a.1, c.: “Et per hunc etiam modum forma sensibilis alio modo est in re quae est extra animam, et alio modo in sensu, qui suscipit formas sensibilibus absque materia, sicut colorem auri sine auro.” 1268: *In de anima*, lib.3, lec.13, n.792: “Sed in hoc differunt ab eis, quia sunt praeter materiam. Nam sensus est susceptivus specierum sine materia, ut supradictum est. Phantasia autem est motus factus a sensu secundum actum.” Cf. Deely 2007: *TS*, 90–91: “We need to realize that, even though the point has almost never been made in modern Thomistic literature, there is not only ‘abstraction’ in intellectual understanding, but already, and as a necessary preparation thereto, in sensory awareness even as that awareness is shared with, common to, humans and other animals, as Thomas describes in ending 1.84, 1c.”

76 Poinsoot 1633: *Naturalis Philosophiae Quarta Pars*, q.10, a.2, (R.III 313a32–34): “neque est corporea neque incorporea, sed virtus ad incorporeum”. It should be noted that the source

This “power towards the incorporeal” is ambiguous, and can be interpreted to mean either some relating towards the incorporeality of the intellect or to mean an order towards the incorporeality of *esse intentionale*. It is this latter interpretation which we principally hold—for although it is true that *phantasmata* are ordered, in the human being, towards intellectual knowledge, if the “power towards the incorporeal” follows upon the sense abstraction from the material conditions of the subjectively-constituted individuality of sensible things, then this power is common to humans and alloanimals. In other words, all *phantasmata* in themselves, inasmuch as they are entitative modifications of an animal, are capable of giving rise to intentional relations; *phantasmata*, like all concepts, are capable of provenating⁷⁷ incorporeal, intentional relationships between knower and known.⁷⁸

text for Poinso's claim is *DV* q.27, a.4, ad.5, which reads: “Ad quantum dicendum, quod virtus illa neque potest dici corporea neque incorporea, proprie loquendo: corporeum enim et incorporeum sunt differentiae entis completi; sed proprie dicitur virtus ad incorporeum, sicut motus magis dicitur ad ens quam ens. Obiectio autem procedit ac si ista virtus esset quaedam forma completa”. Here, Thomas is not speaking of the phantasm, but rather the presence of grace in the sacraments. Nevertheless, the above text from 1268: *In de anima*, lib.3, lec.13, n.792 (in n.75 above), connects the *phantasia* to motion; the activities of the internal sense powers, in creating phantasms, in preparing phantasms for the activity of the *intellectus agens*, is the dispositive forming of an instrument for its agent. Cf. Guagliardo 1994: “Being-As-First-Known”, 380: “There is, however, a power (*virtus*) already in the phantasm itself, Poinso quotes St. Thomas as recognizing, which ‘is neither corporeal nor incorporeal, but a power toward the incorporeal’, where it serves ministerially. This is because an instrument serves an agent by being dispositive to its activity.”

77 Cf. Deely 2010b: *Semiotic Animal: A Postmodern Definition of “Human Being” Transcending Patriarchy and Feminism*, xiii: “Here too, perhaps, is the place to mention a neologism introduced into my analysis from the Latin semiotic of John Poinso, namely, the English verb-form *provenate*. This verb in English derives from the Latin infinitive ‘provenire’, to come or issue forth, appear, arise, be produced; its closest relative in existing English being the noun-form ‘provenance’ (‘where something originated or was nurtured in its early existence’). Hence, as will appear, a relation *provenates* from its fundament only *contingently* in *ens reale* restrictively conceived, but *necessarily* when the fundament is a psychological state. Thus, as psychologic states cannot be without being ‘of’ or ‘about’ something other than themselves, so as qualities they belong to subjectivity as entangled inescapably with suprasubjectivity, but they do not depend upon a *subjectively existing terminus* in order to give rise to relations. In this case, the relation *provenates*—i.e., issues forth from or ‘on the foundation of’ the psychological quality—*necessarily* regardless of any subjectivity on the side of its terminus.”

78 Cf. Deely 1968: “Immateriality and the Intentional as Such” in *The New Scholasticism*, vol.1, 293–306 *in passim*, and Guagliardo 1994: “Being-As-First-Known”, 382: “There is already a dimension and condition which the agent intellect presupposes so that habilitation

In the life of any animal, possessing an intellect or not, this provenating of an intentional relation from knower to known is the first occasion whereby there can be a distinction between the objectivized thing, considered as a thing, and the objectivized thing considered as object. Things, as appearing to animals through their sense powers, provide certain specifications (*species impressae sensatae*), and thereby become specificative objects.⁷⁹ At the level of animal cognition, this specification results in a kind of judgment, i.e., a return to the thing as a terminal object, whereby the animal takes that thing to be something beneficial to it, harmful to it, or irrelevant to it; the thing is not merely made an object as “what is somehow present to”, but an object as “what is to be sought/avoided/ignored”. Oftentimes, the animal is wrong in this judgment. In other words, this specification on the part of the thing, limited as it is by its delivery through a corporeal immutation,⁸⁰ does not result in an infallible judgment. There is, however, no distinction **for the animal** between the thing considered as an object—with that estimative judgment of the thing’s relation to the concerns of the animal itself—and the thing considered precisely in its own subjective constitution as independent of the animal’s cognition of it.

What is of relevance for us in this is that the specificative object, or *obiectum movens*, as it is presented through the senses, does not result in the formation of *phantasmata* which make known the thing as it is in itself, or even necessarily result in the formation of *phantasmata* which are accurate portrayals for the animal’s own use. Thus, as *phantasmata* are in turn specificative objects for the intellect, what is conceived intellectually does not always result necessarily in the things being known as they are in themselves, for, in the reception of a specificative object, all that occurs is that a power is somehow determined. Thus, at the level of animal cognition, insofar as the element of judgment in the objectivization of a thing (beneficial, harmful, or neutral) adds nothing beyond the dimension of use, the only relevant distance between an objectivized thing, as having its own subjectively-constituted reality, and an objectivized thing, in the precise manner in which it is an object for an alloanimal, is between a correct and an incorrect estimative evaluation.

For human beings, contrariwise, there is a potentially infinite distance between the thing as it is in itself and the thing as object. The ability to attempt consideration of a thing as it is in itself, i.e., according to its subjective constitution,

through illumination and abstraction is possible in the first place. How is this dimension, ‘neither corporeal nor incorporeal’ to be described? It is the dimension, not of entitative being (*esse entitativum*) but of intentional being (*esse intentionale, or spirituale*).”

79 I.e., *obiectum movens*. See c.3 below for more on this notion.

80 See c.3 below for more on the modes of immutation.

as well as the ability to consider a thing as in its various cognition-dependent relations, allows not only for errors in judging of the thing, but also correct judgments about the cognitively-dependent aspects of its existence in the world. Thus, the *species expressa*, though always dependent upon *species impressae*, is nevertheless not confined in the content of its expression to what is contained in this, or that, or even all of the *species impressae*; for the intellect may discover some relation between the specifications impressed upon it which those *species* do not of themselves provide, or it may combine them in some way which they themselves are not actually combined, but to which they are not opposed.

Consequently, there can be a very great distance between the *species expressa* as presenting an objectivization and the thing as it exists independently of human cognition, without necessitating some falsity arising from that *species expressa*.

1.3.1.2 The Relationship between *Species Expressae* and Their Terminal Objects

This distance between the *species expressae* and the things which exist independently of human cognition becomes clear in Poincot's treatment of first and second intentions. As he shows, the objects of our cognition, both *entia realis* and *entia rationis*, do not divide neatly into first and second intentions. In other words, while every second intention involves an *ens rationis*, not every *ens rationis* is the object of a second intention.

An intention is considered by Poincot to be a relation, not a thing itself existing entitatively in or as some subject, nor the concepts of things themselves existing as psychological entitative modifications of cognitive beings (i.e., as subjective qualities). An intention is said in this context as standing "for the act or conception of the understanding, which is said to be an 'intention' in a general mode, because it tends towards another, namely, toward an object".⁸¹

1.3.1.2.1 *Distinction between First and Second Intentions*

To see this, we need to look first at how Poincot distinguishes between first and second intentions. To begin with, he distinguishes them in an early text of the *Artis Logicae* of the *Cursus Philosophicus* by their respective terms, i.e., that towards which they provenate cognitive relations:⁸²

81 Poincot 1632b: *TDS*, 58/18–20 (R.I 291a1–3): "pro actu seu conceptu intellectus, qui dicitur intentio generali modo, quia tendit in aliud, scilicet in obiectum".

82 1631: *Artis Logicae Prima Pars*, lib.1, c.4, (R.I 12b49–13a19): "Terminus primae intentionis est, qui significant aliquid secundum id, quod habet in re vel in suo proprio statu, id est

The term of a *first intention* is one that signifies something according to that which the signified has in reality or in its own proper state, that is, apart from the status it has in the understanding and according to how it is conceived, such as a white thing, or a human, as it is in reality. The term of a *second intention* is one that signifies something according to that which the signified has owing to a concept of the mind and in the state of the understanding, such as species, genus, and things of like kind which logicians treat. And these are said to be of first and second intention, because that which belongs to anything according to its own being is, as it were, primary in that thing and its own state; but that which belongs to anything according as it is understood is as it were secondary and a second state supervening upon the first, and for this reason it is called “of second intention”, as of the second state.

Thus a first intention has a bearing on things as they actually are in themselves. First intentions are resultant in actual cognitions because what they make known are things as directly present to the knower. Every first intention, consequently, consists in the direct and immediate consideration by a concept of its object, i.e., the consideration which follows from a direct concept. Contrariwise, a second intention is one which does not only bear upon the thing as such, but according to some secondary consideration “supervening upon the first”. The necessary means for the supervenience of this secondary consideration is the reflexive concept, which is the concept whereby a direct concept itself becomes an object of understanding.⁸³ This concept is called reflexive, not because it bends back directly upon itself nor upon the direct concept which makes known something in a first intention, but rather attains its object, the direct concept, by considering that the objects known—which are chronologically prior, as objectively present to the intellect—are known by some means.⁸⁴ In other words, the reflex concept includes within

secluso statu, quem habet in intellectu et prout conceptum, sicut album, homo ut in re. Terminus *secundae intentionis* est, qui significat aliquid secundum id, quod habet per conceptum mentis et in statu intellectus, sicut species, genus, et alia similia, quae logicus tractat. Et dicuntur ista primae et secundae intentionis, quia id, quod convenit alicui secundum se, est quasi primum in illo et status proprius; quod vero convenit alicui, secundum quod est intellectum, est quasi secundum secundus status superveniens primo, et ideo vocatur secundae intentionis, quasi secundi status.” Cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 58–59, n.2.

83 Cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 324–326 (R.I 741b4–742a9).

84 1632b: *TDS*, 326/45–327/14 (R.I 743a4–25): “Non potest autem aliquid obiective esse praesens, nisi induat condiciones obiecti talis potentiae. Cum autem obiectum proprium nostri intellectus sit quidditas rei materialis secundum se, illud non est direct praesens

the scope of its objectivization the direct concept **only inasmuch** as that concept is **mediated** by a consideration of the direct object as something known.

Given this reflexive concept, the intellect is then able to proceed to a comparison of the direct concept and the object thereby made known—i.e., what is correlative in the thing itself, that actuality grasped in some act of intellectual apprehension, to the concept whereby the thing is known—which comparison is the second intention.⁸⁵

Thus, Poinsoot states, those “affections or formalities [considered by the intellect], which belong to a thing according to how it is in itself, are called first intentions; those belonging to the thing insofar as it is known, are called second intentions”.⁸⁶

Second intentions result in Cajetan’s virtual cognition, i.e., an understanding of what is present in a thing by some kind of power or potency the consideration of which abstracts from the reality. It is important to note, however, that Poinsoot holds that second intentions can, in turn, be the foundations for further second intentions, in which case the former are taken as first intentions: “it is not contradictory that one second intention should be founded on another. In such a case, the founding second intention takes on as it were the condition of a first intention in respect of the other or founded intention, not because it is first simply, but because it is prior to that which it founds”.⁸⁷ Thus, the “firstness” of a first intention is sometimes said relatively;

obiective, quod non est quidditas rei materialis, et ut eam induat, indiget reflexione. Et ita conceptus nostri licet secundum se sint intelligibiles, ad modum quidditatis materialis, et ideo primario et directe non sunt praesentes obiective, nisi prout accipiuntur ad modum quidditatis sensibilis, quod utique ab oectio sensibili accipere debent. Et quia hoc accipiunt intra potentiam ab obiecto exteriori directe cognito, dicuntur reflexe cognosci et reddi intelligibiles intelligibilitate entis materialis.”

- 85 Thus, indeed, reflexive concepts are the comparison whereby the distinctive semiotic character of human understanding is attained; no alloanimal can produce a reflexive concept (cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 325/6–21 [R.I 741b48–742a15]), and thus no animal becomes aware of its own use of signs. It is also to be noted that it is through second intentions that cenoscopic science is possible. Cf. c.4.1.2.
- 86 1632b: *TDS*, 59/29–60/3 (R.I 291a41–44): “Illae ergo affectiones seu formalitates, quae conveniunt rei prout in se, vocantur primae intentiones, quae conveniunt rei prout cognita, vocantur secundae”.
- 87 1632b: *TDS*, 61/34–9 (R.I 292a40–47): “non repugant etiam in ipsa secunda intentione aliam secundam intentionem fundari, et tunc secund intentione fundans induit quasi conditionem primae intentionis respectu alterius fundatae, non quia sit simpliciter prima, sed quia est prior illa, quam fundat.”

just as there is a potential infinity of reflexive concepts,⁸⁸ so too there is a potential infinity of second intentions.

Nevertheless, we should not understand the difference between first and second to be based primarily upon this relativity of the potentially infinite number of second intentions. Rather, we should consider their respective objects.

1.3.1.2.2 *The Bearing of First and Second Intentions Upon Their Objects*

As Poinset points out, there can be cognition-dependent beings which are themselves the terms of first intentions, for: “a first intention can be found also in cognition-dependent beings [*in entibus rationis*], as are many negations, privations, and extrinsic denominations”.⁸⁹ That is, there are direct concepts of beings which are not themselves cognition-independent realities subsisting or capable of subsisting extramentally. Further:⁹⁰

88 Cf. Thomas Aquinas 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.86, a.2, c.: “Et ideo in intellectu nostro invenitur infinitum in potentia, in accipiendo scilicet unum post aliud, quia nunquam intellectus noster tot intelligit, quin possit plura intelligere”. And q.87, a.3, ad.2: “Unde alius est actus quo intellectus intelligit lapidem, et alius est actus quo intelligit se intelligere lapidem, et sic inde. Nec est inconveniens in intellectu esse infinitum in potentia, ut supra dictum est”. Despite the potential infinity, the comparison wrought by second intentions is still nevertheless reducible, as are all sign-relations, to a triad of *fundamentum*, *terminus*, and the relation itself; for the original second intention is itself the relation, while the direct concept and the object known are *fundamentum* and *terminus*, respectively. When a second intention (a) founds a further second intention, and thus becomes as a first intention (a), the direct concept and the object known become, as it were, “merged” and function as the *terminus*, and the first second intention (a) functions as the *fundamentum*.

89 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.12, a.1, (R.I 464b24–28): “etiam in entibus rationis potest inveniri prima intentio, sicut sunt multae negationes et privationes et denominationes extrinsecae”. Cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 59, n2.

90 1632b: *TDS*, 60/25–44 (R.I 291b22–46): “Ubi discerne, quod licet cognitio sit causa, ex qua resultat relatio rationis (quod omni enti rationis commune est), et ita ut conveniat et dominet relatio rationis aliquod subiectum, necessario exigit cognitionem, non tamen semper cognitio reddit ipsum obiectum aptum et congruum susceptivum talis denominationis, ita ut solum conveniat illi in esse cognito, sed solum hoc contingit in intentionibus secundis. Et ita relation Creatoris et Domini, iudicis et doctoris, ut denominet subiectum, requirit cognitionem, quae talem relationem causet, sed non quae constituat subiectum in esse cognito capax, ut denominationem illum suscipiat. At vero esse genus vel speciem non solum supponit cognitionem causantem tales relationes, sed etiam supponit cognitionem, quae reddat subiectum abstractum ab inferioribus, et super rem sic abstractam cadit illa denominatio.”

[1] even though cognition is the cause from which a *relatio rationis* results (as is common to all cognition-dependent beings), and thus, as the *relatio rationis* belongs to and denominates some subject, it necessarily requires cognition, [2] yet cognition does not always render the object itself fitting and congruous for the reception of such a denomination—such that the denomination [of a cognition which does not render the object fitting for it] belongs to that object only in cognized being—for this happens only in second intentions. [3] And thus the relations of Creator and Lord, judge and doctor, as they denominate a subject, require cognition, which causes such relations, but does not render the subject capable in cognized or known being of receiving that denomination. [4] But indeed the being of a genus or species not only supposes cognition causing such relations, but also supposes a cognition which renders the subject abstracted from its inferiors, and upon the thing so abstracted falls that denomination [i.e., that denomination by a second intention].

This dense passage requires significant unraveling. We have accordingly broken it up into four sections. In the first part [1], Poinsoot states that *relationes rationes* require cognition in order to exist. Only cognitive acts can cause such relations. Thus, when a *relatio rationis* either belongs to (or signifies something as belonging to) or denominates some subject, this is on account of a cognitive act.

In the second part [2], it is added that not every cognitive act causing a *relatio rationis* causes a denomination which belongs to the thing only as it is known, nor does every cognitive act causing a *relatio rationis* cause a denomination which is fittingly said of the object as it is in itself. Though to do so is to extrapolate from Poinsoot's text, we can clarify here by distinguishing three different modes of denomination: **first**, a denomination of something which actually belongs to the subjective constitution of the object known, i.e., an **intrinsic denomination**, which follows from a direct concept resulting in an actual cognition. **Second**, a *relatio rationis* which denominates of the object something which belongs to the object both in cognized being and in the thing's actual existence, but **not** in its individual subjective constitution, i.e., an **extrinsic denomination**. And **third**, a *relatio rationis* which denominates of the object something which belongs to it **only** insofar as it exists in cognized being, or what we might call a **purely cognitive denomination**. This lattermost occurs only in the case of a second intention, whereas an extrinsic denomination can occur in the case of signifying *relationes rationes* which nevertheless bear somehow upon the actual existence of the thing, as when we say "Creator" of

God or “doctor” of a human (as an institutional title recognizing that someone has earned a doctoral degree).⁹¹

The third part [3] confirms this last point. The extrinsic denominations of *relationes rationis* such as Creator, Lord, judge, and doctor, require cognition so as to connect the cognition-independent forms. For example, God’s being “Creator” does not entail a distinct determinate form of “Creator” in God, but His existence, and that act whereby He creates (the very same act whereby He exists) are cognition-independent. Likewise, created things in themselves are independent of human cognition, both as to their existences and their essences. But the relatedness of God as Creator to the created things, is, considered inasmuch as the term “Creator” denominates God, a cognition-dependent relation. No *relatio rationis*, no cognition-dependent relation, is a relation whereby a cognition-dependent term comes to fit the subjectively-constituted nature of a cognition-independent being as it actually exists. To be a judge or a doctor, as an institutional position, is not something which belongs to an individual in his or her subjective and cognition-independent constitution, and as such cannot be an intrinsic denomination, and yet nevertheless does denominate that subject in a way which is independent of the particular cognition had by some individual; that is, there can be a true **extrinsic** denomination of an object which is a cognition-independent being, but which extrinsic denomination, as signifying also *relatio rationis*, is itself cognition-dependent. Ultimately, then, such *relationes rationes* are in one way cognition-independent and in another way cognition-dependent; that is, there must ultimately be some cognition-independent form from which the relation comes into being, but proximately and in terms of their ordering to a *terminus*, such relations require existence in cognized being.⁹² We could also, therefore, say that such

91 1632b: *TDS* 60/14–24 (R.I 291b9–21): “licet omnis relatio rationis resultet ex cognitione, non tamen omnis ista relatio denominat rem solum in statu cogniti, qui est status secundus, sed etiam in statu existentiae extra cognitionem, sicut relatio Creatoris et Domini non denominat Deum in se cognitum, sed Deum existentem, et similiter esse doctorem, esse iudicem. Neque enim homo ut cognitus est doctor aut iudex, sed homo existens, et ita denominant illae relationes pro statu existentiae.” Cf. *ibid.*, 60/46–61/2 (R.I 292a1–2): “[D. Thomae dicit] quod secundae intentiones sunt proprietates convenientes rebus ex eo, quod sunt intellectu”.

92 Cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 55/7–49 (R.I 289a5–43), where Poinsoit explains that the form which is extrinsically denominated is something cognition-independent, but its application to the denominated subject is cognition-dependent, and *ibid* 141/11–142/15 (R.I 658b30–659a39) where it is said that the extrinsic denomination of stipulation and imposition gives rise to a twofold *relatio rationis*. On the one hand, “common to every extrinsic denomination”, there is the *relatio rationis* whereby the extrinsic denomination is “conceived by the

relationes are **completed** by the cognitive action, but latently present in the subjective constitutions (and intersubjective relations) of those beings which receive the denomination(s).⁹³

Further, to know blindness in something, or the lack of wings on a human being, or the being-a-judge of an individual person does not require that there be some consideration by means of a second intention; to know that Adolf Hitler was Führer of the Third Reich or that Dwight Eisenhower was the 34th president of the United States—cognition-dependent titles of extrinsic denomination—does not require that we first make clear distinctions between the formal and material objects,⁹⁴ such that

understanding on the pattern of a form [*ad modum formae*] and a denominating relation”, of which Poinsoot gives the examples of “being seen” relative to the one seeing and “being loved” relative to the one loving. On the other hand, there is the particular relation which distinguishes one denomination from another—as a judge is distinguished from a teacher—which relation, such as an office, arises from the one exercising the function and the function exercised, i.e., the office is that relation itself (and further, they are distinguished by the objects upon which the function is exercised).

93 Consider, for instance, the account which Aristotle (c.348/7BC: *Φυσικὴ ἀκρόασις*, IV.10–14) gives of time: though it is dependent upon the motions of bodies, it is not anything in the bodies themselves, but rather the relation which is constituted by the mind through the comparison of motions. Cf. Sachs’ commentary, 133: “Time thus has only a second-order presence in the world, a presence not directly in bodies but in the comparison of the motions of bodies”.

94 Which terms, it should be known, Poinsoot differentiates thus: 1635: *Naturalis Philosophiae Quarta Pars*, q.2, a.3, (R.III 76b37–7b25): “in obiecto aliud est ipsa entitas, quae materialiter in eo consideratur, aliud ipsa formalitas obiecti, secundum quam pertinet ad talem potentiam et actum illumque specificat aut distinguit. Quae formalitas nihil aliud est, quam proportio ipsa seu coaptatio cum tali actu vel potentia; proportio autem respectus est. Et hinc contingit posse plura obiecta entitative et materialiter diversa convenire in una formalitate obiectiva, et e contra posse in una entitate materiali obiecti fundari diversas formalitates obiectivas, sicut manifeste patet exemplis. Videmus enim corpora substantialiter diversa, ut lapis, lignum, homo, convenire in una ratione colorati et proportione movendi visum, et e contra eandem entitatem, v.g., lapidem, fundare formalitatem visibilis ut coloratum, et tangibilis ut frigidum, et intelligibilis ut substantiam, et generalibus ut e materia producibilis, et creabilis ut ex nihilo factibilis. Unde bene dixit Caietanus 1. p q. 1. art 3. Aliam esse divisionem rei ut res, aliam obiecti ut obiectum. Et scientiae dicitur secari sicut et res, non quidem in esse rei, sed in esse et formalitate obiecti.

“Ex quo colligitur, quid sit obiectum formale, quid materiale, quid adaequatum. Dicitur enim obiectum adaequatum illa ratio quae terminat et complectitur, quidquid potest cadere sub attingentia alicuius potentiae, sive primario sive secundario, tam quoad rationem formalem, sub qua attingitur, quam quoad materiale, quod attingitur. Obiectum formale dicitur illa formalitas seu respectus, secundum quem fit proportio et coaptatio

there is a kind of reflexivity on the formal object making it to be known prescissively.⁹⁵

Contrariwise, we see in the fourth part [4] that second intentions require a twofold rendering of cognized being: on the one hand, there is the genus or species as existing in cognized being (*esse cognito*) and there is the “subject

inter obiectum et potentiam. Materiale dicitur illud, quod tali habitudini seu formalitati substernitur et subiectum eius est.

“Sunt autem diversi termini, quibus explicantur rationes istae obiectivae, sicut dicitur ratio formalis sub qua, ratio formalis quae, obiectum quod. Ratio formalis sub qua sumitur dupliciter: Uno modo, ut tenet se ex parte potentiae seu habitus, et sic ipsa ultima ratio virtutis, qua determinatur et proportionatur erga tale obiectum. Alio modo sumitur ex partae ipsius obiecti, et sic est ultima formalitas proportionans et coaptans obiectum potentiae vel actui, sicut in obiecto visibili color non est ultimum, quod proportionat obiectum visui, sed lux, et ideo lux potest dici ratio sub qua ex parte potentiae. Ratio quae dicitur solum ex parte obiecti, non ex parte potentiae, et est illa formalitas, quae constituit obiectum attingibile a potentia vel actu, etiamsi non sit ultima formalitas, sicut color est ratio, quae attingitur in corpore, et non solum lucidum. Non tamen repugnat, quod etiam aliquid, quod est ratio sub qua ex parte obiecti, sit etiam ratio, quae attingitur tamquam ultimum, sicut lux attingitur in re visibili. Denique obiectum quod est ipsum totum, quod constat ex obiecto materiali et formali; in hoc enim fertur potentia, non tamquam in rationem seu formam attingendi, sed tamquam in rem atactam.”

Thus, the formal object is specifically differentiated by being that to which the power is proportioned and to which it can be coapted, i.e., to which it adjoins in a union by presence. The formal object is the terminal anchor, so to speak, whereby the relation between knower and known is completed. The material object is that which is “laid out under” (*substernitur*—which Deely translates as “arranged”) and the subject of the formality and habitude (“perspective”, i.e., the specific structure determinative of the relation which obtains between both terms), i.e., the thing made known “under” that formal object, so to speak, as being an instance of that kind.

Poinsot further differentiates between the “formal rationale under which”, the “formal rationale which”, and the “object which”. The first of these is said in two ways: either respecting the determination and proportioning of the power to the object, or respecting the proportioning and coapting of the object to the power. The formal rationale which speaks only to the object, as the formality whereby that thing is suitable for being proportioned and coapted to the power (the example which Poinsot gives being that of color and light—for color alone is the formal rationale under which a thing is seen, but light is also attained and discerned in it). The object which references the totality is both material and formal.

95 The consideration presented here of socially-constituted reality is left ultimately incomplete; for while Poinsot provides good starting points for such a consideration, his own treatment leaves several questions unanswered—mostly having to do with the role of intersubjectivity in the constitution of such realities—investigation of which would take us far afield of our current intent, i.e., understanding his question on *ens primum cognitum*.

abstracted from individuals”, upon which the purely cognitive denomination of the genus or species as existing in cognized being falls. Thus, there is the genus as existing in cognized being and the subject of which it is predicated, i.e., the concept which is the basis of the first intention. Given a reflex concept, through which the direct concept is known, a new cognitive relation provokes, the *terminus* of which is itself a relation—namely, the relation between the direct concept and the object thereby made known. This new cognitive relation is the second intention.⁹⁶

Thus, the true nature of the distinction between first and second intentions is not the bearing of the former on things as subjectively constituted (*entia naturae*) and the latter as bearing on cognition-dependent beings (*entia rationis*), but rather the immediacy with which a first intention bears upon its object and the reflexivity prerequisite to the bearing of a second; that is, first intentions bear upon their objects directly, such that what they make known is the object itself in some regard, whereas the second intention considers the relation between the direct concept and the object as precisely thereby known—e.g., the concept “animal” and the animality belonging to some cognition-independent instance.⁹⁷ Because a relation’s determination is from its *termini*, the terms are included, albeit secondarily, in the cognition rendered by a second intention.⁹⁸ It is in this sense that first intentions are said to “found” second intentions—not that they are the terminal objects of consideration of a second intention, but rather that it is on the basis of the first intention’s making-known of the thing

96 Cf. Peifer 1952: *The Mystery of Knowledge*, 210–211: “There is another type of reflection that is not reflection properly so-called, but is rather the comparative phase of simple apprehension, i.e., the formation of second intentions. After the mind has directly attained a nature in the absolute phase of simple apprehension, it compares the known nature with the inferiors in which it is realized. Through that comparative act, it forms the intention of universality and the proper intention of predicability.”

97 1632b: *TDS*, 59/23–60/3 (R.I 291a29–44): “Potest enim obiectum considerari in duplici statu: *Primo*, secundum quod est in se, sive quantum ad existentiam sive quantum ad quidditatem. *Secundo*, ut est in apprehensione, et status iste essendi in cognitione est secundus respectu status essendi in se, qui est primus, quia sicut cognoscibilitas sequitur ad entitatem, ita esse cognitum est post illud esse, quod habet in se. Illae ergo affectiones seu formalitates, quae conveniunt rei prout in se, vocantur primae intentiones, quae conveniunt rei prout cognita, vocantur secundae.” Cf. Thomas Aquinas 1269–72: *In Perihermenias*, lib.1, lec.10, n.9: “Quandoque enim attribuitur ei sic considerato aliquid, quod pertinet ad solam operationem intellectus, ut si dicatur quod homo est praedicabile de multis, sive universale, sive species. Huiusmodi enim intentiones format intellectus attribuens eas naturae intellectae, secundum quod comparat ipsam ad res, quae sunt extra animam.”

98 Cf. 5.1.1 *in passim* and especially 5.1.1.4.

that we are capable of distinguishing precissively that-on-the-basis-of-which the thing is made objectively present to the intellect, i.e., the direct concept.

Nor does this distinction between first and second intentions, as being ultimately the manner in which they bear upon some object, contradict Poinso's earlier-quoted declaration (n.82) that the term of a first intention is what a thing has in itself, *in re*, or in its own proper state, *in suo proprio statu*. While a negation, for instance, is a cognition-dependent being, it can nevertheless be considered as it is *in re*—or rather, precisely as it is **not** *in re*.⁹⁹ This is the “proper state” of the cognition-dependent being, which, although not anything in itself, inasmuch as it is constituted through cognition still has a proper meaning and significance.¹⁰⁰ To know a cognition-dependent being does not require a reflex concept, as is the case with a second intention. It is for this reason that Poinso states that a second intention is a *relatio rationis*—that is, it is a relation between the thing in the precise mode whereby it is known (in regards to some specificative form present in the intellect as elaborated and expressed) and the thing itself in the mode of an object considered under that mode as expressed by the intellect.¹⁰¹ A second intention is a relating of the intellectual specifying

99 Cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 54/29–44 (R.1 288b23–40): “negationem, ut dicit carentiam formae, dari a parte rei negative, quia ipsa forma in re non est. Non tamen ex hoc dicitur ens rationis, sed quia cum in re non sit ens, sed carentia formae, accipitur ab intellectu per modum entis, et ita ante considerationem intellectus denominat subiectum carens. Sed ista carentia proprie non est effectus formalis, nec tollere formam est aliqua forma, sed per modum effectus formalis accipitur ab intellectu, quatenus per modum formae accipitur, et consequenter ad modum effectus formalis, cum in re illa carentia non sit effectus formalis, sed ablatio illius.”

100 There is, indeed, something similar in the c.1027 *Kitab al'Sifa* or *Metaphysics* of Avicenna and the c.1252/56 *De ente et essentia* of Thomas Aquinas, to which Avicenna gives the name *haqiqah*—for which there is no good translation into English, but might be rendered “true nature” or “truthness” or “intelligibility”—which is possessed by every object of the intellect, and to which Thomas gives no explicit name in the *De ente* (though he does reference the “true nature”, *ut dicit Avicenna in sua Metaphys.*, in *Quodlibet VIII*, q.3, c., albeit in a way unrelated to our purpose), but recognizes in stating that *ens*, in addition to its application to the ten categories, is said also of “the truth of a proposition”, such that privations and negations are called “beings”.

101 It should also be noted that while every second intention is a *relatio rationis*—and neither a real form, as held by the Platonists, nor an extrinsic denomination, as held by the nominalists—not every *relatio rationis* is a second intention. That is, we may compare, for instance, by a *relatio rationis*, two cognition-dependent things, e.g., Ares and Thor, or even a cognition-dependent state of existing, such as being a judge or doctor of the Church, which state does not depict a reality of that judge or doctor considered in their subjective constitutions. Cf. Poinso 1632b: *TDS*, 60/7–12 (R.1 291b1–7): “Ex quo deducitur primo,

form, for instance, of “animal”, as a direct concept formed in the intellect (known itself through a reflex concept) and that-on-the-basis-of-which a thing in its cognition-independent being is known as an animal, and the cognition-independent thing itself which is accordingly objectivized by that direct concept.

1.3.1.3 Intuitive and Abstractive Awareness

Before we can proceed to examine Poinsot’s treatment of *ens ut primum cognitum*, we need one last ingredient, as it were, namely, the distinction he makes between intuitive and abstractive awareness. This awareness pertains, as he says, not to the objective state of the thing known, but rather to the subjective, in-itself status of the object: that is, intuitive awareness is of a thing which is physically present (and thus present as both an object and a thing) whereas abstractive awareness is of a thing physically absent (and thus present only as an object). Thus:¹⁰²

the knowledge of vision (which is the same as intuitive awareness) adds to simple awareness something which is independent of the genus of awareness, namely the existence of things. Therefore it adds cognition-independent physical existence, for an intentional and objective existence is not independent of the order of awareness ... Therefore the existence which intuitive awareness requires must be a cognition-independent and physical existence.

If we are aware of something as physically present to us, we are aware also of that thing’s existence. What is not present to an intuitive awareness may have its existence doubted. No one intuitively doubts the existence of the sun (Cartesian doubt being rather far removed from any sort of intuition), though they may doubt of its nature; whereas the existence of angels, God, and the human

quod non omnis relatio rationis est secunda intentio, omnis tamen secunda intentio formaliter sumpta, et non solum fundamentaliter, est relatio rationis, non forma realis, non denominatio extrinseca, ut male aliqui putant.”; *ibid.*, 60/34–39 (R.I 291b34–40): “Et ita relatio Creatoris et Domini, iudicis et doctoris, ut denominet subiectum, requirit cognitionem, quae talem relationem causet, sed non quae constituat subiectum in esse cognito capax, ut denominationem illam suscipiat.”

102 1632b: *TDS*, 287/16–26 (R.I 722b41–723a5): “scientia visionis (quae est idem, quod notitia intuitiva) addit supra simplicem notitiam aliquid, quod est extra genus notitiae, scilicet existentiam rerum. Ergo addit existentiam realm, nam intentionalis et obiectiva non est extra genus notitiae... Ergo existentia, quam requirit notitia intuitiva, realis et physica esse debet.”

soul have been subjected to doubt in every era. The existence of something as intentionally present, as **merely** objectively present, depends on cognition for its existence. Since every conceptual cognition we have—both the intellectual and those belonging to *phantasiari*—is necessarily one or the other of these two as concerns its object, since cognition is exhaustively divided into the intuitive and abstractive, the existence of the object is always present either on account of some real existence of the thing or it is constituted through our awareness itself.

As the cause of these distinct modes of awareness, Poinsoot rejects the opinion that intuitive awareness occurs without an intelligible specification—such that there is direct awareness of the object by the intellect without something informing the intellect—whereas such a specification is required for abstractive awareness. This opinion, he says, is false, seeing as “every cognition depends upon an object and a cognitive power, and this object, howsoever much it might be present in itself, cannot intentionally inform the power except through a specifying form, unless of course the very object possesses in itself an intentional and spiritual power which is conjoined to the form”,¹⁰³ in which case, clearly, the object would be acting as a specifying form.¹⁰⁴

After expressing the opinions of many others, which are variations upon the theme that there is an intrinsic and essential difference in abstractive and intuitive cognitions, Poinsoot asserts that the difference between intuitive and abstractive awareness arises wholly from the terminating object, and not at all from an essential difference in the cognition itself. There is, rather, only

103 1632b: *TDS*, 288/13–19 (R.I 723a19–27): “omnis cognitio ab obiecto et potentia, et hoc obiectum non potest intentionaliter informare potentiam, quantumcumque in se sit praesens, nisi mediante specie, vel nisi ipsum obiectum in se habeat esse intentionale et spirituale, quod potentiae sit coniunctum.”

104 Cf. Heidegger 1925: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, 48: “The discovery of categorical intuition is the demonstration, first that there is a simple apprehension of the *categorical*, such constituents in entities which in traditional fashion are designated as *categories* and were seen in crude form quite early. Second, it is above all the demonstration that this apprehension is invested in the most everyday of perceptions and in every experience. This only clarifies the meaning of the term. What matters is to exhibit this kind of intuition itself, to bring it to givenness as intentionality, and to make clear *what* is intuited in it and *how*.” Note also the translators note, derived from student notes from the lecture course, on the distinction between the *categorical* and *categories*—that is, that what is *categorical* is what can be seen as falling within a *category*, even if that category is not explicitly recognized. In other words, Heidegger’s implies, consciously or not, that the intuitive awareness of a thing involves a grasp of the categoriality of the object, even if there is no explicit grasp of the categorial delineation.

an incidental difference, inasmuch as the presence of the object of intuitive awareness imports into the cognition a simultaneous awareness of the object's existence:¹⁰⁵

There is therefore one conclusion. The formal and proper rationale of the intuitive and the formal and proper rationale of the abstractive are not rationales which essentially and intrinsically change cognition, but accidentally. Incidentally, however, that is through another and by reason of that to which they are conjoined, they can each import diverse kinds [*species*] of awareness.

Poinsot explains that the foundational reason for the first part of this conclusion—that the intuitive and abstractive do not import a diversity into the formal principle whereby things are known—is because intuitive and abstractive awareness do not differ from one another on account of the stimulating¹⁰⁶ or specifying objects—the *obiectum movens*—nor out of any diverse mode of immateriality, nor out of any diverse formal rationales (“which” or “under which”). This, Poinsot says, is proved because the presence or absence of the object does not alter the intuitive or abstractive cognitions by altering the definable structure or essence of the things known, but “only according as they affect and modify the object in itself and render that object coexistent with the cognition or not coexistent”.¹⁰⁷ It is not the representation of presence—the consideration of the object which includes the knowledge that the thing is present—which distinguishes the intuitive from the abstractive, since something abstractively known, such as God, can include presence in the representation despite the lack of intuitive awareness. In other words, the actual

105 1632b: *TDS*, 290/30–37 (R.I 724b3–10): “SIT ERGO UNICA CONCLUSIO. Formalis et propria ratio intuitivi et abstractivi non sunt rationes essentialiter et intrinsece variantes cognitionem, sed accidentaliter, licet per accidens, id est per aliud et ratione eius, cui coniunguntur, possint diversas specie notitias importare.”

106 Cf. John Deely’s editorial afterward to Poinsot’s 1632b: *TDS*, 467: “In one of the lengthiest and (to modern ears) strangest of the questions of our *Treatise* (Book I, Question 4), Poinsot dwells on the distinction between *objectum motivum* and *objectum terminativum*. How to render ‘motivum’? I finally settled on ‘stimulus’, after several experiments with ‘motive object’, ‘moving object’, and even the ludicrous ‘motor object’. In the case of this and all related expressions, it is clear in the *Treatise* that an arousal or stimulation of a cognitive power is what is at issue, but usually in the context of objective, not efficient, specificative, not executive, causality.”

107 1632b: *TDS*, 291/16–19 (R.I 724b45–48): “sed solum prout afficiunt et modificant obiectum in se et reddunt illud coexistens cognitioni vel non coexistens”.

existence of the thing is not a part of the specifying object at the levels of intellectual conceptualization (although it is present in sensation prescissively considered), and consequently it does not constitute the **representational** presence of the object. Instead, as part of the object, it is a mode, modifying:¹⁰⁸

the termination of the principal object ... inasmuch as the presence in question coexists with the rationale terminatively or on the side of the terminus, the whole of which modification varies a cognition accidentally. Just as in seeing, the modification of a common sensible in relation to a proper sensible (so that a white thing is seen with or without motion, in this or that position) does not vary the seeing essentially, because it does not hold on the side of the object essentially and formally, but incidentally, so does the modification of a termination through presence or absence function in respect of awareness.

As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, this is important in understanding the nature of objectively-constituted beings and opening the way towards grasping *ens primum cognitum* in its indifference regarding the existential mode of the object.

We can now turn our attention to Poinso's treatment of *ens primum cognitum*. But, for clarity, let us briefly summarize the three points we have outlined above.

First, because even though *species impressae* are necessary for the formation of *species expressae*, they are not strictly determinative of what is made known by *species expressae*, and thus there can be a very great distance between the *species expressa* and the thing as it exists independently of human cognition, without necessitating some falsity of that *species expressa*.

Second, a first intention can bear upon both *entia realis* and *entia rationis*, while second intentions bear principally (though derivatively, when second intentions further found additional second intentions) on *relationes rationis* between concepts and cognition-independent realities.

Third, intuitive and abstractive awareness are differentiations of the terminal but not of the specificative object in any given cognition.

108 1632b: *TDS*, 292/18–31 (R.I 725b5–19): "...terminationem ipsius, non rationem motivam constituit, quatenus illi coexistit terminative seu ex parte termini, quod totum accidentaliter variat cognitionem, sicut in visione modificatio sensibilis communis ad sensibile proprium, ut motu, in tali vel tali situ, non variat essentialiter visionem, quia non ex parte obiecti per se et formaliter, sed ex parte obiecti accidentaliter se tenet, sic respectu notitiae se habet modificatio terminationis per praesentiam vel absentiam."

1.3.2 De Primo Cognito

The treatment which John Poinsoot gives to the question of *ens ut primum cognitum* is strongly influenced by Cajetan's *Commentaria in De Ente et Essentia*. Most especially, the fourfold distinction of cognitions—actual and virtual, confused and distinct—upon which Cajetan bases his refutation of Scotus, can be found throughout q.1, a.3, of the *Naturalis Philosophiae Prima Pars* of Poinsoot's *Cursus Philosophicus*, titled "*Utrum magis universale, atque ideo ipsum ens ut sic, sit primo cognito ab intellectu nostro*"—"Whether the more universal, that is, being itself as such, is the first known by our intellect", (which we will reference as *De primo cognito*). Despite the ubiquitous presence of Cajetan's name, and the adoption of his terminology, Poinsoot brings to bear several of his own insights which, as we will show, improve significantly upon the work of his predecessor, while avoiding the pitfall behind the so-called analogous concept of being (particularly if understood along with the three conclusions enumerated at the end of the previous section).

Whereas Cajetan's discussion of *ens primum cognitum*, despite his many distinctions about the kind of knowledge which can be had, focuses primarily upon the formal concept and the objective concept, Poinsoot, by contrast, considers the correct understanding of the nature of the human intellect to be of paramount importance. Thus, although he states, as his second conclusion in the body of the article, that the "first rationale naturally knowable [or cognoscible¹⁰⁹] by our intellect and the first in our mode of proceeding from imperfection, is the quiddity of a material thing under some maximally confused predicate"¹¹⁰ (a statement not without similitude to Cajetan's assertion that "being concretized in a sensible quiddity is the first thing known in actual confused knowledge"¹¹¹), Poinsoot incorporates a twofold consideration of the intellect's relation to *ens ut primum cognitum*: first, that the quiddity of a material thing under some maximally confused predicate is the first in terms of what is naturally knowable by the intellect, and secondly that it is first in the mode of proceeding which is proper to the intellect, namely, from the

109 It is a point worth mentioning that the Latins generally use the term *cognoscere* for a broader range of activity than they do *scire*, and yet the two terms are often translated into English alike as "to know", and *cognitio* and *scientia* as "knowledge". This seems to be at times misleading, and to blur in an inappropriate manner the distinction between properly human knowledge and the related activities which do not attain the same precision or certitude.

110 Poinsoot 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24a42–46): "Prima ratio cognoscibilis a nostro intellectu naturaliter et imperfecto modo procedente, est quidditas materialis sub aliquo praedicato maxime confuso".

111 Cajetan c.1493/95: *DE*, 5/44.

imperfect to the more perfect. As he goes on, “this predicate is *ens*, not in some specific or generic grade; and this [to know the quiddity of a material thing under the maximally confused predicate of *ens*] is to know the whole by an actual confused cognition”.¹¹²

There is a subtly drawn distinction, here, between the concept whereby the object is known and the nature of that object itself, a distinction which could be missed were we to pass over this text too quickly. We have the maximally confused predicate (the concept) and the quiddity of a material thing (the object). But what does it mean to say that the quiddity of a material thing is known under the “maximally confused predicate” of *ens*, of being? While we provide our own detailed discussion as to what is meant by “quiddity” as the object of knowledge in the following chapter, that discussion benefits by here attending to what Poinsoot says in the first conclusion of *De primo cognito*,¹¹³ namely, that:¹¹⁴

when the intellect knows something as to whether it is [*an est*], it does not prescind from *quod quid* or from the quiddity; for this is impossible, since quiddity is the formal object of the intellect, and the first object, and is *per se* intelligible. Rather, when the intellect knows whether something is, the difference [from knowing *quid sit*] is only that it does not know it quidditatively, i.e., by penetrating the proper constitution of the quiddity and the causes of its being. Rather, in that quiddity it attains only a very confused and common predicate, which is the very *esse* [of it], and this is that which it then knows as *quod quid*.

In other words, knowing a quiddity does not necessarily entail having a definitional grasp, or even any degree of what might be called a “penetrative” knowledge into the subjectively constitutive principles of a being. A quiddity can be known with no further detail than simply that it be known that the thing

112 Poinsoot 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24a47–b3): “quod praedicatum est ens non gradus aliquis specificus vel genericus, et hoc est cognoscere totum cognitione actuali confusa”.

113 Which, properly speaking, is that 1633: *DPC* (R.II 23a11–5): “formali objecto nostri intellectus, quod non potest esse singulare sub modo et exercitio singularitatis, sed objectum eius est quidditas seu quod quid”.

114 Poinsoot 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24a15–27): “quando intellectu cognoscit aliquid quoad an est, non praescindit a quod quid seu a quidditate, hoc enim est impossibile cum sit formale eius objectum, et primo, et per se intelligibile: sed solum non cognoscit quidditative, id est penetrando constitutionem propriam quidditatis et causas essendi, sed in ipsa quidditate solum attingit praedicatum quoddam valde commune et confusum, quod est ipsum esse et hoc est, quod tunc cognoscit *ut quod quid*.”

is, for this knowledge of existence is the very first constituent of quidditative knowledge. The quiddity **as known**, then, for Poinsoot, is not merely the quidditative principles of the thing, i.e., the substantial essence. Rather, the known quiddity is any “what” which is grasped—including the mere fact of existence (as opposed to the **act** of existence as a principle distinct from the essence).¹¹⁵

To better understand the second and more important conclusion of Poinsoot, there are two issues which we need to clarify: first, the overall context within which he is operating in *De primo cognito*, and second, his statement that *ens ut primum cognitum* is grasped by a “negative abstraction”.

1.3.2.1 The Overall Context of *Ens ut Primum Cognitum Intellectus*

As a preface to his treatment of the first known, Poinsoot fittingly takes his principles from Aristotle, whose teaching on the matter may be reduced, the Iberian says, to three distinctions and three propositions.

The three distinctions are: **first**, that “our cognition is either in the sense or in the intellect; and that which is in the senses is prior in the order of acquisition to that which is in the intellect”.¹¹⁶ The **second** distinction is that “whether in the senses or the intellect, some cognitions are confused, others are distinct”.¹¹⁷ The **third** distinction is that “some things are more known simply, and according to themselves—which are said to be more known by nature—and others are more known to us”,¹¹⁸ a maxim commonly accepted among all Aristotelians.

The three propositions are: **first**, that “the connatural mode of proceeding is from things more known and certain to us, to those things which are more known according to themselves”.¹¹⁹ The **second** is that “things more confused are first known to us”.¹²⁰ The **third** proposition is that “it is necessary to proceed from universals to singulars”.¹²¹ All three propositions signify the movement

115 I return to this distinction between “fact” and “act”, in 6.2.2.

116 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20a17–21): “cognitio nostra aut est in sensu, aut intellectu; et illa quae est in sensu, prior est ordine acquisitionis, quam quae est in intellectu”.

117 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20a26–8): “cognitio sive in sensu, sive in intellectu, alia est confusa, alia distincta”. Here we note, on the one hand, an echo of the distinctions which Cajetan emphasizes in his *De ente* commentary; while, on the other hand, in Poinsoot there is an application of these distinctions not only to intellect, but also to sense.

118 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20b1–4): “res aliae sunt notiores simpliciter, et secundum se, quae dicuntur notiores natura, aliae sunt notiores nobis”.

119 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20b20–3): “Connaturalis modus procedendi est a notioribus et certioribus quoad nos, ad ea quae sunt notiora secundum se”.

120 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20b24): “Magis confusa nobis sunt prius nota”.

121 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20b28–9): “ab universalibus ad singularia oportet procedere”.

from a confused, vague, broad grasp to a knowledge more determinate, clear, and singular. Aristotle, Poincot tells us, gives three signs or examples of these propositions:¹²²

The first [example] is deduced from the senses, for the senses first attain the integral whole, then the parts of it distinctly; and therefore the intellect first attains the universal, which the intellect possesses as a whole [or to which it is related as a whole], itself confusedly attained in respect to those things which it contains as parts. The second example is from the defined to the definitional parts; for first we know the defined absolutely and commonly, e.g., “human”, then the parts by which it is defined, e.g., that “animal” and “rational” are the definitional parts of it. The third example is found in children, who in the beginning call all men father, and all women mother, and afterwards they discern each of them; which is a sign that one has proceeded from a confused cognition to a distinct one.

In each case, what is grasped first, either by the senses or by the intellect, or considered as grasped in some way as both, is something without distinction. Each of these examples is manifestly true upon reflection.

1.3.2.1.1 *A First Objection*

While it might be objected that the first proposition, that we proceed from the *quoad nos* to the *quoad se*, and the third proposition, that it is necessary to proceed from universals to singulars, seemingly entails a contradiction—not to mention a contradiction of the third proposition and the first distinction (that the cognition of the senses, which is of the singular, is first in the order of acquisition)—such an objection is one which fails to grasp the unusual proportioning of the human being, mixed in the possession of sense and intellect, to its object.

For while the senses first and proportionately interact with the singular, they do so without an intellectual awareness of the singular thing. Indeed, this

122 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20b30–21a4): “Has propositiones tribus exemplis sive signis Philosophus manifestat. Primum est deductum a sensibus, prius enim sensu attingit totum integrale, quam partes suas distincte: ergo et intellectus prius attingit universale, quod se habet ut totum, confuse ipsum attingendo, respectu eorum quae continet ut partes. Secundum exemplum est a definitio ad definientia, prius enim cognoscimus definitum absolute et communiter, v.g. hominem, deinde partes quibus definitur, v.g. quod animal et rationale eius definientia sint. Tertium exemplum est in pueris, qui a principio omnes viros vocant patres, et omnes feminas matres, postea autem discerunt unumquodque: quod signum est ipsos processisse a cognitione confusa ad distinctam.”

interaction is what allows for the intellect to attain its own proportionate object, the quiddity of the material thing, which it does by grasping some aspect of the thing, some aspect of the *quod quid*, in a universal manner, though not quidditatively. Thus, though there is no intellectual grasp of the singular, the singular can be known under an intellectual light, i.e., by proceeding from the universal to the singular.¹²³ In other words, in the order of acquisition, we proceed from the *quoad se* singulars as grasped by sense, which grasp results initially in a maximally confused intellectual apprehension. The human intellect is the weakest of all intellects, being naturally in a state of potency itself; its only source of potentially intelligible things are the material singulars of sense, potential intelligibles which require being made actually intelligible, and so, naturally, its first apprehension will be of something which is the least intelligible in itself.¹²⁴

123 We examine this as a point of the Thomistic doctrine of illumination below (cf. 3.2.1).

124 1633: *DPC* (R.II 21a23–22a30): “Circa primum, inveniunt aliqui contradictionem in hac doctrina Philosophi, cum his quae tradit 1 Post. cap.2, ubi inquit: « Quod nobis notiora sunt, quae sunt propinquiora sensui, simpliciter vero notiora, quae a sensu remotiora sunt, ea vero esse remotiora, quae universaliora sunt. » Hic autem e contra dicit quod ab universalioribus prius procedendum est, quia sunt confusiora et notiora nobis. Secundo, contradicit sibi ipsi in hoc loco. Nam in I text, dicit quod cum scire contingat per prima principia causa et elementa, de his oportet determinare. At vero in text III et IV, dicit quod confusiora sunt prius nota nobis; deinde principia et elementa, ideoque ab universalibus ad singularia oportet procedere.

“Ad primum respondet D. Thomas tam in I Post. lect. IV, quam in I Physicorum, lect.I, quod in I Post. loquitur Philosophus de cognitione nostra non solum in intellectu, sed in sensu, respectu cuius constat singularia esse prius, imo solum cognita, in praesenti autem loquitur solum de cognitione intellectus, qui cum a singularibus abstrahat, procedit ab universalibus ad singularia, id est ad minus communia. Et sumitur hoc ex verbis Philosophi 1 Phys.text.xlix, dicens, quod: « Universal notius est ratione, singulare vero sensu. » Quando vero dicit universaliora esse notiora secundum naturam, quia sunt remotiora a sensu, loquitur de his quae sunt universaliora in virtute, et causalitate, sive in abstractione formali, sic enim quae formalius abstrahunt, id est magis excludunt materiam, et quae sunt magis universalia in virtute et causatione sunt notiora secundum se, quia magis perfect, sicut Deus et Angeli.

“Ad secundum dicitur quod loquendo de cognitione scientifica certum est quod oportet procedere a principiis ad conclusiones: est enim cognitio scientifica illuminativa conclusionum, et distincta. Unde oportet quod a principiis seu elementis procedat, resolvendo scilicet in ipsa principia: et de ista cognitione loquitur Philosophus in 1 textu, quando dicit quod oportet de principiis et causis prius determinare. Caeterum loquendo de cognitione confusa quam distincta in nobis procedimus de imperfecto ad perfectum, et de hac loquitur in secundo loco, ut ex hoc constet, quod inter materias, quae in aliqua

1.3.2.1.2 *A Second Objection*

The second, and much more serious objection, is one which accepts the teaching of Aristotle, but with an interpretation radically different from Poinsoot. In the Iberian's own words, the "more serious among the objectors are those who admit this doctrine, but strongly contest the design according to the mind of the Philosopher concerning the order of proceeding in cognition, and the order of determining what is the object which is first known by our intellect".¹²⁵ This difficulty, Poinsoot notes, is complex and widespread throughout the scholastic tradition, though he reduces the opinions to three principal genera: **first**, that the nature of the first known of the human intellect is not determined on account of the imperfection and potentiality of the intellect, but rather from manner in which the intellect is moved through the specifying object given it by the senses.¹²⁶ **Second** are those who say that the principle behind the first known of the intellect is that which is more easily abstracted, namely the specific nature of a thing (*species specialissima*, as we saw above in Cajetan's treatment of the Scotistic position), which is as an actual confused cognition of some whole.¹²⁷ The **third** are those who take the first known to be *ens* as under a most-confused concept, through maximally confused predicates discovered by abstracting some nature from singulars.¹²⁸ Poinsoot attributes the first

scientia tractantur, et inter principia a quibus proceditur, ea prius tractanda sunt et attingenda, quae sunt communiora, et confusiora, nobisque magis nota.

"Nec oportet hic distinguere ordinem naturae, et ordinem doctrinae in procedendo, utriusque enim processus via acquisitionis est ab imperfectioribus ad magis perfecta: doctrina enim imitatur naturam et accommodat se modo procedendi ipsius naturae in qua est. Solum cavendum est ne ordo doctrinae, et naturae confundatur cum his quae dicuntur notiora naturae, et notiora nobis, cum tamen longe differant, quia ordo naturae et doctrinae dicit processum et modum acquirendi, qui tam in doctrina, quam in natura est ab imperfectioribus ad perfectiora, esse autem notiora naturae, et notiora nobis, solum importat cognoscibilitatem rei, vel secundum se, vel ut proportionatam et applicatam nobis. Unde bene stat quod alia sint notiora natura, alia notiora nobis, non tamen sit alius ordo seu modus procedendi doctrinae, et naturae in via generationis, et acquisitionis."

125 1633: *DPC* (R.II 21a9–16): "Secunda, et gravior apud eos qui hanc doctrinam admittunt, sed valde certant in designanda menta Philosophi circa ordinem procedendi in cognitione, et determinando quodnam sit obiectum prius a nostro intellectu cognitum".

126 Cf. 1633: *DPC* (R.II 21a20–2): "quod est fortioris impressionis ex parte sensuum, quatenus ab illis intellectus pendit in cognoscendo".

127 Cf. 1633: *DPC* (R.II 21a16–8): "an illud, quod est facilioribus abstractionis, quia a paucioribus abstrahit".

128 Cf. 1633: *DPC* (R.II 21a18–9): "an quod est confusioris, et plura sub se continent".

opinion to Durandus, the Conimbricenses, Pereira, and Martinez; the second to Scotus and his school; and the third to Thomas and his followers.¹²⁹

He does not respond to this difficulty directly, as he does with the objection that Aristotle contradicts himself, but deals with the principal points raised in opposition to what he takes to be the true interpretation of the Stagirite both in his own conclusions¹³⁰ and in the solutions to the arguments.¹³¹

In sum, we might say that, for Poinsoot, the confusions about the first known stem from confusions about the whole and the parts as they relate to the formation and use of concepts in intellectual cognition. Whereas the two opinions opposed to that of Thomas somehow twist the relationship between the intellect and the senses, so as to pervert the intellect's mode of proceeding to one which adds by a kind of accrual of distinct parts and constructing the more universal wholes only afterwards, Poinsoot recognizes the greatest possible universality of the first known—as is found in the numerous texts of St. Thomas and the Angelic Doctor's tradition¹³²—to be *ens* itself; but not, however, grasped precisely as itself. Rather, it is as, we will see, grasped as a most-confused concept.

129 Poinsoot's summary in full: 1633: *DPC* (R.II 22a31–b29): “Circa secundum celebris est difficultas in scholis circa primum cognitum nostri intellectus, unde desumendum sit.

“Et principaliores sententiae in hac parte dividuntur in tria capita. Nam quidam desumunt primum cognitum nostri intellectus non penes potentialitatem et imperfectionem ipsius intellectus procedentis, sed penes fortius motivum ex parte objecti moventis per sensus ipsum intellectum, et hoc est singulare. Ita Durandus in 2, dist. 3, q. 7, n. 7, Conimbr. hic super cap. 1, q. 4, art. 2; Pereira libro 3. Phys, cap. 16. et 17., Martinez hic super cap. 1, disp. unica q. 3. Alii conveniunt in hoc, quod intellectus noster non incipit a singularibus, sicut sensus, sed abstrahit ab illis. Ceterum quidam desumunt primum cognitum ab eo quod facilius abstrahit intellectus. Facilius autem abstrahit, ut dicunt, naturam in specie atoma, cuius singulare efficacius movet sensum, nisi intellectus impedimentum aliquod habeat. Ita Scotus in 1, disp. 3, q. 2, art. 6, quem sequitur eius schola, et alii etiam extra eam, ut notant Conimbric. loco cit. q. 3, art. 2, et sic naturam specificam putat Scotus esse totum actuale confusius cognitum. Denique alii sumunt primum cognitum in natura abstracta ex confusiori praedicato reperto in ipsa natura, hoc autem est ipsum ens sub conceptu magis confuso; et hoc sequitur D. Thomas et eius schola, ut statim videbimus. Ne autem necessarium sit hoc amplius repetere, advertimus nos non loqui de primo cognito quantum ad sensum, hoc enim est singulare quod prius occurrit, sed loquimur de primo cognito intellectus ut abstrahentis a singularibus.”

130 1633: *DPC* (R.II 22b30–27a28).

131 1633: *DPC* (R.II 27a32–33b38).

132 Including, e.g., Avicenna and Cajetan.

1.3.2.2 Negative Abstraction as the Path to the *Obiectum Formale Intellectus*

The meaning of this maximal confusion of the concept of *ens* becomes clearer if we look at how Poincot describes the grasping of *ens ut primum cognitum*: namely, as a “negative” abstraction.

There are two kinds of abstraction, speaking most broadly, which Poincot distinguishes, the negative and the positive:¹³³

It is possible to absolve one thing of its order to others in two ways: in one way, purely negatively, accepting one thing while entirely suppressing or omitting other things to which it can be ordered; the other mode is privatively or positively, because it accepts one thing separating it from others with a cognition of each terminus. On account of this fact, there arises a twofold abstraction: one negative, the other positive. The negative conceives one nature omitting the individuating conditions and negatively relating to them. Positive abstraction is that which separates the nature from the conditions without completely omitting and leaving behind those individuating conditions, or individual differences, but knowing that which is left behind and that which is taken up, and consequently knowing the distinction between one and the other.

Though it is similar to the “abstraction from singulars” which Cajetan describes, inasmuch as both lead to a grasp of *ens ut primum cognitum*, Poincot’s negative abstraction is one which omits all other relations; not that negative abstraction **pre**scinds from them, but all other related things are not, as distinct objects, in any way a part of the grasp. In order for something to be an object, to be a term of the cognitive relation provenated by a concept possessed by a finite mind, its **deter**mination needs to be discerned. This is manifestly not the case with the negative abstraction of *ens ut primum cognitum*, despite the fact that, like the “abstraction from singulars” of Cajetan, the negative

133 Poincot 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.4, a.2 (R.I 347b28–48): “Potest autem aliquis absolvi ab ordine ad aliud dupliciter: uno modo pure negative, accipiendo unum omni alio suppresso vel omissio, ad quod poterat ordinari; alio modo privative seu positive, quia accipit unum separando ab alio cum cognitione utriusque termini. Hinc nascitur duplex abstractio, alia negativa, alia positive. Negativa concipit unam naturam omissis conditionibus individuantiis et circa illas negative se habendo. Abstractio positiva est illa, quae separat naturam a conditionibus non pure omitendo a conditionibus et relinquendo individua, seu differentias individuales, sed cognoscendo id quod relinquit et id quod assumit, et consequenter cognoscendo distinctionem inter unum et aliud.”

abstraction of Poincot also leads to a knowledge of *ens* in a “concrete sensible quiddity”:¹³⁴

When *ens* is said to be the first known and to be better and more universally known than the predicates, *ens* is not taken as existing under a positive abstraction—neither formal nor total, as metaphysics treats of it—but as conceived according to itself and under a negative abstraction, of such a kind as can happen in sensation, by which one thing is taken and the other omitted, e.g., the color of an apple omitting its flavor, and in something colored we are able to see from afar the rationale of a singular colored thing, not discerning the proper difference of the particular colors which constitute the whole. Thus, in its first cognition, the intellect receives *ens*, as a concrete sensible quiddity, not because it forms a positive abstraction of it, nor because it accepts it as a proper and determinate rationale from inferior predicates, but because in that sensible quiddity it accepts only a confused rationale, or something common according to itself, which is most imperfect and potential, and this is more easily grasped by a negative abstraction, while a positive abstraction of it, which includes the relation of superior to inferior, would be more difficult, and is more easily accomplished with inferior species.

There are two points to take away from this passage:

First, the reinforcement of the assertion that negative abstraction entails an intellectual grasp whereby there is absolutely no consideration whatsoever of anything but the one nature. There is something of a curious twofold notion here, to which Poincot does not draw much attention: namely, between that whereby we grasp one object in such a way as to ignore the other parts of it, as the color of the apple without its flavor; and that whereby we grasp some

134 1633: *DPC* (R.II 31a5–33): “cum dicitur ens esse primo cognitum et praedicata universaliora esse notiora, non sumitur ens, ut subest abstractioni positivae, sive formali sive totali, sicut de illo tractat *Metaphysica*, sed ut concipitur secundum se et sub abstractione negativa, qualis etiam potest contingere in sensu, qui accipit unum omisso alio, v.g. colorem in pomo omisso sapore, et in ipso colore possumus videre a longe rationem colorati singularis, non discernendo propriam differentiam talis coloris. Sic in prima cognitione intellectus accipit ens, ut concretum quidditati sensibili, non quia abstractionem positivam eius formet, nec quia propriam, et determinatam rationem praedicata inferioris accipiat, sed quia in ipsa quidditate sensibili solum accipit rationem confusionem, vel communionem secundum se, quae est magnis imperfecta, et potentialis. Et haec est facilioris abstractionis negativae, licet positiva eius abstractio quae est cum habitudine superioris ad inferior sit difficilior, et in specie infima facilior.”

whole indistinctly, as the many-colored thing from afar appears to be one color. In both cases, though, it is clear that what is received or grasped is grasped apart from any other specifying determinations.

Second, the negative abstraction of *ens* as in some concrete sensible thing entails no positive grasp of *ens*, but only the “confused rationale” which is “most imperfect and potential”. This grasp attains no proper or determinate rationale of some thing, which is attained only through a positive abstraction. This is due to the proportioning of the intellect to its objects, and thus, as Poinsoot states, such a positive grasp is more easily accomplished in regard to the inferior species—that is, through things which present themselves to us with a certain amount of determination which is proportioned to the potency of the *intellectus possibilis*. What is left, then, is a grasp of *ens* as something **with no determination whatsoever**. In the above cited text, where Poinsoot distinguishes negative and positive abstractions from one another,¹³⁵ he claims that through a negative abstraction there is grasped “one nature”. What is this “one nature” grasped through the negative abstraction of *ens*? How can the negative abstraction of *ens primum cognitum* result in the grasp of a nature if there is no positive grasp?

1.3.2.3 The Content of *Ens Primum Cognitum*

We can answer this question by examining the second conclusion of Poinsoot’s *De primo cognito*:¹³⁶

[1] the first rationale naturally knowable [or cognoscible] by our intellect and the first in our mode of proceeding from imperfection, [2] is the quiddity of a material thing [3] under some maximally confused predicate, which predicate is *ens*, without any specific or generic grade. [4] This is to know a whole by an actual confused cognition; that is, knowing something confusedly which belongs to the very thing in act, not potentially or in ordination to the what it contains more intimately[.]

There are four distinct elements, which we have enumerated, to this conclusion. The first [1] is the condition of the intellect: namely that the intellect,

¹³⁵ See n134.

¹³⁶ Poinsoot 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24a42–b6): “Prima ratio cognoscibilis a nostro intellectu naturaliter et imperfecto modo procedente, est quidditas materialis sub aliquo praedicato maxime confuso quod praedicatum est ens non gradus aliquis specificus vel genericus, et hoc est cognoscere totum cognitione actuali confusa, id est cognoscendo aliquid confusum quod ipsi ipsi actu convenit non potentialiter et in ordine ad interiora”.

being something which proceeds from imperfection to perfection, naturally seeks in the *primum cognitum* that which is naturally proportionate or knowable. The second [2] is that this naturally proportionate object is, in some way or another, the quiddity of a material thing. The third [3] is that, while the quiddity of a material thing is the object known, the concept under which it is known, the predicate, is the “maximally confused” *ens*, which has no degree of specification whatsoever. Fourth [4], such a knowledge is an actual confused cognition, which bears upon the very thing as it is in actuality, precluding an ordination of that which is grasped to the potencies of the thing or to what might be said to be contained in it interiorly.

To provide a foundation—that is, a most basic underlying rationale—for this conclusion, Poinset appeals to the *De ente* commentary of Cajetan.¹³⁷

when we say *ens* is the first known, the term *ens* does not mean that which is abstracted in a state of universality and separation from every inferior. Rather, *ens* is taken as concrete and imbibed in some determinate thing, which then occurs to cognition, as a certain predicate of that thing. Thus, in the object which occurs to cognition in this way, the determinate rationales are not discerned, but only accepted or conceived according to a certain indetermination, in which whatever pertains to such an object is mingled with it. And it is generally the same to know of a thing as to whether it is, and likewise to say that in some object, we begin from a cognition of *ens* as it is an actual whole—i.e., by the cognition of a predicate thusly confused, the predicates are not discerned in that which is discovered, nor the determinate rationales of it, but it is known precisely as that in which nothing is discrete, nor separate; namely, as the very *esse*; for this is most confused, because it is most indistinct.

137 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24b18–42): “quando dicimus ens esse primum cognitum ly ens non sumitur pro abstracto in statu universalitatis et separationis ab omni inferiori, sed sumitur ens ut concretum et imbibitum in aliqua re determinata, quae tunc occurrit cognitioni, quasi praedicatum quoddam ipsius, ita quod in ipso obiecto sic occurrente non discernuntur determinatae rationes, sed solum accipitur seu concipitur secundum quamdam indeterminationem, in qua quidquid ad tale obiectum pertinet, confunditur et fere est idem quod cognoscere rem quoad an est. Atque ita idem est dicere, quod in aliquo obiecto, ut totum actuale est, incipimus a cognitione entis, id est a cognitione praedicati ita confusi, quod non discernantur praedicata in eo inventa, et determinatae rationes, sed praecise cognoscatur, id quo nulla est discretio nec segregatio, scilicet ipsum esse; hoc enim est maxime confusum, quia maxime indistinctum.”

Poinsot thus claims that what is really known is the fact of *esse*—not as distinctly conceived, but *esse* as “mixed in” or “imbibed”, belonging to some sensible quiddity, realized as something more fundamental to the object than what is grasped through the evaluations of the object elaborated in *phantasiari*.¹³⁸ In other words, what is grasped is that the object known is not merely an object, but that it is in its own right, independently of its relation to me; that what is known through the formal object, *ens* in its barest fact of existence, is that the thing does not reduce to the relation to the self.¹³⁹

This is further clarified, and the seeming opposition of saying that what is known is both *esse* and the quiddity of a material thing, with a declaration that neither Cajetan nor Thomas deny that a sensible quiddity, understood underneath the greatest possible universal,¹⁴⁰ and thus respecting the whole order of material being (though not only of material being), is the first thing which occurs to the intellect:¹⁴¹

138 As Vincent Guagliardo points out (1994: “Being-as-First-Known in Poinsot: A-Priori or Aporia?” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, vol.68, no.3, 371), Poinsot also uses the term “imbibed” to describe *relationes secundum dici*: 1632b: *TDS*, 90/18–30 (R.I 578b25–38): “Nam si absolutum non importat, transcendentalis non erit, id est vagans per diversa genera, sed ad unum praedicamentum tantum spectabit. Unde relatio transcendentalis non est forma adveniens subiecto seu rei absolutae, sed illi imbibita, connotans tamen aliquid extrinsecum, a quo pendent vel circa quod versatur, ut materia ad forma, caput ad capitatum, creatura ad Deum, sicque relatio transcendentalis coincidit cum relatione secundum dici.”—“For if it does not convey an absolute, it will not be transcendental, that is, ranging through diverse genera, but will look to only one category. For this reason, a transcendental relation is not a form adventitious to a subject or absolute thing, but imbibed throughout it, yet connoting something extrinsic, on which the subject depends or about which it is concerned, as matter to form, head to the ‘headed’, creature to God, and thus transcendental relation coincides with relation *secundum dici*.”

139 Cf. Guagliardo 1994: “Being-as-First-Known”, 377–378: “the ‘one nature’, in the case of being-as-first-known, is the fact of existence presented in the material nature of a sensibly given object-field: that something is, which does not reduce to my experience of it... The intellect seizes on the ‘*an est*’ from which nothing is left out, the ‘reality’ of the world, while ignoring (or without considering) the actual multiplicity of sensible being or the here and now determinateness of what is thus conceived”.

140 Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.3, c., in which Thomas asserts emphatically the most universal is first in our cognition of all things.

141 1633: *DPC*, (R.II 24b43–25a12): “Unde nec D. Thomas nec Cajetanus negant rem ipsam quae primo occurrit intellectui, tanquam id quod cognoscitur, ut objectum *quod esse* aliquam quidditatem sensibilem, et speciem specialissimam, sed dicunt quod in hoc concreto, et in hoc toto et in hac specie, quae occurrit primum, quod offertur intellectui tanquam ratio *quae*, est illa confusio entis, et quasi cognitio quoad an est, non quia attingatur

Thus, neither Thomas nor Cajetan deny that the thing which first occurs to our intellect, precisely as “that which” is known, as the [material] **object which**, to be some sensible quiddity, and most specific species; but they say that in this concrete, and in this whole, and in this species, which occurs first, what is offered to the intellect precisely as the [formal] **rationale which**, is that confusion of *ens*, and as a cognition pertaining to “whether it is”, not because it actually attains the supreme universality of *ens*, according to the state of universality, but because that object itself, or the nature which it first attains, is a rationale maximally lacking discrete parts, and is confused ... We call this thing *ens concretum*, or *ens* applied to a sensible quiddity, i.e., *ens* as discovered in some sensible nature and not as under the state of abstraction, nor according to the perception of universality, nor in respect to inferiors, to which it is potentially related, but as it actually enters the composition of things, and as it is known according to itself.

While there is admittedly an interpretational interpolation in this translation—the insertion of “material” and “formal”—their explicit lack in Poincot’s text does not in any way seem to preclude their fittingness to the meaning. The point should be fairly clear: the sensible quiddity (which as aforementioned is not at all something known quidditatively but simply something known as having its own constitution independent of the relation it has to the knower’s evaluative estimation of it) is that which is known, i.e., it is the material object, but that under which, or by which, it is known is the confused concept of *ens*, the formal object.

Thus, in the subsequent paragraph, Poincot reduces the doctrine on *ens primum cognitum* proposed in his second conclusion to a syllogism:¹⁴²

actu suprema illa universalitas entis, secundum statum universalitatis, sed quia de ipso objecto, seu natura primum quod attingitur, est ratio, maxime indiscreta, et confusa.”

Ibid. (R.II 25a19–29): “Et hoc vocamus ens concretum, seu applicatum quidditati sensibile, id est in natura aliqua sensibili inventum, non ut subest statui abstractionis, et universalitatis secundum habitudinem, et respect ad inferiora, ad quae potentialiter se habet, sed ut actualiter intrat ipsam compositionem rei, et ut cognoscitur secundum se.”

142 1633: *DPC* (R.II 25a46–b14): “Intellectus noster connaturali modi procedens procedit de potentia ad actum, et de imperfecto ad perfectum: ergo proportionatum eius obiectum in tali processu, debet etiam esse aliquid imperfectius et confusius: semper enim id quod distinctius est, est perfectius confuso, sed conceptus entis quatenus in unoquoque objecto applicate invenitur, est ratio confusior, et omnia quae in objecto actu inveniuntur magis confundens, et indeterminans: ergo illa est primo ratio cognoscibilis, seu primum cognitum formale respectu nostri intellectus.”

The connatural mode of proceeding for our intellect proceeds from potency to act, and from the imperfect to the perfect. Therefore, the proportionate object of the intellect in such a process ought to be something more imperfect and confused; for it is always the case that that which is more distinct is more perfect than that which is confused. But the concept of *ens*, insofar as it is discovered as applied in whatever object, is a rationale more confused, and all things which are found in an object in act are more confused and indeterminate. Therefore *ens* is the first knowable rationale, or the first thing formally known in respect to our intellect.

The major of this syllogism—that the connatural mode of proceeding for the human intellect is one which moves from potency to act and imperfect to perfect—is said to be not only manifestly the case, but also about which there is no disagreement among most authors. Clearly the human intellect, prior to cognition, abides in pure potency with regard to intelligibles, and the least among intellects; and so it must begin with the more imperfect grasp of its objects, both by beginning at the level of sensation and, within intellectual cognition, beginning with the most vague and confused notions, and proceeding to the more perfect grasp, which attains clear and distinct notions.

The minor of the syllogism, however—that *ens* grasped in this manner is the “most imperfect, confused, and therefore most proportionate to an intellect proceeding from potency to act”¹⁴³—requires argument to be established. Poinset takes as his example the grasp had of “Peter”; he is mostly distinctly grasped when he is “discerned not only in a generic or specific rationale, but as an individual, on the basis of those things by which he is distinguished from other individuals, and thus more designated in himself”. Contrariwise, when he is not grasped according to the things which distinguish him from other individuals, then he is grasped in the rationale of human being; and when that level of distinction is not attained, he is grasped in the same rationale as other animals. Above this, he is grasped in the rationale which distinguishes substance from accident, and if even this level of distinction is not attained, then “the cognition would be most confused in every way”; this rationale founding the cognition could be nothing other than *ens*, “because only in *ens* is substance confused with accident”.¹⁴⁴

143 1633: *DPC* (R.II 26a31–6): “Restat ergo probare, quod conceptus entis modo superius explicato sit imperfectior, et confusior, et consequenter magis proportionatus intellectui sic procedenti de potentia ad actum”.

144 1633: *DPC*, (R.II 26a36–b15): “et hoc constat, quia in aliquo toto actuali, illa est ratio confusior, per quam minus discernuntur, et distinguuntur ea, quae ipsi tota conveniunt, sicut,

This is to grasp *ens* in an actual confused cognition—it has a bearing upon some thing as it actually is, but without any discernment of the parts of it, including those things which belong to the quidditative, cognition-independent subjective constitution of the thing which go towards determining the thing as specifically or even generically different from other substances. *Ens primum cognitum* is the grasp of some whole, under some predicate yet more confused.¹⁴⁵

On the one hand, Poincot's conclusion seems, *prima facie*, little different from that of Cajetan.¹⁴⁶ If, however, we apply the conclusions we ascertained in the previous section dealing with the objectivity of conceptualization, we should see a curious and indeed illuminating difference.

v.g., occurrente Petro, tunc maxime cognoscitur distincte, quando discernitur in eo non solum ratio generica, vel specifica, sed etiam individualis, in qua a caeteris individuis distinguuntur, et magis in se designatur: quando autem non apparet in quo discernatur ab alio individuo tunc dicitur confuse cognosci in ratione hominis; quae est ratio confundens illa individua; quod si ulterius non appareat, in quo distinguatur ab alio animali, adhuc confusius cognoscetur, quod si denique nec discerni possit in quo distinguatur substantia et accidens erit confusissima omnium cognitio, quia nihil habet discernitionis, et distinctionis respectu omnium, quae sibi conveniunt, illa autem ratio sic indeterminata, et confusa non potest esse nisi ens, quia solum in illo confunditur substantia cum accidenti; ergo ejus conceptus est maxime imperfectus, et consequenter maxime proportionatus potentiae imperfectae." It is added, in response to the Scotistic objection that this is impossible because *ens* is "a concept most simple", that *ens primum cognitum* is "most simple", *simplicissima*, if considered as *ut quod*, the terminal object of consideration understood in metaphysics, but is, as *ut quo*, "most confused", *confusissima*, since it is predicated of all things regardless of their distinctions. It is further stated that there is no essential order of concepts following the grasp of *ens primum cognitum* because, in so grasping it, the proportionate rationale has been attained to move the intellect from potency to act, and through the exercise of will, it can then subsequently grasp other things according to its own volition (26b-27a).

145 Cf. Guagliardo 1994: "Being-as-First-Known", 367: "It is clear that Poincot's position revolves around a whole/parts distinction. Knowledge does not proceed atomistically with the gathering of one part after another to constitute them subsequently into a whole as a sum of the parts. The whole, implicitly containing the parts for sense or intellect to discriminate further, is already given. Confused knowledge for the intellect pertains to some whole as not yet unpacked and sorted out, as transcendental, not yet categorial (predicamental) with predicates (attributes) and definition (essence)."

146 Cf. Guagliardo 1994: "Being-as-First-Known", 374: "If Poincot has the mind of Cajetan here, whom he quotes, then being-as-first-known does not initially and indifferently embrace mind and things but arises from and is oriented to the 'to be' (*esse*) of real things (*ens reale*, but here so understood as to include cultural objects and relations within 'reality')."

1.3.3 *Objectivity and the Concept of Ens Primum Cognitum*

How are we to characterize the concept of *ens primum cognitum*? It is an unusual concept, *sui generis* to be sure; for while other things are grasped by a negative abstraction, no other concept is proportioned to the intellect as it is in its first state of potency, i.e., the possibility of the *tabula rasa*. As from a sensible quiddity, i.e., some material reality directly present to it, it is something of which there is an immediate and therefore intuitive awareness, such that the fact of existence which is actually made known by its application is directly present to the one knowing. Yet, as an intellectual concept, *ens primum cognitum* makes something known over and above the limited engagement of an alloanimal cognition directly, without intellectual reflexivity upon its own action or conceptual content; and thus, it must be said to be a *species expressa* in a first intention.¹⁴⁷

Now, as aforementioned, the fact that a thing is grasped through a specifying object which first results in an intuitive awareness in no way prohibits that same specifying object from being considered in abstractive awareness. Intuitive and abstractive awareness are differentiations only of the **terminal object**. Likewise, a first intention can bear upon not only some *ens naturae*, but also upon any *ens rationis*. And finally, the only specification impressed upon the intellect by its first grasp of being is that which moves it from potency to act, from lacking to possessing the distinctively human awareness of things specifically constituted in some measure independently of their relation to the knower. The expressed specifications which follow upon this are in no way dependent upon the object **from which**, nor even upon that which is received; rather, the awareness of the fact of *esse*, of existence independent of the relativity to the knower, in contrast to the mere awareness of objects as in a relation of use, can be combined with anything else, so long as we can conceive of it as something intelligible, something which in some way has existence—even if that existence is strictly and purely constituted through its objectivity.¹⁴⁸

147 This *species expressa* involves the turning of a *species expressa sensatae* into a specifically human *species impressa intelligibilis* which the *intellectus possibilis* forms into the first *species expressa intellecta*; one which, like all formal objects of any cognitive power, accompanies all objects of awareness had or developed by that power—first in the sense of a framework forming and “first” in the sense of a successive series.

148 Cf. Guagliardo, 1994: “Being-as-First-Known”, 365: “Poinot remains rooted in the aporetic character of being-as-first-known, which is closer to the experience of Being in Heidegger’s sense than it is to the modern ‘absorption’ (‘forgottenness’) of being into the ‘knowing subject.’ Instead, the realm that being-as-first-known discloses to us lies neither in ‘things’ nor in ‘minds’, ‘objects’ or ‘subjects’, but on the side of ‘objectivity’, to which both the ‘subjectivity of the subject’ (Dasein) and the ‘thinghood of things’ belong.”

Succinctly put, Poinsoot does not in any measure address the applicability of *ens ut primum cognitum* to the question of socially-constituted intersubjective or purely objective realities. Though it is a fundamentally pressing question for those living in human society, it was not an issue raised in his own time, nor was it raised in the time of Cajetan. However, through his insights into the nature of conceptualization and the manner in which concepts bear upon their objects, and by adopting and adapting, albeit subtly, the distinctions concerning cognition made by Cajetan in his *De ente* commentary, Poinsoot does provide for us a starting point, which we will pick up again in later portions of the dissertation, for adequately dealing with *ens ut primum cognitum*.

Recent Thomistic Interpretations of *Ens Primum Cognitum*

When we turn our attention to the Thomistic authors of later centuries, we find much different concerns; for our two representatives, Gilson and Maritain, *ens primum cognitum*, though addressed, was not an explicit topic of concern. The ability of the human intellect to truly grasp things as existing outside of the mind takes precedence in their work, confronted as they were with the yet-unresolved problem of modernity's epistemological quagmire. While they succeeded in overcoming this problem, their ardor for realism may be taken too far in some cases, to the exclusion of a complete perspective on *ens primum cognitum*. Let us, therefore, address their considerations of being and the human intellect.

2.1 Étienne Gilson's "Metaphysical Realism"

It is true to say that there would likely be far fewer students of Thomas Aquinas in North America today if not for the work of Étienne Gilson. It is equally true to say that Gilson's work has made significant contributions both to the overcoming of modern philosophy and to the understanding of Thomas himself, particularly as regards the Angelic Doctor's metaphysics and philosophy of knowledge. The resurgence of genuine Thomism—as opposed to the Suarezian impostor which had come to dominate—following Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* had much to overcome, not the least of which was the preponderance of modernity's idealist epistemology. Descartes' mathematicism, the insistence that all things lacking the certitude of mathematics cannot truly be called "knowledge,"¹ begat Cartesian idealism, which in turn launched a centuries-long quest, carried out by numerous philosophers, for an answer to what is perhaps best called "the wrong question": namely, "how is it that we can know things outside the mind?" This question, particularly in the most thorough treatment among moderns given by Kant, coursed through philosophy so strongly that many Thomists were swept along by its current.

1 Cf. Gilson 1937: *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (hereafter *Unity*), 132–133.

Enter Gilson. By participating in the recovery of the thought of the scholastics, and especially Thomas Aquinas, Gilson formulated a theory of knowledge which, though aimed at answering the question of the moderns, avoided their fundamental errors. If one adopts the necessity of defending a knowledge of the extramental real, Gilson argued, by grounding it in a critical philosophy which begins with the nature of knowledge itself, he is condemned to idealism.² Against the idealist philosophy Gilson opposed a position which he calls “metaphysical realism”: that is, a philosophy which begins one’s inquiry, and thereby provides a foundation for not only a theory of knowledge but for all branches of philosophy, in a systematic manner which takes **being, ens**, as its principle. Further, he argued that any attempt at a “critical realism” which attempts to synthesize the two positions is fundamentally impossible: “We... have come to the conclusion that the critique of knowledge is essentially incompatible and irreconcilable with metaphysical realism.”³ Gilson’s view on the question of knowledge may be boiled down to a simple, mutually exclusive, and entirely exhaustive division: either one is a realist or one is an idealist, and there is no middle ground, for their points of departure are inherently incompatible.

In the course of his missives against idealism—both in itself and in the attempts to incorporate it into Thomism—Gilson outlines many of the principles of his own theory of knowledge. Consequently, we will begin our consideration of his position on being as first known by looking at Gilson’s works; secondly, we will turn to his interpretation of Thomas Aquinas on the relevant issues of abstraction and the nature of the intellectual concept; and third, we will conclude by considering the opposition between realism and idealism as informing his philosophy.

2.1.1 *Overcoming Critique*

What is “critique”? In short, critique is the theory that in order to provide a valid foundation for philosophical inquiry, one must first arrive at a satisfactory demonstration of the theory of knowledge; or, in other words, that the success or failure of a philosophy’s ability to prove the existence or proper nature of anything outside of one’s own mind depends on whether or not one can first

² Cf. Gilson 1935: *Methodical Realism*, 21.

³ Gilson 1939: *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (hereafter *Thomist Realism*), 149. Cf. Raymond Dennehy 2003: “Maritain’s Reply to Gilson’s Rejection of Critical Realism” in *Thomistic Tapestry: Essays in Honor of Étienne Gilson*, ed. Peter A. Redpath (New York: Rodopi B.V.): 57–80 for an enlightened consideration of this dispute as it unfolded between Gilson and Maritain.

establish a working epistemology. The critique, of course, is the system established by Kant, principally in his *Critique of Pure Reason*; but the critical turn, that turn towards beginning our philosophical inquiries with a study of knowledge and a demonstration of its ability to produce certitude, the turn which dominated modern philosophy, begins with Descartes and his *cogito*. There is neither time nor need here to expound at length upon these two figures and their way of ideas, but let it suffice to say that once either the existence or the knowability of the extramental world is called into question, it is a legitimate problem to ask how humans know; but it is an inescapable problem if one has the wrong conception of knowledge. What Gilson sees as fatally problematic in the characteristic epistemologies of modernity are three sequential problems which lead to the completion of the critical turn and thus to the various subsequent instantiations which attempted its incorporation.

2.1.1.1 The First Problem of Critique

First is that, against the advances of science which had been carried out during the centuries intervening the birth of Descartes and the death of Kant (or one might even say until this very day), philosophy—particularly in metaphysics and ethics—seemed not to advance one iota. Whereas physics and astronomy were making great strides forward, metaphysics seemed to spin its wheels in a mud pit of uncertainty, allowing scepticism to waltz past it unhindered. Thus both Descartes, motivated by the scepticism of Montaigne, and Kant, awakened from his dogmatic slumber by the scepticism of Hume, sought to recast philosophical inquiry in the model of the precise sciences. For Descartes, this precision was found in mathematics: where everything else seemed dubious, mathematics delivered answers which were clear, distinct, and could not be otherwise. Thus, while he did not reduce all sciences to mathematics, he did demand that the conclusions reached in an inquiry be mathematically-evident:⁴

... Descartes' own inference was that mathematical knowledge was the only knowledge worthy of the name.... The whole philosophy of Descartes was virtually contained in that initial decision [to demand certitude equal to mathematics], for the *I think, hence I am* is the first principle of Descartes' philosophy, but it is his pledge to mathematical evidence that led Descartes to the *I think*.

This mathematicism of Descartes led to his postulation of a common method for all inquiry and a common standard for evidence—for Descartes mistook

4 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 132.

the certainty a human mind has in the grasp of the inferior object, the mathematical abstraction, to be superior to penetrating the mystery of the superior object, the subjective constitution of the (meta)physically real, on account of the latter's difficulty (or perhaps, to his mind, seeming impossibility).

Immanuel Kant would be no less guilty of such an idolatry of method. Though developed significantly since the time of Descartes, there was still in the time of Kant an alluring simplicity of the ideoscopic sciences, particularly in contrast to the even-further muddled properly philosophical sciences. As Gilson puts it:⁵

There was so striking a contrast between the obvious senility of metaphysics and the flourishing condition of positive science in the second half of the eighteenth century that nothing short of a fundamental blunder made by the metaphysicians themselves could account for their perplexities... To sum up the situation in a few words: all was well with science, but something was wrong with philosophy. What was it?

After groping his way through the problem for about fifteen years, Kant thought he had at last found the answer to that question. What defines science as a specific ideal of human knowledge is self-criticism. Perceiving as true what can be demonstrated, science dismisses all the rest as idle speculation, with the twofold result that it is always progressing, and always respected... The time had come when men could no longer feel interested in any discipline for the sublimity of its ambitions, but only for the soundness of its demonstrations.

Thus, although he did not fall victim to Cartesian mathematicism, a much more extreme cognitive reductionism, Kant was nevertheless enamored of the "positive sciences", especially Newtonian physics. What he sought, then, was not to employ the methodology of any one specific science to philosophy, but rather to discover what was common to all science, and then to extrapolate that method to all inquiries, including and especially the philosophical. Only then could speculative thinking rest easily in the "soundness of its demonstrations".

2.1.1.2 The Second Problem of Critique

Following upon the demand for a certitude, be it based upon a mathematical precision as in Descartes, or upon the verified roots of self-criticism which Kant sought—which ideoscopic certitude is innately repugnant to the nature of philosophical inquiry—it is deemed necessary by the modern epistemologist

⁵ Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 224–225.

to establish some immovable, Archimedean point upon which knowledge can be based, something certain and not open to dispute, doubt, or the variegations of deceivable senses and incorrect judgments. Thus, Descartes found his *cogito* and Kant derived his system of *a priori* categories and intuitions.

The consequence of these starting points is that only if “knowledge” itself is as narrow as the paradigmatic and ideoscopically-scientific discipline or method in which a starting point for certitude is found can the paradigm then be justly applied to all knowledge. As such, the meaning of “knowledge” for the moderns devolves from something said analogically to a purely univocal concept—the clear and distinct idea in the case of Descartes, and the synthetic *a priori* judgment in that of Kant.

For Descartes, this meant eliminating from the meaning of “knowledge” anything which was not contained within a clear and distinct idea—most especially what can be grasped by the senses. In the brief First Meditation, Descartes introduces his intention and method: dissatisfied with previous philosophical attempts to establish the truth, he proposes to reject as true all things which can be subjected legitimately to doubt—in the realm of speculation only, recognizing that to do so in the practical realm would be fruitless and mad—until he can establish for them some certain basis. This certain basis must be an idea clear and distinct, and not capable of being doubted. All subsequent ideas must also have this clarity and distinction to lay claim to being true.

While the First Meditation sees Descartes establish his systematic doubt, it is in the Second Meditation that the **methodological** starting point of Descartes inquiry (as opposed to the **ontological** starting point, the existence of a benevolent God)—his firm and immovable Archimedean point—is found. The senses, being clearly something depended upon in common practical affairs, are rejected as providing certitude; for they are often deceived, Descartes claims, by illusions and mirages, and moreover, by dreams. Consequently, it is to some thought independent of sensation which he turns for an indubitable truth: namely, any thought composed of “I think” or “I exist”.⁶ That one

6 This is not, however, an original thought. Roughly twelve centuries earlier, St. Augustine, in book 10, Chapter 10 of his i.417–28: *De trinitate* writes: “Viuerē se tamen et meminisse et intellegere et uelle et cogitare et scire et iudicare quis dubitet? Quandoquidem etiam si dubitat, uiuit; si dubitat, unde dubitet meminit; si dubitat, dubitare se intellegit; si dubitat, certus esse uult; si dubitat, cogitat; si dubitat, scit se nescire; si dubitat, iudicat non se temere consentire oportere.” “Who doubts himself to live, or remember, or understand, or will, or think, or know, or judge? For whensoever he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands himself to doubt; if he doubts, he wills to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows himself to not know; if he doubts, he judges

inevitably provides himself with evidence of self-existence by reflecting on the fact of thought cannot be denied; that is, as Descartes wrote in his other most important work, *The Discourse on Method*, “cogito, ergo sum”—“I think, therefore I am”.⁷ Thus Descartes defines the human person as a “thinking thing”, as the conclusion derived from this evidence for the existence of the self. Since the process of thinking does not seem to be dependent upon the body, the thought “I am a thinking thing”, for instance, not containing any notions evidently derivative from sense data, Descartes posits here a conceptual distinction, at the least, between the mind and the body:⁸

What else am I? I will set my imagination in motion. I am not that concatenation of members we call the human body. Neither am I even some subtle air infused into these members, nor a wind, nor a fire, nor a vapor, nor a breath, nor anything I devise for myself. For I have supposed these things to be nothing. The assumption still stands; yet nevertheless I am something. But is it perhaps the case that these very things which I take to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, nevertheless are in fact no different from that me that I know? This I do not know, and I will not quarrel about it now. I can make a judgment only about things that are known to me. I know that I exist; I ask now who is this “I” whom I know?

This conceptual distinction is elaborated into a real distinction (such that mind and body constitute two actually distinct substances) in the final meditation; but first, Descartes finds it necessary to discover what can be professed certainly from the knowledge of the self.

that he ought not to consent blindly.” The same thought is echoed in Augustine’s c.420: *Enchiridion*, c.7, n.20, that “by not positively affirming that they are alive, the skeptics ward off the appearance of error in themselves, yet they do make errors simply by showing themselves alive; one cannot err who is not alive. That we live is therefore not only true, but it is altogether certain as well.” Additionally, Thomas Aquinas expresses the same indubitability of one’s own existence in i.1256–59: *DV*, q.10, a.10, ad.7: “sic nullus potest cogitare se non esse cum assensu: in hoc enim quod cogitat aliquid, percipit se esse”. “Thus no one is able to think himself not to exist with assent; for in thinking something, he perceives himself to be”.

7 At §7 of 1644: *The Principles of Philosophy*, as well as (in French) in the *Discourse on Method* of 1637, “Je pense, donc je suis”. Nevertheless, the same sentiment can be found in *Meditation II*: “hoc pronuntiatum: *ego sum, ego existo*, quoties a me profertur, vel mente concipitur, necessario esse verum”. “This statement: *I am, I exist*, as often as it is advanced by me, or conceived by the mind, is necessarily true”.

8 Descartes 1641: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 109.

In analyzing the notion of the “thinking thing”, Descartes posits understanding, affirming, denying, willing, refusing, imagining, and sensing to be functions of the mind, i.e., functions which belong to anything which has “thinking” as its mode of being. He continues to refine such a notion against the corporeal, which seems so inescapably present. Can bodies be known with clear and distinct ideas? Not bodies considered abstractly, vaguely and in general, but a concrete, particular body? To this question Descartes subjects for scrutiny a piece of wax. It provides him with a series of sensations: a firmness, color, odor, flavor, and sound if tapped. Taking that same piece of wax to a flame, the flavor disappears, the scent vanishes, the color changes, the shape disappears, the size increases, it changes state from solid to liquid, and temperature from cold to hot; it no longer makes a sound when tapped. Is it the same wax? Certainly it is; yet none of the sensations received from it are the same. It is only by an act of the mind, an act of judgment, that it is conceived as the same wax. The wax itself is something grasped mentally; the senses are subject to such wild variation that they do not allow for the recognition of grasp of a thing’s identity. What Descartes gleans from this experiment is that he still has found no source of certitude equal to that found in mathematics other than what is found in the intellect alone. Sense or sense-perceptual knowledge is entirely eliminated. “Brute animals”, are for this reason considered to be merely unknowing animatronic machines. Knowledge is reduced to the univocity of strictly-intellectual certitude.

Kant’s critical endeavor was initially sparked by Hume’s objection that the notions of cause and effect, and the innate relatedness that they have to one another, cannot be found in the content of experience. Kant tried to put this objection in a “general form, and soon found that the concept of the connection of cause and effect was not the only concept by which the understanding thinks the connection of things *a priori*, but rather that metaphysics consists altogether of such concepts.”⁹ In other words, there are a number of concepts which are something which must be “thought” or somehow possessed *a priori*, i.e., such that they are necessary or cannot be otherwise, and which are entirely antecedent to any actual experience. Such concepts include, for instance, affirmative or negative qualities, hypothetical relations, contingency and necessity, cause and effect, and so on. What is common to all of these, in the Kantian epistemological theory, is that the notion expressed by each

9 Immanuel Kant 1783: *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können* (Riga: bey Johann Friedrich Hartknoch) in the English translation by Paul Carus and extensively revised by James W. Ellington, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), 6.

concept cannot be found in the content of things experienced; that is, the cognition of something as a cause or as an effect, for instance, cannot be reduced to sense impressions. But whereas Hume insists that the connection of cause and effect arises as a psychological impression formed by the constant juxtaposition of similar sense impressions, Kant claims that the connection of cause and effect is an innately possessed concept to which things' appearances can be adequated.

This relating of an *a priori* concept to the sense intuition, such that the two are irreconcilably distinct yet necessary to the attainment of knowledge, Gilson notes, proves to be the ultimate failing of Kant's epistemology:¹⁰

There was a first chasm, within the *Critique of Pure Reason* itself, between sensibility and understanding. These two sources of knowledge are not only distinct, but heterogeneous, yet they belong to the same mind. Is it conceivable that no common root can be found within the very mind from which they spring? If there is none, how is it that, wholly distinct, they succeed in working together, as they do successfully in mathematics and physics? Kant, of course, had seen the question, but answer it he would not, and could not. He would not because that was not a question for criticism, which deals only with the *a priori* conditions of human knowledge, but for a metaphysic, which deals with the ultimate causes of reality. But he could not, because ascribing to sensibility and understanding a common origin would have wiped out their distinction; empirical knowledge would then become impossible, there would be no difference between physics and metaphysics, in a short a metaphysical idealism would be the final result of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

In other words, according to Gilson, by reducing knowledge to the univocity of the intellectual, the *a priori* categories of the mind, Kant's system collapses in on itself; for the veracity of knowledge, through the synthetic *a priori* judgments which occur within natural philosophy and mathematics, require the union of two distinct sources of cognition—the categories of reason and the intuitions of the senses (or at least, in the case of mathematics, the pure intuition of space)—the positing of a cause for which union seems to transgress the very principles of Kant's epistemological system.

10 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 236–237.

2.1.1.3 The Third Problem of Critique

Thus it becomes clear that, in making the critical turn, one turns the universe inside out: for the first principle of all philosophy becomes **thought**, rather than **being**, and so rather than attempting to discern how it is that the intellect conforms to what is, the critical philosopher has no choice but to twist what is until he can explain thought. To quote Gilson:¹¹

The most tempting of all the false first principles is: that *thought*, not *being*, is involved in all my representations. Here lies the initial option between idealism and realism, which will settle once and for all the future course of our philosophy, and make it a failure or a success. Are we to encompass being with thought, or thought with being? In other words, are we to include the whole in one of its parts, or one of the parts in its whole?

While it is certainly true that every being which is grasped, in its being, by a human, is grasped by thought—and that thought therefore makes every being an object for the human—it is nevertheless false to think that thought is therefore the first principle of our knowing things. As Gilson is quite right to point out, the intelligibility of things is not first and foremost because they are thought, but because they are.

It is against the backdrop of the critical turn, and his repudiation of it, then that Gilson develops his own theory of knowledge. In consequence of what he perceives to be the failures of the critical turn, Gilson lays out several “laws” which he says are to be inferred from philosophical experience. While these are principally a prohibition against idealism,¹² they nevertheless give the basic structure of the “metaphysical realism” favored by Gilson. Each is interesting in its own right and worthy of consideration, but here we will only focus on those few which are most pertinent to Gilson’s realism.

First is that, “By his very nature, man is a metaphysical animal”.¹³ Gilson derives this law from the historically verifiable fact of persistent inquiry into the

¹¹ Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 316–317.

¹² Enumerated in Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 306–316. Especially the first, fourth, and fifth: “Philosophy always buries its undertakers” (306), “As metaphysics aims at transcending all particular knowledge, no particular science is competent either to solve metaphysical problems, or to judge their metaphysical solutions” (309–310), and “The failures of the metaphysicians flow from their unguarded use of a principle of unity present in the human mind” (312), respectively.

¹³ Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 307.

first causes of all things—from the materialism of Democritus to the creative duration of Bergson, human beings have always attempted to discover and explain the ultimate causes of the universe.

Second, “Metaphysics is the knowledge gathered by a naturally transcendent reason in its search for the first principles, or first causes, of what is given in sensible experience”.¹⁴ In other words, humans, being “metaphysical animals”, have their reason ordered by nature towards knowing something **beyond** what is given in sensible experience; there is something about the very nature of rationality which, for the sake of the unity of knowledge, demands that it transcend the particular and the sensory.

Third, “Since being is the first principle of all human knowledge, it is *a fortiori* the first principle of metaphysics”.¹⁵ This law follows for Gilson from two points: first, **being** is that “which the mind is bound to conceive both as belonging to all things and as not belonging to any two things in the same way”;¹⁶ second, that whatever “is first, last and always in human knowledge is its first principle, and its constant point of reference”—and since “metaphysics is knowledge dealing with the first principles and the first causes themselves”,¹⁷ one and the same being is the first principle of knowledge and the subject matter of metaphysics.

On the one hand, this law is absolutely true—being is certainly both the first principle of all human knowledge and the principle of metaphysics; but simultaneously it is also the first principle of biology, chemistry, mathematics, logic, and computer programming. On the other hand, while it is true that *ens primum cognitum* has an intimate connection to the metaphysically-considered *ens*, as the latter is in some way a fulfillment of the former, we should not be too quick to assume that the *ens* which is said to be first known is one and the same thing as the *ens* which is the proper subject matter of the science of metaphysics.¹⁸ Many others have written on this question, and there is no need to enter into those debates for our present purpose, which is only to point out the danger of applying the term “metaphysical” to being or *ens* in every iteration whatsoever. It is with that in mind that we look at a fourth of Gilson’s laws, “All the failures of metaphysics should be traced to the fact, that the first principle of human knowledge has been either overlooked or misused

14 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 308.

15 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 313.

16 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 312.

17 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 313.

18 Cf. 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.

by the metaphysicians”.¹⁹ Certainly, the idealists are guilty of this, if they have completely misapprehended the first principle of human knowledge—and it remains sound advice also for the realist.

2.1.2 *Abstraction and the Nature of the Concept*

To understand the consequences of Gilson’s stark division between realist and idealist philosophies, particularly as this division bears upon his interpretation of *ens primum cognitum*, we need to look at his treatment of St. Thomas’ doctrine on intellectual knowledge, for it is in his interpretation of the Angelic Doctor that Gilson’s own philosophy of a metaphysical realism is explicated. We intend to show in the following pages that, although he faithfully upholds the outlines of a Thomistic theory of cognition, Gilson’s treatment results in an over-simplification which leaves out many of the nuances crucial to grasping both the true nature of the act which Thomas calls “abstraction” and of intellectual concept formation.

2.1.2.1 Abstraction

First, it is to be noted that, with regard to abstraction, Gilson faithfully and closely follows Thomas in emphasizing that the object of intellectual knowledge is something universal. He begins by reiterating Thomas’ oft-stated claim that the proper object of the human intellect is the quiddity, “quidditas rei est proprium obiectum intellectus”.²⁰ The quiddity is said by Gilson to be the essence of a thing as known by an intellectual concept. This is a true but commonly misleading statement. However, in terms of abstraction, Gilson makes the problematic statement that this operation of the *intellectus agens* consists in the dissociation of the “universal and intelligible element” from the “particular and material element”, as though there is some mystical intersection of the former through the latter. As we read:²¹

The proper object of the human intellect is a quiddity, that is, a nature existing in an individual material thing. Our object is not the idea of stone but the nature of this particular stone, and this nature is the result of the union between a form and its proper matter. Similarly, the object of our knowledge is not the idea of a horse; we have to know the nature of horse as it is realized in a particular instance of a horse. In other words, the objects of human knowledge contain a universal and intelligible factor

19 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 316.

20 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.17, a.3, ad.1.

21 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 253.

that is associated with a particular and material factor. The distinctive act of the agent intellect is to dissociate these two factors in order to furnish the possible intellect with the intelligible and universal elements that are involved in the sensible object. This act is called abstraction.

Gilson is very careful here to point out simultaneously **both** the intimate connection between the object of intellectual knowledge and the sensible thing in which that object is known as existentially united in the concrete substantial constitution of the thing, **and** that the intelligible is in some manner separated out from that existential reality by abstraction. In the parlance of many Thomists, but not Thomas himself, we could say that according to Gilson the universal and intelligible object is known in the real being, in *ens reale*. Through abstraction, something is realized in the intellect which allows the intelligible to be realized in the intellect apart from the material and particular, such that the concrete, particular, material being is subsequently known intellectually through the intellect's ability to grasp its nature.²²

Through this operation, Gilson states, it is the subsistent principle, the form, which comes to be known apart from the individuating characteristics contained in the perceptual representation of the phantasm:²³

Now, to know what is in matter without taking into account the matter it is in, is to abstract the form from the individual matter represented by phantasms.

Consequently, Gilson goes on to assert that the "simplest aspect" of abstraction is the consideration of the essence of something without consideration of the distinguishing aspects of the individuals contained logically under those species:²⁴

From the simplest point of view, abstraction is first of all the agent intellect's apprehending in every material thing what places it in its own species, leaving aside the individuating principles belong to its patten. Just as we can consider separately the color of a fruit without taking account of its other properties, so our intellect can consider separately, in

22 Cf. Gilson 1939: *Thomist Realism* 193: "Realist abstraction is an apprehension of the universal in the particular and of the particular through the universal. The concepts and judgments it utilizes substitute for our lack of an intellectual intuition of the singular."

23 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 254.

24 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 254.

the phantasms of the imagination, what constitutes the essence of man, horse or stone, without taking into account what differentiates the individuals in these species.

Thus, in its separating function, Gilson appears to believe that the *intellectus agens* dissociates the essence of real beings by grasping the substantial form, such that what is grasped is independent of anything individuating; that the essence is grasped in a universal fashion. Again, he emphasizes at once the existential unity of the known aspect with the concrete thing and the intellectual separation of the intelligible from the sensible, saying that the intellect considers the essences separately, but **in** the phantasms of the imagination.

Yet the separating out of form from matter is not the only result of the *intellectus agens'* operation, for abstraction—of which Gilson says illumination of the sensible species is its very essence—results in the **production** of the intelligible. This productive function is not like some kind of photocopying, whereby the form contained in the image of the phantasm is exactly reproduced sans matter in the intellect, but rather the “engendering” in the possible intellect of what is potentially universal in the phantasm:²⁵

The activity of the agent intellect is not limited to separating in this way the universal from the particular. Not only does it separate intelligible objects, it also produces them. In order to abstract the intelligible species from phantasms, the agent intellect does not simply convey it as it is into the possible intellect; it must produce it. For the sensible species of the thing to become the intelligible form of the possible intellect, it must undergo a considerable change. This is what is meant by saying that the agent intellect turns to phantasms in order to illuminate them. The illumination of sensible species is the very essence of abstraction. It abstracts from species the intelligible features they contain and begets in the possible intellect the knowledge of what the phantasms represent. But it considers in them only their specific and universal features, while abstracting from the material and the particular.

Gilson explains this process of the production of the intelligible by looking at two properties of the intellect and the phantasm, namely, their respective intelligibility and determination. For the intellect is of itself something intelligible, but it lacks determination, innately containing no proportionate object for its own consideration, whereas the phantasm is determinate but lacks

25 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 254.

intelligibility. Thus the *intellectus agens* confers intelligibility on the phantasm, whereby it in turn confers a determinate object to the *intellectus possibilis*. In other words, the form represented in the phantasm provides the specification inherently lacking in the intellect, which gives to that form its intelligibility by separating it out from the material and particular aspects of the individual.²⁶

Yet, Gilson notes, abstraction alone does not constitute the knowledge of something, but there is a further process necessary; the intellect's operation does not terminate with the reception of the determinate abstracted form, with what we would call the *species impressa*. Rather, there is a further step which must be taken, namely, the formation of the concept, or what we would call the *species expressa*. The concept is no longer formally the same as the impressed species or the intelligible species as contained potentially in the phantasm, but is a similitude, an intentional being²⁷ existing only on the basis

26 Cf. Peifer 1952: *The Mystery of Knowledge*, 119–131.

27 This admission made by Gilson, perhaps, begrudgingly. Cf. Deely 2007: *IS*, 9–12. While Gilson's student, Joseph Owens (1992: *Cognition*), uses the term "intentional being" frequently, he seems nevertheless to disavow that the notion is one which is genuinely of St. Thomas, 164n20: "Aquinas, *De ver.*, 21.3.ad 5m, carefully distinguished the technical sense of the term *intentio* in its present context [as referring to first and second intentions of the mind] from what its etymology seemed to imply." The text referenced, *DV* q.21, a.3, ad.5, states: "Et tamen sciendum, quod cum dicitur quod finis est prior in intentione, intentio sumitur pro actu mentis, qui est intendere. Cum autem comparamus intentionem boni et veri, intentio sumitur pro ratione quam significat definitio; unde aequivoce accipitur utrobique."—"Nevertheless it must be known, that when it is said that the end is prior in intention, 'intention' is taken as the act of the mind, which is 'to intend.' When we compare the intention of the good and the intention of the true, 'intention' is taken for the rationale which the definition signifies; thus it is taken equivocally in the two places." Owens' interpretation of this passage seems, however, to imply first of all that the *intentio intellecta*, while of a being distinct from the substantial or subjective being which is proper to things as they are in themselves, to the so-called *ens reale* of extra-mental being, is distinct only as an accident belonging to the mind—a different way of being *esse in*, and not, as will be shown later, essentially distinguished by its being *esse ad*—and second of all to be contrary to what is stated in *SCG* I, c.53, n.4: "Haec autem intentio intellecta, cum sit terminus intelligibilis operationis, est aliud a specie intelligibili quae facit intellectum in actu, quam oportet considerari ut intelligibilis operationis principium: licet utrumque sit rei intellectae similitudo. Per hoc enim quod species intelligibilis quae est forma intellectus et intelligendi principium, est similitudo rei exterioris, sequitur quod intellectus intentionem formet illi rei similem: quia quale est unumquodque, talia operatur. Et ex hoc quod intentio intellecta est similis alicui rei, sequitur quod intellectus, formando huiusmodi intentionem, rem illam intelligat."—"This intention of the intellect, since it is a terminus of intelligible operation, is other than the intelligible species which makes the intellect to be in act, which it is necessary to consider as the principle of intelligible

of thought, distinct from the impressed intelligible species and expressed in the *verbum mentis*, considered as a **substitute** for the thing:²⁸

The act of knowledge is going to be further liberated from the object in a still clearer way when it produces the interior word or concept. The name “concept” is given to what the intellect conceives in itself and expresses by a word. The sensible species and then the intelligible species, by which we know but which we do not know, was still the form of the object itself. The concept is the likeness of the object that the intellect brings forth under the action of the species. We are now dealing with a true substitute for the object. The substitute is no longer either the substance of the knowing intellect nor the known thing itself, but an intentional being incapable of existing outside of thought, which is designated by a word and which later will be fixed by the definition.

operation; although each is a similitude of the thing understood. For, by the fact that the intelligible species which is the form of the intellect and the principle of understanding is the similitude of an exterior thing, it follows that the intellect forms an intention for itself similar to that thing; because such as a thing is, such does it operate. And from the fact that the intention of the intellect is alike to some thing, it follows that the intellect, forming such an intention, understands that thing.” In other words, the intention formed by the intellect—which has all of the marks of the *species expressa*—is for the intellect an orienting back towards the thing. In the previous passage of *SCG* I, c.53, i.e., n.3, *intentio* and *definitio* are explained as synonyms; which should not be taken to imply that the *intentio intellecta* is something strictly immanent, as it were, but rather that it *per naturam* tends back towards the things which to which it is alike. The point made in *DV* q.21, a.3, ad.5 seems simply to be that there is no process of the individual possessing the *intentio intellecta* moving itself towards an entitative or subjectively-constituted union with the thing intended, as there is in the case of an practical intention. Cf. Peifer 1952: *The Mystery of Knowledge*, 163–64n76. The attainment of the object is entangled in the notion of the *intentio intellecta*; we cannot immanentize the *intentio*.

- 28 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 266. Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.2, ad.2: “Ipsa igitur natura cui accidit vel intelligi vel abstrahi, vel intentio universalitatis, non est nisi in singularibus; sed hoc ipsum quod est intelligi vel abstrahi, vel intentio universalitatis, est in intellectu. Et hoc possumus videre per simile in sensu. Visus enim videt colorem pomi sine eius odore. Si ergo quaeratur ubi sit color qui videtur sine odore manifestum est quod color qui videtur, non est nisi in pomo; sed quod sit sine odore perceptus, hoc accidit ei ex parte visus, in quantum in visu est similitudo coloris et non odoris. Similiter humanitas quae intelligitur, non est nisi in hoc vel in illo homine, sed quod humanitas apprehendatur sine individualibus conditionibus, quod est ipsam abstrahi, ad quod sequitur intentio universalitatis, accidit humanitatis secundum quod percipitur ab intellectu, in quo est similitudo naturae speciei, et non individualium principiorum.”

The nature of this intentional being of the concept is not further discussed by Gilson; but it is important to note that he considers it something distinct, in terms of its constitution, both from the substance of the intellect or the intellectual creature and from the thing known.

2.1.2.2 Metaphysical Realism and Concepts

It seems at this point that Gilson becomes concerned with preserving the metaphysical realism of his interpretation of St. Thomas; as though the admission of the concept as something constituted in at least some measure by thought, dependent upon thought for its existence, seems to open the door to the difficulties of the idealist—as though Gilson hears in that admission a whisper of Kant’s unbridgeable chasm between *noumena* and *phenomena*. Thus, he qualifies that, whereas the impressed species is the direct likeness of the object itself, the concept is a representation of the form and so a likeness of it, but not directly:²⁹

Between the thing, considered in its own nature, and the concept which the intellect forms of it, there is a twofold likeness that we must be able to distinguish. First, there is a likeness of the thing in us, that is, the resemblance of the form that is the species. This is a direct likeness which the object produces by its very nature and imprints in us. It is as indistinguishable from the object as is the action a seal exerts on wax from the seal itself. Consequently, this likeness is not distinguished from its source, because it is not a representation of it but its expression and, as it were, its extension. Second, there is the likeness of the thing that we conceive in ourselves and which is not the form itself but nothing more than its representation.

First, we note that Gilson applies the example, taken from Aristotle’s *De anima*,³⁰ of the impression of the seal on wax, and applies it to the impression of the intelligible species upon the intellect.³¹ Secondly, since the production of the concept, as expressed by the word and “fixed” by the definition,³² follows upon the impression of this intelligible species, Gilson says that the fruit of the

29 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 266.

30 Aristotle c.330BC: Περὶ Ψυχῆς: II.12, 424a20–22; cf. Thomas Aquinas c.1268: *In de anima*, lib.2, lec.24, n.551 and n.554.

31 Neither Thomas nor Aristotle, it would seem, ever applied the example of the wax and the signet ring to the impression of a species upon the intellect.

32 The meaning of this term, “fixed by the definition”, seems to me ambiguous.

concept is given to it by the species of the thing, and therefore there is a true resemblance: “The concept of an object resembles it [the object] because the intellect must be impregnated by the species of the object itself in order to be able to beget the concept.”³³

Gilson goes still further to defend the realism of his interpretation of Thomas’ theory of knowledge. Because the process of concept formation is a natural one, and since its object is the intelligible, Gilson concludes that the concept is unerringly produced; there cannot be a mistake in the formation of a concept, and consequently there is an infallible conception of essences (emphasis added):³⁴

The act by which the intellect begets a concept in itself is a natural act. In performing it, then, it is only acting according to its nature. Since the operation is carried on as we have just described it, **we can conclude that its result is naturally unerring.** An intellect that only expresses the intelligible if the object has first impressed itself in it, cannot err in its expression. Let us give the term “quiddity” to the essence of the thing thus known. We can say that the quiddity is the proper object of the intellect, and that it never errs in apprehending it... **The intellect conceives essences as hearing perceives sounds and sight colors.**

Though there is an ambiguity in Gilson’s notion of the concept—namely, whether or not it is synonymous with or somehow virtually contains the definition³⁵—this claim that the intellect unerringly grasps essences is troublesome on several counts, and seems to us to be said in an attempt to justify the metaphysical realism of Gilson’s philosophy of knowledge. As he adds just a little later, “to say that the immediate object of thought is the concept is not to

33 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 267.

34 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 268.

35 There does not appear to be sufficient textual evidence across Gilson’s *oeuvre* to identify definitively his understanding of the intellectual concept. It does seem to be a fair inference, however, based upon his response to Fr. Regis in the appendix to 1949: *Being and Some Philosophers*, 221–227, that what Gilson considers as the concept (adopting a notion closer to that which is found in modernity), *proprie loquendo* and in opposition to the broader sense of the *conceptus*, is that which has a distinct intelligible content, i.e., that which is or can be more fully expressed in a definition. This suggests a kind of intellectual reduplication of an underlying metaphysical structure in the thing known—as though the concept properly speaking is the grasp of the internal structure of some *res extra animam*.

deny that it is the thing, but rather to affirm that it is the thing inasmuch as its intelligibility constitutes the whole intelligibility of the concept.”³⁶

In a sense, but not the one evidently meant by Gilson, this statement is true: whatever intelligibility there is to be found in a concept is ultimately instigated or derived from that which is found in the experience had of things. But to say that the concept of a thing is, as the object of thought, the same as the thing itself because all of the concept’s intelligibility is constituted by that of the thing itself is to oversimplify the reality of concept formation to the genuine detriment of understanding the truth of the human intellect.³⁷

2.1.3 *Realism vs. Idealism and the Question of Ens ut Primum Cognitum*

Ultimately, what we find in Gilson’s approach is a systematic integration of St. Thomas’ doctrine into a philosophy specifically oriented to the refutation of idealism. Having correctly identified that idealism is an untenable

36 Gilson 1965: *Le Thomisme*, 272.

37 Cf. Oliva Blanchette 1992: *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 8: “Gilson shows a marked resistance to having his metaphysics or that of Saint Thomas linked to any scientific theory or model. ‘We are interpreting history in a misleading way,’ he writes, ‘if we say that scholasticism tied the Christian faith to the ancient philosophy of Aristotle, and, consequently, that we are invited by its example to do the same thing with the philosophy of our age. What scholastic theology did was rather to create, in the human meaning of this word, a new metaphysics, whose truth, being independent of the state of science at any given historical moment, remains as permanent as the light of faith within which it was born’ (*Gilson Reader*, 164). Part of the reason for this kind of separation between metaphysics and any kind of physics, whether ancient or modern, was to insist on the originality of the medieval theologian. But it does have the disadvantage of conveying the impression that Thomistic philosophy of being is more a matter of faith than that of rational discourse, something which Saint Thomas himself would surely have disagreed with, as he clearly distinguished between two ways of teaching, one *in doctrina philosophiae* and the other *in doctrina fidei*, one being a way of investigation going from creatures to their creator and the other starting from God and embracing creatures as they are in relation to God.” As Blanchette here suggests, Gilson’s metaphysical realism is elevated to a place of intellectual supereminence, above and beyond the understanding of natural things—for while it is certainly the case that there are truths of metaphysics which transcend the natural world, our understanding of them can never be properly separated from the natural world, at least, not in this life. It is an unfortunate tendency of the response to modernity’s materialism that the Thomist can easily lapse into a kind of angelism: that is, an elevation of the intellectual capacity of the human being above what is properly natural—both in terms of what belongs to the species-specific human nature and in terms of the natural world to which human existence belongs—to something supernatural.

position, Gilson appears to overreact, taking as a given fact that there is an absolute dichotomy between the realist and idealist. This acceptance of such a dichotomy is the result of the presumption that all objects of thought are either the so-called real beings, *entia realis*, of extramental substantial constitution, or the logical beings, *entia rationis*, which exist only in thought. Gilson comes closest to admitting the possibility of a third kind of object in his depiction of the concept as an intentional being, but he quickly obliterates this possibility, in an evident attempt to produce an airtight defense against idealism, by reducing the content of the concept to that which is derived from the substantial form of the thing itself.³⁸

Gilson thought that a genuine metaphysics without “returning to realism pure and simple” to be impossible.³⁹ This “pure and simple” realism requires that one take being as first known to be *ens reale*. Certainly, the first conception of being is germinated from something existing in the order of substantial constitution, from something somehow constituted between principles of essence and existence which in no way depends upon our intellect for its being. In a way, however, this is to make the inverse mistake of Plato—who thought that things must be constituted according to the way they exist in the mind—namely, to believe that what is in the mind is precisely the same as what it discovers in the thing. Thomas confirms a point very similar to Gilson’s statement that “nothing is in the understanding unless it has first been in the senses”,⁴⁰

38 Cf. Owens 1992: *Cognition*, 153: “In abstraction, however, the corresponding representation is no longer individual and mixed with the other features, but expresses the one aspect only. It is called the concept, in the sense of an expressed species, but the thing itself, as presented in the concept, is what one knows through abstraction.” Again, 152: “In late Scholasticism the intellectual representation tended to be called the formal concept, to mark it off as the concept produced by the mind. Contrasted with it was the conceived object, under the designation ‘objective concept’. This notion paved the way for the Cartesian doctrine of ideas as the proper object of the mind’s consideration. The notion of an ‘objective concept’ does not fit very well into an epistemology in which real sensible things are the direct object of our intellection. Rather, the object of the concept is the thing itself as known in abstraction. In this way the human nature, the animal nature, and the vegetative nature of a perceived object are represented in separate concepts. They are represented apart from each other, even though in reality they are never found in separation from the really existent individual.”

39 Gilson 1935: *Methodical Realism*, 92.

40 Gilson 1939: *Thomist Realism*, 183. It should be noted that the text Gilson cites, i.1256–59: *DV* q.10, a.6, s.c.2, has two marks against it for supporting the precise claim that Gilson makes: first, it is present in a *sed contra* which, while not contradicted by Thomas, nevertheless may not fully represent his own position; and secondly, even if it is taken as the meaning

for, as the Common Doctor writes: “omnis nostra cognitio a sensu incipit”—“every one of our cognitions begins from sense”.⁴¹ Nevertheless, we ought to note this important if slight difference between Gilson’s claim and the teaching of Thomas: while it is agreed that our cognition **begins** in sensation, Thomas never declares that **everything** in the understanding has first been in the senses. In fact, we can find texts which seem to support clearly that Thomas held a different position:⁴²

sense cognition is not the whole cause of our intellectual cognition. And therefore it is not to be wondered at if the intellectual cognition extends itself beyond the sensitive.

And:⁴³

A sign conveys something, on the basis of that which is known to us, by which we are led to the cognition of another. The first things known to us are things falling under the senses, from which every one of our cognitions has its rising; and therefore the sign as to its first institution signifies some sensible thing, insofar as through it we are led into the knowledge of something hidden.

of St. Thomas, the text—“omnis nostra cognitio originaliter consistit in notitia primorum principiorum indemonstrabilium. Horum autem cognitio in nobis a sensu oritur, ut patet in fine Poster. Ergo scientia nostra a sensu oritur”—includes two terms, *originaliter* and *oritur* which signify that knowledge **begins** with sense; not that it always and in every case is reliant upon something having been contained in sense. This notion of beginning, seemingly in the sense of the first piece of a larger construction rather than as a persistent principle, is confirmed in the texts cited below, in which Thomas states that our cognition *incipit a sensu*.

41 i.1259/65: *SCG* II, c.37, n.2. Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.9, a.1, c.; 1272: *ST* IIIa, q.60, a.4, ad.1; 1271–2: *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib.2, lec.1, n.2; 1251–2: *Super Isaiam*, c.1, lec.1; 1269–72: *Super Iohannem*, c.3, lec.1; *ibid.*, c.8, lec.8.

42 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.6, ad.3: “quod sensitiva cognitio non est tota causa intellectualis cognitionis. Et ideo non est mirum si intellectualis cognitio ultra sensitivam se extendit.”

43 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.4, d.1, q.1, a.1, qc.2, c.: “signum importat aliquod notum quo ad nos, quo manuducimur in alterius cognitionem. Res autem primo notae nobis, sunt res cadentes sub sensu, a quo omnis nostra cognitio ortum habet; et ideo signum quantum ad primam sui institutionem significat aliquam rem sensibilem, prout per eam manuducimur in cognitionem alicujus occulti.”

And:⁴⁴

The superior and inferior power do not operate similarly, but the superior operates more sublimely; for which reason, through the form received from a thing, the sense does not know as efficaciously as the intellect, but the sense is led through that form to cognition of the exterior accidents. Meanwhile, the intellect reaches to the bare quiddity of the thing, separating it from every material disposition. Thus, the cognition of the mind is said to have its origin from the senses not so much because that which the mind knows, the sense apprehends; but because from those things which the sense apprehends, the mind is led into further things, just as the sensibles lead the understanding to the divine intelligibles.

While Gilson may not have intended his statement to be taken to the letter, it seems that his adamantness against the idealist position would repudiate that any object of knowledge—as, at the very least, a specificative object existing independently of the act whereby a mind grasps it—is one which is not constituted within the subjective order. Certainly, he would not deny that there are *entia rationis* as objects of the intellect which are not actually existing in nature—there is no such thing as “animal”, nor is there some independently existing “2”, yet we know them—but the notion that an *entia rationis* could be a specificative rather than a terminative object seems to have no place in Gilson’s metaphysical realism.

Ultimately, Gilson is consistent. As he himself stated, “any attempt on the part of a philosopher to shun the consequences of his own position is doomed to failure”.⁴⁵ Taking *ens ut primum cognitum* as *ens reale*, Gilson is bound to

44 i.1256–59: *DV* q.10, a.6, ad.2: “idem virtus superior et inferior operantur, non similiter, sed superior sublimius; unde et per formam quae a rebus recipitur, sensus non ita efficaciter rem cognoscit sicut intellectus: sed sensus per eam manuducitur in cognitionem exteriorum accidentium; intellectus vero pervenit ad nudam quidditatem rei, discernendo eam ab omnibus materialibus dispositionibus unde non pro tanto dicitur cognitio mentis a sensu originem habere, quod omne illud quod mens cognoscit, sensus apprehendat; sed quia ex his quae sensus apprehendit, mens in aliqua ulteriora manuducitur, sicut etiam sensibilia intellecta manuducunt in intelligibilia divinorum.”

45 Gilson 1937: *Unity*, 302. Cf. Langan 1996: *Being and Truth*, 37: “What Etienne Gilson has shown about the history of ontology is true of the history of concepts of truth: Philosophers have latched onto parts of reality and made them models for understanding the whole, with distorting results. In seeking to relate the various dimensions of truth, while the knower is always one and the same living subject, he has access to quite different kinds of objects, to which he relates in distinctive ways. The tree I see in my garden is a very different kind of entity from the South Seas vacation I am imagining.

uphold a strictly-realist notion of conceptualization.⁴⁶ As a consequence, *entia rationis* are relegated to a kind of second-order existence. Objects of knowledge are exclusively and exhaustively divided into extra-cognitionally real, *ens reale*, and intra-cognitionally unreal, *ens rationis*. To get beyond this division, we will need a much stronger, well-developed, and robust notion of conceptualization.

2.2 Jacques Maritain

It is to this end that we propose to make a substantial investigation of the teaching of Jacques Maritain—likely the best, in our estimation, of the 20th century Thomists in terms of confronting the contemporary situation of the world from Thomistic principles—in his metaphysical and epistemological works, especially *Preface to Metaphysics*, *Existence and the Existent*, and *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Within these works, we will show his contributions to the Thomistic doctrines of, **first**, (1) abstraction, namely the emphasis he places upon the positive aspect of this act; **second**, (2) what Maritain, thanks in large part to his familiarity with John Poincaré, shows us about the process of concept formation—in contrast to the oversimplification we found in Gilson—and the nature of the object of the concept; **third** (3) we will consider the root of Maritain's philosophy of being as it relates to his philosophy of knowledge, specifically in those texts where Maritain discusses the nature of *ens ut primum cognitum*.

2.2.1 Maritain on Abstraction

Whereas Gilson shied away from using language which distinguished “object” from the term “thing”, there is likely no distinction more important to Maritain's

“Acknowledging the pluralism of our situation and with a tip of the hat to the deconstructionists, I want to avoid reductionism, driven by some hidden agenda. Gilson is right: One of these kinds of knowledge should not be made a criterion in terms of which all the other kinds of object, truth, and reality are to be appreciated. *The unity required by wisdom shall not be attained on the cheap.*”

46 Indeed, Gilson seems to make, at no point in his writings, any clear distinction between *ens ut primum cognitum* and *ens* under any other consideration. Consequently, when he says (1949: *Being and Some Philosophers*, c.6) that *ens* is grasped through its principle sense of *esse* by means of judgment rather than apprehension, it is unclear in what sense he is speaking of being. George Klubertanz, writing a few years later (1952a: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 39–44), while he makes a clear distinction between *ens primum cognitum* and *ens inquantum ens*, holds the two to be continuous in terms of their object.

Poinsot-influenced interpretation of St. Thomas' philosophy of knowledge. Maritain, while he (like Gilson) was strongly concerned with overcoming the idealist hurdle, nevertheless saw that specifically human knowledge is not simply and directly an immediate perception of things as things, but rather that "object and objectivity are the very life and salvation of the intellect"⁴⁷ (object being said here in the original sense of the Latin *obiectum* as that which is present to a power and most especially to a cognitive power).⁴⁸ While it is the distinctive mark of the human intellect that it is able to think about a thing as a thing—that is, according to the subjective constitution of its own being, as possessing its own reality—such thinking is impossible unless the thing **first** and **continually** be an object. To quote, the⁴⁹

object is the term of the first operation of the intellect (simple perception, or 'simple apprehension'); what is it therefore if not, under a given specific aspect determined and cut out by abstraction, the intelligible density of an existent subject, rendered transparent in act to the mind and identified with the mind's vital activity by and in the concept? Briefly, the object as present in the mind is the intelligible objectisation of a trans-objective subject.

By abstraction, a subjective being, outside the mind, is made intelligible. This occurs only so long as a thing is made into an object for the intellect, in such a way that the intellect becomes uniquely directed towards the thing, or towards that part of the thing which is capable of an adequation to the mode of being proper for the intellect's reception of it. We ought to note, however, that in terms of the actual experience of a human animal, things are first known as objects and only as objects. We do not, prior to intellectual experience of them, discern that they are **things** apart from their relation to ourselves; in other words, we have no conception of the **being** of the thing, and consequently cannot understand the thing as thing, but rather have it grasped only as an object.⁵⁰ At the same time, things, even while understood as things, are always at the same time still understood in their "objectisation" (to use Maritain's term); that is, through the fact that it is an object, because it is standing in the relation given it by the intellectual grasp, a thing is made into an object. Thus: "we must distinguish between the thing as thing—as existing or able to exist for

47 Jacques Maritain 1947: *Existence and the Existent*, 23.

48 Maritain 1959: *Degrees of Knowledge* (hereafter *DK*) 91n.1. Cf. Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 9–16 for a more thorough explanation of the terminology.

49 Maritain 1947: *Existence and the Existent*, 23.

50 Cf. Deely 2007: *IS*, 98–100.

itself—and the thing as object—when it is set before the faculty of knowing and made present to it.”⁵¹

This distinction between “thing as thing” and “thing as object” is not to say that the two are unrelated, or that it is a problem of how we move from the object to the thing; this problem, the difficulty modernity found insurmountable, occurs only if we take the object as a pure object⁵²—as though to be an object is to be something mutually exclusive from being a thing. Rather, Maritain says that:⁵³

Philosophical reflection has to affirm that the *thing* is given with and by the object, and that it is even absurd to wish to separate them... We would say in Thomistic language that the *thing* is the “material object” of the sense and intellect, whereas what we are calling *object* in this context (i.e., on the one hand, the coloured thing, the sounding, cold, warm thing, etc.; on the other, the intelligible *quid*) is their “formal object”: material object and formal object are grasped at a single stroke and indivisibly by the very same perceptions.

The object is the *terminus* of a relation of knowing: when someone actually understands (i.e., intellectually grasps and perceives) the human nature in some human individual, that specific intelligible *quid* alone is properly the object of the act of understanding, of the intellectual act. The whole “thing”, in its unique subjective constitution, is not grasped by the intellect. The particular human being is not the **formal object** of the intellect’s act of understanding; but because of the *intellectus agens*’ connection to the particular reason, the *vis cogitativa* working in conjunction with the *vires memorativa* and *imaginativa*,⁵⁴ there is a cognitive, though not intellectual, grasp of the whole

51 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 91. Cf. *DK* 94: “Whether cisobjective or transobjective, the subject is never grasped as pure subject; it is, rather, precisely what is attained as object. The process of knowledge consists in making it object.” See *DK* 93 for an explanation of the terminology of cisobjective (the self as object) and transobjective (the other as object).

52 Maritain 1959: *DK*, *ibid.*: “In general, moderns take *object* as pure object, cut off in itself from any *thing* in which it has existence, I mean an existence independent of my *cogito*, an existence posited in its own right before my act of thinking and independent of it: existence which is called, in that sense, extramental without the ‘exteriority’ having the slightest spatial meaning; it might as well be termed premental, i.e., preceding the knowledge we have of it, or even metalogical.”

53 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 93.

54 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.25, a.1, ad.3: “ratio vero inferior habet actum circa sensibilia secundum aliquam intentionem universalem.” 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.78, a.4, ad.5: “Ad quantum dicendum quod illam eminentiam habet cogitativa et memorativa in homine, non per id quod est

thing, of what Maritain above calls the “material object”. Here we want to focus upon the claim that the formal object is the *terminus* of the relation whereby intellectual knowledge arises. To be such a *terminus* necessitates that there be also a *fundamentum*, something in the intellect which is connected to that which is in the thing.⁵⁵ It is important, moreover, to note that “formal object” is said with regard to the intellect in two ways: **first**, inasmuch as the intellect itself, as a power, has a proper and proportionate object through which it understands things, just as light differentiated within the visible spectrum is the formal object of sight, or sound the formal object of hearing; and **second**, in regards to the particular concepts through which we know particular objects in their distinction. Here and now we are concerned with this second sense, i.e., the formal object of the concept. We can now proceed to examine how it is, according to Maritain’s interpretation, that this concept as *fundamentum* on account of which we are said to have knowledge comes to exist.

proprium sensitivae partis; sed per aliquam affinitatem et propinquitatem ad rationem universalem, secundum quandam refluentiam. Et ideo non sunt aliae vires, sed eadem, perfectiores quam sint in aliis animalibus.” The *ratio inferior* is not a power, but the application of the intellectual power which is considered with universal things, to particulars, which involves the use of the particular reason, i.e., the *vires cogitativa, memorativa, and imaginativa*.

55 This “being-a-*terminus*” and “being-a-*fundamentum*”, as modifications of that which is the formal object in the thing and that which is the foundation of the relation in the intellect, i.e., the concept, are accidents of objectivity constituted by the existence of the relation itself. Cf. Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 36–37: “It is easy enough to see that for triangle A really to be similar to triangle B, both triangles must exist. If either A or B is destroyed, the relation between them is destroyed. Yet consider the subjective characteristic of B whereby it is ‘similar’ to A, namely, its triangular shape. This shape is part of the subjectivity of B: it needs neither A nor the shape of A in order to be what it is; it needs only the existence of B. When A exists, however, B’s shape does something it does not do when A does not exist, to wit, it *terminates* a relation of similarity to A founded on A’s shape, and it *founds* a relation of similarity to A founded on B’s shape. Thus, for the foundation and the terminus of a relation, even when the relation is a categorial relation, and even though the foundation and the terminus alike have a subjective dimension or being which is independent of the being of the relation as intersubjective, *precisely as foundation and terminus, it is not the subjective being of the inherent accidents that is decisive but the being of the relation itself*. Otherwise the being of the triangular shape as from one side foundation and from the other side as terminus could not cease when the relation ceases.

“In short, the *being of terminus* of a relation and the *being of foundation* of a relation are alike creatures of the relation itself in its suprasubjective character, even when the relation itself is an intersubjective reality (a categorial relation) and as such dependent upon the inherent, subjective reality of *both* fundament and terminus as modifications of substance.”

All students of St. Thomas are, of course, familiar with the doctrine of abstraction as that which produces the intellectual concept, the fundament which provenates a relationship to the object as a terminus. There is, however, tension in attempts at interpreting this Thomistic doctrine. The very etymology of the word “abstraction” suggests primarily a process of extraction or removal of the intelligible form from the unintelligible material thing. “Abstraction” conveys a “drawing out of”, as though there is imprisoned in material things some hidden reality to be freed by the intellect. Thus we can find, for instance, in the otherwise quite excellent book of John Peifer, *The Mystery of Knowledge* (or *The Concept in Thomism*, under which title it was also published), the cringe-worthy comparison of abstraction to the production of an x-ray image.⁵⁶

Others, such as Van Steenberghen and De Raeymaeker, discuss the abstract as the intellectual value which is “disengaged from the concrete spatio-temporal conditions that characterize every object”;⁵⁷ that the intellect, in abstraction, “has a certain power of apprehending the value of being, or a capacity for discovering being and the modes of being which are hidden in the spatio-temporal world, or the world of lived experience.”⁵⁸

56 John F. Peifer 1964: *The Mystery of Knowledge*, 120: “St. Thomas probably would have welcomed the example afforded by the X-ray. When X-rays shine upon a body, they can penetrate the flesh and produce an image on a photographic plate of the internal structures of the body. Such rays do not perceive the internal structure; they merely reveal it. So too, the active intellect does not know but prepares for knowledge by its dematerializing illumination. Furthermore, the internal structure is not seen directly in the body, but in an image produced by the X-rays on a photographic plate or screen. Similarly, the intelligible content latent within the phantasm is not seen in the phantasm itself, but in an intelligible species formed in the possible intellect.”

57 Fernand Van Steenberghen 1947: *Epistemology*, 136–137.

58 Van Steenberghen 1947: *Epistemology*, 138. Cf. De Raeymaeker 1947: *The Philosophy of Being: A Synthesis of Metaphysics*, 34–35. Cf. Yves Simon 1934: *Introduction a l'ontologie du connaitre* (Paris: Desclée, de Brouwer). References are to the English trans. by Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 120–121: “The production of the idea is an *abstraction* that disengages the intelligible from the image. By a unique act, the mind causes the intelligible to emerge from the image that contains it—the intelligible is there because nature is an idea of the divine art—and thus gives itself the means for thought.” Maritain himself is not guiltless in this sort of expression; cf. 1947: *Existence and the Existent*, 25: “in abstractive perception, what the intellect lays hold of is the natures or essences which are in existent things or subjects (but not in the state of universality or intelligibility in act), which themselves are not things, and which the intellect strips of existence by immaterialising them.”

Likewise, Rudolph Allers says that the “universal nature is enclosed, as it were, in the particular”, which universal nature “becomes disengaged from matter”;⁵⁹ the nature is imprisoned, captured, and must be freed from the confines of materiality. While these statements are not **entirely** at variance with the truth of the action which Thomas calls “abstraction”—the process resulting in the formation of specifically intelligible *species* informing the *intellectus possibilis*, which we will examine in careful detail in Chapters 3 and 4—the suggestion or bald assertion that there exists a “hidden” immaterial, intelligible form within the concrete material individual, which abstraction somehow removes, frees, or grasps (not so as to transfer to itself the same numerical form, but what we might call the same content of the form, such that what exists subjectively in the concrete material individual now exists cognitively in the intellect) is a negative perspective not entirely coherent with experience.

Maritain, consequently, attempted to minimize this negative aspect of intellectual abstraction while preserving some sense of the divestment of form from matter,⁶⁰ spoken of so frequently by St. Thomas. Beyond the preservation of this notion of abstraction, however, as a kind of divestment, his primary concern was to emphasize the “positive perception” of being, as we read here:⁶¹

The essence of the process of abstraction, the eidetic visualisation, is not to remove baser minerals in which the precious metal is embedded but to find the metal. The essence of metaphysical visualisation is not to remove first the individualising notes, then the sensible qualities and finally the quantity, it is that of which all this is but the indispensable condition, namely the positive perception, the intuition of being as such.

In Maritain’s description, abstraction is not so much a removal or disengagement from the inferior surrounds, but rather a discovery of something

59 Rudolph Allers 1942: “Intellectual Cognition” in *Essays in Thomism*, ed. Robert E. Brennan, O.P., 54. See 3.2.3.1 below for a more in-depth look at Thomist explanations of abstraction.

60 Maritain 1934: *Preface to Metaphysics* (hereafter *PM*), 86–87: “You understand what is meant by the term abstraction. It must never be separated from the intuition which it effects. That is why in many cases I prefer the term *visualisation*.”

“To abstract means to disengage, to draw out. There is always *something to be disengaged*, a metal from the ore in which it is contained. But we often insist too exclusively upon the negative aspect of the process, the aspect implied by the term abstraction, on the divestment it involves, and fail to see that this divestment is simply a condition. So the term is understood in a purely material fashion, and it becomes incomprehensible how it can designate the supreme degree of human knowledge.”

61 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 87.

distinctive within—it is not that the form is in some way extracted or copied from the thing and placed in the intellect, but that the form is discovered in such a way that the mind returns back to the form's source. In other words, as opposed to “ideas” or “concepts” existing in the mind as merely representational impressions, such that the genesis of an idea through sensation is simultaneous with its being known as a representation, Maritain explains abstraction as one stage among many in the process of understanding. As he warns us, “It is a radical error to restrict the object of the intellect to the object of the first operation of the mind... It is merely a preparation for the second [judgment], which achieves knowledge.”⁶²

While we wholeheartedly agree with Maritain that the “essence of the process of abstraction... is not to remove baser minerals... but to find the metal”, his account of abstraction nevertheless leaves something to be desired. At the very least, there is a lack of clarity regarding what it means to say that abstraction is more essentially a positive perception than it is a removal or divestment of matter. What is actually being affected by the process? How does the intellect take what is *in se* unintelligible, the material reality, and from that produce the intelligible form? The metaphor of finding metal, while it helps to detract from the “dematerializing” and “disengagement” language, does not truly help us to understand the nature of the act of abstraction itself.

2.2.1.1 Degrees and Kinds of Abstraction

We can make our dissatisfaction with Maritain's treatment clearer by looking at the way in which he emphasizes two commonly discussed aspects of abstraction: first, the three degrees; and second, the distinction between *abstractio totalis* and *abstractio formalis*. The three degrees correspond to the three basic divisions of pre-modern science: physics, which abstracts from the sensible matter of an individual, but not from common sensible matter; mathematics, which abstracts from common sensible matter, but not from common intelligible matter; and metaphysics, which abstracts from common intelligible matter and therefore matter altogether.⁶³ This set of distinctions is taken directly from St. Thomas.⁶⁴

The other consideration of abstraction which Maritain emphasizes, the two-fold notion of *abstractio totalis* and *abstractio formalis*, consists respectively in the **initial** abstractive grasp whereby we realize some more general or universal concept from the individuals encountered in experience, and the **incisive**

62 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 20.

63 Cf. Maritain 1959: *DK*, 35–38.

64 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1, ad.2.

abstractive insight which grasps the essential differentiation of beings—which distinction Maritain also calls “extensive” (the initial grasp) and “intensive visualization” (the incisive grasp), respectively. Thus, while *abstractio totalis* moves further away from the concrete singular through progressively broader considerations—e.g., “human” from “Steve” and “Anne”, “animal” from “human” and “dog”, “color” from “green” and “blue”, etc.—*abstractio formalis* moves deeper into the subjective constitution of the concrete singular by distinguishing “what belongs to the formal reason, or essence, of an object of knowing”.⁶⁵ This twofold notion, while it exists in Thomas,⁶⁶ is taken by Maritain from Cajetan and John Poinsoot,⁶⁷ as we saw in the previous chapter. What the two Latin Thomists assert is undeniably a development, and it seems that Maritain aims

65 Maritain 1959: DK, 37.

66 c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.5, a.3, c.: “Et ita sunt duae abstractiones intellectus. Una quae respondet unioni formae et materiae vel accidentis et subiecti, et haec est abstractio formae a materia sensibili. Alia quae respondet unioni totius et partis, et huic respondet abstractio universalis a particulari, quae est abstractio totius, in quo consideratur absolute natura aliqua secundum suam rationem essentialem, ab omnibus partibus, quae non sunt partes speciei, sed sunt partes accidentales. Non autem inveniuntur abstractiones eis oppositae, quibus pars abstrahatur a toto vel materia a forma; quia pars vel non potest abstrahi a toto per intellectum, si sit de partibus materiae, in quarum diffinitione ponitur totum, vel potest etiam sine toto esse, si sit de partibus speciei, sicut linea sine triangulo vel littera sine syllaba vel elementum sine mixto.”—“And likewise there are two abstractions belonging to the intellect. The first corresponds to the union of form and matter or accident and subject, and this is the abstraction of form from sensible matter. The other corresponds to the union of whole and part, and to this corresponds the abstraction of the universal from the particular, which is the abstraction of the whole, in which some nature is considered absolutely according to its essential meaning, distinct from all parts which are not parts of the species, but are accidental parts. We do not find abstractions opposed to these, in which a part is abstracted from the whole or matter from form; because a part either is not able to be abstracted from a whole through the intellect, if it is a part of the matter in the definition of which the whole is posited; or it can exist without the whole, if it is a part of the species, as a line without a triangle, a letter without a syllable, or an element without the mixture.” Thomas also mentions that abstraction is twofold in 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.1, ad.1.

67 Maritain 1959: DK, 36. Maritain’s references are to Cajetan c.1493/5: *In de Ente et Essentia*, proem., q.1, and Poinsoot 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, vol.1 in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. Reiser, q.27, a.1 (728). Owens notes (1963: *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 64n13) that Thomas uses *abstractio totius* and *abstractio formae*, but states that Cajetan (and presumably, therefore, Poinsoot) uses the terms with a change in meaning. There is a great deal of complexity and difficulty in discussing the meaning of Thomas, as well as his commentators and followers, when it comes to abstraction. See c.3 and c.4 for more.

to make such a development himself—at least in the realm of rhetoric—with his terms “extensive” and “intensive” visualization.

Maritain describes extensive visualisation as the grasp of an object which “is not explicitly the type or essence abstracted by and for itself”, such that “the essence is there, but contained in the notion after a fashion wholly implicit or blind, as it were hinted, not such that thought can employ or handle it”.⁶⁸ Maritain does not explain what he means by saying that the essence is present but “contained in the notion after a fashion wholly implicit or blind”. It seems fair to presume, however, that he means there is a lack of clear distinction; that the intellect has grasped some “thing”, but that the nature of the thing is not yet known beyond the vaguest outlines, like a surface brushed against in the dark. As Maritain goes on: “Contact has been made with the intelligible order, the order of the universal in general; but nothing more”.⁶⁹ Contrariwise, intensive visualisation penetrates to the “form or regulative type perfected, complete in its distinctive intelligibility”.⁷⁰ In this case, not only is the outline of the understood thing grasped, but also its distinctions and details, in a manner which accords with the intensity of the visualisation. The object of intensive visualisation is clear and distinct, and it is only by means of this intensive visualisation that we attain to the three degrees of abstraction and thereby establish a distinction between the sciences. We not only find the precious metal amongst the lesser ore, but succeed in precisely distinguishing it from its surrounds. We distinguish not only one metal among the ore, but find indeed three distinct kinds of metal.

2.2.1.2 The Degrees of Communicability

In his *Preface to Metaphysics*, Maritain adds to the degrees of abstraction his own elaboration. On the one hand, he does maintain the traditional sense of the degrees abstracted according to the *ratio formalis objecti ut res*, the rationale of the formal object as a thing, the “inspect” under which that thing appears to a knower and the division of sciences which follows from such distinctions.⁷¹ On the other hand, he speaks also of the “objective light”, the

68 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 75.

69 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 75–76.

70 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 76.

71 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 78: “The subject or object of a science is the subject matter with which it deals—*ens* in the case of metaphysics. What we may term its index of real intelligibility—*ratio formalis objecti ut res*, or *ratio formalis quae*—is a particular aspect or more truly ‘inspect’ under which the object appears or presents itself, confronts knowledge, a particular perspective in which it discloses its depths, *entitatis* in the case of metaphysics.

ratio formalis objecti ut objectum, the rationale of the formal object as object, of “a certain characteristic immateriality in the medium of knowledge, the peculiar mode of visualising and defining it demanded by the object in question if we are to attain and penetrate it”.⁷² Maritain thus distinguishes between the object as belonging to a specific sort of thing, as part of the subjective constitution whereby it is what it is, or being in a thing in a specific way, and the object precisely as “objectised” through some act of knowledge, through the way in which it is grasped, and therefore as, in at least some measure, constituted objectively. In the sense of the formal object as thing, *ratio formalis objecti ut res*, we are considering the formal object precisely as it belongs to a thing, and thus the objects are distinguished according to the existence proper to their subjective constitutions. Here, one object is distinguished from another according to the actual existence proper to the thing: the object is considered as part of a whole. Contrariwise, in the sense of the formal object as object, *objecti ut objectum*, we are considering how objects themselves are distinguished precisely in their mode of being as object, and thus they are distinguished according to the manner of their reception in the one knowing. We could further label this a distinction between the entitative being considered as not only an individual specificative object but as a thing open to further specification, and the intentional being of a terminative object as already given through a determinate mode of specification.

In this latter sense, Maritain speaks of four degrees of communicability, from absolute opacity to sheer transparency, in terms of what and in what manner something is communicated and consequently understood through some objectivization.

The lowest and most opaque of these is the degree of pure nothingness—about which there is little to say, but about which we ought to note that, while it cannot be a formal object as thing, it is nevertheless known as an object, for we can objectivize even that which is not a thing. It cannot communicate itself to us in any way, but it can still be understood as a terminative object, even in the absence of a specificative object.

Second to pure nothingness is the object we call prime matter, totally unknowable in itself, and not something which communicates itself in the mode of itself to any other. Indeed, there really is no “itself” of prime matter, for it exists only as the indefinite and wholly indeterminate realm of possibility that is the potency for change. Prime matter does not exist on its own, but

“The formal subject or object of metaphysics is thus *ens sub ratione entitatis*, being with the index value of the real intelligibility of being—being as such.”

72 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 79.

“it communicates with the form which actualises it. This is a reminder that transference to the mind, communicability, is co-extensive with being.”⁷³ In other words, prime matter—which is distinct from the matter actualized by the form—communicates with forms as being receptive of them. It does not contribute anything to them, but only receives; it is a one-way communication, and prime matter always stands, as it were, “outside” or “enveloping” the existing, material thing actualized by some present form. This being of pure possibility, is, however, still a being and not pure non-being, and is therefore a thing of a sort—or we might even say, the being of possibility between what actually is and what might be—in addition to being something which can be an object.

Subsequently, Maritain speaks of “the second degree of communicability, that of bodies in their material existence”, which occurs when matter supersedes mere possibility by its conjunction with some form and becomes, through transitive interaction, *signate* matter, as Thomas would say.⁷⁴ The occasion of signate matter becomes known to us by the observation of a change wrought upon those interacting bodies in some way or another, which bodies, Maritain says, “can communicate only by the modifications which they receive from each other, each of which is bound up with a corresponding loss.”⁷⁵ Communication between things which are strictly bodies is nothing other than the communication of transitive action. In other words, the form received is communicated to the body of the receiver as something which contributes to, detracts from, or even constitutes the receiver’s subjective constitution.⁷⁶ Only by the displacement of some other, antecedently-present form, can such a form be received.⁷⁷

The third degree of communicability is that whereby a form is received, in a soul, by the virtue of a transitive action of one body upon another—namely, what occurs in the sensation of the external sense powers. Yet the form is received not in the order of the receiver’s subjective constitution, but rather with an intentional existence; that is, its existence in the soul of the knower is a likeness which makes its existence in the subjective constitution of the known to be known—though, at the level of sensation, known only *secundum quid* and

73 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 79.

74 E.g., i.1259/65: *SCG* II, c.75, n.10; 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.75, a.4, c.; i.1256–59: *DV* q.2, a.6, ad.1.

75 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 80.

76 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 80: “Between one being and another whose form is *entirely* absorbed in informing its matter, namely an inanimate being, no other communication is possible than transitive action.” *Ibid.*: “At the upper limit, two bodies communicate their natures to each other *by destroying* each other, to exist henceforward only virtually in a third of a different species. This is substantial generation.”

77 That is, through the third of the principles of motion or material change, “privation.”

not properly as belonging to that subjective constitution independent of the sensing being's relation to the known. Thus, though there is a transitive action, a kind of reception of some form by the one sensing, the form impressed upon the organs transitively does not come to exist in those organs in the way it exists in the thing sensed—the roughness of sandpaper does not make the finger rough, but the form of roughness is received in sensation, existing intentionally and making known the roughness in the sandpaper. It is only through this intentionality of the form in the animal awareness being constituted through the accidents, and with a kind of corroboration of them so as to form a substitute identity, that sense knowledge—or what we might call “perception”, though no English term truly encapsulates the process whereby the interior and exterior senses work together to enable cognition—is attained.⁷⁸ In other words, by collating the various sense perceptions had of a thing's sensible accidents—including what Aristotle and Thomas call the *sensible per accidens* or what we might call “incidental sensibles”⁷⁹—an animal considers something outside of itself in a particular and determinate way through an intentional form. Merely having sensation, *sentire*, does not produce animal cognition.

The fourth degree of communicability is that of intellectual knowledge. Maritain distinguishes this from the third degree in that the intentional existence

78 We might even say that, in Maritain's own terminology, sense cognition or perception is always and intrinsically *perinoetic*—that is, it essentially cannot get at the essence of anything. Cf. Maritain 1959: *DK*, 205. One curiosity which requires our attention is that, despite its frequent presence and importance in the philosophy of Poinset (and Thomas, but with less precision or elaboration), is the absence of any consideration of the operations of interior sense—which Poinset terms *phantasiari* (cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 240–242 [R.I 702a38–702b3])—in Maritain's account of knowledge. Ultimately, it seems that his account of the degrees of communicability, inasmuch as he posits only four, is therefore somewhat oversimplified. One thing which needs certainly to be said here is that **there is no sense knowledge/cognition without also some operation of *phantasiari***. What makes the reception of material form something over and above merely entitative change through some transitive action, i.e., sensation properly speaking, is the intentionality of the interaction. Merely receiving through exterior organs some form whereupon intentionality can follow does not induce a cognitive relation. Rather, the interior sense powers must form some sort of concept, although not an intellectual concept, which allows a cognition of the object to occur. Nevertheless, there seem to clearly be two distinct levels of communication occurring, one proper to *sentire* and another proper to *phanstiari*.

79 For more on the role of incidental sensibles in the working of the interior sense powers, see Daniel De Haan 2014: “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 88.3, pp. 397–437 as well as Anthony Lisska 2007: “A Look at Inner Sense in Aquinas: A Long-Neglected Faculty Psychology” in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, vol.80.

of the form attained in sensation is the product only of “accidental transitive action”, whereas the intentionality of the intellectual form is “in virtue of an object’s being itself... in virtue of what it is”.⁸⁰ This is the communication of the very form itself, not by virtue of some proxy, but in its own proper mode. At this point, the intentional existence of the form in the intellect is somehow, to some degree, the same in terms of **what** it is as the existence of the form in the order of subjective constitution.⁸¹ Maritain sees this as involving a sacrifice, in that “the individuating notes bound up with sensible knowledge, which is itself psychophysical, necessarily fall away”.⁸² The human intellect cannot know the sensible as the sensible is; here, Maritain is certainly in line with the teaching of St. Thomas.⁸³ But in what sense are we paying a price in not having an intellectual understanding? Is this some deficiency on the part of the object informing our intellect? Or is this not a deficiency on the part of the human intellect itself? After all, the divine intellect is said to be capable of knowing singulars in the mode of their singularity.⁸⁴ Is it not then, rather, that our intellects are, because composite with the body and confined to the existence of a determinate and limited nature, innately prohibited from such knowledge?⁸⁵

It seems that there is something subtle and important which is absent in the schema of communicability which Maritain has here outlined, something problematic with the notion that we are **losing** something in abstraction; that, ultimately, this is a problematic way of considering matter, and especially

80 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 81.

81 To clarify, this need not necessarily mean that the form attained in cognition is the very same, in terms of “what”, as the substantial form of the being which is known; only that the *species impressa*, the *similitudo*, consists in a real relation whereby the known somehow affects the knower in a way which (through further acts of the intellect) allows the knower to have the known intentionally and intellectually present to it. See c.3.1.3 and 3.2.3.2 below.

82 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 81.

83 i.1259/65: *SCG* I, c.65, n.9: “Forma igitur rei sensibilis, cum sit per suam materialitatem individuata, suae singularitatis similitudinem perducere non potest in hoc quod sit omnino immaterialis, sed solum usque ad vires quae organis materialibus utuntur; ad intellectum autem perducitur per virtutem intellectus agentis, in quantum omnino a conditionibus materiae exiit; et sic similitudo singularitatis formae sensibilis non potest pervenire usque ad intellectum humanum.”

84 i.1259/65: *SCG* I, c.65 *in passim*.

85 Cf. Klubertanz 1952b: “St. Thomas and the Knowledge of the Singular” in *The New Scholasticism*, 26.2, 135–166, especially 166: “material individuality remains a kind of transcended limit of understanding. It is known by intellect as a determination to the here and now of sense (or the there and then of imagination), and remains in a way external to intellect. It is touched, but not assimilated.”

signate matter. It is easy to begin to treat such matter, matter combined with, determined, and actualized by a specific form, as though it is a positive thing in its own right. Because it is a principle in something actually existing, we can make the mistake of treating the matter as though a thing itself, a *res* with its own content apart from the form—as though the matter is responsible in a **positive** manner for the singularity of the individual material being. If it is not this, though—if in saying that “wood” is the matter of the “chair”, we do not mean that “wood” is a positive something apart from “chair”—what then do we mean? We explore this issue in the following chapter.⁸⁶

Here we must say only this about signate matter: namely, that it has real existence only in a composition with form; “matter” alone is nothing, and must always be considered in relation to a form in order to have an intelligibility of any sort whatsoever.

Granted this, when we “abstract” from matter, what is it that we are really pulling away from? Of what is the form truly divested? If we conceive of matter-form composite as though one thing is simply giving structure or even meaning to another, then we are doomed to be mistaken about the nature of abstraction, for, consciously or not, such a conception mischaracterizes matter and form as *res et res*. If, contrariwise, we see that “signate matter”, as the principle of potency in this or that determinately existing thing, signifies nothing other than a determinate set of potencies, then we can perceive the truth: that to abstract from matter is to grasp the “whatness” of something, found in its form, apart from the potencies which allow it to become otherwise than it actually is—which does, of course, mean that we must pull away from the material individual, which can always be otherwise than it is, and indeed, as we now know, is always in a state of some flux and change, even if not observable change. In abstracting from matter, the form grasped is divested not of anything that it actually is, but only what it might be; it is divested only of potency. We provide this interpretation of abstraction systematically in Chapter 3, where we also attend to what Thomas Aquinas means by saying that the *intellectus agens* “illuminates” the objects of its understanding.

In summary, there is great value in what Maritain has to say concerning the various degrees of communicability whereby the objects of our understanding come to be understood as and distinguished from one another in their objectivity—the distinction between the *ratio formalis objecti ut res* and *objecti ut objectum* is an invaluable one for understanding not only intellectual proceeding as a whole, but especially the grasp of *ens primum cognitum*. We can see that the realm of that which can be grasped as **object**, wherein we can

86 See 3.2.2.

make formal distinctions of kind, exceeds that whereby we may grasp things as objects formally distinct as **things**. Objectivity, in this way, can extend beyond subjectivity and the substantial constitutions of *res extra animam*. Furthermore, by distinguishing between the grasp of a formal object as belonging to a **thing** and of the formal object in its **objectivity** we can more properly see the continuity in the objects of intellection—that all being is communicable, no matter the kind of thing in which the being is found, even if that thing is actually nothing. To grasp further the value of these insights, however, we need now to turn our attention to Maritain’s interpretation and theory of concept formation, heavily influenced as it is by John Poinset.

2.2.2 *Concept Formation*

Maritain begins his discussion of knowledge with a “very concise resume in seven points of the Thomistic doctrine,”⁸⁷ which we would further adumbrate thus:

- I. A being is a knowing being to the extent that it is immaterial.
- II. Knowing is to become a thing other than the self, to be or become the other as other.
- III. Knowing is to the intellect as existing (*esse*) is to the essence.
- IV. The act of knowing is an immanent action belonging to the category of quality.
- V. The knower is the known not through an entitative mode of being, but through intentional being, *esse intentionale*.
- VI. The union of knower and known through *esse intentionale* is accomplished through the intra-psychic immaterial forms, the *species impressae* and *species expressae*, which exist in the soul as “vicars of the object”.
- VII. The *species intelligibile*, as determinate modifications of the entitative being of the knower, are prerequisite to but do not in that role constitute knowledge, which vital activity is accomplished only through the *esse intentionale* proper to them.

Thus, Maritain summarizes by saying that “knowing appears to us to be an immanent and vital operation that essentially consists, not in making, but in being; to be or become a thing... in a way other than by an existence that actuates a subject.”⁸⁸ This being or becoming of the other, in a union which,

87 Maritain 1959: DK, 112.

88 Maritain 1959: DK, 117–118.

as he notes, does not constitute a *tertium quid* in the way that union of matter and form do, but rather that the object is, according to Maritain, made present through the *species* which is a “presentative” form. This germination of knowledge constitutes only the first half, the prerequisite to knowledge being accomplished: “intellectual knowledge is accomplished thanks to a mental word or concept, a presentative form uttered by the intellect within itself, and in that form the intellect intentionally becomes... the thing taken in.. one of its intelligible determinations.”⁸⁹ To see how Maritain arrives at this conclusion, it would benefit us to examine more closely the fifth, sixth, and seventh points above.

2.2.2.1 *Esse Intentionale*

Concerning the fifth point: the phrase *esse intentionale* occurs only 9 times in the oeuvre of Thomas Aquinas; its correlative term, however, *esse spirituale*, appears 52 times. In the case of both terms, a kind of existence distinct from the entitative or natural—i.e., what exists on the basis of an essence or substantial form—is signified. Thus, although the knowing human or non-human animal subject undergoes an entitative modification, this modification does not make the knower to be the same as the known; rather, the existence is **intentional**. While it has been contested that Thomas does not use the term *intentiones*, referring to the forms present in the cogitative and intellectual powers, with any inclusion of the etymological signification of “tending-towards”,⁹⁰ it seems quite certain that the meaning of *esse intentionale* or *spirituale* quite clearly includes this sense, for it is fundamentally constituted through **relation**.⁹¹

89 Maritain 1959: DK, 118.

90 Cf. Owens 1963: *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 32n4.

91 For instance: 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.30, q.1, a.3, ad.3: “Quaedam vero quorum alterum importat relationem realem, et alterum relationem rationis tantum, sicut scientia et scibile. Et hujusmodi diversitatis ratio est, quia illud supra quod fundatur relatio, quandoque invenitur in altero tantum, et quandoque in utroque; ut patet quod relatio scientiae ad scibile fundatur supra apprehensionem secundum esse spirituale. Hoc autem esse spirituale in quo fundatur relatio scientiae, est tantum in sciente et non in scibili, quia ibi est forma rei secundum esse naturale; et ideo relatio realis est in scientia, non est in scibili.” Cf. 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.19, q.1, a.3, ad.1: “Alia quae sequitur actionem quae est per modum animae; quando scilicet species agentis recipitur in patiente secundum esse spirituale, ut intentio quaedam, secundum quem modum res habet esse in anima, sicut species lapidis recipitur in pupilla; et talis passio semper est ad perfectionem patientis”; 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.4, d.44, q.2, a.1, qc.3, c.: “Alio modo immutatione spirituali, quando recipitur qualitas sensibilis in instrumento secundum esse spirituale, idest species sive intentio qualitatis, et non ipsa qualitas; sicut pupilla recipit speciem albedinis, et tamen ipsa non efficitur

We will see this more clearly a little below, in dealing with Maritain's consideration of the sign. Meanwhile, it is most important to note that here there is a distinction between the entitative existence of the received form whereby it is a modification of the subject, and the intentional existence whereby it unites the knower to the known suprasubjectively.

Maritain now turns his attention, in the sixth point, to the term *species*, as what designates these immaterial forms existing in the soul which accomplish this union of knower and known. Noting that there is no equivalent in modern languages, he states that the "most suitable expression to render [*species*] would be presentative or objectifying form";⁹² with a footnote adding that "presentative form" is preferable, given that it is understood to be what "makes present" rather than "presenting". Such presentative forms exist first in sensation, where they are initially impressed, and later expressed:⁹³

In the case of sensitive knowledge, the external sense, which is in a state of vital tension and has only "to open up" in order to know... receives from the thing... a *species impressa*, a presentative form impressed upon it—let us say a "received presentative form"—thanks to which it is specified as though by a seed that has entered into its very depths. The sense, having thus intentionally become the sensible thing in initial or "first" act (for the sense and the sensible thing are then but one and the same principle of operation), becomes it in terminal or "second" act in its immanent action itself, and exercises one and the same act with the sensed thing—not without at the same time producing an image of that sensed thing, a *species expressa* of the sensible order, in the imagination and memory.

Consequent to this formation of the *species expressa sensibilis*, Maritain states that there is in "the intellect an active light", the *intellectus agens*, which "specifies the intellect with the help of a *species impressa*, a 'presentative form' abstracted from the sensible and 'received' by [the intellect]. Then the intellect is in initial or first act."⁹⁴ This *species impressa* is said to be a "fertilizing seed",

alba"; 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.78, a.3, c.: "Spiritualis autem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato secundum esse spirituale; ut forma coloris in pupilla, quae non fit per hoc colorata. Ad operationem autem sensus requiritur immutatio spiritualis, per quam intentio formae sensibilis fiat in organo sensus."

92 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 115.

93 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 116.

94 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 116.

a principle of the act of knowing, but it is not the act of knowing itself. Rather, it actuates the *intellectus possibilis* only partially towards this act; it gives to it the first means, as it were, the specification for knowing, but requires the further production “within itself [of] a *species expressa* of the intelligible order, an ‘elaborated’ or ‘uttered’ ‘presentative form’ in which it brings the object to the highest level of actuality and intelligible formation”, such that the intellect “becomes the object in final act”.⁹⁵ We will return to this twofold notion of the presentative (specificative or specifying) form momentarily.

Meanwhile, let us note that Maritain sharply distinguishes, in the seventh point, between the function of the entitative modification by the presentative forms or *species* as being merely “prerequisite conditions for knowledge”, and that as “means of knowing, presentative forms are purely and formally vicars of the object, pure likenesses of the object”. The first function is the determination of an accident to a subject; the second is a determination “according to a wholly immaterial and suprasubjective union in virtue of which one becomes the other intentionally, first in initial act and then in second act through its vital operation.”⁹⁶ The intentional determination goes out over and above what is in the knowing subject; even if it does not reach actually to some other subject, it is not confined within the entitative being whereby the cognitive agent is itself constituted and always extends out towards some object as “other” than the knowing subject. The suprasubjectivity of the intentional function of *species expressa* is a curiosity wrought by the fact that such *species* are constituted in this functionality precisely because they are signs, and especially by the fact that they are **formal signs**. A sign, in general, is something which is “constituted as such by the typical relationship of notification of another thing in virtue of being a substitute or a vicar for this other thing”.⁹⁷ In other words, something is a sign not in virtue solely of its own intrinsic principles or subjective constitution—of its own proper nature or entitative mode of existence—but rather on account of that relationship whereby it makes “known” to one thing something other than itself, or makes itself and its consequences in some way or another present to the other. Thus, signification is not limited to intellectual human knowledge, but extends throughout animal cognition, the interactions of plants, and even of purely inorganic beings as well. Sign-relations pervade the universe.

95 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 117.

96 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 117.

97 Maritain 1941: “Sign and Symbol” (originally published in 1934 but edited for inclusion in *Ransoming the Time*), 218.

Maritain goes even further with this notion of a sign as constituted by relation: “Taken precisely as such, this relationship does not belong to the class of transcendental relationships (*relatio secundum dici*), but to that of relationship as a special entity (*relatio secundum esse*).”⁹⁸ Thus, the being of a sign, as a sign, is properly on account not of any principle belonging to the order of substantiality, of *esse in*, but rather by *esse ad*, by relation.

2.2.2.2 *Quo and in quo*

With the relationally-constituted existence of the sign kept in the spotlight of our minds, let us return to Maritain’s mention of the *species expressa*—that is, the concept, a formal sign⁹⁹ “whose whole essence is to signify”¹⁰⁰—as an “elaborated” or “uttered” presentative form. In what does the distinction between the *species impressa* and the *species expressa* consist? What does it mean to say that each is a “presentative form”, but the former one which is “received” and the latter one which is “elaborated” or “uttered”? Here, we turn our attention to a major point Maritain is keen to make concerning the nature of the concept, a point common among Thomists of the 20th century: namely,

98 Maritain 1941: “Sign and Symbol”, 218. I deal at length with the distinction between *relatio secundum dici* and *relatio secundum esse* below in 5.1. Cf. John Poinsett 1632b: *TDS*, 116–134 (R.1 646a9–655b7), *in passim*.

99 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 121: “[a formal sign] is not known by ‘appearing’ as an object but by ‘disappearing’ in face of the object, for its very essence is to bear the mind to something other than itself... All that we have established up to this point enables us to understand that the *species expressae*, or the elaborated presentative forms which intervene in knowing, are formal signs, not instrumental signs. A remembrance, or presentative form retained in memory and used by the memory *hic et nunc* is not *that which* is known when we remember. It is the *means* by which we know. And what we know by that means is the past itself, the thing or event woven into the web of our past. The concept or mental word is not *that which* is known when our intellect is at work; it is the *means* whereby intellection takes place. And what we know by that means is the very nature or intelligible determination of an actually or possibly existing thing.”

Ibid 119–120: “presentative forms, concepts in particular, are pure means of knowing; scholastics called them *objectum quo*, mental objects *by which* knowledge takes place. What is known through these immaterial *species*, they called *objectum quod*, the object *which* is known.”

“...while existing in two different states (1° in the concept, in a state of abstraction and universality which allows it to be handled, divided, compared by the mind, and to enter into the concatenations of discourse; 2° in the thing, in a state of individuality and concreteness), nevertheless the *object* and the *thing* do not constitute two known terms, two *quod*’s, but only one. One and the same term of knowledge, one and the same *quod*, exists for itself as a thing, and is attained by the mind as object.”

100 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 119.

that the concept and that which is known by the concept are not each distinct *quods*—that is, each is not a distinct “that which”, such that the concept is something in the mind which is the direct object of understanding, one *quod*, and representationally, in the same mode as a picture, of the thing outside the mind, another *quod*—but rather that the concept is a *quo*, a “that by which” or a means which operates to make known something other than itself. In other words, Maritain states that concepts are a specific instance of “mental forms whose *entire essence* is to convey meaning (to signify).”¹⁰¹ What does it mean to say that a concept is a formal sign? To be a *quo*, according to Maritain, is to be a pure means. Other signs, words or images for instance, may function as a *quo* but are in some way, prior to their function of signification, *quods*—they must be understood in themselves first, and only secondarily is their signification realized; they are means, but not **pure** means. The *quo* on the other hand, Maritain claims, is a pure means in one of two ways. It can:¹⁰²

either be understood in general, in the sense of a *pure means* (and then the concept is a *quo* just as the *species impressa* is), or in particular, in the sense of a means by which (as from a *principle*) the act of intellection is produced (and then the word only suits the *species impressa*, whereas the concept is *in quo*, a means in which, as in its *term*, the act of intellection is completed).¹⁰³

Both the *species impressa*, the determination of a cognitive power, and the *species expressa*, which provenates a relation, are *quo*, but not in precisely in the same way. To be a pure means or a *quo* is not necessarily to be a formal sign, but could entail merely being the principle or incipient stage whereby a formal sign comes into being, as is the case with the *species impressae*, which are “part of the preconscious equipment of knowledge”.¹⁰⁴ Maritain sees, between the terms *quo* and *in quo*, a distinction whereby the former refers merely to being

101 Maritain 1941: “Sign and Symbol”, 223.

102 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 393n2.

103 It is unfortunate that Maritain came so close to grasping the significance of the distinction between *quo* and *in quo* but never quite crossed the threshold. The work has been further carried on, from the dyadic division of *quod* and *quo* to a full triadic distinction in Deely 2007/8: “The *Quo/Quod* Fallacy in the Discussion of Realism”.

104 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 120n3. The preceding comments of the footnote are worth considering as well: “Received presentative forms (*species impressae*) are not called formal signs by the scholastics because they are at the beginning, not at the end, of the act of knowing and, hence, are not themselves known (*in actu exercito*) by the same knowledge that grasps the object.”

a pure means, and thus stands indifferent to the manner in which something is a means, and the latter refers specifically to the term of the process whereby knowledge is attained. The concept, the “elaborated presentative form” is the term, the *species expressa*, the *in quo*.¹⁰⁵ This *in quo* is a “means in which”—in other words, the concept is that in which the object is known, and by this term, *in quo*, is signified the simultaneity of “the concept signifying and the object signified”¹⁰⁶ united in the act of understanding.

While Maritain tries to see no problem in applying the term *quo* to that of the concept, as a generic term, he does note a greater precision to the being of a concept, or that a more precise signification can be given to the concept than what is connoted by *quo* alone. It is an unfortunate reality that, having seen something of a distinction between the *species impressa* as an incipient *quo* and the *species expressa* as a terminal *in quo*, Maritain did not further investigate, in writing at least, the nature of this distinction. For, while it is true that the concept alone is the formal sign whereby knowledge is accomplished, it is not enough to merely speak with greater specificity of the *species expressa* as a means “in which”, as opposed to the generic notion of a “pure means”, a *quo*; nor is it sufficient to distinguish concept by *quo*, said either generically or specifically as *in quo*, and the object by *quod* as, respectively, the “means by which” or “in which” and “that which”,¹⁰⁷ for, while this is certainly true, it does

105 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 393: “The concept is not a pure means in the sense of a principle or fertilizing seed, like the presentative form which is received (*species impressa*); it is a pure means as *term* or fruit (*species expressa*, presentative form which is uttered). But since this produced term—term *quod* in respect to intellection as productive—is a pure means in respect to intellection as intellection, it does not arrest in itself the intellection which fulfills itself in it. By the fact that understanding is completed in it as in a *quo* which makes known, by that very fact is understanding achieved in the object as in the *quod* which is known. Whence we have the expression *in quo*, an expression which in no way destroys or diminishes the force of the word *quo* as applied to the concept, but only makes it more precise, and signifies that the act of understanding indivisibly includes, at once and by the same token, both the concept signifying and the object signified.”

106 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 393.

107 Cf. Deely 2007: *IS*, 56–71. To quote just a part, 71: “Whence to insist simply that the expression ‘in quo’ in no way ‘destroys or diminishes the force of the word ‘quo’” is to miss a crucial point and to beg the question. For the *quo* as *species impressa* simply conveys iconically the otherness of its source, whereas the *in quo* normally and necessarily (by virtue of its function to engender a *perception* and not merely to duplicate a *sensation*) adds to that iconicity ‘relations of reason’ (*entia rationis*), whether only materially (as in the perception of brute animals rendering the cognized environment meaningful *for them*) or also formally (as in the intellection of rational animals rendering the perceived environment something able to be understood in terms of being, both *reale* and *rationis*).

not fully explicate the distinction between the form impressed upon the intellect, the inception of the concept, and the form expressed by the intellect after the formation of the concept, the *verbum mentis*, *species expressa*, or concept properly speaking.¹⁰⁸ Maritain was well aware that the two were different, as he clearly states here:¹⁰⁹

the conceptual task is highly complicated and slow moving... it proceeds from the indeterminate and generic to the determined... it admits of a large measure of construction and artifice... it makes us take very indirect or 'confused or partial or derivative or negative' views of things, and finally... it runs the risk of error in proportion as it advances—not only from the fact of judgment and reasoning but from the fact of abstractive perception as well, because when our intellect is already busied with forms, the new concepts it engenders (whose formation no longer depends on the thing alone, but on objects already possessed and in virtue of which the new object is placed before the mind) can be formed awry.

Maritain adds that the “word itself is not perfect within us at the first stroke; on the contrary, it is constantly taken up once more, elaborated step by step and matured in the course of discursive activity.”¹¹⁰ In other words, between the

And it is as *terminus* of the relations *founded in* (provenating from) the *species expressae* that the object perceived exists, which includes but does not reduce to the relations of the environmental source which provenate from the *species impressae* as sensory stimulus.” For a fuller account, see Deely 2007/8: “The *Quo/Quod* Fallacy in the Discussion of Realism”.

108 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 389n4: “it seems that St. Thomas was much more concerned with the relation between the *extramental thing* and the presentative form [Maritain's term for the *species impressa*] thanks to which it is made object than with the relation between the presentative form and the *object* itself taken as such. That is why, as we will see later, it often happens that he deals with the concept not by distinguishing between *mental concept* and *objective concept*, but rather by speaking of it, at one time, in the sense of mental concept (*intentio intellecta* could then be translated as “the mental aim”) and, at another time, in the sense of objective concept (*intentio intellecta* could then be translated as “the object aimed at mentally”). This is to say, he speaks of the concept by thinking of the mental concept not precisely as *species* but from the point of view of the *object* it presents to the mind.”

109 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 127.

110 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 125n2: “Once the intellect is actuated into first act by the *species impressa*, it is a sufficient principle of its own operation. That is why Aristotle and St. Thomas call intellectual action *actus perfecti*, the act of a thing that is already in act... The actuating of the intellect, insofar as the object is not formed in the word, still remains imperfect

impression of the presentative form or *species impressa* and the formation of the *verbum mentis* or concept proper, there is a discursive process—the word, the concept, is not something statically produced and preserved, but it emerges as a living and dynamic product, capable of constant and continual revision and deepening. The *species expressa* is an **elaborated** presentative form; this elaboration results in “the complex products fashioned by the intellect, for instance, definition and division (which have to do with the mind’s first operation) and proposition (which has to do with the second).”¹¹¹ What is contained in or signified by the *verbum mentis* is not always exactly the same—the child who forms a *species expressa* of a cow contains less specificity in it than the expert in bovine husbandry. As we will see later on,¹¹² no particular concept is purely simple; each involves some measure of composition and division, of definition or elaboration.

Yet, while he posits a discursive process of concept formation, clearly distinguishing the content of the *species expressa* from that of the *species impressa*—one might even say the entitative structure of the concept, itself a *quod* produced within the intellect, which in turn specifies the *quod* that it makes an object of the act of understanding—such that the mental composition of the concept makes it to be something properly “ours”, Maritain, in his alacrity for overcoming the quagmire of modernist epistemology, claims an identity of the concept and the formal object inasmuch as it belongs to the subjective constitution of the extramental thing. As he says, “the concept is therefore [identical] with the object—not, certainly, as if it were *that which* is known: that is not what I mean; rather I mean precisely this: it is identical insofar as it is the inner sign and term *by which* the intellect becomes, in ultimate act, what it knows.”¹¹³ Even more strongly, he states:¹¹⁴

the form that the intellect, once it has been placed in first act by the *species impressa*, engenders within itself, under the uninterrupted irradiation of

on the side of its term, and that is why this *processus de actu in actum*, which is ‘perfect’ as regards its principle of intellection and as the *species impressa* has formed and actuated the intellect, at the same time constitutes a *fieri* for understanding wherein, in the very instant it takes place, it *perfects* the actuating of the intellect, as regards its term, by producing the word and forming the object in it. Moreover, the word itself is not perfect within us at the first stroke; on the contrary, it is constantly taken up once more, elaborated step by step and matured in the course of discursive activity.”

111 Maritain 1959: DK, 395.

112 4.2.

113 Maritain 1959: DK, 124.

114 Maritain 1959: DK, 127.

the agent intellect, is truly, as we have said, the object's pure likeness, spiritually on fire, or rather the object itself now made spirit and *intentionally* present (not as object but as sign): because its entire specification comes from the object. The intellect that illumines and the intellect that knows are by themselves equally undetermined. Thus, the concept (in its intentional role) and object are indistinguishable, save that one makes known and the other is known, one is sign and the other is signified, one exists only in the mind and the other exists at the same time in the mind and in the thing.

While it is certainly true that there is a genuine sameness between the *species impressa* out of which any concept is formed and the formal object, as *terminus* of the act of understanding, yet, because the concept is discursively formed, there exists the possibility of a non-identification between the concept and the formal object **as it exists in the thing**. In other words, the concept may include some specification which is **not from the thing**, as it exists according to its own subjective constitution. Note that we are not simply referring to the false or pseudo-concepts which involve some falsity entailed in contradictory elements of a definition (of which Maritain was well aware¹¹⁵), though the method of elaboration—the composition or division which belongs to concept formation discussed below—is the same in these “pseudo-concepts” as it is in the true concepts.

Even more poignant for our own largely-social world: it must be understood that some aspect of the formal object signified by a concept may be contingent upon the recognition of it by minds, independently of the subjective constitution of the thing.¹¹⁶ Part of such an object made known through a concept is not present in or part of the thing itself. For instance, when we say that a human being is a “judge”, as the magistrate in a court of law, what does this mean? Clearly, someone who is a judge is supposed to be proximately capable of rendering good judgment concerning the application of the law, and the accomplishment of this is the end towards which he is ordered *qua* judge; such are qualities giving rise to action and passion, and therefore within the substantial order. However, to be a judge, as an official either elected or appointed,

115 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 128: “Undoubtedly, they always present to the mind some aspect of the real—or some being of reason based on the real—when they are not pseudo-concepts giving the mind a complex of contradictory elements (such as the greatest whole number or the most perfect world); yet they may be capable of being cut up or recast in such arbitrary fashion that the gain will be very slight, if not illusory.”

116 See c.4 below on the discursive process of concept formation.

is not just to be one who judges well, but one who is recognized as having the authority to pronounce judgments by the government, and thus civilly-constituted, and always to some extent made a judge by the consent of the general populace of the governed. In other words, the “judgeness” of the judge, as an office, although ideally based in some way upon the individual’s qualities of sound judgment, cannot be found in the subjective constitution or activity of the judge himself, but rather in the **objective constitution** given him through the way in which others consider him. We accordingly prohibit those who have not been officially recognized in certain offices, even though they may be fully qualified, from performing the duties of that office. Such objective constitutions will always have a measure of conventionality in their being; failing to accord for what it is within them that is conventional and what is in some way in accord with nature can only lead to social and likely ethical disasters.¹¹⁷

It appears that such objective constitution is left out of Maritain’s account from the fact that he takes “ens reale” to be “the direct object of the intellect”, which is exhaustively divided into “something which exists or can exist for itself (a thing as thing)” and “something that exists or can exist for the mind—something attained by it and made present to it (thing as object)”.¹¹⁸ This limitation of the concept to be directly of only *ens reale*—a term not once used by St. Thomas himself—ignores the very complexity of concept formation which Maritain insightfully acknowledges, the fact that the mental composition whereby we elaborate upon the presentative forms of knowledge is properly ours. It is certainly true that every thing of which we can have a concept requires first that we know some positive thing, that all knowledge begins with the experience of something given to us on account of the subjective constitution of a thing through corporeal interaction with our bodies; but we also have the ability to know relations and negations—and even the negations are a kind of relation formed by the conceptual denial of some positive aspect of being, as blindness is formed by negating the concept of vision, which the concepts

117 Take, for instance, the issue of gender roles. Clearly, some of the functions traditionally fulfilled by men and women throughout history, despite their long endurance, are nonetheless conventional; they are not based upon any subjective distinctions proper to the different genders.

118 Maritain 1959: DK, 392: “I. *Ens reale*, the direct object of the intellect, does not imply actual existence. It is that which exists or *can exist* outside the mind, in the ‘thing’ (actual or possible).

“II. This *thing* can be considered either as something which exists or can exist for itself (a thing as thing), or as something that exists or can exist for the mind—something attained by it and made present to it (thing as object).

“III. The *object* is one with the thing and differs from it only by a virtual distinction of reason.”

of, though formed through a patterning based upon the experience of things, are not reducible to those things after which they are patterned.

Maritain grazes against the proper articulation of this complexity in concept formation as being open to not only the world outside our minds, but also to those things constituted both through our own objective thinking and the intersubjectivity of social construction, those *entia rationis* found not in logic but in our diurnal human experience. Yet, concerned with repudiating idealism, he returns again and again to insist upon a “realist” point of view, as though there is no third way; as though the dichotomy between realism and idealism is absolute and exhaustive. We see this emphasis upon the so-called real, an emphasis which we believe is an overreaction exclusionary to an important facet of human understanding, whenever Maritain speaks of the being which is first known by the intellect. It is to Maritain’s texts on this question that we now turn.

2.2.3 *Maritain on Ens Primum Cognitum*

Maritain’s conception of *ens primum cognitum*, given a similar historical and intellectual context, differs somewhat from that of Gilson, but occupies the same anti-idealist assumption of a metaphysical realism. To begin with where they differ: Maritain **does** make a clear distinction between the vague being of *ens ut primum cognitum* from the scientifically-separated being of *ens in quantum ens*, the subject of metaphysics:¹¹⁹

[Vague being] is not... the element common to all these things, disengaged from them, *extricated* in its purity. Nor yet is it diversity in its pure state, that is to say the manifold of diverse essences and diverse sensible quiddities. It is at the same time the particular quiddity and being in general. It is being as enveloped, embodied, in the manifold of natures or essences... But we must be quite clear that this is not the object of metaphysics. If it were, a child, as soon as he begins to perceive objects intellectually, would already be a metaphysician.

When we first apprehend being, it is not as **being**; it is a grasp of the whole, but not in any way distinguished from the instances in which it is found. Rather, it is the first awakening of the intellect, the first instance in which the human being transcends, as it were, the level of cognition which he shares in common with brute animals. It is through this first confused apprehension of being that the first principles of reasoning are grasped “intuitively, that is immediately

119 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 18.

and without discourse”, such that *ens primum cognitum* is the “objective light of all our knowledge”.¹²⁰ In other words, just as the differentiation of light into the visible spectrum accompanies all things that we see, being as first known accompanies all things that we know intellectually.

Nevertheless, Maritain considers the two, being as first known and being as being, as intimately and inseparably related in a problematic way; namely, that the distinction between the two is not a distinction of the **object**, but only of the mode in which the object is perceived and subsequently understood. This is to say that *ens primum cognitum* is grasped through what Maritain calls extensive visualisation, or *abstractio totalis*—an intellectual grasp which is proper to the pre-philosophical, pre-scientific, common sense intellectual activity of human beings; whereas *ens in quantum ens* is the same formal object but attained through the intensive visualisation of *abstractio formalis*, whereby it attains its scientific or properly philosophical character as the subject matter of the science of metaphysics.¹²¹

The knowledge of common sense is a natural and spontaneous growth, the product so to speak of rational instincts and has not yet attained the level of science... It possesses a certain metaphysical value in as much as it attains the same objects as metaphysics attains in a different fashion. Common sense is therefore, as it were, a rough sketch of metaphysics, a vigorous and unreflective sketch drawn by the natural motion and spontaneous instincts of reason... being as such is apprehended blindly at this level, in a sign, an object of thought, which is, as it were, a *surrogate* and a *mask of being as such, ens in quantum ens....* Common sense will not explicitly conceive this being of which [the metaphysician] speaks

120 Maritain 1914: *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 127.

121 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 29–30. Cf. Vincent Edward Smith, 1950: *Philosophical Physics*, 20–21: “Genuine philosophy discerns two notions of being. The first is the view of the ordinary man who, even though not formally a metaphysician, has a spontaneous conviction that being is. It is this idea which, at least in implied form, appears in the first concept of the mind, as will be presently shown. It is vague, confused, unconsciously accepted not only for itself but in the principles which it immediately exhibits. The other notion of being is that of the metaphysician. This is a refined, reflex, scientific notion of being, explicitly recognized as being and rigorously defended as to its reality and its principles. In these two notions of being, one is simply a refinement of the other. For the average man thinks about the same world as the profoundest of metaphysicians. The metaphysician, however, has a reflex and scientific knowledge of the subject, probing it deeper and wider by the hard steel of proof.”

otherwise than as the object of what Thomists call *abstractio totalis*, an abstraction which is pre-scientific and infra-scientific.

This notion of the common-sense knowledge of *ens* as a “rough sketch of metaphysics” is not without merit; for indeed, as the objective light of all our understanding, there is a universality to the potential objects realized on the foundational insight whereby *ens primum cognitum* is grasped that can be matched in actuality only by objects of an equal universality—such as, for instance, the infinite actuality of God. It does seem, indeed, to signify an openness natural to the human being’s intellect to the infinite.

The distinction between the first grasp of being and the metaphysical grasp as merely due to different kinds of visualization, however, remains problematic. We can make this clearer by looking at another text:¹²²

As the first object grasped by the intellect, it is clear that being is not known in the mirror of some other previously known object... There is, therefore, an intellectual perception of being which, being involved in every act of our intelligence, in fact rules all our thought from the very beginning. And when this is disengaged for itself by the abstraction of the trans-sensible, it constitutes our primordial philosophical intuition without which we can no more acquire the science of metaphysical realities than a man born blind acquires the science of colours. In this metaphysical intuition the principle of identity: “being is not non-being”, “every being is what it is”, is not known merely *in actu exercito* and as an inescapable necessity for thought. Its ontological necessity is itself seen.

Here we see that the principles grasped confusedly and without articulation in being as first known are, in the metaphysical grasp, understood clearly and precisely, not merely as principles of thought, but as principles of the subjective constitution of *entia reales*. This relation of *ens ut primum cognitum* and *ens inquantum ens*, of course, raises the question as to whether or not *ens inquantum ens* as the subject matter of metaphysics in any way includes *entia rationis* within its grasp—that is, whether or not metaphysics is exclusively concerned with *ens* in the order of its subjective constitution, including *relationes reales*. Considering that Maritain follows Thomas in stating only that *entia rationis*

122 Maritain 1959: DK, 214–215.

constitute the subject matter of logic,¹²³ the question does not here apply,¹²⁴ rather, the only *ens* considered in metaphysics by Maritain is that which exists in the order of subjective constitution, *ens reale* (emphasis added):¹²⁵

Being, disengaged as such by *abstractio formalis*, being, with its transcendental properties and the cleavages it presents throughout the whole extent of **things**, constitutes the proper object of metaphysics... The object of metaphysics is... an entirely other world, the world of the superuniversal, the world of transcendental objects which, disengaged as such, do not demand, as genera do, to be completed by progressive differentiations coming as from outside, but offer a field of intelligibility which has in itself its own ultimate determinations. And those objects can be realized outside the mind in individual subjects which do not fall under the senses and so are outside the whole order of the genera and differentiations of the world of experience.

We must remember that, used in a technical sense, the term “thing” for Maritain denotes the being of what is cognition-independent.¹²⁶ Thus, we find a conflict present within Maritain’s own work; as noted above, even that which is not a thing at all, the nothing of pure possibility, is something which can still be thought. And as Maritain noted, being as first known is “an intellectual perception... which, being involved in every act of our intelligence, in fact rules all our thought from the very beginning”.¹²⁷

If the proper object of metaphysics is that aspect present within the subjective constitution of things, superuniversal and indifferent as to its instantiation or realization in sensible or supersensible being,¹²⁸ and the object of both

123 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.4, n.574; Maritain 1923: *Formal Logic*, 19–21; 1934: *PM*, 33–36.

124 See 6.2 below for my own brief treatment of the question. Suffice it to say, for now, that the question is not directly or entirely clear in Thomas himself, particularly given some of the statements he makes at the beginning of *De ente et essentia*, the disputable meaning of *res* in his lexicon, and the convertibility of *ens* and *verum* as transcendentals, and in what sense *ens* is said analogically.

125 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 217.

126 See above, n51 (Maritain 1959: *DK*, 91, 94.).

127 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 214. See n.122 above for full citation.

128 Cf. Maritain 1959: *DK*, 214: “‘Superuniversal’ or ‘polyvalent’, a transcendental object of concept is *unum in multis* only as a variable enveloping an actual multiplicity, and realized in several without thereby positing a community of essence among them. It is not analogous after the fashion of an originally univocal concept that a metaphor attributes afterwards, but in an extrinsic and improper way, to other transobjective subjects than those in which

the vague grasp and the metaphysical grasp is one and the same being, then, by default, Maritain sees in being as the first and formal object of the intellect nothing other than *ens reale*, *ens* as the subject matter of metaphysics, only unscientifically and vaguely apprehended;¹²⁹ “The first intelligible ‘formality’ by which that which is becomes object, and which is attained in the concept of being, imbues everything real, is capable of everything that is”.¹³⁰

It is quite probable that Maritain did not see the consequences of the assumption that *ens ut primum cognitum* is the so-called *ens reale* of being existing outside of the mind in the order of subjective constitution. Indeed, the question of *ens ut primum cognitum* inasmuch as it is briefly presented within Maritain’s work entirely passes over the role of *entia rationis*, hemmed-in as it is by the presumed dichotomy between realism and idealism. Although he correctly asserts that “Being is the formal object of the intellect”, such that

it was first grasped. It belongs intrinsically and properly to all the subjects to which it is attributable because it is analogous from the very start and by its essence. From the first instant in which it is grasped by the mind in a subject, it bears within itself the possibility of being realized according to its proper significance (*formaliter*, the scholastics would say) in subjects which by their essence differ totally and absolutely from that one.

“Such objects are trans-sensible. For, though they are realized in the sensible in which we first grasp them, they are offered to the mind as transcending every genus and every category, and as able to be realized in subjects of a wholly other essence than those in which they are apprehended. It is extremely remarkable that being, the first object attained by our mind in things—which cannot deceive us since being the first, it cannot involve any construction effected by the mind, nor, therefore, the possibility of faulty composition—bears within itself the sign that beings of another order than the sensible are thinkable and possible.”

129 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 29: “The knowledge of common sense is a natural and spontaneous growth, the product so to speak of rational instincts and has not yet attained the level of science... It possesses a certain metaphysical value in as much as it attains the same objects as metaphysics attains in a different fashion. Common sense is therefore, as it were, a rough sketch of metaphysics, a vigorous and unreflective sketch drawn by the natural motion and spontaneous instincts of reason.”

130 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 212. Cf. 1934: *PM*, 32: “[The primordial object, the reality we call being] is simply the most general and the most convenient of the classifications which we constantly employ and in which all the objects of our thought are arranged, the most comprehensive of them. It is merely a class.

“This is true. But although common sense, when we mention being, explicitly thinks only of this most general class, nevertheless—and this second feature is as typical and as important as the first—it places in this class all the diverse objects of sense, all the varieties of being, a chaotic universe of innumerable forms, so that, if we may so put it, the comprehensive class together with the host of sensible objects which fill it, is, as it were, the practical equivalent and the surrogate of the being which is the metaphysician’s concern.”

“whatever it knows and every time it knows it attains being”,¹³¹ yet when he asks “what is the object first attained by the human intellect?” he sees no difficulty in stating that it “is being as enveloped or embodied in the sensible quiddity, being ‘clothed’ in the diverse natures apprehended by the senses, *ens concretum sensibile*”.¹³²

Thus, the first object of the intellect, which is also the intellect’s formal object, is considered by Maritain to be nothing other than a thing considered in its subjectivity—specifically, its “objectifiable” subjectivity, as contrasted to the objectifying subject, the cognitive agent (emphasis added):¹³³

We will say that just as the object is the correlative of a knowing subject, an ontological “for itself”, to which it shows itself and which, by reflecting upon its own acts of thought immediately perceives, not its own essence (as Descartes believed) but the fact of its own existence—we may call this the cisobjective subject—it is also not correlative to, but inseparable (because it is itself) from, an ontological “for itself” which precisely takes the name “object” from the fact that [it] is presented to the mind and this we may call the *objectifiable subject* or *transobjective subject*—not, certainly, because it is hidden behind the object but, on the contrary, because it is itself grasped as object and yet constitutes something irreducible in which the possibility of grasping new objects always remains open (for it can give rise to an endless series of necessary or contingent truths. The transobjective is not a field of shapeless unknowns which shrinks in proportion as new objects are grasped; it is a field of **known subjects**, and subjects interminably knowable as objects.

What Maritain evidently overlooks here is the relevance of his own distinction between the grasp of an object in the rationale of the formal object as belonging to the thing, *ratio formalis objecti ut res*, and the grasp of the object in the mode of its objectivity, *ratio formalis objecti ut objectum*; for while *ens ut primum cognitum* is, considered in terms of the “thing-from-which” or the material object, certainly derived from the sensible-real, the “transobjective subject”, it is on the other hand, if considered in its mode of objectivity, communicated not simply as the mode of reality proper to a substantial existence or as cognition-independent being. Rather, being as first known is that communication whereby **all** further objects of intellectual cognition are made capable

131 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 25.

132 Maritain 1934: *PM*, 18.

133 Maritain 1959: *DK*, 93–94.

of being grasped according to what they are in themselves, and not only what they are relative to the one cognizing. This communication is open to *entia rationis* and *entia realis* alike—objects of consideration which are equally public and equally accessible by the intellect—as well as to whatever combination of the two might come to exist.

We would further suggest that Maritain's apparent confusion about Thomas' meaning in saying "that into which the intellect resolves all conceptions, is being" relates to the problematic ambiguous conflation of *ens primum cognitum* with the transobjective subject in its subjectivity; for as he writes in his *Degrees of Knowledge*:¹³⁴

let us note that all our concepts are resolved in being which is the first object attained (*in confuso*) by intellectual apprehension. The concepts of METAPHYSICS are resolved in being as such, *ens ut sic*; those of MATHEMATICS in that sort of being (isolated within the real) which ideal quantity is; those of PHYSICS in mobile or sensible being, *ens sensibile*.

The resolution of our concepts into the being first known is not to distinct or different degrees—the resolution must result in a unity.¹³⁵ It is true that the concepts of each of the sciences are resolved into their distinctive mode of understanding being; but there must be a further resolution, one which does not efface the differences, of those distinctive subject matters into *ens ut primum cognitum*. Are not the objects of logic also being? Are they not also resolved into this one, this first object of intellectual cognition?

2.3 Conclusion

For both Maritain and Gilson, the primary concern in discussing human knowledge, including that of *ens ut primum cognitum*, is to establish its realism. In Gilson, we find an insightful and just repudiation of a critical philosophy which demands that the veracity and certitude of knowledge be established before any account can be given of how we know things extramental, but an oversimplified and unsatisfactory presentation of the operations whereby we grasp

¹³⁴ Maritain 1959: DK, 38. We would suggest *ens inquantum ens* is a better term for use than *ens ut sic*.

¹³⁵ See below, 4.1.2 for my discussion of the *via resolutionis* and the *via inventionis/compositionis*. Cf. Oliva Blanchette 2003: *The Philosophy of Being: A Reconstructive Essay in Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press), 39–41.

and form knowledge. In Maritain, we find significant elaborations, following in the tradition of John Poinset, which incorporate the Iberian's insights into the general task of overcoming idealist approaches, as well as what will prove an important distinction in later chapters between the consideration of the *ratio formali obiecti ut res* and *ut obiectum*. Nevertheless, like Gilson, his theory of knowledge fails to satisfy some of the difficulties prevalent today, namely, what it is that "abstraction" really accomplishes and how it is that socially-constructed realities are apprehended.

The invaluable work of these four Thomists—Cajetan, Poinset, Gilson, and Maritain—informs the attempt to answer these questions, and thereby unfold the full meaning of *ens ut primum cognitum*, which constitutes the following chapters.

The *Intellectus Agens* and Concept Formation

As we have seen in the previous chapters, ascertaining the nature of *ens ut primum cognitum* presents a great difficulty, rising from the tendency of all philosophical inquiry towards producing a systematic response to the idiosyncratic problems of its age. Such systematic response all too often turns into an unresponsive systemization, a calcification rendering the system incapable of change, whether that change is the adoption of a new insight from without, or a revision of its own currently-held positions.¹ That is not to say that

1 As Etienne Gilson says, 1949: *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2: “if *being* is the first principle of human knowledge, it must be the very first object to be grasped by the human mind; now, if it is, how are we to account for the fact that so many philosophers have been unable to grasp it? Nor is this all. That which comes first in the order of knowledge must of necessity accompany all our representations; now, if it does, how can *being* both be constantly present to the most common mind, yet prove so elusive that so many very great philosophers have failed to see it? If the ultimate lesson of philosophical experience is that the human mind is blind to the very light in which it is supposed to see both itself and all the rest, what it teaches us is worse than a paradox, it is an absurdity.” As Gilson spends most of the rest of his book demonstrating, starting with the wrong principles, and conforming all the rest of their philosophical inquiries to those principles, led a great number of philosophers to mistake the nature of being.

In a curious coincidence, though it may not be entirely coincidental, much the same thing was seen by Martin Heidegger throughout his career, to which he frequently gave expression. Cf. Martin Heidegger 1947: *Brief über den “Humanismus”*, 230–231: “Insofar as thinking limits itself to its task it directs man at the present moment of the world’s destiny into the primordial dimension of his historical abode. When thinking of this kind speaks the truth of Being it has entrusted itself to what is more essential than all values and all types of beings. Thinking does not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest.” 1927a: *SZ*, 4/23: “The very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again.” *Ibid.*, 21/43: “When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it ‘transmits’ is made so inaccessible, proximally and for the most part, that it rather becomes concealed.” *Ibid.*, 22/43: “when Dasein understands either itself or Being in general, it does so in terms of the ‘world’, and that the ontology which has thus arisen has lapses [verfällt] to a tradition in which it gets reduced to something self-evident—merely material for reworking, as it was for Hegel.” *Ibid.*, 35/59: “Yet that which remains *hidden* in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets *covered up* again, or which shows itself only *‘in disguise’*, is not just this entity or that, but rather the *Being* of entities, as our previous

philosophy must not be carried out systematically—any other way and it produces naught but an unintelligible effusion of disordered thought—but rather it is to say that, in order to remain true to itself, philosophical thinking cannot become a closed system. It must be, instead, rooted in principles which accept and incorporate all truth, regardless of its origin or its seeming opposition to what has been systematically developed on the basis of some temporally-situated response

More specifically, the difficulty concerning *ens primum cognitum* as it stands in Thomism today can be reduced to one specific issue—commonly subjected to a thoroughly confused attempt at a systematic response to idealism and resulting in a myriad of systemizations which differ significantly in their details—namely, the nature of the concept. For Cajetan and Poinso, the chief opposition to which they developed an attempted response was the doctrine advanced by the Scotists, who pushed for a more atomistic theory of the development and process of intellectual understanding, centralized around the claim that *ens* is first, but only first in the sense of the principle object, that is, the **end** which the intellect seeks. Much of the Scotistic argument was based upon the notion that *ens* is a concept *simplicissimus*. Thus, in Cajetan, we saw the overreaction of positing that the concept of *ens* is something analogical. In Poinso, although we find a nuanced and sophisticated theory of conceptualization, his own treatment of *ens primum cognitum* is aimed principally at refuting the same Scotistic position, and while there are many helpful insights to take from each Latin Thomist examined, neither provides the clarity about *ens primum cognitum* necessary for the systematic response needed in our own time.

For Gilson and Maritain, the opponent was not any one school of thought—not Kantians nor Cartesians, Leibnizians nor Hegelians—but the predominant tendency of idealism, and along with it, nominalism and skepticism. Gilson, though an excellent critic of modern philosophy and especially of idealism, in his efforts to provide an alternative solution, diminishes the role of cognition in the forming of being to nearly nothing, so as to provide an airtight defense against idealism. Maritain, though committed to understanding the nature of the concept in the light of Poinso's teaching, nevertheless joins Gilson in the dichotomous opposition of realism and idealism and, failing to discern the precise distinction between *species impressae* and *species expressae*, ultimately reduces *ens ut primum cognitum* to an *abstractio totalis* of *ens reale*.

observations have shown. This Being can be covered up so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no question arises about it or its meaning.”

What follows, in this and subsequent chapters, is an attempt to provide a perspective which avoids the danger of interpreting St. Thomas and his followers—Cajetan and Poinsoot, Gilson and Maritain—in such a way as to ossify our understanding of *ens primum cognitum*. Nevertheless, our concern is prompted by a particular problem in our own day, namely, the nature and status of socially-constituted reality. While this is not a dissertation about such reality, it is nevertheless attempting to get at the roots of a coherent theory of knowledge, so that the continuity of rightly-ordered socially-constituted reality with cognition-independent, “natural” reality can be grasped.

We therefore take as guideposts two extreme and opposed errors: one is to posit cognition-dependent beings as in some or in all cases as **purely** fictive results of the human mind’s activity, produced apart from any relation to what is cognition-independent. The other is to deny any contribution of the cognitive faculties to what is grasped within *ens ut primum cognitum* which is not immediately derived from the realm of independent being, i.e., being in its subjective constitution. In other words, *ens primum cognitum* is irreducible to either order, and is therefore somehow prior to both, which can be realized when we see clearly the role which relation plays in our understanding.² Before carrying out a discussion concerning what that *ens* is, however, we need first to clarify an authentically Thomistic notion of understanding. We therefore begin, in this chapter, by (3.1) examining what we take to be the key texts of Thomas Aquinas on the *obiectum intellectus*. We will then (3.2)

2 Cf. John Deely, 1992: “Philosophy and Experience”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 66.3, 305: “One and the same relation, realized in nature on the basis of a subjective fundament or ground which is independent of cognitive activity, can *also* be realized according to what it is as a relation within cognition, regardless of whether that mind-independent fundament continues to exist or (through some other natural deficiency, such as the destruction of the terminus of the relation, for example) continues to exercise the relation in question.

“This permeability of relation as existing in nature to existing with rationale unchanged in cognition works the other way as well. Given the peculiarity of its rationale whereby relation as such is indifferent to existing in nature or in cognition, relations born in the mind can also be transferred into the physical world simply through the appropriate manipulation of the conditions of the physical environment, according to which a given relation or set of relations is no precluded and now (under rearranged conditions) emanated [sic]. The permeability is thus two-way: of a mind to nature and of nature to mind. Nevertheless, the membrane of the permeation is in both cases the same: relation according to its proper rationale as a suprasubjective mode of existence, always intersubjective as well when the conditions obtain which are required for the physical exercise of the relation.”

consider the incipient formation of the intellectual concept by looking first (3.2.1) at the meaning of Thomas' statement that it is an act of the *intellectus agens* to illuminate those objects; engage in a brief discursion (3.2.2) on the relationship between matter and form; and conclude this chapter by (3.2.3) examining the meaning of the act called "abstraction". In Chapter 4, we will discuss the elaboration of the concept proper. In Chapter 5 we will consider the nature of relation as within the scope of understanding. Then, in Chapter 6 we will provide a concluding consideration as to the true nature of *ens primum cognitum*.

3.1 St. Thomas and the *Obiectum Intellectus*

Many texts in the corpus of St. Thomas seem to be at odds with one another in regards to the object of the intellect. At different times, he calls this object (3.1.1) *ens*, *ens ut verum*, or *ens intelligibile*, (3.1.2) *quod quid est* or *quod quid erat esse*, (3.1.3) and the *quidditas rei* or *quidditas rei materialis*. What do these terms signify? Is the object the same in each case, or somehow differentiated? If differentiated, is this on the part of the object itself or is it somehow based upon the one knowing? Given the oft-stated principle that "the received is in the receiver according to the mode of the receiver",³ it would seem, if these terms signify intellectual objects either univocally or analogically and not equivocally, that any differentiation of the object, and hence any difference in the terms used to signify that object, would be according to the mode in which the intellect apprehends. In order, therefore, to clearly discern both the nature of the object in itself and the differentiation of its mode of apprehension, let us examine some of the most important of these texts.

3.1.1 *Ens, Ens ut Verum, and Ens Intelligibile*

These three terms seem to be closely related in the ways that they are used. Oftentimes, they signify an indifference of the kind of intellect knowing them: that is, *ens*, *ens ut verum*, and *ens intelligibile* are known by human, angelic, and the Divine intellect alike, or at least as alike to one another as they can be said to be. The second term, however, *ens ut verum*, appears most frequently in those places where Thomas distinguishes the object of the speculative

3 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.79, a.6, c.; q.84, a.1, c.; 1273: IIIa, q.54, a.2, ad.1; i.1256–59: *DV* q.2, a.2, ad.5; q.20, a.4, ad.1, etc.

intellect from the practical.⁴ Less frequently does he state that *verum* is the *proprium obiectum intellectus*.⁵

As the object of the intellect, the term *ens*, without any qualification, appears most frequently in the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. One might be tempted to think, since in later works—namely, the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*—Thomas more frequently references *quod quid est* or *quidditas rei* as the *obiectum intellectus*, that Thomas develops out of holding *ens* to be the *obiectum intellectus* in his more mature thought. Such an interpretation, however, we will show, would be grossly violent to the textual evidence. Let us begin by examining one of the more famous texts from *De veritate*, question 1, article 1:⁶

That which the intellect first conceives as most well-known, and that into which the intellect resolves all conceptions, is being [*ens*], as Avicenna says in the beginning of his *Metaphysics*. Whence it is necessary that all other conceptions of the intellect are grasped from an addition to being [*ens*].

There are four key points here of which we must take note: (1) *ens* is that which is first conceived; (2) *ens* is conceived *quasi notissimum*, as that which is most knowable; (3) *ens* is that into which the intellect resolves all conceptions; and (4) all other concepts are in some way or another an addition to *ens*. We will return to the first point later.⁷ For now, let us be content with a provisional understanding of conceiving as the fundamental process whereby intellectual understanding is actually attained, and thus ask: what does it mean to say that *ens* is conceived *quasi notissimum*, as “most knowable”? Things are graded in their “knowability” in two ways: first according to how they are constituted in

4 Note that “*ens ut verum*” is not the exact phrase which Thomas uses, but given the convertibility of *ens* and *verum*, there seems to be little worth in disputing that the phrase accurately represents his meaning in the following passages: 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.25, q.1, a.2, c.; *ibid.*, d.39, q.1, a.2; 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.17, q.1, a.1, qc.3, ad.3.; 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.59, a.2, ad.2 and ad.3; q.79, a.11, ad.2. Thomas also frequently refers to the true as the good of the intellect, i.e., its proper and perfective object; cf. 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.23, q.2, a.3, qc.3, c.; i.1259/65: *SCG III* c.118, n.5; 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.16, a.2, c.; 1271: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.57, a.2, ad.3. These lists do not aim at being exhaustive, but at being sufficiently illustrative.

5 i.1259/65: *SCG III* c.107, n.9; 1271: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.3, a.7, c.

6 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.1, a.1, c.: “Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens, ut Avicenna dicit in principio suae metaphysicae. Unde oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens.”

7 See 4.2.1.

themselves (*quoad se*), as by a degree of actuality, and second according to how they are accessible to the one knowing, specifically to human beings (*quoad nos*). Clearly, the *ens* which is first conceived by the intellect could not be that which is *notissimum quoad se*, for this is God Himself.⁸ Thus, as that which is *notissimum quoad nos*, the being which is first conceived must be in some way rightly proportioned to the mode and order through which the human intellect comes to possess knowledge. Furthermore, since *ens concipitur quasi notissimum quoad nos* is also that into which all other concepts are resolved, it must have a kind of openness to every possible object of intellectual consideration, such that it can be a “ground” of that resolution.

But what does it mean, in this instance, “to resolve”? The *via resolutionis*, Thomas states, is that process whereby reasoning terminates in understanding “insofar as reason assembles one, simple truth from a multitude”. This is contrasted to the *via compositionis vel inventionis*, in which the intellectual understanding is a principle for reasoning “insofar as the intellect comprehends a multitude in one”.⁹ All other concepts, therefore, are resolved into being as that one, simple truth which comprises them all, as that which can be said of all other things. Conversely, other texts of St. Thomas¹⁰ show us that this intellectual concept of being is in turn that on the basis of which all other things are understood, as the *unum* in which a multitude is comprehended.

We find this converse relation of the notion of being to all other things, the *via compositionis*, where Thomas writes that “a certain order is found in all things which fall into the apprehension. For that which first falls into the apprehension is being, which the intellect includes in everything whatsoever which it apprehends”.¹¹ Thus, when other concepts are grasped as from some addition to being, this “addition” is not as something from outside, but as “expressing

8 E.g., i.1256–59: *DV*, q.18, a.1; 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.2, a.1; q.88, a.3; cf. 1267/8: *Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristoteles*, lib.1, lec.1, n.7.

9 c.1261: *Expositio super de librum Boethii De Trinitate* (hereafter, “*In de Trin.*”) pars.3, q.6, a.1, c.22: “Sic ergo patet quod rationalis consideratio ad intellectualem terminatur secundum viam resolutionis, in quantum ratio ex multis colligit unam et simplicem veritatem. Et rursum intellectualis consideratio est principium rationalis secundum viam compositionis vel inventionis, in quantum intellectus in uno multitudinem comprehendit. Illa ergo consideratio, quae est terminus totius humanae ratiocinationis, maxime est intellectualis consideratio.” Cf. Aertsen 1988: *Nature and Creature*: 254–255.

10 Such as 1271: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.94, a.2, referenced below in n.11.

11 1271: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.94, a.2, c.: “In his autem quae in apprehensione omnium cadunt, quidam ordo invenitur. Nam illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit.” For more on the *viae resolutionis et inventionis*, see below, c.4.1.2.

a mode of that being which is not expressed by the term ‘being.’¹² Being as first known inseparably attaches to all other concepts, both as that into which they are resolved and as that on the basis of which they are understood. Other concepts are differentiated from being only by expressing a mode which is understood in a regard uncommunicated by the undifferentiated intelligibility of *ens*. This mode is either something special, that is, more specific than the universality of “being”; or something common—that is, something just as universal as “being” but which, because it produces a distinction in the mode by which the understanding relates to the object, is considered as different—but both modes fall under and are understood within the comprehension one and the same concept of *ens*.

The latter mode of addition to being, the mode of equipollent extension, the concepts of which are generally called transcendentals, adds something to the concept of being by means “of reason alone”—that is, in a manner entirely cognition-dependent. This addition, Thomas tells us, can be made in either one of two ways:¹³

Since being is that which first falls in the conception of the intellect, as Avicenna says, it is necessary that every other name be either a synonym of being—which cannot be said of “good”, since it is not uselessly redundant to call a being “good”—or that it add something at least according to cognition. Thus it is necessary that “good”, by the fact that it does not contract being, adds something to being which is entirely cognition-dependent [*rationis tantum*]. That which is entirely cognition-dependent is not able to exist except in one of two ways, namely as a negation or as some relation. Every absolute positing signifies something existing in the nature of things. Therefore, to “being”, which is the first conception of the intellect, “one” adds that which is entirely cognition-dependent, namely negation: for something is said to be “one” as “being undivided”. But “true”

12 i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1, c.: “exprimunt modum ipsius entis qui nomine entis non exprimitur.”

13 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.21, a.1, c.: “Cum autem ens sit id quod primo cadit in conceptione intellectus, ut Avicenna dicit, oportet quod omne aliud nomen vel sit synonymum enti: quod de bono dici non potest, cum non nugatorie dicatur ens bonum; vel addat aliquid ad minus secundum rationem; et sic oportet quod bonum, ex quo non contrahit ens, addat aliquid super ens, quod sit rationis tantum. Id autem quod est rationis tantum, non potest esse nisi duplex, scilicet negatio et aliqua relatio. Omnis enim positio absoluta aliquid in rerum natura existens significat. Sic ergo supra ens, quod est prima conceptio intellectus, unum addit id quod est rationis tantum, scilicet negationem: dicitur enim unum quasi ens indivisum. Sed verum et bonum positive dicuntur; unde non possunt addere nisi relationem quae sit rationis tantum.”

and “good” are said positively; for which reason they are not able to add something to “being” unless it is a relation which is entirely cognition dependent.

The transcendentals of “one”, “true”, and “good” are distinguished from that of “being” by a contribution which exists only by virtue of reason: that is, truth, unity, and goodness, as notions distinct from that of being, are cognition-dependent. That which is a cognition-dependent addition, Thomas notes, can only be either a negation (the denial of something) or a relation. “One” is said to be a negation because the intellect alone can grasp indivision in its greatest universality, that is, the various ways in which something can be undivided within itself; “division” is denied of a being according to whatever mode in which it is understood.¹⁴ “True” and “good” are, conversely, said positively—their existence as cognition-dependent beings or additions to the concept of “being”, constituted entirely by the activity of the human intellect, is in the mode of a *relatio rationis*. A relation is:¹⁵

found to be entirely cognition-dependent according to that which is said to be referred, which does not depend on that to which it is referred, but vice versa, since that relation is a certain dependence—as is clear in knowledge and the thing known, sense and the thing sensed. For knowledge depends on the thing known, but not conversely; and thus the relation by which knowledge is referred to the knowable thing is a relation of the cognition-independent; but the relation by which the knowable is referred to knowledge is entirely cognition-dependent: for the knowable is said to be related, according to the Philosopher, not because it is itself referred, but because another is referred to it. And likewise in all other

14 The “oneness” of a society or social organization, for instance, is something entirely beyond the grasp of the perceptive powers; and yet, we can by our intellect discern the unity which makes that organization to be one. See 5.2.1 for more on the intellectual grasp of relations.

15 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.21, a.1: “invenitur esse rationis tantum, secundum quam dicitur referri id quod non dependet ad id ad quod refertur, sed e converso, cum ipsa relatio quaedam dependentia sit, sicut patet in scientia et scibili, sensu et sensibili. Scientia enim dependet a scibili, sed non e converso: unde relatio qua scientia refertur ad scibile, est realis; relatio vero qua scibile refertur ad scientiam, est rationis tantum: dicitur enim scibile relatum, secundum philosophum, non quia ipsum referatur, sed quia aliud referatur ad ipsum. Et ita est in omnibus aliis quae se habent ut mensura et mensuratum, vel perfectivum et perfectibile.”

things which are related as measure and measured or as perfective and perfectible.

A relation “of reason”, a cognition-dependent relation, is one in which at least one of the two things related is not effected by the relation. In the examples given here, one of the terms of the relation, the knower and the one sensing, are really effected by the relation with the other term, the known and the sensed, but not vice versa. In another place, Thomas speaks of relations which are purely of reason, such that neither term is effected, such as in the mental comparison of the species “man” to the genus “animal”.¹⁶

Thomas goes on to add that both “good” and “true” add to the notion of being a relation which is somehow perfective.¹⁷ Something can be perfective in a relation in one of two ways: either according to the natural mode of being proper to the thing being perfected, or according to actual existence had by the thing being perfected. “Good” adds to the notion of being that aspect of desirability or of being an end, as one being can be perfective and “consummative” or completing of another. Such a mode of being perfective is not intrinsic to the natural mode of being proper to the thing, even though the thing may be by its nature ordered towards that perfection, for the good is in the things desired themselves; in other words, the denomination is said of the term of the relation which is the object. “True”, on the other hand, adds to “being” something which is perfective according to the natural mode of being proper to the thing being perfected; for “truth” is properly in the mind. Someone is said to possess the truth when there is, as is said in *DV* q.1, a.1, an *adequatio intellectus et rei*. Since, in the cases of all other than the Divine (in which things are said to conform to the intellect, rather than the other way around), the intellect is the term perfected by this relation, it is clear that “true” is said as perfective with regard to the thing being perfected, and thus, of what is the subject, so to speak.¹⁸

16 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.28, a.1, c.

17 Cf. Jan A. Aertsen 2007: “Is Truth *Not* a Transcendental for Aquinas?” in *Wisdom’s Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.*, ed. Peter A. Kwasniewski (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press): 3–12.

18 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.21, a.1, c.: “Oportet igitur quod verum et bonum super intellectum entis addant respectum perfectivi. In quolibet autem ente est duo considerare: scilicet ipsam rationem speciei, et esse ipsum quo aliquid subsistit in specie illa; et sic aliquod ens potest esse perfectivum dupliciter. Uno modo secundum rationem speciei tantum. Et sic ab ente perficitur intellectus, qui percipit rationem entis. Nec tamen ens est in eo secundum esse naturale; et ideo hunc modum perficiendi addit verum super ens. Verum enim est in mente, ut philosophus dicit in *VI* *Metaphys.*; et unumquodque ens in tantum dicitur

When we say that *verum* is the *obiectum intellectus*, there is a twofold sense in which this can be meant: (1) on the one hand, “true” is said of every being as “that which precedes the notion of truth, and that on the basis of which truth is founded”, as “that which is”¹⁹—and in this sense, it is more nearly equivalent with *ens*, inasmuch as the true is in this sense the object which is perfective. This notion of *verum* as *ens* in some way independent of the objectivizing constitution of the cognition seems to be what Thomas has in mind, furthermore, with saying that the *obiectum intellectus* is *ens intelligibile*:²⁰

For the proper object of the intellect is intelligible being: which comprehends every difference and species of possible beings; for whatever is able to be, is able to be understood. Since every cognition is made through the mode of similitude, the object of the intellect is not able to be completely cognized unless the intellect has in itself the similitude of the whole of being and every difference of it.

verum, in quantum est conformatum vel conformabile intellectui; et ideo omnes recte definiens verum, ponunt in eius definitione intellectum. Alio modo ens est perfectivum alterius non solum secundum rationem speciei, sed etiam secundum esse quod habet in rerum natura. Et per hunc modum est perfectivum bonum. Bonum enim in rebus est, ut philosophus dicit in VI Metaphys. In quantum autem unum ens secundum esse suum est perfectivum alterius et consummativum, habet rationem finis respectu illius quod ab eo perficitur; et inde est quod omnes recte definiens bonum ponunt in ratione eius aliquid quod pertinet ad habitudinem finis; unde philosophus dicit in I Ethicorum, quod bonum optime diffinierunt dicentes, quod bonum est quod omnia appetunt. Sic ergo primo et principaliter dicitur bonum ens perfectivum alterius per modum finis; sed secundario dicitur aliquid bonum, quod est ductivum in finem: prout utile dicitur bonum; vel quod natum est consequi finem: sicut et sanum dicitur non solum habens sanitatem, sed et faciens et conservans et significans.” This is also true *secundum quid* of the human artisan, inasmuch as the design of his idea is in some measure from him and not solely constituted by those things Divinely-made which have allowed the artisan to arrive at his idea.

- 19 Ibid., q.1, a.1, c.: “illud quod praecedat rationem veritatis, et in quo verum fundatur; et sic Augustinus diffinit in Lib. Solil.: verum est id quod est; et Avicenna in sua Metaphysic.: veritas cuiusque rei est proprietas sui esse quod stabilitum est ei; et quidam sic: verum est indivisio esse, et quod est.”
- 20 i.1259/65: SCG II c.98, n.9: “Est enim proprium obiectum intellectus ens intelligibile: quod quidem comprehendit omnes differentias et species entis possibiles; quicquid enim esse potest, intelligi potest. Cum autem omnis cognitio fiat per modum similitudinis, non potest totaliter suum obiectum intellectus cognoscere nisi habeat in se similitudinem totius entis et omnium differentiarum eius.”

(2) On the other hand, “true” is also said of that perfection which is proper to the formal mode of being of the intellect—the proper adequation between the intellect itself and its object—and in this sense, *verum* is the *obiectum intellectus* as that which is the fundament of a relation of knowledge. This second sense is the proper way in which “true” is said. We again find a corroboration of this twofold sense of true in the aforementioned text of *Summa theologiae* Ia–IIae, q.94, a.2, where Thomas says—as he does in a number of other places—that *ens cadit in apprehensione*. Of particular interest here is the verb *cadere*, of which the etymology is illuminating. Lewis and Short define it as, “In an extended sense, *to be driven or carried by one’s weight from a higher to a lower point, to fall down, be precipitated, sink down*,”²¹ and so on. In all of these senses and definitions of the word there is conveyed a movement following nature, the following-through of what has been ordained in the specific kind of being belonging to the thing which falls. Yet, more pertinent to the time and therefore the use of Thomas Aquinas, the Blaise Medieval Lexicon defines *cadere* as “to fall under, to belong, to be placed in.”²² While the first two of these three senses have connotations similar to Lewis and Short, the last definition is strikingly different: whatever is placed is necessarily something that is acted upon by another. The occasion of the act is not something *per naturam* or *per se*—for to place is as to move: nothing moves itself—and is therefore *per aliud*. What acts upon *ens* in this placing is the intellect, through its act of apprehension. If we pair this last definition of Blaise with the others, in which the action is *per naturam*, we see *ens* in both the senses of *verum*: as that thing which is outside the intellect which is the foundation for the formal notion of *veritas*, and as that which is the accomplished relationship perfective for the intellect.²³

21 Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short 1879: *A New Latin Dictionary Founded on the Translation of Freund’s Latin-German Lexicon edited by E.A. Andrews*, revised 1889 edition (New York: Harper & Brothers), 258.

22 Albert Blaise 1975: *Lexicon Latinitatis Medii Aevi: praesertim ad res ecclesiasticas investigandas pertinens: Dictionnaire Latin-Français des Auteurs du Moyen-Âge* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols), 123. Cf Roy J. Deferrari 1960: *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas: based on The Summa Theologica and selected passages of his other works* (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul), 127.

23 Norris Clarke (“Reflections on John Deely’s *Four Ages*” in *The American Journal of Semiotics*, 21.1–4, 2005: 11–28) called this bidirectional proceeding of truth and being, 27: “a two-way process of intentionality at work in the world-system of communication between active (and receptive) beings: a first *ontological intentionality*, looking forward from the communicator to its receiver by projecting signs of itself into the conscious receptive field of the knower; then a second, responsive, *psychological intentionality* proceeding

Thus it seems, on the notion that *ens* is the *obiectum intellectus*, that the intellect is oriented towards knowledge of things as in some way understood through or underneath the transcendentals. That is, the intellect is able to apprehend and understand those things in the light of their truth, goodness, and unity:²⁴

This is because that which falls first in the apprehension of the intellect, is being; for which reason it is necessary that whatsoever is apprehended through the intellect, the intellect attributes to that thing that it is being. And therefore when the intellect apprehends the essence of some being, it says that essence is being; and similarly whatever form, general or specific, as: “goodness is being”, “whiteness is being”, and so on. And—because there are some of those which are inseparably concomitant with the notion of being, such as “one”, “good”, and others of this kind—it is necessary that these also be predicated of whatever is apprehended, for the same reason as “being” is. Thus we say: an essence is one and good, and similarly that unity is one and good; and likewise we say it of goodness and whiteness, and any general or specific forms.

Consequently, what we are left with is a schema of concepts which can be diagrammatically represented as in figure 1.²⁵

All of these various notions are conceived on the basis of the first known *ens*.²⁶ It is an easy and often made mistake to assume that *ens* said as the

from the knower through the intentional (pointing) signs it has received back to its active source, thus making the latter formally known to the responsive knower.”

24 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.21, a.4, ad.4: “Cuius ratio est, quia illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione intellectus, est ens; unde oportet quod cuicumque apprehenso per intellectum, intellectus attribuat hoc quod est ens. Et ideo cum apprehendit essentiam alicuius entis, dicit illam essentiam esse ens; et similiter unamquamque formam generalem vel specialem, ut: bonitas est ens, albedo est ens, et sic de aliis. Et quia quaedam sunt quae concomitantur rationem entis inseparabiliter, ut unum, bonum, et huiusmodi; oportet quod haec etiam de quolibet apprehenso praedicentur eadem ratione qua ens. Unde dicimus: essentia est una et bona; et similiter dicimus: unitas est una et bona; et ita etiam de bonitate et albedine, et qualibet forma generali vel speciali.”

25 Note that “the relative” as listed in the order of conceptual composition *secundum rem* is based upon a traditional division of the categories; the view represented in this diagram is one which does not, as yet, take into consideration the proper nature of relation as illustrated in c.5.

26 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.5, a.2, c.: “Ratio enim significata per nomen, est id quod concipit intellectus de re, et significat illud per vocem, illud ergo est prius secundum rationem, quod prius cadit in conceptione intellectus. Primo autem in conceptione intellectus cadit ens, quia secundum hoc unumquodque cognoscibile est, in quantum est actu, ut dicitur in IX

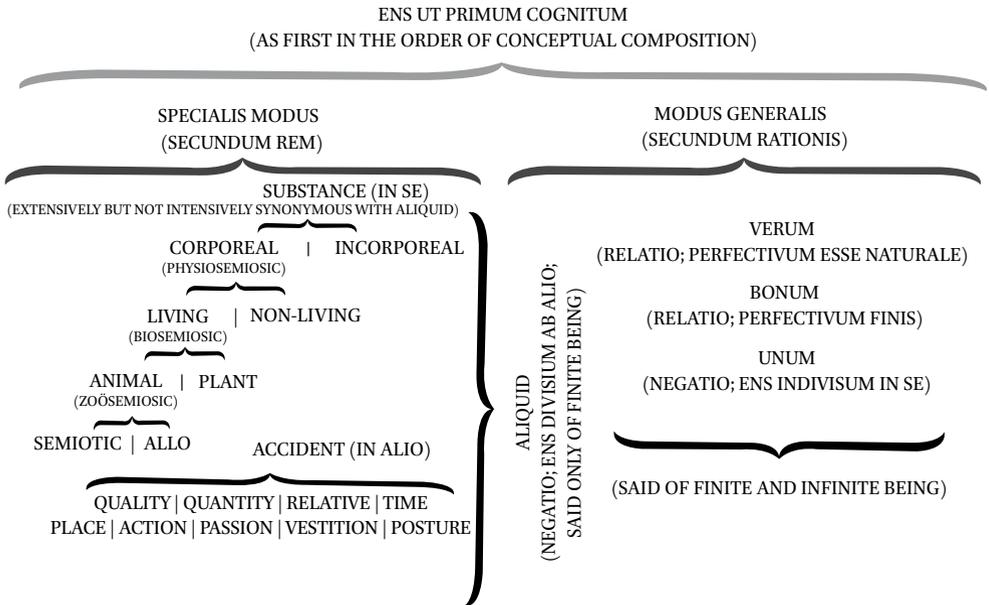


FIGURE 1 Conceptual divisions of ens ut primum cognitum.

first or proper object of the intellect is identical with *ens* as the subject matter of metaphysics. In the former case, as the proper object, *ens* is said of the things conceived on the basis of its greatest possible universality *in potentia* or indeterminacy²⁷—such that the concept of *ens* does not provenate

Metaphys. Unde ens est proprium obiectum intellectus, et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonus est primum audibile.”—“The reason signified through a name is that which the intellect conceives of a thing, and signifies through the voice; therefore that which is first according to reason is that which first falls into the conception of the intellect. The first thing which falls in the conception of the intellect is ‘being’, on account of the fact that a thing is cognoscible insofar as it is in act, as is said in *Metaphysics* IX. For which reason ‘being’ is the proper object of the intellect, and is thus the first intelligible, just as sound is the first audible.”

27 Cf. John Poinset 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24b18–33): “quando dicimus ens esse primum cognitum, ly ens non sumitur pro abstracto in statu universalitatis et separationis ab omni inferiori, sed sumitur ens, ut concretum et imbitum in aliqua re determinata, quae tunc occurrit cognitioni, quasi praedicatum quoddam ipsius, ita quod in ipso objecto sic occurrente, non discernuntur determinatae rationes, sed solum accipitur, seu concipitur secundum quendam indeterminationem, in qua quidquid ad tale obiectum pertinet confunditur et fere est idem quod cognoscere rem quoad an est.” Cf. Cajetan, c.1493/5: *In de ente*, proem., q.1, *in passim*.

an understanding of *ens univsum*, but rather such that it can be included in all other concepts and is that into which all other concepts are resolved—including and oftentimes beings which are not only not *in se* (substances), but also not *in alio* (accidents); that is, of relations or patterns of relations which are irreducible to the order of substantial being. Indeed, we can see that “truth”, a concept equipollent in extension with “being” can be and often is said of non-beings, and therefore “being”, as first known, is likewise said of non-beings.²⁸ The absolute extensive universality *in potentia* of the intellect’s reach, established on the basis of the first concept of *ens*, goes beyond that which is *per modum substantiam* or *per modum accidentalis in substantiam*. Thus, the above picture, while it has provided for us the full extensive range of the most general sorts of concepts, has not been filled-out in terms of the distinct kinds, nor has the term *res*, included in Thomas’ list of transcendentals in *DV* 1.1, been included, and therefore the schema remains incomplete and will so remain until the penultimate chapter, in which we can pair it with a diagrammatic consideration of relation (see 5.1.3, p. 303).

Nevertheless, we must be careful not to angelize the human intellect. While the commonality of the object of the intellect pervades all things, an understanding of the substances of things, or of things precisely as falling under the transcendentals, even when objectized by the human mind as objects of intellection, cannot be attained directly—indeed, the realm of the positively immaterial is reached only circuitously and in conjunction with sense perception. As such, Thomas says:²⁹

The object of the intellect is something common, namely “being” and “the true”, under which is comprehended the act of understanding itself. For which reason the intellect is able to understand its own act; but not first, because the first object of our intellect, according to this present

28 Cf. c.1252/6b: *De ente et essentia*, c.1: “Horum autem differentia est quia secundo modo potest dici ens omne illud, de quo affirmativa propositio formari potest, etiam si illud in re nihil ponat. Per quem modum privationes et negationes entia dicuntur; dicimus enim quod affirmatio est opposita negationi et quod caecitas est in oculo.”

29 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.87, a.3, ad.1.: “obiectum intellectus est commune quoddam, scilicet ens et verum, sub quo comprehenditur etiam ipse actus intelligendi. Unde intellectus potest suum actum intelligere. Sed non primo, quia nec primum obiectum intellectus nostri, secundum praesentem statum, est quodlibet ens et verum; sed ens et verum consideratum in rebus materialibus, ut dictum est; ex quibus in cognitionem omnium aliorum devenit.” Cf. *Ibid.*, q.55, a.1, c.: “Potentia autem intellectiva Angeli se extendit ad intelligendum omnia, quia obiectum intellectus est ens vel verum commune.”

state of life, is neither whatever being nor whatever truth; but being and truth considered in material things, as aforesaid, from which the intellect arrives at the cognition of all other things.

We can see here a conflation of the sense of object: Thomas does not clearly distinguish between the material and the formal, but nevertheless uses *obiectum* in both senses. What is common, under which all things are comprehended, is being, the formal object; but “the first object of our intellect” in this life, is “being and truth considered in material things”.

Finally, we can see a similarity in what Thomas says at the beginning of his *De ente et essentia*. After stating in the proemium that “*ens* and essence are the first conceived by the intellect”,³⁰ he goes on to explain at the beginning of the first chapter that:³¹

as the Philosopher says in *Metaphysics* v, *ens* is said, through itself, in two ways: in one way as that which is divided through the ten genera, and in the other way as that which signifies the truth of a proposition. The reason for the difference of these two is that in the second way, *ens* can be said of anything about which an affirmative proposition is able to be formed, even if that thing posits nothing in reality. In this way, privations and negations are said to be *entia*; for we say that affirmation is the opposite of negation and that blindness is in the eye. But in the first way, we are not able to say *ens* of something which posits nothing in reality. For this reason, blindness and other such things are not *entia* in the first way. Therefore, the term “essence” is not taken from *ente* in the second way mentioned, for some things called *entia* in this mode do not have an essence, as is clear in the case of privations. But essence is taken from *ente* in the first way mentioned.

30 c.1252/6b: *De ente et essentia*, proem: “ens autem et essentia sunt quae primo intellectu concipiuntur”.

31 c.1252/6b: *De ente et essentia*, c.1: “sicut in v metaphysicae philosophus dicit, ens per se dicitur dupliciter, uno modo quod dividitur per decem genera, alio modo quod significat propositionum veritatem. Horum autem differentia est quia secundo modo potest dici ens omne illud, de quo affirmativa propositio formari potest, etiam si illud in re nihil ponat. Per quem modum privationes et negationes entia dicuntur; dicimus enim quod affirmatio est opposita negationi et quod caecitas est in oculo. Sed primo modo non potest dici ens nisi quod aliquid in re ponit. Unde primo modo caecitas et huiusmodi non sunt entia. Nomen igitur essentiae non sumitur ab ente secundo modo dicto, aliqua enim hoc modo dicuntur entia, quae essentiam non habent, ut patet in privationibus; sed sumitur essentia ab ente primo modo dicto.”

Thus, the first division of *ens* as *primum cognitum* by the intellect is not as it is into the categories—*ens* as subjectively constituted, independent of our cognition, or “*ens reale*”—but as into that which is divided into the categories and that which corresponds to the truth of a proposition. “Being”, *ens*, said without qualification, is therefore co-extensive with truth, *verum*, although there are propositions which can be said to be true, the terms of which cannot be said to be “being” in the sense of categorical being.

As regards the texts of St. Thomas, what has been said concerning *ens* as the *obiectum intellectus* is certainly an incomplete story, and, taken at face value, seems contrary to other, more numerous texts, which indicate a different and more limited mode and scope of human intellection. We can provide a more complete picture only by reconciling this difficulty.

3.1.2 Quod Quid Est, Quid Est, and Quod Quid Erat Esse

The last of these three terms, *quod quid erat esse*, appears often, but almost exclusively in Thomas’ commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *Posterior Analytics*, being more a transliteration and less a translation of the corresponding Greek phrase, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, the “what it is for a thing to be”³² of some being; there is only a double handful of other occurrences in the entirety of Thomas’ corpus, and even the majority of those make some reference to Aristotle or appear in a commentary.³³ It appears to be used synonymously with the simpler *quod quid est* or even *quid est*, and more often than not seems employed to show a continuity between the language Thomas prefers and the language employed by the Philosopher.

How then are we to translate *quod quid est*? *Quid est* presents no special challenge—“what is” is best translated by its simplest formation—but the grammatical structure of *quod quid est* is very odd, and unusual to the Latin language. Translated most literally, word for word, we would end up with “that what is”—not a particularly helpful formulation. Thus, one common way of translating this phrase is “that which is”, so that *quid* is translated as “which”.³⁴

32 Cf. Joe Sachs 1999: “Introduction” to Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press), xxxvi–xxxvii; Joseph Owens 1951: *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Medieval Thought* revised 3rd edition, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), 180–185.

33 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.2, q.1, a.3, qc.1, ad.3; *ibid.*, d.5, q.1, a.2, c.; c.1265/6a: *Quaestiones disputate de anima*, a.3, ad.20; c.1267–8: *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis*, a.2, c.; c.1252/6b: *De ente et essentia*, c.1; 1270: *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*, cap.1, c.; 1268: *In de anima*, lib.1, lec.1, n.15; lib.2, lec.2, n.2–3; lib.3, lec.8, n.15–16; i.1268–71: *In Physicorum*, lib.2, lec.11, n.8.

34 Cf. the translation of *scg*, III, c.56, n.5 by Vernon Bourke. An alternative translation, given by both Anton Pegis and James Anderson, is “what a thing is” (cf. Pegis translation, *scg*

This translation, while it might comfortably fit the ear of an English speaker, is philosophically indefensible, and appears to be smashing the round meaning of the Latin words into a square hole of realist interpretation; for “that which is” suggests to an English-hearing ear “the thing having existence”, that is, substance.³⁵ To say in English that “the object of the intellect is that what is” is hopelessly ambiguous; and to translate *quod quid est* as “that which is” deprives the English of what is most central to the Latin phrase, namely, the sense of **what**, and instead shifts the focus to the **is**. We propose, therefore, that the most reasonable way to interpret *quod* in the construction *quod quid est* is as the short form of the relative construction *id quod*³⁶—meaning “that”—where the antecedent of “that” is something left unspecified in the formulation because of the intellect’s natural extension, as being in some way all things—so that the most accurate way of translating, as to preserve both the meaning of the Latin and to provide the same sense in English, is “what ‘that’ is”. The object of the intellect, in these texts, is therefore not some **thing** which is—the existing, “extramental” real—but the “what”, the kind as a distinct mode of actuality which can belong to things, of that which is being **considered**. Thus, the phrase *quod quid est* is very often used by Thomas to explain *substantia rei*, *essentia rei*, or *quidditas rei* considered primarily as it is an object of the intellect and not primarily according to the reality it has in the substantial constitution of a subjective thing.³⁷

The juxtaposition of these terms—the substance, essence, or quiddity of the thing and *quod quid est*—if the texts are read carelessly, can mislead us into believing that they are precise synonyms, being used to signify the same thing as existing in one and the same manner, in each instance; as though the *quod quid est* and the *essentia rei* differ only by an extrinsic differentiation,

1, c.3, n.4; Anderson, *SCG* II, c.96, n.10), found also in Oesterle (cf. his translation of the *Treatise on Happiness*, 1271: *ST* Ia–IIae, q.1–21), which is more akin to our own, but which we have emended to avoid any possible confusion by the importing of the term “thing”, which, although a properly transcendental term, has come to have the connotation of “extra-mental substance”.

35 As an example of this tendency, consider Lawrence Dewan 1984: “St. Thomas and the Integration of Knowledge into Being” in *International Philosophical Quarterly* 24.4: 383–393, wherein *ens* is translated as “that which is” throughout.

36 Cf. Allen and Greenough 1903: *New Latin Grammar*, §307.d, p.187.

37 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.4 d.12, q.1, a.1, qc.2, ad.2; *ibid.*, d.49, q.2, a.7, ad.6.; i.1259/65: *SCG* I, c.3, n.4; *ibid.*, III, c.49, n.6; *ibid.*, III, c.56, n.5; 1271: *ST* Ia–IIae, q.3, a.8, c.; 1272: *ST* IIa–IIae, q.8, a.1, c.; 1256–59 *DV*, q.8, a.7, ad s.c.8; 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.7, n.605, n.613, n.619; lib.5, lec.19, n.1048; lib.7, lec.8, n.1450; lib.9, lec.11, n.1901, nn.1905–9; lib.11, lec.7, nn.2249–51.

such as “existing in *re*” and “existing in *mente*”. For instance, as we read in *De veritate* (emphasis added):³⁸

The objects of the sense and imagination are the exterior accidents, which are similitudes of the thing and not the thing itself. But **the object of the intellect is “what ‘that’ is”, that is, the very essence of a thing**, as is said in *De anima* III. And **thus the similitude of a thing which is in the intellect is a direct similitude of the essence of it**; whereas the similitude which is in the sense or imagination is a similitude of its accidents.

The careless reading of this passage would take the *similitudo rei quae est in intellectu*, which is a *similitudo directe essentiae*, to signify the same thing which is meant by *quod quid est*; but the more careful reading perceives that this similitude is evidently the intelligible species (without being distinguished here into impressed or expressed, though given the comparison which is made with sensation, it is fair to interpret Thomas here to mean only the impressed—and this indeed seems to quite often be what he means by *similitudo*) which assists in forming the basis upon which the intellect comes to know *quod quid est*. Important to note, moreover, is that in speaking of the object, Thomas often makes no explicit distinction between the **specifying** and the **terminal** object. In addressing the work of John Poinsett, we noted that though there is no error with regard to the reception of some *species impressa* and thus the objective specification which is received—such that what is received and what is directly and immediately made present to the cognitive powers through that reception are indeed one and the same—no such case holds in the *species expressa*, which, because discursively formed, can attain a distance from the nature of the subjectively-constituted cognition-independent reality.

In a similar vein, this rather brief passage from the *Summa contra Gentiles* can be misread if we are too quick to identify *quod quid est* and the *essentia rei* (emphasis mine):³⁹

38 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.8, a.7, ad s.c. 8: “Sensus enim et imaginationis obiectum sunt exteriora accidentia, quae sunt similitudines rei, et non res ipsa. Sed obiectum intellectus est quod quid est, id est ipsa essentia rei, ut dicitur in III de anima. Et sic similitudo rei quae est in intellectu, est similitudo directe essentiae eius; similitudo autem quae est in sensu vel imaginatione, est similitudo accidentium eius.”

39 i.1259/65: *SCG* III, c.49, n.6: “Omnis intelligibilis species per quam intelligitur quidditas vel essentia alicuius rei, comprehendit in repraesentando rem illam: unde et orationes significantes quod quid est terminos et definitiones vocamus.”

Every intelligible species **through which** the quiddity or essence of some thing is understood comprehends that thing in its representation [i.e., that thing which is re-presented by the intelligible species]; for which reason we call orations signifying “what ‘that’ is” by the names of “terms” and “definitions”.

Again, though there is a close connection between the essence or quiddity, which are said here to belong to the thing itself, and *quod quid est*, Thomas focuses in this passage on how the intelligible species which makes known a thing in its essential being comprehends—that is, embraces the whole—of that thing.⁴⁰ In knowing “what ‘that’ is” by means of an intelligible species, the “that”, the object of consideration, is known such that nothing of the “what” escapes the extension of the intelligible species, and hence Thomas can say that, concerning the *quid*, the intellect does not err.⁴¹ But it would fallacious to conflate the extension of the “what” which is thus made known with the essence, as intrinsic principle, of the thing which is contained in the representation, for such would require that the specifying form be a direct impression of the very essence by the essence itself. And again from the *Summa contra Gentiles*:⁴²

40 Cf. Josef Pieper 1966: *Verteidigungsrede für die Philosophie*, 73: “The difference between cognition (*cognoscere*) and understanding (*comprehendere*) should equally be clarified from the start. Understanding itself, of course, is a particular form of cognition; this especially is our concern here after all. We might say that every *understanding cognition* is the same as perfect cognition, ‘knowing all about it’. Thomas Aquinas, it seems to me, offers an even more precise formulation: to *understand* a thing would mean, ‘to know it to the full extent of its essential knowability’. An object, therefore, is being *understood* whenever on its part there remains nothing that is more knowable and not yet transformed into knowledge. If such a remainder is there—would we not have to call it ‘knowable’ even though in fact it is not known?” While Pieper seems to have grasped the essential specification which is proper to *comprehendere* as a mode of cognition, he has, I believe, too readily identified the grasp of the “what”, as some part or aspect of the essence, in the fullness of its extension—such that anything which “falls under” that “what” is thus known within it—with grasping the essence of the thing **as it is in the thing itself**.

41 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.57, a.1, ad.2: “Unde in III de anima dicitur quod obiectum intellectus est quod quid est, circa quod non errat, sicut neque sensus circa proprium sensibile.”

42 i.1259/65: *SCG* III, c.56, n.5: “Nulla virtus cognoscitiva cognoscit rem aliquam nisi secundum rationem proprii obiecti: non enim visu cognoscimus aliquid nisi in quantum est coloratum. Proprium autem obiectum intellectus est quod quid est, id est substantia rei, ut dicitur in III de anima. Igitur quicquid intellectus de aliqua re cognoscit, cognoscit per cognitionem substantiae illius rei: unde in qualibet demonstratione per quam

No cognitive power cognizes some thing unless according to the intrinsic reason of its proper object; for sight does not cognize something except insofar as it is colored. The proper object of the intellect is “what ‘that’ is”, that is, the substance of a thing, as is said in *De anima* III. Therefore, whatever the intellect cognizes of some thing, it cognizes through a cognition of the substance of that thing; for which reason, in any demonstration through which the proper accidents become known to us, we accept “what ‘that’ is” as the principle, as is said in *Posterior Analytics* I.

The error in reading *quod quid est* and *substantia rei* as either synonyms or as terms signifying an identity of content or meaning in this text rapidly dissipates given our translation in which *quod* signifies a relative “that”—for clearly, it would refer in such cases to the “that” of the substance (or essence), so that the object of the intellect which is actually attained is not the complete substance or essence itself, but the intellectually grasped “what” which belongs to the essence or substance as some intrinsic principle, however vaguely ascertained, of the thing’s being. In other words, we understand the “what” which “that” is. This is not to say that the substance and essence of a thing are not correlative with the “what” in some way—the texts of St. Thomas make it abundantly clear that they are in fact objects of our knowing⁴³—but that the being of a substance grasped as an actual part of the thing under consideration is radically different in kind from the being of a “what” as the object of understanding; a point which remains in need of explanation.⁴⁴

Despite seeming to indicate a knowledge of things in their essences in many texts, such as those cited above, Thomas repeatedly states that the “essences of things are unknown to us”.⁴⁵ The human intellect is incapable of having a

innotescent nobis propria accidentia, principium accipimus quod quid est, ut dicitur in I posteriorum.”

43 Most especially from c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.4, d.49, q.2, a.7, ad.6: “objectum intellectus est quid, idest rei essentia, seu quidditas” or i.1256–59: *DV*, q.10, a.4, ad.1: “obiectum intellectus est ipsa rei essentia”.

44 See 3.2.

45 i.1256–59: *DV* q.10, a.1, c.: “rerum essentiae sunt nobis ignotae”. Cf. c.1268: *In de anima*, lib.1, lec.1, n.15: “Quia in definitione oportet non solum cognoscere principia essentialia, sed etiam accidentalialia. Si enim recte definirentur et possent cognosci principia essentialia, definitio non indigeret accidentalibus. Sed quia principia essentialia rerum sunt nobis ignota, ideo oportet quod utamur differentiis accidentalibus in designatione essentialium: bipes enim non est essentialia, sed ponitur in designatione essentialis.”; 1266–9: *De spiritualibus creaturis*, a.11, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod formae substantiales per seipsas sunt ignotae; sed innotescent nobis per accidentia propria. Frequenter enim differentiae

direct knowledge of a thing's substance or essence, but instead attains to such an insight only through what is presented by the senses, and more often than not, must use what is known through the senses in order to provide a name for the "what" which is proper to the thing sensed.

Yet, while seeing the variety of explanations which Thomas employs in a large number of places may help us to see that Thomas is likely not contradicting himself—for if we simply take each text at face value, as though there is no greater complexity at work in the operation of the intellect than an immediate abstractive grasp of the "essences" of "real" beings, he most certainly **does** contradict himself—we remain with an unanswered question: how is it that we can both have something about or related to the substance or essence of a thing, the "that", of which the "what" is the proper object of the intellect, and yet be naturally incapable of knowing essences? In pursuit of the answer to this question, we must now turn our attention to the use and meaning of the term *quidditas*.

3.1.3 Quidditas Rei *and* Quidditas Rei Materialis

How should we describe the object of intellectual knowledge which Thomas calls the quiddity of a thing? Typically, we consider the knowledge of a quiddity as the intellectual grasp of the *sine qua non* of the thing's what it is for it to be—that is, of its essence—and of that which corresponds to the definition as stated in a genus and specific difference. Indeed, something like this—though perhaps deceptively portrayed in such static and limited terms as "genus" or

substantiales ab accidentibus sumuntur, loco formarum substantialium, quae per huiusmodi accidentia innotescunt; sicut bipes et gressibile et huiusmodi; et sic etiam sensibile et rationale ponuntur differentiae substantiales. Vel potest dici, quod sensibile et rationale, prout sunt differentiae, non sumuntur a ratione et a sensu secundum quod nominant potentias, sed ab anima rationali, et ab anima sensitiva."; i.1256–59: *DV*, q.4, a.1, ad.8: "nomen dicitur ab aliquo imponi dupliciter: aut ex parte imponentis nomen, aut ex parte rei cui imponitur. Ex parte autem rei nomen dicitur ab illo imponi per quod completur ratio rei quam nomen significat; et hoc est differentia specifica illius rei. Et hoc est quod principaliter significatur per nomen. Sed quia differentiae essentialis sunt nobis ignotae, quandoque utimur accidentibus vel effectibus loco earum, ut VIII Metaph. dicitur; et secundum hoc nominamus rem; et sic illud quod loco differentiae essentialis sumitur, est a quo imponitur nomen ex parte imponentis, sicut lapis imponitur ab effectu, qui est laedere pedem. Et hoc non oportet esse principaliter significatum per nomen, sed illud loco cuius hoc ponitur. Similiter dico, quod nomen verbi imponitur a verberatione vel a boatu ex parte imponentis, non ex parte rei."; c.1273: *Expositio Symbolum Apostolorum*, proem.: "sed cognitio nostra est adeo debilis quod nullus philosophus potuit unquam perfecte investigare naturam unius muscae".

“species”, especially if taken with an immanentized Platonizing interpretation of form, i.e., as though the objects considered as genus and species exist in some hypostatic union in the individual—is a terminus of our knowledge of a thing’s being. Yet as seen above in the texts dealing with *quod quid est*, it would be a mistake to interpret the “what” of a thing with its essence or essential principles; and indeed, this would seem to carry over to consideration not only of the “what”, but also of the “whatness”.⁴⁶ But is there any difference in the signification of the terms *quidditas rei materialis* and *quidditas rei*? And moreover, what does **quiddity really mean**?

While it often seems to be used interchangeably with *quidditas rei materialis*, it should be noted that the *quidditas rei* is also said to be the object of the intellect in those places where Thomas makes no distinction as to the kind of intellect about which he is speaking. That is, the *quidditas rei* is said to be the object of the intellect for any intellectual creature, including not only human beings, but also angels and God. This indifference of the term is most evident in *Summa theologiae prima pars*, q.85, a.5.⁴⁷

the human intellect does not immediately seize the perfect cognition of a thing in the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about it, such as the quiddity of the thing, which is the first and proper object of the intellect; and then it understands the properties, accidents, and the various relations of the essence. And on account of this, it necessarily relates one apprehended thing to another by composing or dividing; and from one composition and division it proceeds to another, which is to reason. But the angelic and the Divine intellect, like all incorruptible things, have their complete perfection at once from the beginning. Hence the intellect of the angelic and of the Divine has the entire cognition of a thing at once and perfectly. Whence in cognizing the quiddity of a thing,

46 Cf. Blanchette 2003: *The Philosophy of Being*, 97–98.

47 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.5, c.: “intellectus humanus non statim in prima apprehensione capit perfectam rei cognitionem; sed primo apprehendit aliquid de ipsa, puta quidditatem ipsius rei, quae est primum et proprium obiectum intellectus; et deinde intelligit proprietates et accidentia et habitudines circumstantes rei essentiam. Et secundum hoc, necesse habet unum apprehensum alii componere vel dividere; et ex una compositione vel divisione ad aliam procedere, quod est ratiocinari. Intellectus autem angelicus et divinus se habet sicut res incorruptibiles, quae statim a principio habent suam totam perfectionem. Unde intellectus angelicus et divinus statim perfecte totam rei cognitionem habet. Unde in cognoscendo quidditatem rei, cognoscit de re simul quidquid nos cognoscere possumus componendo et dividendo et ratiocinando.”

they cognize at once whatever we can cognize by composition, division, and reasoning.

In addition to the commonality of the *quidditas rei* as the object of any intellect, we ought to note two further things: first (1) that Thomas says the *quidditas rei* is the “first and proper object of the intellect”. It is oftentimes a question as to what Thomas means when he says that something is “first” in regards to the order of knowledge. Is this firstness of the quiddity a chronological first, and thus something *quoad nos intelligibile*, or is it first in the sense of a principle, such as *ens* is said to be first in the *via compositionis vel inventionis*? Second (2) we must note that composition and division, while necessary for the human intellect to attain a perfect cognition of a thing, are not needed for the simple intellectual beings, God and the angels, which, in perceiving the quiddity, immediately grasp the whole of what can be known, proportionate to their respective natures, all at once. In other words, simple intellectual substances have a direct insight into the quiddity, into the whatness of a thing. On the contrary, it appears that the grasp of a quiddity had by human beings, as making known the essence of some being, is not something attained all at once, but discursively, progressively. This discursiveness, to which we will return more fully a little later on,⁴⁸ coheres with another text from the *Summa theologiae*.⁴⁹

It must be said that because the quiddity of a thing is the proper object of the understanding, it is on account of this fact that we are properly said to understand something when it is reduced to “what ‘that’ is” and so we judge of it, as occurs in demonstrations, in which there is no falsity.

In other words, there is a kind of reduction in our understanding of things to “what ‘that’ is,” to the *quod quid est*. Superficially, this presents a difficulty: for it seems that the *quidditas* and *quod quid est* would signify the same thing, yet in the above text from q.85 (n47), the *quidditas rei* is said to be not only the proper object of the understanding, but its first; unless we can clarify in what sense it is first, we cannot resolve our problem. The difficulty compounds if we look at two earlier texts from the *Sentences* commentary, in which Thomas describes the *duplex operatio intellectus*—one, the “understanding of indivisibles which

48 See c.4.

49 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.17, a.3, ad.1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, quia quidditas rei est proprium obiectum intellectus, propter hoc tunc proprie dicimur aliquid intelligere, quando, reducentes illud in quod quid est, sic de eo iudicamus, sicut accidit in demonstrationibus, in quibus non est falsitas.”

consists in the apprehension of the quiddity of a simple thing”, also called “formation”; and two, the composition and division of propositions—of which the former, apprehension, respects the *quidditatem rei*, and the latter the *esse ipsius*.⁵⁰ It seems that, on the one hand, Thomas is suggesting that some sort of discursion must take place in order for us to grasp the quiddity of a thing as it properly is, and yet, on the other, that quiddities are grasped solely through an apprehension of simple things.

The difficulty resolves, however, if we consider that Thomas oftentimes states that the *proprium obiectum intellectus* of human beings, is, *in statu vitae*, the *quidditas rei materialis*.⁵¹ Such quiddities are always of things composite; these are not the quiddities of simple things which are grasped simply and at once in the first act of the intellect, but rather, as themselves composed from multiple principles which are part of the essence of the thing, require some sort of compositional act in the intellect by which they are received.⁵²

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- 50 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.19, q.5, a.1, ad.7: “Ad septimum dicendum, quod cum sit duplex operatio intellectus: una quarum dicitur a quibusdam imaginatio intellectus, quam philosophus nominat intelligentiam indivisibilem, quae consistit in apprehensione quidditatis simplicis, quae alio etiam nomine formatio dicitur; alia est quam dicunt fidem, quae consistit in compositione vel divisione propositionis: prima operatio respicit quidditatem rei; secunda respicit esse ipsius.” Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.38, q.1, a.3, c.
- 51 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.5, ad.3; *ibid.* a.8, c.; *ibid.*, q.86, a.2, c.; *ibid.*, q.88, a.2, c.; *ibid.*, a.3, c.; i.1256–59: *DV*, q.18, a.5, ad.6; c.1265/6a: *Quaestiones disputate de anima*, a.16 *in passim*. Also used, with no seeming difference is *natura rei materialis*, e.g., 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.87, a.2, ad.2; a.3, c., ad.2.
- 52 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.5, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod similitudo rei recipitur in intellectu secundum modum intellectus, et non secundum modum rei. Unde compositioni et divisioni intellectus respondet quidem aliquid ex parte rei; tamen non eodem modo se habet in re, sicut in intellectu. Intellectus enim humani proprium obiectum est quidditas rei materialis, quae sub sensu et imaginatione cadit. Invenitur autem duplex compositio in re materiali. Prima quidem, formae ad materiam, et huic respondet compositio intellectus qua totum universale de sua parte praedicatur; nam genus sumitur a materia communi, differentia vero completiva speciei a forma, particulare vero a materia individuali. Secunda vero compositio est accidentis ad subiectum, et huic reali compositioni respondet compositio intellectus secundum quam praedicatur accidens de subiecto, ut cum dicitur, homo est albus. Tamen differt compositio intellectus a compositione rei, nam ea quae componuntur in re, sunt diversa; compositio autem intellectus est signum identitatis eorum quae componuntur. Non enim intellectus sic componit, ut dicat quod homo est albedo; sed dicit quod homo est albus, idest habens albedinem, idem autem est subiecto quod est homo, et quod est habens albedinem. Et simile est de compositione formae et materiae, nam animal significat id quod habet naturam sensitivam, rationale vero quod habet naturam intellectivam, homo vero quod habet utrumque, Socrates vero quod habet

[1] The similitude of a thing is received in the intellect according to the mode of the intellect, and not according to the mode of the thing. Wherefore, something on the part of the thing corresponds to the composition and division of the intellect; but nevertheless the relation is not in the same mode in the thing as it is in the intellect. For the proper object of the human intellect is the quiddity of a material thing, which falls under the senses and imagination. A twofold composition is found in a material thing. [2] The first composition is of form to matter, to which corresponds the intellectual composition by which the whole universal is predicated of its part; for genus is taken from the common matter, the difference completing the species is taken from the form, and the particular is taken from the material individual. [3] The second composition is of accident to subject, and to this real composition corresponds the composition of the intellect according to which an accident is predicated of a subject, as when it is said, "the man is white." [4] Nevertheless, the composition of the intellect differs from the composition of the thing, since those which are composed in the thing are diverse; whereas the composition of the intellect is a sign of the identity of those things which are composed. For the intellect does not thus compose, as though it says "human" is "whiteness"; but, rather, it says that "the human is white", that is, something having whiteness: the subject, which is "human" is also "that which has whiteness". And similarly with regard to the composition of form and matter, for "animal" signifies "that which has a sensitive nature", "rational" signifies "that which has an intellectual nature", "human" signifies that which has both, and "Socrates" signifies that which has all of these with individual matter; and in accord with this kind of identity, our intellect composes by predicating one thing of another.

For the ease of understanding, we have divided this complex text into four sections: (1) the prefatory remarks; (2) the composition of form and matter as understood in the essence of a thing; (3) the composition of subject and accident as understood in the particular reality of an individual; and (4) the comparison and contrast between these compositions and the mode whereby the intellect composes in understanding.

In (1) the prefatory remarks, Thomas states that the composition or division of parts by the operation of the intellect differs from the mode of composition in the essence of the thing as it exists independent of understanding.

omnia haec cum materia individuali; et secundum hanc identitatis rationem, intellectus noster unum componit alteri praedicando."

There is a correspondence in the parts, to be sure, such that a part involved in the composition of the intellect corresponds to a part in the thing understood, and therefore something in the composition of the intellect corresponds to something in the composition of the thing understood, but (as will be shown in the fourth section) the manner of composing itself differs.

In the (2) second section, concerning the composition of form and matter as understood in the essence of a thing, Thomas points to two different compositions in the order of the subjective constitution of the being itself, and one composition of the intellect. The two compositions of the subjective constitution are, first, the generic matter and the specific form (and thus the constitution of the species), and, second, the species and the differences composing the particular individual; or, in other words, first, of a less-designated matter to a specificative form, and, second, of a designated matter properly speaking to an individual form. In dealing with each case, the intellect composes by predicating a universal of a part—as “animal” is said of “human” and as “human” is said of “Aristides”. Thus there is a correspondence of part to part, as in the essence of a thing understood we look at its genus and specific difference as the universal and particular, and in the individual understood we look at its species and the individual as the universal and particular, respectively.

In the (3) third section, concerning composition of subject and accident, there is a real composition of a “that-in-which” and a “that-which”; the subject, something independently constituted, receives something which subsists only on the basis of some such independently constituted being, i.e., an accident. To this, Thomas says, corresponds the intellectual composition of predication, whereby the accident is predicated of the subject as a whole is predicated of a part. As explained in the fourth section, this is the kind of predication in which the subject is said to be a thing having that accident—the human is “that which has whiteness”; but the human is not identical with that whiteness, just as he is not identical with his generic “animality”, but has animality. Nevertheless, there is this difference: the composition of genus and specific difference is **not** a real composition in the subjective constitution of the thing, for there is no actual “animal” outside the really existing individual being; there is no principle from which it comes, but it is intrinsic to the being itself. On the contrary, the whiteness which is had does in some measure come from outside the essence of the thing, and is a corollary of the designated matter specific to the individual, as is evidenced by the fact that someone’s skin color can in fact change, within certain limits.

But as becomes abundantly clear in (4) the fourth section, the intellect composes in one way only. Whereas the composition of genus and specific difference is distinct from the composition of subject and accident—inasmuch as the first is *secundum rationis tantum* and the second is *secundum re*—the composition of the intellect is always a predication of something more universal to something more particular. The intellectual grasping and subsequent relating of the more universal and the more particular does not correspond directly to the realities of the things as they are themselves composed, but rather signifies those things in a kind of unity—indeed, in an identity to which the human intellect corresponds, but with which the correspondence of the intellect is not absolutely identical. It seems fairly clear that—since the intellect must make these acts of composition and division, predicating universal of particular (and presumably excluding false predications) in order to arrive at the specific nature of the thing under consideration—Thomas can mean only one of two things in saying that the *quidditas rei* is the “first and proper object of the intellect”: either that it is first in the sense of a principle which is recursively employed in the scientific understanding of particulars; or that what is meant by quiddity is not the specific nature of the thing understood—as what is formulated in a definition consisting of the most proximate genus and specific difference—but the kind of knowledge which is had of the nature of things, to any degree of specificity.

Evidently, in order to understand the teaching of St. Thomas concerning the object of the intellect in the context of a philosophical world muddled by the modern epistemological obtrusion, we need still to discern the precise meaning of “quiddity”. The presumption that it is entirely synonymous with “essence” as what properly signifies the internal element of a thing’s subjective and cognition-independent constitution—while a defensible interpretation, given certain texts of the Angelic Doctor⁵³—coheres completely with neither the texts asserting the *quidditas rei* nor those asserting *ens* to be the *obiectum intellectus*. Merely looking at the texts where Thomas discusses the object of the intellect, though such an endeavor has provided us with many valuable insights, does not suffice for understanding what he truly means. We

53 Not the least of which is at the end of c.1252/6b: *De ente et essentia*, c.1, wherein Thomas explains as related—though notably not synonymous—the four terms of form, nature, quiddity, and essence. Other examples could be proliferated, but it is enough to note that anyone approaching Thomas’ texts with the explicitly anti-idealist position of 20th century Thomistic realism will be inclined to read those texts in this way.

need, therefore, to understand the process whereby the object of the intellect is attained.

3.2 *Intellectus Agens*

Heretofore the biggest difficulty in presenting a clear interpretation of St. Thomas' teaching on the object of the intellect stems from the ambiguity and seeming contradictions of the text. Given that the vast majority of places where Thomas mentions the *obiectum intellectus*—quite often in order to compare or help explain some other point—are exceedingly brief, many of these texts seem to be in opposition to one another. Therefore, to attain clarity about his meaning, we will be best served by considering some of those places where Thomas talks not so much about the **object**, but rather about the **intellect** and the **operation proper to it**. One of the most helpful such texts is found in the *De veritate*:⁵⁴

In this way [by means of form and end] the *intellectus agens* and *intellectus possibilis* are distinguished. For something is not an object for the same reason inasmuch as it is in act and inasmuch as it is in potency, or inasmuch as it acts or is acted upon: for the intelligible in act is the object of the *intellectus possibilis* as acting in itself, inasmuch as it moves from potency to act; but the intelligible in potency is the object of the *intellectus agens*, insofar as through the *intellectus agens* it is made intelligible in act.

In other words, the *intellectus possibilis*, while the intelligible is still its object, has this intelligible as its object as a form—the *species intelligibilis* whereby things can be actually understood,⁵⁵ making the *intellectus possibilis* to be in a

54 c.1256–59a: *DV* q.15, a.2, c.: “Sic etiam et circa intellectum agens intellectus et possibilis distinguuntur. Non enim eadem ratione est obiectum aliquid in quantum est in actu et in quantum est in potentia, aut in quantum agit et patitur: intelligibile enim actu, est obiectum intellectus possibilis agens quasi in ipsum, prout eo exit de potentia in actum; intelligibile vero in potentia est obiectum intellectus agentis, prout fit per intellectum agentem intelligibile actu.”

55 Cf. i.1259/65: *SCG* II, c.76, n.4: “Amplius. Sicut materia prima perficitur per formas naturales, quae sunt extra animam, ita intellectus possibilis perficitur per formas intellectas in actu. Sed formae naturales recipiuntur in materia prima, non per actionem alicuius substantiae separatae tantum, sed per actionem formae eiusdem generis, scilicet quae est in materia: sicut haec caro generatur per formam quae est in his carnibus et in his ossibus,

certain way—while the *intellectus agens* has the intelligible as its object as an end—that which is not yet actually intelligible, but could be; something outside of itself. It is worth noting that Thomas does not, in the texts concerning the *obiectum intellectus* mentioned in the previous section, specify whether he is speaking of the *obiectum intellectus* in the sense of a form or an end.

St. Thomas describes the manner in which the *intellectus agens* affects the proper action whereby apprehension occurs in two terms: *illuminare*, as the *intellectus agens* is a sort of illumination which moves the potentially intelligible to the actually intelligible, as physical light moves the potentially visible to be actually visible; and *abstrahere*, as the *intellectus agens* “separates out” (as it were) the actually intelligible from the constrictive potency consequent upon any being’s materiality. Both of these terms, while they designate a specific immaterial operation when said in reference to the operation of the *intellectus agens*, are taken from rather vivid physical images: “to shed light upon” and “to draw, drag, or pull away from”. If we misunderstand what is meant by either of these terms—that is, if we incorrectly interpret the implicit metaphor—we are doomed to misunderstand the crux of Thomas Aquinas’ theory of knowledge; and as with all great philosophers, there is a domino effect inasmuch as misconstruing the meaning of one part of his philosophy inevitably leads to at least some degree of error concerning all the rest.

3.2.1 Illuminare

Thomas Aquinas often uses the metaphor of light to explain the functioning of the intellect, specifically, that the *intellectus agens* relates to the *intellectus possibilis* as light relates to vision.⁵⁶ It is fairly easy to treat this use of the term *illuminare*, or *illuminatur*, as nothing more than a metaphor—and as one which gives a particularly clear image, not needing any further explanation:

ut probat Aristoteles in VII metaphysicae. Si igitur intellectus possibilis sit pars animae et non sit substantia separata, ut probatum est, intellectus agens, per cuius actionem fiunt species intelligibiles in ipso, non erit aliqua substantia separata, sed aliqua virtus activa animae.”

56 i.1259/65: SCG III, c.45, n.6: “intellectum agentem, qui ita se habet ad intellectum possibilem sicut se habet lux ad visum”. Most of the commentaries on Thomas’ use of the term *illuminare* consider it only inasmuch as it is contrasted to the theory of divine illumination which prevailed upon St. Augustine’s theory of knowledge. We find it sufficient to merely point to c.1265/6a: *Quaestiones disputate de anima*, a.4, ad.7: “Ad septimum dicendum quod, sicut in rebus naturalibus sunt propria principia activa in unoquoque genere, licet Deus sit causa agens prima et communis, ita etiam requiritur proprium lumen intellectuale in homine, quamvis Deus sit prima lux omnes communiter illuminans.” Cf. 1266–68: ST Ia, q.79, a.4, c.

the *intellectus agens* illuminates the potentially intelligible, making it therefore actually intelligible in and for the *intellectus possibilis*. Yet a moment's pause will show us that understanding Thomas' use requires considerably further consideration. Is this description of the *intellectus agens* illuminating merely an alternative depiction of the act of *abstrahere*? Or does it signify some sort of activity which is distinct from and preparatory to *abstrahere*?⁵⁷

While "the intelligible" is clearly identified as the object of both the *intellectus possibilis* and the *intellectus agens*, and it has been shown that the *intellectus agens* respects the intelligible as its end (*finis*), considering the precise manner in which the action of illumination and abstraction arrives at the intelligible will help us to attain clarity.

Illumination makes intelligible something found within the phantasm. To explain this relation of intellect and phantasm, Thomas invokes the relation between color and sight:⁵⁸

Colors made actually visible through light certainly imprint their similitude in the diaphanous, and consequently in sight. If, therefore, the phantasms illuminated by the agent intellect do not impress their similitudes in the *intellectus possibilis*, but only dispose the *intellectus possibilis* to their reception, then the comparison of the phantasm to the *intellectus possibilis* as color to sight, as Aristotle posits, would be false.

Thomas understood light not to be a body, but the actuality of the diaphanous body whereby it becomes transparent. Language which suggests motion in a thing's becoming lighted he considered metaphorical.⁵⁹ While advances in scientific instrumentation have allowed us to see that light is in fact a kind of body and it is in fact something which travels, Thomas' conception of light as the immediate inception or actualization of luminosity in the diaphanous helps to clarify the act of illumination in the process of understanding. First, we ought to note that within the metaphor, the phantasm is not compared to

57 Cf. Deely 2007: 18, 103: "Are we talking two processes here, one preparatory to 'abstraction', the other abstraction proper? Or are we talking about one and the same process, either two aspects thereof, or simply two different ways of speaking about one and the same process?"

58 i.1259/65: *SCG* II c.76, n.10: "Colores facti visibiles actu per lucem pro certo imprimunt suam similitudinem in diaphano, et per consequens in visum. Si igitur ipsa phantasmata illustrata ab intellectu agente non imprimerent suas similitudines in intellectum possibilem, sed solum disponunt ipsum ad recipiendum; non esset comparatio phantasmatum ad intellectum possibilem sicut colorum ad visum, ut Aristoteles ponit."

59 Cf. c.1268: *In de anima*, lib. 2, lec. 14–15 *in passim*, but especially lec.14, n.408–414.

the intellect as color is to sight, but rather as the diaphanous; it is itself a kind of sign, through which the thing is made intelligible.⁶⁰ There are undoubtedly corporeal constituents of the phantasm—some dynamic interplay of neurons and synapses, of axons and dendrites, in the brain—but these are still, insofar as they are making something else known, existing in an intentional mode; while the phantasm is an accident inhering in the subject, it is nevertheless a formal sign. Second, we must consider that the phantasm is not itself a sign of something simple, nor could it be, but rather a complex formed from various sensations impressed by and particular judgments about the object.

3.2.1.1 The Preparation of Phantasms

What, therefore, does it mean to say that the phantasms “impress their similitudes in the *intellectus possibilis*”? One way to interpret this statement is to consider that, being illumined by the *intellectus agens*, the phantasm, since it is now actually intelligible, acts upon the *intellectus possibilis* directly. In such an interpretation, *illuminare* and *abstrahere*—based upon the common understanding of this latter as that act whereby the intelligible species is impressed upon the *intellectus possibilis*—would appear to be two names synonymously denominating the same act in the same regard. This interpretation, to our mind, is a mistake; nor do we hold two senses of *illuminare*, one denominating an act which is the strict and proper meaning of the term, and the second loose and coextensive with *abstrahere*.⁶¹ Rather, we hold that, because of the immediacy of the action of the *intellectus agens*, *illuminare* and *abstrahere*, which are two aspects of the same act differentiated by the manner in which the object (the phantasm) is related to that act, can occur simultaneously. *Illuminare*, specifically, is that aspect of the intellectual discovery whereby the actuality of a phantasmally presented being, which can be understood apart from the potency and thus in a universal manner, is seen in or through the particular phantasm.

We can see the sense of this interpretation if we attend to the fact that Thomas often speaks of the “preparation” of phantasms for the intellect, as

60 Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.79, a.3, ad.2: “circa effectum luminis est duplex opinio. Quidam enim dicunt quod lumen requiritur ad visum, ut faciat colores actu visibiles. Et secundum hoc, similiter requiritur, et propter idem, intellectus agens ad intelligendum, propter quod lumen ad videndum. Secundum alios vero, lumen requiritur ad videndum, non propter colores, ut fiant actu visibiles; sed ut medium fiat actu lucidum, ut Commentator dicit in 11 de anima. Et secundum hoc, similitudo qua Aristoteles assimilat intellectum agentem lumini, attenditur quantum ad hoc, quod sicut hoc est necessarium ad videndum, ita illud ad intelligendum; sed non propter idem.”

61 Cf. Deely 2007: *IS* 113–114.

performed by the interior sense powers, which the intellect needs in order to operate.⁶² In what sense is a phantasm prepared for the activity of the intellect? Is it prepared for illumination? for abstraction? for understanding? What does this preparation entail? Phantasms are in themselves emergent from entitative corporeal accidents, “residing” in the organ of the brain, and with the limitations of a material being; as such, Thomas says that their causality is material, as they are potentially intelligible but, being enmattered, cannot be actually intelligible.⁶³ And yet, the preparation of something which is a material cause requires a specification of form—for as we will demonstrate in the following section,⁶⁴ signate matter is a distinct, if infinitely malleable, set of potencies following upon the present form giving to that signate matter its designation. Given this, then, the preparation of the phantasms could never be such that they are prepared to be efficient causes, but rather, they must be a blend of a material causality (though **not** a material object), as “that from which”, and an extrinsic specifying or objective causality; this is what Thomas means in stating that the phantasm is an *obiectum movens*.⁶⁵

For the moment, let us note that the preparation of the phantasm for the *intellectus agens* seems to center around the “collation” of “individual intentions”.⁶⁶

62 Thomas Aquinas 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.75, a.3, ad.2: “intellectus indiget operatione virium sensitivarum, per quas ei phantasmata praeparantur” and *ibid.*, q.84, a.6, c.: “non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae.”

63 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.84, a.6, c.

64 3.2.2.

65 i.1259/65: *SCG II*, c.73, n.36: “Ante enim, indiget eo ut ab eo accipiat speciem intelligibilem: unde se habet ad intellectum possibilem ut obiectum movens.” See 3.2.1.2 below.

66 Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.78, a.4, c.; c.1268: *In de anima*, lib.2, lec.13, n.396: “Si vero apprehendatur in singulari, utputa cum video coloratum, percipio hunc hominem vel hoc animal, huiusmodi quidem apprehensio in homine fit per vim cogitativam, quae dicitur etiam ratio particularis, eo quod est collativa intentionum individualium, sicut ratio universalis est collativa rationum universalium.” The treatment given this text by Barker 2012: “Aquinas on Internal Sensory Intentions: Nature and Classification” in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 52.2, issue 206 (June) at 214–215 seems somewhat problematic; Barker considers these “individual intentions” to be representative of individuals such that “the son of Diare”, in his specific identity and as an incidental sensible, is grasped by a singular individual intention. The individual intention is opposed to what Barker calls “sortals, i.e., cogitative or estimative intentions referring to more than one but less than all based on accidental characteristics”. (214n70; cf. De Haan 2014: “Perception and the *Vis Cogitativa*: A Thomistic Analysis of Aspectual, Actional, and Affectional Percepts” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 88.3, 409: “the cogitative power also retains its proper objects in the form of a retentive *habitus*, which Aquinas calls an *experience*”

Though the phrases do not occur in Thomas with such a distinction, we would distinguish between the *intentio individui* and the *intentio individualis*—that is, between the intention of an individual and the individual intention. The former is constituted through collation, inasmuch as we do not possess an interior sense cognition of an individual in the identity of its individuality from a single encounter with it, but must build up that grasp of its individuality by a multitude of encounters, so as to form more clearly its distinguishing accidental characteristics which set it apart from others like it. The latter, the individual intention, refers to an intention which is itself individuated by the particular circumstances of exterior sensation in or through which it was received. Thus, *phantasmata*, considered as belonging to the imagination, are particular impressions of external sensation. Considered generally, as belonging to all of the interior sense powers, they are collations of the individual intentions, including the relation of these intentions to the individual impressions whereby the intentions were grasped in the first place.

Thus, Thomas says that there is an ordination of the *vis cogitativa*, and the *vires imaginativa et memorativa*, to the *intellectus possibilis* through its operation of preparing phantasms for the operation of the *intellectus agens*, which results ultimately in the production of the *species intelligibilis*.⁶⁷ Moreover, the ordination which the *vis cogitativa* has in preparing phantasms for the operation of the *intellectus agens* involves a distinguishing and comparing of “individual intentions”, much the same way that the intellect works with “universal intentions”, as Thomas says in *SCG* II, c.60.⁶⁸

[*experimentum*] or a *first universal*, and which I call a *cogitative sortal*.”). Diarez’ son is never presented to the cogitative/estimative power, or to any power of sensation for that matter, as an individual whole except as through the particular sensations of him which are received diversely by the exterior senses; there is no direct connection between the object of sense experience and the cogitative/estimative power. Any consideration of the distinctly identified individual, inasmuch as it is cognized through sensation, requires a multitude of experiences and an elaborated *species expressa* of the interior sense powers.

67 Cf. i.1259/65: *SCG* II c.76, n.26: “Dispositiones praedictarum virtutum sunt ex parte obiecti, scilicet phantasmatis, quod propter bonitatem harum virtutum praeparatur ad hoc quod faciliter fiat intelligibile actu per intellectum agentem.”—“The dispositions of the aforementioned powers are from the part of the object, namely the phantasm, on account of which goodness belonging to these powers, the phantasm is prepared to be easily made intelligible in act through the *intellectus agens*.”

68 i.1259/65: *SCG* II c.60, n.1: “Huius autem cogitativae virtutis est distinguere intentiones individuales, et comparare eas ad invicem: sicut intellectus qui est separatus et immixtus, comparat et distinguit inter intentiones universales. Et quia per hanc virtutem, simul cum imaginativa et memorativa, praeparantur phantasmata ut recipiant actionem intellectus

It belongs to the cogitative power to distinguish individual intentions, and to compare them to one another; as the intellect which is separate and unmixed compares and distinguishes among universal intentions. And through this power, together with the imagination and memory, phantasms are prepared to receive the action of the *intellectus agens*, by which they are made intelligible in actuality, just as some arts prepare the matter for the principle artificer.

Thomas implies that the phantasms becoming “intelligible in actuality” follow upon the preparation of the cogitative, imaginative, and memorative powers of interior sense. Another point of which we ought to take particular note in this text is the use of the term *intentiones*: an *intentio* is not a sensory impression in the same way as a color or a sound, but rather is something which occurs in the mind concurrently with the occasion of sensation, which does not produce a change in the sensitive being in the same way. Sensation, as a change proper to all animals, occurs in a twofold manner: namely what Thomas calls immutation according to *esse naturale*, or natural immutation—which we will call impressed corporeal immutation—and immutation according to *esse spirituale* or *esse intentionale*; that is, spiritual⁶⁹ or intentional immutation—which we will call impressed intentional immutation.⁷⁰

Now, the senses themselves are differentiated by their proper objects and the mode in which those objects are received. In the Thomistic tradition, the exterior senses are enumerated as five:⁷¹ touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight

agentis, a quo fiunt intelligibilia actu, sicut sunt aliquae artes praeparantes materiam artificii principali.”

69 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.78, a.3, c.: “est autem duplex immutatio, una naturalis, et alia spiritualis.” Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.* lib.4, d.44, q.2, a.1, qc.3, ad.2: “Si ergo aliquid sit quod natum sit immutari ab activo, naturali et spirituali immutatione, immutatio naturalis praecedit immutationem spiritualem, sicut esse naturale praecedit esse intentionale.”

70 I have chosen these two terms—impressed corporeal immutation and impressed intentional immutation—to efface the specter of dualism. The qualification of “impressed” has been added, despite “immutation” already connoting a kind of transitive change, to emphasize that each change originates extrinsically to the animal having sensation, as well as to suggest a parallel with the impressed species (of both sense and intellect). For more on the notion of *esse intentionale* see Deely 1968: “The Immateriality of the Intentional as Such” in *The New Scholasticism*, 42.2 (1968): *in passim*; Simon 1934: *Introduction a l'ontologie du connaitre*, 96–99 n17; 1271/2a: *In Meta.*: lib.1, lec.1, n.6; c.1268a: *In de anima* lib.1, lec.10, n.14–15; i.1256–59: *DV*: q.3, a.1, ad.2.

71 Touch is undoubtedly a genus of sensory powers, for there are clearly distinct objects for the sensations of texture, heat, balance, body position, hunger and thirst, and so on; but for the sake of simplicity, we distill these into their common genus.

are the proper senses, those which receive differentiated types of *sensibilia*, as well as the common *sensibilia* of shape, motion and the like, perceived by a number of the senses. The *sensus communis*, although enumerated as an interior sense on account of its having no exterior organ, since it is that which receives the sensible *per se* (the thing sensed as a whole, the *terminus ad quem* of the *sensibilia propria* precisely as distinguished from one another) seems fittingly placed among the exterior senses on the basis of its object being something sensible *per se*.⁷² Each of these exterior senses receives an impressed corporeal immutation and simultaneously serves as a passageway for the impression of an intentional immutation. Corporeal immutation occurs through the sensible form of a thing being received according to the precise manner in which one material thing is a cause upon the matter of another material thing; in other words, the activity of the thing immuting produces an effect upon the recipient, the immuted, as one hot thing applied to another increases the temperature of the latter, or as a soft object striking a hard object with sufficient force undergoes a change of its shape corresponding in some way to the shape of the hard object, such that the form possessed in some manner by the cause is received by the potency of the matter of the thing effected. Obviously, this corporeal change is not the proper cause of sensation, but only a material by means of which something properly disposed in itself is capable of attaining some sense knowledge—otherwise every body would be sensitive.⁷³ Thus, while the form received is in itself somehow sensible, it is not necessarily sensed, nor does it cause an act of sensation. Consequently, there must necessarily be some other change in the sensing being which is not directly caused by the mere presence of *sensibilia propria*.⁷⁴

This further change is the aforementioned impressed intentional immutation. Such immutation is a reception not of *sensibilia* as they are entitatively, but rather of *intentiones*;⁷⁵ incorporated with but nevertheless aspectually distinct and distinguishable from the *sensibilia* by means of which they are received. Whereas *sensibilia* are produced by the existence of the sensible

72 Cf. c.1268: *In de anima*: lib.3, lec.1 n.12–15 concerning the reception of common *sensibilia* by the exterior sense powers, and lib.3, lec.3 *in passim* for the proper object of the *sensus communis*. Where one lists the *sensus communis* is not important here.

73 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.78, a.3, c.: “Alioquin, si sola immutatio naturalis sufficeret ad sentiendum, omnia corpora naturalia sentirent dum alterantur.”

74 So called because *intentiones* are sensible, but not in the same way as the proper objects of sense, such as color and sound; as such they *sensibilia per accidens*. Cf. Thomas Aquinas c.1268a: *In de anima*, lib.2, lec.13, n.14.

75 1271: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.22, a.2, ad.3: “uno modo, transmutatione spirituali, secundum quod recipit intentionem rei.”

things themselves in conjunction with their intentional presence in the medium and subsequent presence to another being, and therefore interact with all material being they come into contact with, particularized or individual *intentiones* come to be only in the mind of a sensing, knowing being, of a being actually receptive of them. It would be a profound mistake to ascribe to these two receptions—of sensory data and of *intentiones*—two distinct receptive principles, as though an animal were at once both a physical body and an immaterial knower entitatively hypostratified.⁷⁶ *Intentiones* are not *sensibile per se*, as are *sensibilia propria* and *sensibilia communia*, but rather *sensibile per accidens*; that is, sensed **through** those things which are *sensibile per se*. What occurs by means of the receptivity proper to the cogitative power⁷⁷—that power of interior sensation which receives the *intentiones* which cannot be grasped by the exterior senses or the common sense but is delivered through them—is not necessarily posterior in time to the activity of the other sense powers, but rather simultaneous. The *intentiones* received by the cogitative power are not constructs that the mind makes for itself from *sensibilia propria*; rather, *sensibilia* act as vehicles which enable the cogitative power to grasp the *intentiones*, but which do not contain them *per se*. This simultaneous grasping of *intentiones*, as *sensibilia per accidens*, along with the *sensibilia per se*, presents a cognitive psychology which avoids the erroneous bundle-theories of perception and which coheres well with modern neuroscience and cognitive science. As Anthony Lisska writes, this notion of an *intentio* that is received by the apprehensive powers of the sense-endowed animal but which is not sensed as such “is an important, albeit continuously overlooked, principle in Aquinas’s

76 Cf. Heidegger 1927a: sz, 56/82–3: “Hence Being-in is not be explained ontologically by some ontical characterization, as if one were to say, for instance, that Being-in in a world is a spiritual property and that man’s ‘spatiality’ is a result of his bodily nature (which, at the same time, always gets ‘founded’ upon corporeality). Here again we are faced with the Being-present-at-hand-together of some such spiritual Thing along with a corporeal Thing, while the Being of the entity thus compounded remains more obscure than ever. Not until we understand Being-in-the-world as an essential structure of Dasein can we have any insight into Dasein’s *existential spatiality*. Such an insight will keep us from failing to see this structure or from previously cancelling it out—a procedure motivated not ontologically but rather ‘metaphysically’ by the naïve supposition that man is, in the first instance, a spiritual Thing which subsequently gets misplaced ‘into’ a space.” See also Catherine Jack Deavel 2010: “Thomas Aquinas and Knowledge of Material Objects: Proper Objects of Cognition” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 83: 269–278.

77 Cf. Thomas Aquinas c.1268c: *In de Memoria et Reminiscentia*, lec.2, n.321.

philosophy of perception".⁷⁸ It is only on the basis of a cognitive ability that an animal can constitute an environment out of the brute facts of the cognition-independent facts of the world around it. This reception of an *intentio* is the fundamental distinction between the being of an animal and the being of a plant. In other words, an *intentio* is the species-specific relation between object and animal and consequently, different animals can have different cognitive results, because of differing *intentiones*, concerning the same *sensibilia*.

Within the objectivized context of an animal environment—an *Umwelt*⁷⁹—animals become aware, to varying degrees, not only of stimuli to which they respond, but the ready-presence of individuals.⁸⁰ These individuals, however, are not recognized as cognition-independently-constituted individuals, but rather as objects; that is, they are recognized only insofar as they are relatable to the overall context of the *Umwelt*. There may be, in that objectivization, a distinction from all others, as the puppy relates to its mother in a manner distinctively from its relation to another adult female dog (though not "instinctively"), or as the pet responds to its owner. Nevertheless, this relation is still bound up in the context of the objectized world of environmental experience, the *Umwelt*. The bee, as Heidegger says, has only the flight-path of the bee; the path as path is something entirely foreign to it.⁸¹

This is not to say that every cognitive act of an animal lacking intellect is one of nothing other than the evaluation of benefit, harm, or neutrality, but rather that the internal psychological structure of the animal, such that it is always and inextricably oriented towards pursuit of the goods of its sensitive appetite, is determinative of its comportment towards the objects made present to it through the *intentiones* ascertained by its estimative power; for although the *vis aestimativa* or *cogitativa*, while discursive in its process and as a power requiring a material organ, processes these *intentiones* in time, it nevertheless cannot **not** process them. However we subdivide the cognitive acts of non-human animals concerned with the various *intentiones* it perceives, all of these acts are subordinated and in a way reducible to the tripartite evaluation of benefit, harm, and neutrality.

78 Lisska 2007: "A Look at Inner Sense in Aquinas: A Long-Neglected Faculty Psychology" in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, 80, 6.

79 Cf. Heidegger 1929–30: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983). References are to the English translation by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World—Finitude—Solitude* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995) 261–264. Hereafter *GM*.

80 Cf. Lisska 2007: "A Look at Inner Sense in Aquinas" *in passim*.

81 1929–30: *GM*, 247.

As noted in the quoted text above, from *SCG* II, c.60, however, the *vis cogitativa* does not simply receive these intentions, but rather conjoins or collates them,⁸² on account of which it is called the “particular reason”;⁸³ that is, there is a discursion proper to the *vis cogitativa* which results in complex *intentiones* produced through the activity of the cogitative power. As such, the *vis cogitativa* is not a strictly passive power with regard to the *intentiones* which it receives. Rather, they are incorporated, along with their correlated *per se sensibilia* preserved in the *vis imaginativa*, into one another and thereby form complex *phantasmata*⁸⁴ or what we might call the *species expressae sensatae*,⁸⁵ which serve not only as the basis of intellectual operation, but also for the judgments concerning singulars which are rendered by the *ratio particularis*. A wealth of intricacies need to be elaborated in giving an account of this function of the *vis cogitativa*. Nevertheless, we are here focused upon how, in this collating of *intentiones* along with various sensations preserved in the *vis imaginativa* and the *vis memorativa* which not only serve as a passageway for the *intentiones* but are also necessary for their recollection, the *vis cogitativa* prepares the *phantasmata* for the activity of the intellect; for the phantasm can be one which is either experience-poor or one which is experience-rich. The more singular instances which are collated as forming the phantasm which one has of a corporeal thing, or of a multitude of corporeal things associated by their similitude in *sensibilia*, the richer the experience, such that it encompasses not only a consideration of an individual, but of a multitude, as a quasi-universal.⁸⁶

82 Thomas often uses the Latin term “collatio” in reference to the activity of the particular reason in sorting out the *intentiones* of the internal sense powers; thus, a putting of these things in the proper order or sequence.

83 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.78, a.4, c.: “Et ideo quae in aliis animalibus dicitur aestimativa naturalis, in homine dicitur cogitativa, quae per collationem quandam huiusmodi intentiones advenit. Unde etiam dicitur ratio particularis, cui medici assignant determinatum organum, scilicet mediam partem capitis, est enim collativa intentionum individualium, sicut ratio intellectiva intentionum universalium.”

84 It should be noted that every phantasm is complex in one way or another—just as we do not experience individual sensations in isolation from one another, neither do we imagine them in isolation from one another. Even the simplest corporeal image rendered by our minds requires some combination of distinct aspects of material beings; a color, for instance, cannot be imagined apart from a surface; when we imagine sounds, we imagine them originating in some place; imagined smells are associated with their source, and a place, and so on.

85 Though the *vis cogitativa* is the power principally responsible for the formation of the *species expressae*, it is on account of all the sense powers that it is produced; hence, *species expressae sensatae*.

86 Cf. 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.1, lec.1, n.15: “Experimentum enim est ex collatione plurium singularium in memoria receptorum. Huiusmodi autem collatio est homini propria, et pertinet

3.2.1.2 *Obiectum Movens*

The kind of causality proper to such *phantasmata*, as aforementioned in being prepared for the activity of the *intellectus agens*, is at once a kind of material causality and at the same time a kind of extrinsic specifying or objective causality. This latter notion, though undeniably present in Thomas, was not thoroughly developed by him. Fortuitously, however, John Poinsoot dedicates an article of his *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars* to asking *qualiter dividatur obiectum in motivum et terminativum*, “in what way are objects divided into stimulus objects and terminative objects”.⁸⁷ Poinsoot defines *obiectum* generally as: “[what] consists in this: that it be something extrinsic, from which derives and upon which depends the intrinsic *ratio* and *species* of any power or act; and this is reduced to the genus of an extrinsic formal cause not causing existence, but specification.”⁸⁸

Poinsoot also distinguishes three senses of the term *obiectum*:⁸⁹

The object is threefold: namely, stimulative only, terminative only, and stimulative and terminative at once. The stimulative only is that which moves the power to form a notion not of itself, but of another; as the picture of the emperor which moves the power to cognize the emperor. The terminative only is a thing cognized through a notion produced by some other object, as the emperor is cognized through the picture. That which is at once stimulative and terminative moves the power to forming a cognition of itself, as when the wall is seen in itself.

ad vim cogitativam, quae ratio particularis dicitur: quae est collativa intentionum individualium, sicut ratio universalis intentionum universalium.”

87 1632a: *Artis Logicae Seuncda Pars*, q.21, a.4 (R.I 670a18–679b5). I have followed John Deely (1632b: *TDS*, 166–192) in translating “motivum” here as “stimulus”; while the term is not perfect and eschews any sense of transliteration, it does cohere with the explanation given by Poinsoot.

88 1632b: *TDS*, 166/4–11 (R.I 670a21–29): “Obiectum in communi, ut abstrahit a motivo et terminativo, consistit in hoc, quod sit aliquid extrinsecum, a quo sumitur et dependet intrinseca ratio et species alicuius potentiae vel actus; et hoc reducit ad genus cause formalis extrinsecae non causantis existentiam, sed specificationem.”

89 1632b: *TDS*, 26/7–19 (R.I 9a37–9b6): “Obiectum est triplex, scilicet motivum tantum, terminativum tantum, motivum et terminativum simul. Motivum tantum est, quod movet potentiam ad formandam notitam non sui, sed alterius, sicut imperatoris imago, quae movet ad cognoscendum imperatorem. Terminativum tantum est res cognita per notitam ab alio obiectum productam, sicut imperator cognitus per imaginem. Termatintivum et motivum simul, quod movet potentiam ad formandam cognitionem sui, sicut quando paries in se videtur.”

In other words, the *obiectum*, even when it exists entitatively (which is not always), outside that which it affects, causes the specification (the determination to being **this** rather than **that**) inside that which it affects. This threefold notion of the objective cause is essential to understanding the role of the phantasm in the production of the *species intelligibilis*; for while the senses are as a material cause in the production of intellectual understanding, the interior senses, and especially the *vis cogitativa*, also arrange this material cause, the terminative object of the activity of the *intellectus agens*, in such a way as to specify and determine the stimulative object which informs the *intellectus possibilis*.

An object specifies in a twofold manner, depending on whether it relates to an active or a passive power. The active power respects the object as terminative—it is that towards which the action of the power is oriented. The passive power respects the object as specificative—that from which it receives its form. This distinction is made by Thomas in *De veritate* q.15, a.2, quoted above, as regards the *intellectus agens* and *intellectus possibilis*.⁹⁰ It is reiterated in *Summa theologiae* Ia, q.77, a.3⁹¹ and Ia–IIae, q.9, a.1,⁹² as well as *In de anima*, lib.2 lec.6, n.305.⁹³

90 Quoted above, 3.2, n.54.

91 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.77, a.3, c.: “Omnis enim actio vel est potentiae activae, vel passivae. Obiectum autem comparatur ad actum potentiae passivae, sicut principium et causa movens, color enim in quantum movet visum, est principium visionis. Ad actum autem potentiae activae comparatur obiectum ut terminus et finis, sicut augmentativae virtutis obiectum est quantum perfectum, quod est finis augmenti. Ex his autem duobus actio speciem recipit, scilicet ex principio, vel ex fine seu termino, differt enim calefactio ab in frigidatione, secundum quod haec quidem a calido, scilicet activo, ad calidum; illa autem a frigido ad frigidum procedit.”

92 1271: *ST* Ia–IIae, q.9, a.1, c.: “Indiget igitur movente quantum ad duo, scilicet quantum ad exercitium vel usum actus; et quantum ad determinationem actus. Quorum primum est ex parte subiecti, quod quandoque invenitur agens, quandoque non agens, aliud autem est ex parte obiecti, secundum quod specificatur actus” and “Sed obiectum movet, determinando actum, ad modum principii formalis, a quo in rebus naturalibus actio specificatur, sicut calefactio a calore.”

93 c.1268a: *In de anima*, lib.2 lec.6, n.305: “Species enim actuum et operationum sumuntur secundum ordinem ad obiecta. Omnis enim animae operatio, vel est actus potentiae activae, vel passivae. Obiecta quidem potentialium passivarum comparantur ad operationes earum ut activa, quia reducunt potentias in actum, sicut visibile visum, et omne sensibile sensum. Obiecta vero potentialium activarum comparantur ad operationes ipsarum ut fines. Obiecta enim potentialium activarum, sunt operata ipsarum. Manifestum est autem, quod in quibuscumque praeter operationes sunt aliqua operata, quod operata sunt fines operationum, ut dicitur in primo *Ethic.*: sicut domus quae aedificatur, est finis

Further, Poinsoot distinguishes between the stimulative or moving as efficient cause and the stimulative as formal object; for the former moves by a mode of exercise—a transitive act conducing some existence—whereas the latter moves by specifying some passive power—the specifying form of the stimulative object which gives an initial determination to the manner in which the power reflexively relates to the terminative object. To take Poinsoot's example, consider the way in which a picture of someone, the stimulative object, determines how we are cognitively related to that person, the terminative object. From a particular angle, someone may look more corpulent than they actually are, or thinner, or lighting may accentuate or obscure less attractive features. Likewise, we could encounter an intelligent person having a deliberately unintelligent conversation, and by means of his or her words, the stimulative objects, misapprehend the reality of the terminative object, i.e., the mind of the intelligent person.

Thus, in being made *intelligibile in actu*, the phantasms considered under this intelligibility are not numerically the same as they are in themselves, as *intelligibile in potentia*. The phantasm of itself does not by its own causality generate a *species intelligibilis impressa*.

What then, does it mean to say that the phantasms are made intelligible in actuality? The simple answer is to say that the activity of the *intellectus agens* upon the phantasm results in the production of the *species intelligibilis*; the more sophisticated answer is **both** (1) the production of the *species impressa intellectus* and (2) the realization of actual knowledge on the basis of the *species expressa intellectus*. Let us first look at a few texts of St. Thomas which support the first claim of our answer—and therein make some distinctions about the relation between *phantasmata* and *species intelligibilis*; and, second, look at texts which corroborate the second claim of our answer.

3.2.1.3 Antecedent Illumination

The first text supporting our interpretation that illumination precedes the *species impressa intellecta* comes from the *Summa contra Gentiles* and discusses the kind of ordination which the *vis cogitativa* has in relation to the *intellectus possibilis*:⁹⁴

aedificationis. Manifestum est igitur, quod omne obiectum comparatur ad operationem animae, vel ut activum, vel ut finis. Ex utroque autem specificatur operatio.”

94 i.1259/65: *SCG* II c.73, n.16: “Virtus cogitativa non habet ordinem ad intellectum possibilem, quo intelligit homo, nisi per suum actum quo praelegantur phantasmata ut per intellectum agentem fiant intelligibilia actu et perficientia intellectum possibilem.”

The cogitative power does not have an ordination to the *intellectus possibilis* by which the human being understands, unless through its act by which phantasms are prepared in order to be made intelligible in act, through the operation of the *intellectus agens*, and therefore made perfective of the *intellectus possibilis*.

Reception of the *species intelligibilis* perfects the *intellectus possibilis*, insofar as it is thus “moved” from potency to act.⁹⁵ But this perfection does not occur simply and all at once, given the illumination of the phantasms. Rather, the illumination of things intelligible provides a medium through which the actually intelligible can subsequently be seen: “Just as every color is seen in a corporeal light, likewise every intelligible is seen in the light of the *intellectus agens*; not, however, in the rationale of an object, but rather in the rationale of a cognitive medium.”⁹⁶

Just as the presence of corporeal light does not make an object actually seen, so too the intellectual light does not make a thing actually known. A corporeally illuminated body remains unseen without something there to see it, or with a defective organ, and, depending upon what is meant by “sensed”, there can even be an impressed corporeal immutation without the sense-specific impressed intentional immutation, as when we have no awareness of a color being made present to our sight, or we can even misperceive the color, as occurs with optical illusions:⁹⁷

For colors existing outside of the soul, in the presence of light, are actually visible as having the power to move the sight; but they are not actually sensed as though they were one with the sense power in actuality. And similarly, the phantasms are made intelligible in act by

95 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.79, a.2, c.: “Tertio modo, dicitur aliquid pati communiter, ex hoc solo quod id quod est in potentia ad aliquid, recipit illud ad quod erat in potentia, absque hoc quod aliquid abiciatur. Secundum quem modum, omne quod exit de potentia in actum, potest dici pati, etiam cum perficitur. Et sic intelligere nostrum est pati.”

96 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.3, q.4, a.5: “Unde sicut in omni colore videtur lumen corporale, ita in omni intelligibili videtur lumen intellectus agentis; non tamen in ratione objecti sed in ratione medii cognoscendi.”

97 i.1259/65: *SCG* II, c.59, n.14: “Colores enim extra animam existentes, praesente lumine, sunt visibiles actu ut potentes movere visum: non autem ut actu sensata, secundum quod sunt unum cum sensu in actu. Et similiter phantasmata per lumen intellectus agentis fiunt actu intelligibilia, ut possint movere intellectum possibilem: non autem ut sint intellecta actu, secundum quod sunt unum cum intellectu possibili facto in actu.”

the light of the *intellectus agens*, such that they are capable of moving the *intellectus possibilis*; but not, however, such that they are actually understood, as though they were made one with the *intellectus possibilis* in actuality.

Thus, the illumination of the *intellectus agens* does not cause the unity of the *intellectus possibilis* with the things which are actually intelligible. Rather, this illumination is, as Thomas considered corporeal light to be, the immediate actualization of the medium through which such a unity between the receptive power of the *intellectus possibilis* and its actually intelligible object can occur.

So what does the illumination of the *intellectus agens* bring to light antecedent to *abstrahere* (the operation, we will see, whereby the *intellectus possibilis* and the actually intelligible object are united inasmuch as the former is specified by the latter)? The specificative stimulating object of the *intellectus possibilis*, the essence, not necessarily of something in its substantiality, but some material thing. The intellect **always acts in this regard**, it is always illuminating, but it is **not** always grasping these stimulating objects, for the phantasms thus illumined are not always prepared such that their potentially intelligible specifications are ready to be realized apart from their unintelligible aspects.

Thus, this bringing-to-light is accomplished by acting upon the disposition of the “what”, the *quid*, within the object presented through a phantasm, such that something within that phantasm is realized to supersede its relativity to the subject and belong properly to the object, such that it is not **merely** an object, but also a thing. In other words, the illumination of the *intellectus agens* is a revealing of what it is for a thing to be—τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι—as it is independently of our cognition of it. But that thing need not be a substance. It can be an accident or even a relation.⁹⁸ Since, however, the understanding of accidents is only capable of a full interpretation on the basis of their relation to substance, substantial essences are the proper and adequate objects of intellectual understanding. These essences are not made known directly to the intellect of a corporeal being, but are rather delivered part by part, insofar as phantasms are collated to produce experiences sufficiently rich for the essential actualities, *essentialia*, to be grasped. Consequently, there is a constant discursion back and forth between the substantial unity of the whole and the aspectual parts.

98 See 5.2.1.

3.2.1.4 Consequent Illumination

We must also take notice that *illuminare*, as used by Thomas, can be interpreted to refer not only to a kind of preparatory activity for abstraction, but also for the actuality of understanding **consequent** to it:⁹⁹

The phantasm is the principle of our cognition, as that from which the operation of the intellect begins; not in a passing manner, but as something remaining and as a certain fundament of intellectual operation, just as the principles of demonstration necessarily remain in every procession of scientific knowledge. This is because the phantasms are compared to the intellect as objects, in which it sees everything which it sees, either through a perfect representation or through a negation.

In this text, we find a suggestion for both claims—that illumination both allows for the production of the *species impressae intellectae* and for actual understanding of a material being known under the *species expressae intellectae*: namely, in saying that the phantasm is “that from which” intellectual understanding begins **and** is a “certain fundament” for intellectual operation which remains even after the intellectual operation has begun; it is a permanent and not merely passing fundament for the operation of the intellect. This return of the *intellectus agens* to the phantasm consequent to the formation of the *species expressa intellectus* is corroborated by three texts (emphases added):¹⁰⁰

For the cogitative power apprehends individuals, as existing under a common nature, which mode of apprehension belongs to the cogitative power insofar as it is united to the intellectual power in the same subject. It is for this reason that the cogitative power knows this human being precisely as this **human**, and this tree precisely as this **tree**.

99 c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.6, a.2, ad.5: “phantasma est principium nostrae cognitionis, ut ex quo incipit intellectus operatio non sicut transiens, sed sicut permanens ut quoddam fundamentum intellectualis operationis; sicut principia demonstrationis oportet manere in omni processu scientiae, cum phantasmata comparentur ad intellectum ut obiecta, in quibus inspicit omne quod inspicit vel secundum perfectam repraesentationem vel per negationem.”

100 c.1268a: *In de anima*, lib.2, lec.13, n.398: “Nam cogitativa apprehendit individuum, ut existens sub natura communi; quod contingit ei, in quantum unitur intellectivae in eodem subiecto; unde cognoscit hunc hominem prout est hic homo, et hoc lignum prout est hoc lignum.”

And:¹⁰¹

Because the apprehensive interior powers prepare the proper object for the *intellectus possibilis*, therefore from the good disposition of these powers, to which cooperates the good disposition of the body, **a human being is readily returned to understanding.** And thus the habit of the intellect is able to be in these powers secondarily; it is principally in the *intellectus possibilis*.

And:¹⁰²

Consequently, the proper operation of [the intellect], which is to understand, although it does not depend upon a body as though needing the exercise of a corporeal organ, nevertheless has its object in the body; namely, the phantasms. For which reason, for as long as the soul is in the body, it is not able to understand without phantasms, nor is it able to remember except through the cogitative and memorative powers, through which the phantasms are prepared, as is clearly said above.

In the return to the phantasms through which human beings actually understand, the activity of illumination by the *intellectus agens* is still required; for through this, the phantasms are made intelligible in act, not simply in a temporal sequencing whereby the *intellectus possibilis* is capable of grasping the *quid*, the what, but in the return of that *quid*, determined through the presentation of the phantasm as a stimulative object, to the particular image of the thing as a terminative object: *impossibile est intellectum nostrum, secundum praesentis vitae statum, quo passibili corpori coniungitur, aliquid intelligere in actu, nisi convertendo se ad phantasmata.*¹⁰³ By illumination of the medium whereby

101 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.50, a.4, ad.3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod, quia vires apprehensivae interiorum praeparant intellectui possibili proprium obiectum; ideo ex bona dispositione harum virium, ad quam cooperatur bona dispositio corporis, redditur homo habilis ad intelligendum. Et sic habitus intellectivus secundario potest esse in istis viribus. Principaliter autem est in intellectu possibili."

102 i.1259/65: *SCG II* c.80, n.13: "Unde et consequenter operatio propria eius, quae est intelligere, etsi non dependeat a corpore quasi per organum corporale exercita, habet tamen obiectum in corpore, scilicet phantasma. Unde, quandiu est anima in corpore, non potest intelligere sine phantasmate: nec etiam reminisci nisi per virtutem cogitativam et memorativam, per quam phantasmata praeparantur, ut ex dictis patet."

103 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.84, a.7, c.: "It is impossible that our intellects, according to the present state of life in which the intellect is conjoined with a passible body, to understand something in actually except by converting itself to the phantasms."

intellectual cognition occurs, the phantasm, the *intellectus agens* provides not only a means through which the specifying stimulative object of the *intellectus possibilis* can be grasped, but also the means through which that *species intelligibilis*, become a *species intellecta*, grasped and elaborated into an intellectual concept, can be seen in its material object.

3.2.2 *Digression on Nature: Matter, Form, and Understanding*

Before proceeding with our discussion of abstraction, we need some clarification. For although it can have a broader use, the term “abstraction” is most often said, within the contemporary Thomistic literature, in regards to an “abstraction or removal from matter”. As a simple example: the three degrees of abstraction are framed in terms of how far removed the object of consideration is from the matter which provides the originary specifying form for the phantasm, from which the intellect attains its knowledge. Consequently, if we are to understand St. Thomas’ use of the term *abstrahere*, we need first to have at least a provisional understanding of the meaning of matter.

Specifically, we want to understand why matter is itself unintelligible, and thus why an abstraction from it is necessary.¹⁰⁴

What do we mean by “matter”? The term, ὕλη or *materia*, has the historical connotation of being the “stuff” to which a form is given—as wood becomes a chair, or cotton becomes a garment. More broadly, however, the term is used to represent anything “from which” or “out of which” something else is made. As

104 A more thorough analysis of the Aristotelian conception of matter, form, and privation, as the principles of change (and therefore of *ens mobile*), is much needed for understanding St. Thomas’ overall philosophical endeavor. As said by Blanchette 1992: *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 9: “Thus, to make little of Saint Thomas’s understanding of physical cosmology is not only to ignore significant elements of his thought (historically speaking, since Aquinas himself was constantly referring to that understanding to illustrate his thinking on the order of being, on the virtues, and in theology). It is also to lose sight of some important metaphysical ideas, such as certain aspects of hylomorphic theory or the series of essentially subordinate causes in the universe, which Aquinas often explained and clarified in terms of that understanding... notwithstanding the obsolescence of the model, there were still important ideas connected with it, not the least of which was the perfection of the universe.” To this, we would add the Thomistic theory of knowledge is profoundly dependent upon having at least some understanding of the cosmological theory which informed St. Thomas—not only to avoid potential errors following from the theory of the celestial spheres, but also to gain true insight into the process of encountering material beings and coming to true intellectual understanding of them.

what is more proximate to our mode of knowing—intellectually in union with the senses—this means that we look at the matter of what is here and now before us; that is, matter as under some determinate form which can receive others, or what is called **signate matter** by Thomas.¹⁰⁵ As changes continually occur under our observation, however, it is realized that the full extension of what the term “matter” primarily signifies comprises more than the matter of the here and now, i.e., what is indicated by “signate matter”, for not only does the same matter perdure through the change of accidental and artificial forms, but even through substantial changes. Thus, what is primarily signified by matter shifts from the mere “stuff out of which” to the “capacity to receive change”.¹⁰⁶ Advances in physics have corroborated this; while material things, as identifiably possessing this or that form, are quite frequently destroyed, the constitutive material parts are not. The same matter existing in stars billions of years ago is still existing today—it has received practically innumerable changes and is still the “same” matter (e.g., an electron in my hand could be numerically the same electron expelled by a quasar 10 billion years ago) despite subsumption under numerous forms through its existence. And yet even that matter, among the seemingly most fundamental particles discovered today, is signate matter.

What is common to all material beings—whether a complex and developed substance like a dog or a relatively simple and undeveloped particle such as a photon or a gluon—is that they have a determinate potency. A photon can actually be causally involved in an electromagnetic exchange and a gluon can

105 The common translation of this Latin phrase as “designated matter” seems somewhat unfitting, as “designated” carries with a connotation of finality or what is unchanging, which connotation is utterly at odds with the meaning, although the term is not inaccurate or necessarily misleading. “Signate matter”, on the other hand, signifies the present state with a connotation of both the past—what it is that has “signed” the matter, so to speak—and the future—what might yet “sign” it.

106 Charles De Koninck 1957: “Abstraction from Matter (1)” in *Laval theologique et philosophique*, 13.2, 133–196, indicates this truth looking at the opposite tendency of our consideration of what we mean by matter, 158: “Hence, when we say what an individual thing is, the what compares to the individual thing as form to matter. For example, when we call a certain tool a saw, ‘saw’ is to this single tool as form to matter. It should therefore be clear that even the matter which enters into the definition (as steel in the definition of saw) has the nature of form if related to a single specimen of the thing defined (as steel in general has the nature of form as regards this particular saw). Thus we have a new imposition of the words ‘matter’ and ‘form’. To return to our bowling-pin, ‘matter’ now will be individual bowling-pins as instances of ‘bowling-pin’. It is in this sense that ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ are called the subjective parts or matter of the predicable universal ‘animal.’”

actually be causally involved in a strong force interaction, but the photon cannot be causal, directly, at least, in the strong force interaction, and the gluon cannot be causal in the electromagnetic interaction. A dog can apprehend intentional forms of its environment, while a photon cannot; but a photon can travel through the earth's atmosphere at 186,000 miles per second, whereas a dog shot around the world at that speed, with naught but its fur around it, would almost certainly cease to be a dog.

In each case, the limitations to and determinations of the potency of the signate matter are caused by its adjoined form, its being of this or that kind. When we separate out some matter from a specific form—either in the thing itself, in which case the removed form is necessarily replaced by another, or even a multitude, or by some act of consideration—there is still some signation left on the matter, some form.¹⁰⁷ What is usually referred to as “common matter”, existing actually only on the basis of being in the intellect, is still understood determinately. Thus, we discover that there is a kind of **relativity** of what we refer to as signate matter.¹⁰⁸ We should not make the mistake of taking matter to be, as **matter**, something on its own—as did Sir Isaac Newton, for whom indeed, “matter” is treated as what is synonymous to the constitutive reality of any body.¹⁰⁹ The consequence of this is that matter becomes thought of as

107 Cf. Josephus Gredt 1899: *Elementa Philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*, 223: “Materiam et formam esse partes constituentes totum seu substantiam completam, ex ipsa essentia patet materiae et formae; materiam et formam ad invicem causalitatem exercere immediate sua ipsius entitate probatur: Forma causalitatem exercet in materiam, quatenus actuat materiam, materia in formam, quatenus eam recipit et sustentat. Atqui forma immediate sua ipsius entitate actuat materiam, et materia immediate sua ipsius entitate recipit et sustentat formam. Forma enim per essentiam suam est actus materiae seu evolutio eius, et materia per essentiam suam est potentia sustentativa formae. Nam haec est differentia inter causas intrinsecas (materiam et formam) et causas extrinsecas (efficientem et finalem), quod hae causant mediante aliquo medio (ita efficiens causat mediante virtute et actione), illae vero immediate sua ipsius entitate. Ergo.”

108 Cf. c.1252/6c: *De principiis naturae*, c.2: “Sed sciendum, quod quaedam materia habet compositionem formae: sicut aes, cum sit materia respectu idoli, ipsum tamen aes est compositum ex materia et forma; et ideo aes non dicitur materia prima, quia habet materiam.”

109 Cf. Isaac Newton 1686: *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, 8–9: “Materia vis insita est potentia resistendi, qua corpus unumquodque, quantum in se est, perseverat in statu suo vel quiescendi vel movendi uniformiter in directum.

“Hæc semper proportionalis est suo corpori, neq; differt quicquam ab inertia Massæ, nisi in modo concipiendi. Per inertiam materiæ fit ut corpus omne de statu suo vel quiescendi vel movendi difficulter deturbetur.”

something of itself knowable; indeed, Eddington considered intelligibility to be a fundamental property of matter.¹¹⁰

We must take care to prevent confusing the experimental and instrumental scientific treatment—i.e., the ideoscopic treatment—of “matter” with the consideration of what is material according to natural reason alone—i.e., the cenoscopic view. Have the “final indestructible units of matter”¹¹¹ truly been found? Is energy truly the primary “out of which” all matter is constituted?¹¹² These questions persist in no small part due to the fact that the ideoscopic methods of discovery, the results of which are tabulated in quantifications, are often dissociated from any truly meaningful overall intelligible framework which can only be given through a cenoscopic inquiry and are yet taken as being constitutive of such a framework. Heisenberg exemplifies this conflation of the cenoscopic and ideoscopic studies of nature when he states that, “If we compare this situation [of energy and matter] with the Aristotelian concepts of matter and form, we can say that the matter of Aristotle, which is mere ‘potentia’, should be compared to our concept of energy, which gets into ‘actuality’ by means of the form, when the elementary particle is created.”¹¹³ To posit matter as the dynamic and active element and form as the static and rigid aspect within material being turns Aristotle inside-out and obliterates the notion of substantial form as the first act. Indeed, the conflation of ideoscopic with

110 Arthur Eddington 1928: *The Nature of the Physical World*, 262–268, but especially 267: “In saying that the differentiation of the actual from the non-actual is only expressible by reference to mind I do not mean to imply that a universe without conscious mind would have no more status than Utopia. But its property of actuality would be indefinable since the one approach to a definition is cut off. The actuality of Nature is like the beauty of Nature. We can scarcely describe the beauty of a landscape as non-existent when there is no conscious being to witness it; but it is through consciousness that we can attribute a meaning to it. And so it is with the actuality of the world. If actuality means ‘known to mind’ then it is a purely subjective character of the world; to make it objective we must substitute ‘knowable to mind’. The less stress we lay on the accident of parts of the world being known at the present era to particular minds, the more stress we must lay on the *potentiality* of being known to mind as a fundamental objective property of matter, giving it the status of actuality whether individual consciousness is taking note of it or not.”

111 Werner Heisenberg 1958: *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, 157.

112 Cf. Heisenberg 1958: *Physics and Philosophy*, 160: “All the elementary particles can, at sufficiently high energies, be transmuted into other particles, or they can simply be created from kinetic energy and can be annihilated into energy, for instance into radiation. Therefore, we have here actually the final proof for the unity of matter. All the elementary particles are made of the same substance, which we may call energy or universal matter; they are just different forms in which matter can appear.”

113 Heisenberg 1958: *Physics and Philosophy*, 160.

cenoscopic inquiry, without clear boundaries as to what belongs to the domain of each, has led to a profound and thorough confusion as to what is meant by matter, especially as the “that from which” an abstraction takes.¹¹⁴

Thus, if we are considering what is separated off as the proximate matter of some corporeal being through an intellectual act, what we are considering is a less-specific form, except insofar as we are considering that matter, as having the kind of existence given it by that less-specific form, as in potency to the reception of another form. For instance, when we think about the “wood” of a chair, if we are thinking about it precisely as it is wood, we are thinking about it as a form; if we are thinking about how the wood of the chair could be made into the fuel of our fire, we are thinking about the potency of the less-specific form—“wood” being less specific than “chair”—as it is in its potency for being burnt. When we separate matter itself off as an object of consideration, however—in an intellectual act which serves as a prime example for what is distinctive about human understanding—such that we are considering it as not joined to any form whatsoever, then and only then have we arrived at the notion of **prime matter**.¹¹⁵ This, as Thomas states repeatedly, is “pure potency”,¹¹⁶ a potency which is open to an infinite variety of forms. Its existence as an object is granted only by intellectual consideration, i.e., as a purely cognition-dependent being, by the consideration which is capable of realizing in objectivity that which is not realized in the subjective constitution of something cognition-independent.

But we have also to recognize that, while not wholly cognition-dependent in the same way, the designation of something as “the matter of an existing

114 Cf. William Wallace 1996: *The Modeling of Nature*, 8–9. Here, Wallace points implicitly to the confusion, at once insightfully and problematically; he seems inclined to agree with Heisenberg that mass-energy is the “ultimate matrix to which science seems to have come in identifying the material cause of the universe.” At the same time, he recognizes that this notion only “comes closest to conveying the Aristotelian idea of protomatter [prime matter] as the basic stuff of the universe”—not that it actually conveys the same idea Aristotle himself had. The problem, as I see it, is that if energy *is*, apart from the elementary particle, however that existence might be, then it *must be* determinate in some or another regard, it must exist through some form. Rather, it would seem more accurate to describe energy as the first matter only insofar as we understand it to be the most fundamental and elementary **form**, the signate matter closest to prime matter.

115 Cf. c.1252/6c: *De principiis naturae*, c.2: “Ipsa autem materia quae intelligitur sine qualibet forma et privatione, sed subiecta formae et privationi, dicitur materia prima, propter hoc quod ante ipsam non est alia materia.”

116 E.g., i.1259/65: *SCG I*, c.17, n.7; c.43, n.6; *SCG II*, c.16, n.12; c.44, n.11; 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.7, a.2, ad.3, etc.

being” requires a contribution or completion from the intellect. We do not and cannot know potency directly, but only as it is in relation to act. This does not mean that matter is not a real principle of the thing—only that its explicit discovery requires a contribution of the mind not directly provided by sensible observation of the thing, for any thing is sensibly present only under a determinate form, or, more accurately, a plurality of accidental forms. Certainly, the intellect discovers things belonging to the substantial nature of the thing **through** the accidental forms sensibly ascertained, and, certainly, the sense powers receive form without the particular matter belonging to the thing. But the **intentional presence** of the thing, through the objectization given it by the sense powers, entails no dissociation of matter from form, and the cognition of the thing is no less contingent than the sensitive experiences of it or the thing itself. Sense cognition abstracts the intentional forms by retentively preserving them in the imaginative and memorative powers, and thus preserves them for an abstractive awareness apart from the immediate presence of what they represent. These intentional forms, although separated from the matter in which they are entitatively found, nevertheless exist actually as accidental modifications of the brain as new enmattered entitative forms—not as absolutely determined structures present in the brain, but as the possibility for being made present through newly-acquired accidents belonging to the brain. Consequently, the abstraction which occurs in the senses is not an abstraction from particular matter, but rather from *this* particular signate matter; for the content of the senses is always particularized.

This is why every external sense impression entails not only a natural immutation, but also an immaterial immutation. In every sensation, the organs allow the intentional form of the thing known to be present in the knower through the reception of something from the known. Thus, there is simultaneously, as in the case of touch, both an immaterial and a material immutation—material in as much as the hard edge of a rock, for instance, indents the softness of a finger when pressed against it and immaterial inasmuch as, though the hardness does not come to be corporeally present in the one knowing, it becomes intentionally and therefore immaterially present. This immaterial presence allows it to be retained and objectively present even when physically absent.

As Thomas explains, the immaterial immutation proper to sense cognition occurs either through a direct contact with the sensed, or through a medium whereby the sensed affects the organ. In each case, a material change is involved,¹¹⁷ though Thomas did, mistakenly, hold that no material change

117 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.77, a.3, c.; c.1265/6a: *Quaestio disputata de anima*, a.13, c: “Quia vero sensus proprius, qui est primus in ordine sensivarum potentiarum, immediate a sensibilibus

occurs in sight and therefore held it to have a strictly immaterial immutation. Why this error? Ostensibly, without the use of specialized equipment, it is nearly impossible to tell that light travels—i.e., that it is in motion, that light has an actual physical effect on the eyes. This mistake nevertheless tells us something about the mind of Thomas concerning nature of sensation and immutation, particularly as pertaining to abstraction from matter: namely, that, as Thomas saw it, the further removed something moved is from its mover—further in the sense of the immediacy in which it is grasped—the more abstract the cognition is.¹¹⁸ In other words, the abstraction of sense is the abstraction from the motion in which the cognized object exists and by means of which it is actually sensed. Touch is the sense power which is most directly moved by its object—and thus Thomas says it is, along with taste, is the “most material”¹¹⁹ for the thing known has to be in some way actually moving the organ. Sight is the least

immutatur, necesse fuit quod secundum diversitatem immutationum sensibilium in diversas potentias distingueretur. Cum enim sensus sit susceptivus specierum sensibilium sine materia, necesse est gradum et ordinem immutationum quibus immutantur sensus a sensibilibus, accipere per comparationem ad immateriales immutationes. Sunt igitur quaedam sensibilia quorum species, licet immaterialiter in sensu recipiantur, tamen etiam materialem immutationem faciunt in animalibus sentientibus. Huiusmodi autem sunt qualitates quae sunt principia transmutationum etiam in rebus materialibus: sicut calidum, frigidum, humidum et siccum et alia huiusmodi. Quia igitur huiusmodi sensibilia immutant nos etiam materialiter agendo, materialis autem immutatio fit per contactum, necesse est quod huiusmodi sensibilia contingendo sentiantur. Propter quod potentia sensitiva comprehendens ea vocatur tactus. Sunt autem quaedam sensibilia quae quidem non materialiter immutant, sed tamen eorum immutatio habet materialem immutationem annexam; quod contingit dupliciter. Uno modo sic quod materialis immutatio annexa sit tam ex parte sensibilis quam ex parte sentientis; et hoc pertinet ad gustum. Licet enim sapor non immutet organum sensus faciendo ipsum saporosum, tamen haec immutatio non est sine aliquali transmutatione tam saporosi quam etiam organi gustus, et praecipue secundum humectationem. Alio modo sic quod transmutatio materialis annexa sit solum ex parte sensibilis. Huiusmodi autem transmutatio vel est secundum resolutionem et alterationem quamdam sensibilis, sicut accidit in sensu odoratus; vel solum secundum loci mutationem, sicut accidit in auditu. Unde auditus et odoratus, quia sunt sine mutatione materiali sentientis, licet adsit materialis mutatio ex parte sensibilis, non tangendo, sed per medium extrinsecum sentiunt. Gustus autem solum in tangendo sentit, quia requiritur immutatio materialis ex parte sentientis. Sunt autem alia sensibilia quae immutant sensum absque materiali immutatione annexa, sicut lux et color, quorum est visus. Unde visus est altior inter omnes sensus et universalior; quia sensibilia ab eo percepta sunt communia corporibus corruptibilibus et incorruptibilibus.”

118 Cf. c.1268–69; *In librum de Sensu et Sensato expositio*, lec.16, n.13f.

119 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.78, a.3, c.: “Tactus autem et gustus sunt maxime materialis”.

directly moved,¹²⁰ *ad mentem Thomae*, because it (to his [mis]understanding) requires no motion in the organ, but only of the medium, i.e., the actualization by light of the potency for translucency (diaphaneity) in the air.¹²¹

But what is motion? Aristotle's definition, the actuality of a potency insofar as it is a potency, ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἣ τοιοῦτον, presents notorious difficulties. We could say that motion is a kind of becoming, or a change, or an actualization—all of which tell us no more than that motion is motion. We can point to things in motion. But to point out things sensibly observable is not the same as to grasp them essentially with the intellect.

In general, the Thomistic way of interpreting the definition considers motion as “incomplete” or “imperfect act”.¹²² It is the “act of existing in potency”, *actus existentis in potentia*. We might elaborate on this by noting that the Greek

120 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.2, c.: “inter ipsos sensus, visus est magis cognoscitivus, quia est minus materialis”.

121 Cf. c.1265/6a: *Quaestio disputata de anima*, a.1, ad.6; a.4, ad.4; 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.78, a.3, c.

122 i.1268–71: *In Physicorum*, lib.3, lec.2, n.285: “Considerandum est igitur quod aliquid est in actu tantum, aliquid vero in potentia tantum, aliquid vero medio modo se habens inter potentiam et actum. Quod igitur est in potentia tantum, nondum movetur: quod autem iam est in actu perfecto, non movetur, sed iam motum est: illud igitur movetur, quod medio modo se habet inter puram potentiam et actum, quod quidem partim est in potentia et partim in actu; ut patet in alteratione. Cum enim aqua est solum in potentia calida, nondum movetur: cum vero est iam calefacta, terminatus est motus calefactionis: cum vero iam participat aliquid de calore sed imperfecte, tunc movetur ad calorem; nam quod calefit, paulatim participat calorem magis ac magis. Ipse igitur actus imperfectus caloris in calefactibili existens, est motus: non quidem secundum id quod actu tantum est, sed secundum quod iam in actu existens habet ordinem in ulteriorem actum; quia si tolleretur ordo ad ulteriorem actum, ipse actus quantumcumque imperfectus, esset terminus motus et non motus, sicut accidit cum aliquid semiplene calefit. Ordo autem ad ulteriorem actum competit existenti in potentia ad ipsum. Et similiter, si actus imperfectus consideretur tantum ut in ordine ad ulteriorem actum, secundum quod habet rationem potentiae, non habet rationem motus, sed principii motus: potest enim incipere calefactio sicut a frigido, ita et a tepido. Sic igitur actus imperfectus habet rationem motus, et secundum quod comparatur ad ulteriorem actum ut potentia, et secundum quod comparatur ad aliquid imperfectius ut actus. Unde neque est potentia existentis in potentia, neque est actus existentis in actu, sed est actus existentis in potentia: ut per id quod dicitur actus, designetur ordo eius ad anteriorem potentiam, et per id quod dicitur in potentia existentis, designetur ordo eius ad ulteriorem actum. Unde convenientissime philosophus definit motum, dicens quod motus est entelechia, idest actus existentis in potentia secundum quod huiusmodi.” Cf. Yves Simon 1970: *The Great Dialogue of Nature and Space*, 66; William Wallace 1977: *The Elements of Philosophy*, 49; Vincent Edward Smith 1950: *Philosophical Physics*, 46.

term for actuality, in this case, is *entelecheia* (ἐντελέχεια), a persistent kind of being-at-work.¹²³ But how can a potency be actual?

The actuality of a potency can be seen if we break Aristotle's definition into two parts: the first, "the *entelecheia* of a potentiality" and the second "insofar as it is a potentiality". We can also help ourselves by provisionally delineating the elements necessary for every motion: namely, the beginning point, a *terminus a quo*; the substrate or that in which the change occurs (as "I" am the subject of moving in the sentence, "I biked from home to work today".); and the end point, the *terminus ad quem*. Prior to the motion, the *terminus a quo* is actual and the *terminus ad quem* is not; it is potential. During the motion, we would say that neither is wholly actual, nor is either wholly potential. This intermediate state between the actuality and potentiality of each is the motion of a particular thing, which does not explain the definition of motion **itself**, but considers more precisely what happens to something undergoing motion.

Turning our attention to the first part of the definition: the persistent actuality of a potentiality. This qualification seems to be nonsensical. Act is really distinct from potency, and vice versa. So how could we have an actuality, persistent or not, of a potentiality? Simply stated, we could say that potency is the capacity to receive change—that is, to receive some different form or actuality, some existence not presently actual. Thus, potency is what it is, in itself, only in relation to actualities—both that which is currently present and that which is possibly present given the right cause. For instance, when I am asleep, I am potentially awake. If I could never wake up, I would not be potentially awake, and if I were already awake, if I were not presently asleep, I would not be potentially awake. If the potentiality is made actual, it is no longer a potentiality.

Oddly enough, this seeming mutual exclusivity gives us our answer as to how a potentiality can be persistently actual, through the second part of the definition, "insofar as it is a potentiality". A potentiality can be persistently actual itself insofar as it is not yet complete; that is, insofar as it is a potentiality.

123 Cf. Joe Sachs' excellent article on *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Aristotle: Motion and its Place in Nature" < <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aris-mot/>>. Retrieved 14 March 2015. See also Sachs' introduction to his translation of *The Physics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 1–31, for a general discussion of the errors and pitfalls of translating Aristotle, as well as an explanation for the etymologically-based translations which Sachs favors. While Sachs seems to grasp Thomas' understanding of motion poorly, and to be unaware of some of the Thomistic interpreters (such as Simon), he does an excellent job of making clear both many of the problems with the scholarship on Aristotle and with providing his own account.

In other words, we can distinguish two senses of potency:¹²⁴ one, that which refers to what can be but in no way is, and two, that which refers to what can be and in some way is. In the process of motion, the capacity to receive change (to be actual in a determinate way) is itself actual in its state as a capacity—not the reception of the change, but the capacity itself. The potency for something to be otherwise than what it is, through time, is what is actual.¹²⁵

Thus, the Thomistic understanding of motion as an incomplete act—as belonging to the thing moved—is an accurate depiction. A thing, insofar as it is in motion, is undergoing change; it is in some way actualizing a capacity such that, so long as it is moving, it is not entirely at rest. Therefore, when we consider that material things are always undergoing some kind of motion, though perhaps not ostensibly, we see the difficulty in grasping them intellectually. The formal object of intellection is something permanent, unchanging; the object of sensation is something material, grasped in and through material organs, in what is itself always undergoing change.

It seems to be no accident—and we will here end our digression—that when Thomas discusses the **second** degree of abstraction, the mathematical, he says that it abstracts not only from the material conditions, but also from motion.¹²⁶

124 Cf. Simon 1970: *Great Dialogue*, 71: “in this act of a thing in potency precisely *qua* in potency, you have to consider two relations of potentiality”.

125 Cf. Sachs “Aristotle: Motion and its Place in Nature” <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/aris-mot/>>, §7: “Let us consider, then, a man’s capacity to walk across the room. When he is sitting or standing or lying still, his capacity to walk is latent, like the sight of the man with his eyes closed; that capacity nevertheless has real being, distinguishing the man in question from a man who is crippled to the extent of having lost all potentiality to walk. When the man is walking across the room, his capacity to walk has been put to work. But while he is walking, what has happened to his capacity to be at the other side of the room, which was also latent before he began to walk? It too is a potentiality which has been put to work by the act of walking. Once he has reached the other side of the room, his potentiality to be there has been actualized in Ross’ sense of the term, but while he is walking, his potentiality to be on the other side of the room is not merely latent, and is not yet canceled by, an actuality in the weak sense, the so-called actuality of being on that other side of the room; while he is walking his potentiality to be on the other side of the room is actual just as a potentiality. The actuality of the potentiality to be on the other side of the room, as just that potentiality, is neither more nor less than the walking across the room.”

126 See 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.5, a.3, ad.4; i.1268–71: *In Physicorum*, lib.2, lec.3, n.161; 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.1, lec.10, n.157; lib.5, lec.16, n.989; lec.17, n.1024.

3.2.3 Abstrahere

The word “abstraction”, unlike “illumination”, conveys unhelpful physical imagery in its etymology; the image of something being drawn out, as though an immaterializing of the “formal skeleton” of a material being, only leads to misunderstandings.¹²⁷ Additionally, the texts of St. Thomas, while he speaks of abstraction ubiquitously, produce no small amount of confusion as to the types and functions of abstraction—in what way it relates the intellect to its object, or produces a change in the object, or results in the distinction of one science from another. We have already seen a significant number of these confusions, implicitly, in looking at Cajetan, Poinsot, and Maritain: consider for a moment the differences between *abstractio totalis, formalis, a singularibus*, and *abstractio negativa*, the notions of a universal whole and a definable whole, and confused and distinct cognitions. This problem only compounds, the more texts of St. Thomas and the more Thomistic authors we consider: we hear of an abstraction by composition and division, of simple and absolute consideration; of abstraction with and without precision; of universal wholes and integral wholes. Beyond the mere troublesome etymological imagery of the term, we find a whole world of complexity in attempts at understanding and explaining the nature and distinctions pertaining to the act of abstraction itself. Do all, some, or any of these terms and notions map on to one another? Are the contributions of Thomists, both Latin and recent, merely elaborations of Thomas—and if so, are they accurate—or do they constitute new developments or even departures from the teaching of the Common Doctor?

3.2.3.1 Common Thomist Depictions

There are many explanations given within the recent Thomistic tradition which might be misleading in the search for what “abstraction” really means, not just as a word used by Thomas, but also as a description of the act itself.¹²⁸

127 For instance, see Peifer 1952, *The Mystery of Knowledge*, 120: “St. Thomas probably would have welcome the example afforded by the X-ray. When X-rays shine upon a body, they can penetrate the flesh and produce an image on a photographic plate of the internal structures of the body. Such rays do not perceive the internal structure; they merely reveal it. So too, the active intellect does not know but prepares for knowledge by its dematerializing illumination. Furthermore, the internal structure is not seen directly in the body, but in an image produced by the X-rays on a photographic plate or screen. Similarly, the intelligible content latent within the phantasm is not seen in the phantasm itself, but in an intelligible species formed in the possible intellect.”

128 Such misleading explanations have led to a caricature of Thomas’ theory of knowledge. Consider Giorgio Pini 2009: “Scotus on Knowing and Naming Natural Kinds” in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 26.3 (July), 256: “A key feature of this account is that we are able to

Many of these treatments (and seemingly every Thomist does have a treatment, be it brief or lengthy, of abstraction) proceed by an often-vague presentation of various kinds and degrees of abstraction, often portraying the whole act of intellection as something ultimately mysterious which cannot be properly grasped in itself,¹²⁹ or sometimes even conflating the kinds and degrees.¹³⁰ While there is a consensus that abstraction is an essential aspect of intellectual understanding, an exhausting number of distinctions arise in the myriad of unique interpretations. Yet, Thomists commonly explain abstraction as a separating out of the form from the matter or from the individuating characteristics so as to grasp what is essential and therefore universal. Some of these explanations stray outside the Aristotelian tone of St. Thomas' philosophy and into a Platonizing interpretation. At the very least, it is often presented as though there is an inexplicable intersection of the common natures with their individual instantiations which is subsequently disentangled by abstracting. Cardinal Mercier, a founder of the "transcendental Thomist" school which attempts reconciliation of Thomas Aquinas with the *a priori* "critical" philosophy of Kant, claims for instance that:¹³¹

our consciousness declares that besides these cognitions [of concrete things which exist here or there, at this or that moment] we have another equally large class in which the object is without any of these particularizing notes and which on this account are rightly called *abstract*. This proves that we have a faculty whereby we apprehend the quiddity, or abstract reason, of things; a faculty that we call the *intellect*, having a proper object that is distinguished by being abstract.

In other words, Mercier sees abstraction not as understanding things essentially, but understanding their essences separately from them; we do not understand the things themselves, but their abstract reasons. Or as Peter Coffey, following Mercier, though with more emphasis upon a "moderate realism"—such that

grasp essences by a noninferential act of our intellect, which was described as a simple act of cognition, also called 'apprehension'. This simple act of cognition was regarded as the first of three acts... By the intellect's simple act of cognition, we get direct cognitive access to the building blocks of the world, that is, natural kinds' essences."

129 E.g., Simon 1934: *Introduction a l'ontologie du connaitre*, 129: "our thought reaches out to the created reality by a kind of divine alchemy, immaterializing whatever it touches." Van Steenberghen 1947: *Epistemology*, 107: "The subject 'lives' the object, it grasps the object in a mysterious way."

130 See for instance, Klubertanz 1952a: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 37–38.

131 Mercier 1910: *A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy*, 244.

the objects of intellectual abstraction are not divorced from those of sense in the “extramental” world, but only, as it were, imprisoned within them—writes in his work on knowledge: “When, therefore, sense perceives its data in the concrete, intellect must simultaneously exercise a power of apprehending them in the abstract”.¹³² Later on, he adds:¹³³

the elementary thought-objects which enter into all our specific and generic universal concepts, and which, as present to intellect, are abstract and universal, are *really in* the individual data apprehended by sense; that as to their content they are not fabrications of thought.

In other words, thought does not fabricate the abstract and universal forms, but it does in some sense free them from the individualized presentation of sense cognition; in abstracting, the *intellectus agens* presents to the *intellectus possibilis* an incorporeal form which it knows. This erroneous tendency to view the *intellectus agens*, in its act of *abstrahere*, as a liberator of forms appears also in the Austrian psychiatrist and later philosopher, Rudolf Allers:¹³⁴

The universal nature is enclosed, as it were, in the particular. The intellect has this universal nature as its proper object, but cannot reach it until it is disengaged from the material aspects with which it is bound up in in the particular. In other words, the universal nature must be stripped of all its material appendages... the dematerialization through which the universal nature becomes disengaged from matter has to be the work of the intellect, and the intellect has to be immaterial.

The tendency to view abstraction in this way results in a misunderstanding of the concept as though a thing itself abstracted and subsequently grasped

¹³² Coffey 1917: *Epistemology*, 262. On 263, he states, “The schoolmen called this *abstractive faculty* of intellect the *Intellectus Agens*... and endeavoured by an introspective analysis of the whole process of conception to trace the transition to the latter from the concrete individual perceptions or imagination images of sense consciousness.” On 264: he states that the *species impressa* is “an immaterial or spiritual modification whereby the understanding conceives or apprehends immaterially and in the abstract”. On 265: “Reality is given through sense-data, and in these the intellect apprehends its abstract thought-objects”.

¹³³ Coffey 1917: *Epistemology*, 288.

¹³⁴ Allers 1942: “Intellectual Cognition” in *Essays in Thomism*, 54.

as the object itself of knowledge, rather than something produced through or somehow resulting from abstraction.¹³⁵

Others have taken less Platonic views, limiting the abstractedness of the abstracted to the mode of being of the form, and not to the thing understood as its object; yet these more “moderate” realisms nevertheless couch the activity of abstraction principally in a terminology of disengagement of form from matter, of the intelligible from the sensible. Joseph Owens, for instance, writes that:¹³⁶

The term [abstraction]... seems acceptable enough. It implies that something has been “drawn away from” time and space and individuation. What, then, is the object that has been drawn away or abstracted in this fashion? It seems to be the *kind* of thing that each of the individual objects is.

135 Cf. Wallace 1996: *The Modeling of Nature*, 132: “The concept, precisely as abstracted from the percept, is itself abstract... Thus, whereas the percept is concrete and individual, the concept is abstract and universal”. Wallace does not clearly distinguish here between the concept/percept as entitative modifications of the subject, accidental forms residing in the intellect and interior senses, and the concept/percept as intentional forms, as uniting the cognizer with the cognized, or as at the very least making present to the knower the object in some way—either concretely and particularly or universally and abstractly Cf. Thomas c.1265/6a: *Quaestio disputata de anima*, a.2, ad.5: “Ad quantum dicendum quod anima humana est quaedam forma individuata; et similiter potentia eius quae dicitur intellectus possibilis, et formae intelligibiles in eo receptae. Sed hoc non prohibet eas esse intellectas in actu: ex hoc enim aliquid est intellectum in actu quod est immateriale, non autem ex hoc quod est universale; sed magis universale habet quod sit intelligibile per hoc quod est abstractum a principiis materialibus individuantibus.— Manifestum est autem substantias separatas esse intelligibiles actu, et tamen individua quaedam sunt; sicut Aristoteles dicit in VII Metaph., quod formae separatae, quas Plato ponebat, individua quaedam erant. Unde manifestum est quod si individuatio repugnaret intelligibilitati, eadem difficultas remaneret ponentibus intellectum possibilem substantiam separatam: sic enim et intellectus possibilis individuus esset individuans species in se receptas. Sciendum igitur, quod quamvis species receptae in intellectu possibili sint individuatae ex illa parte qua inhaerent intellectui possibili; tamen in eis, in quantum sunt immateriales, cognoscitur universale quod concipitur per abstractionem a principiis individuantibus. Universalia enim, de quibus sunt scientiae, sunt quae cognoscuntur per species intelligibiles, non ipsae species intelligibiles; de quibus planum est quod non sunt scientiae omnes, sed sola physica et metaphysica. Species enim intelligibilis est quo intellectus intelligit, non id quod intelligit, nisi per reflexionem, in quantum intelligit se intelligere id quod intelligit.”

136 Owens 1992: *Cognition*. 140.

Frederick Copleston, though he emphasizes the necessity of a return to the phantasm and of the combination of the formal and material objects, in his *A History of Philosophy* describes abstraction in this thoroughly unhelpful manner:¹³⁷

To abstract means to isolate intellectually the universal apart from the particularising notes. Thus the active intellect abstracts the universal essence of man from a particular phantasm by leaving out all particular notes which confine it to a particular man or particular men.... The intellect... comes to know by abstracting the intelligible species from the individualising matter, and in this case it can have direct knowledge of universal only.

Or as Yves Simon, one of the more insightful (in our opinion) writers of the 20th century on the issue of intellectual knowledge, states:¹³⁸

The mind will give the idea its spiritual character, but what that idea will be is determined by the image. The production of the idea is an *abstraction* that disengages the intelligible from the image. By a unique act, the mind causes the intelligible to emerge from the image that contains it—the intelligible is there because nature is an idea of the divine art—and thus gives itself the means for thought.

None of these less-Platonic characterizations are necessarily false, depending upon how we understand them, but neither do they penetrate to the heart of the matter.¹³⁹ The aforementioned neglect of illumination as equally central to the activity of the *intellectus agens* has been thoroughly covered; but what is it that the intellect, having allowed the thing to present itself as itself, can then be said to abstract?

John Deely has rightly contested that abstraction, as an action of the human intellect, can no longer be considered as simply as it was in the time of

137 Copleston 1950: *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 390–391.

138 Simon 1934: *Introduction à l'ontologie du connaitre*, 120.

139 See Georges Van Riet 1946: *L'épistémologie thomiste. Recherches sur le problème de la connaissance dans l'école thomiste contemporaine* (Paris: Louvain Éditions de l'Institut Supérieur de Philosophie). References are to the English translation by Gabriel Franks, *Thomistic Epistemology: Studies Concerning the Problem of Cognition in the Contemporary Thomistic School* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1963) for a thorough consideration of pre-Vatican II Thomist revival theories of knowledge.

St. Thomas for the reason that our understanding of the nature of the universe differs,¹⁴⁰ we now know there to be, according to the best observations, no matter which remains unchanging except in place, but all matter fundamentally lies open to continual change, be it to an organic evolutionary development or to the death and birth of stars and galaxies. Biological species, as Thomas understood them, were overall of a fixed kind and number—not because there was a limit on the potency, but because the unchanging motions of the celestial spheres provided for their continuity. If aberrations occurred—possible due to the innate potency of terrestrial material things, expressed in the phrase “prime matter”, to an infinite variety of forms—they would be “cut off”, so to speak, by the regularity of celestial motions. Without the unchanging matter of the heavens, however, and with the realization that all matter is of the sort that is found on earth, we discover that the number and variety of natural substantial forms is innumerable, not to mention the incredible number of possibilities so far discovered among the constitutive formal actualities within a material substance which have been realized to exist through the use of specialized instrumentation (i.e., parts such as molecules and subatomic particles).

3.2.3.2 The Grasping of Essences

Does this mean, however, that we do not discover essences through abstraction? Yes and no, depending upon what we mean by an “essence”. For, if by “essence” we mean some internal principle differentiating not only an individual being of which it is a principle, but a principle which differentiates a class of beings by means of a single specific difference found identically in all of the

140 Deely 2007: *IS*, 81: “This simplistic picture works well enough against the background of a universe—a cosmological image—the specific structures of which are fixed once and for all. But once that imaginary picture has been shown to be illusory, the term ‘abstraction’ in its original sense extended from the abstraction that constructs mathematical objects to putatively describe the ‘drawing out’ of formal essences from individuals of the various species turns, all unnoticed, into literal nonsense.” This is not to say that the idea of abstraction had by Thomas was itself inexorably tied to this “background cosmological image”—as Thomas himself recognized, (1272/3b: *In de Caelo et Mundo*, lib.2, lec.17, n.451), the suppositions about the heavenly motions “save the appearances”, but are not necessarily true: “*Illorum tamen suppositiones quas adinvenerunt, non est necessarium esse veras: licet enim, talibus suppositionibus factis, apparentia salvarentur, non tamen oportet dicere has suppositiones esse veras; quia forte secundum aliquem alium modum, nondum ab hominibus comprehensum, apparentia circa stellas salvantur.*” Cf. Blanchette 1992: *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 11: “Saint Thomas had exacting demands for what he meant by scientific truth, and he did not find them met in the cosmological model he was using”.

individuals, such that every essence as known is **actually** universal, then such a thing is not discovered through abstraction, except perhaps inasmuch as we discover radically different orders of being, such as the intellectual and the perceptive souls.

If, on the other hand, by “essence” we mean a discernible mode of acting properly belonging to a being such that it is inextricable from the reality proper to that being,¹⁴¹ as the possession of intellect is inextricable from a human being, then most certainly such a thing can be and in fact is discovered through “abstraction”, though not in the sense connoted by the word’s etymology. Indeed, not only does abstraction result in the knowledge of such essences, it also results in the knowledge of things entirely inessential—of things accidental, as distinguishable ways that a substance can be present to the senses—and this abstraction occurs in **precisely the same manner**; for what primordially distinguishes the human cognitive ability from non-human animals is not the grasp of a universal (as “what can be said of or applied to many”), but rather that human cognition grasps something as belonging properly to the thing, as independent of the object’s specific relation, species-specifically, to the human individual. Or, as Thomas states, the intelligibility of a thing follows not upon its **universality**, but rather upon its **immateriality**;¹⁴² and the degrees to which

141 Cf. Deely 2007: *IS*, 189: “We see, then, that the so-called ‘essences of material things’, so far as the material things themselves are concerned, actually consist in that subjective constitution or structure which enables them to exist as distinct individualities of this or that type sustaining and sustained by (in and through and over and above causal interactions) that invisible intersubjective web the Latins called categorial or ‘real’ (‘predicamental’) relations; while those same essences so far as understanding is concerned consist in *patterns of relationships* instantiated or verified in perceptible objectivities.” We will address this issue of the necessity of relations to the understanding of things in c.5. See also Deely 1969: “The Philosophical Dimensions of *The Origin of Species*, Part 1” in *The Thomist* 33 (January), 76: “it is not entirely accurate to oppose the modern conception of species to the conception entertained by the ancients, particularly Aristotle, and to claim on this basis (as so many do) that the entire classical metaphysical approach to the essential structures of existence has been shown to be a cultural illusion.”

142 c.1265/6a: *Quaestio disputata de anima*, a.2, ad.5: “Ad quintum dicendum quod anima humana est quaedam forma individuata; et similiter potentia eius quae dicitur intellectus possibilis, et formae intelligibiles in eo receptae. Sed hoc non prohibet eas esse intellectas in actu: ex hoc enim aliquid est intellectum in actu quod est immateriale, non autem ex hoc quod est universale; sed magis universale habet quod sit intelligibile per hoc quod est abstractum a principiis materialibus individuantibus.” 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.14, a.1, c.: “Patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicuius rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva; et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis.” Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.14, q.1, a.1, qc.2, ad.2: “non omnes res, prout sunt in sua natura, sunt actu intelligibiles; sed solum res

the object is immaterially grasped—as abstracting either from the particular signate matter of an encountered individual or abstracting from any particular signate matter—results in this differentiation between brute and human cognition.¹⁴³ We will see this more clearly as we continue.

It needs to be noted, however, that the names we give to the understanding of the things directly perceived by sense, i.e., the accidental qualities, are without precise denomination, for the very nature of the sensible and material defies precise naming. For example, the word “blue” is applied to a spectrum of color, of which the wavelength range is conventionally considered to be 450–495nm. Thus, the “most” blue within that spectrum would be 472.5nm—but the nanometer, as a measurement of distance, is infinitely divisible, and therefore we could come to an ever more precise rendering of what constitutes the color blue; we could reduce from the nanometer (10^{-9}m) to a picometer (10^{-12}m), from a picometer to a femtometer (10^{-15}m), and so on *ad infinitum*. Likewise, we can, in theory at least, produce infinitely decreasing shades of blue—that is, color moving away from the most central point in the blue spectrum. At what point does it cease to be blue? While an infinitely divisible gradient stretches between 472.5nm and either 450 or 495, a color at either end of that spectrum is clearly distinct from its mid-point. “Blue”, then, signifies not a species, but rather a genus which admits an infinite variability of species.

How then, does this apply to our knowledge of essences? *Nihil est in intellectu nisi in sensu primum originaliter*, and all knowledge of any thing in its essential being which we have in some way or another derives from what is known by sensation; in other words, all knowledge comes from things as they are presented to us materially.¹⁴⁴ If all things material admit of infinite formal

immateriales; unde et res materiales intelligibiles efficiuntur per hoc quod abstrahuntur a materia particulari et a conditionibus ejus, ut sic quodammodo intellectui, qui immaterialis est, assimilentur.” Cf. c.1265/6a: *Quaestio disputata de anima*, a.3, ad.17: “Ad decimumseptimum dicendum quod aliquid est intellectum in potentia, non ex eo quod est individuale, sed ex eo quod est materiale; unde species intelligibiles, quae immaterialiter recipiuntur in intellectu, etsi sint individuatae, sunt intellectae in actu.” Cf. Josephus Gredt 1899: *Elementa Philosophiae*, vol. 1, 384–386.

143 Cf. Deely 1968: “The Immateriality of the Intentional as Such”, in *The New Scholasticism*, 42.2, 293–306, *in passim*.

144 i.1256–59: *DV*: “Illa enim quae est in intellectu nostro, est accepta a re secundum quod res agit in intellectum nostrum, agendo per prius in sensum; materia autem, propter debilitatem sui esse, quia est in potentia ens tantum, non potest esse principium agendi; et ideo res quae agit in animam nostram, agit solum per formam. Unde similitudo rei quae imprimitur in sensum nostrum, et per quosdam gradus depurata, usque ad intellectum pertingit, est tantum similitudo formae.” Of course, this does not mean that all things

variation, then the formal knowledge of a species—what is distinct in kind from all others—must be a very rare thing indeed, attainable only when we encounter some species whose difference is not ensconced in matter. Beings whose essence is confined within material existence, no matter how specific our knowledge of such may be, can always be further divided and distinguished; rather we can only attain to, at the most, a very specific yet nevertheless still-generic understanding of the material thing. This is an inherent limitation of the human capacity for understanding: *sed cognitio nostra est adeo debilis quod nullus philosophus potuit unquam perfecte investigare naturam unius muscae*—“our cognition is so weak that no philosopher is able to perfectly investigate the nature of even one fly”.¹⁴⁵

That does not mean that we have no knowledge of what things are, nor does it mean that our knowledge of material things is strictly limited to those objects present to our faculties of sensation. As aforementioned, illumination is that whereby the *intellectus agens* allows human beings to understand that the objects which we encounter are not mere objects, but things in themselves. Correlatively, abstraction is that whereby the *intellectus agens* does in fact separate out something from the material—but this separation ultimately adds by subtracting, for what it “leaves behind” is itself something negative: namely, the potency attendant upon the existential reality of a material being, the potency attached to the thing insofar as it is in motion. (As we will see momentarily, even intellectual abstraction from motion is not always and in all ways complete.) The *intellectus agens*, first by illuminating the phantasm of the thing known allowing it to be seen in its own right as an entity independent of the cognizant being’s relations to it and second by abstracting the form—that is, grasping the actuality proper to the thing as present *hic et nunc* through its presentation in sensation to the intellectual being—grasps some measure of the universalizable “what”; it grasps some *quid*, which can be said of many. What is responsible for the particularization in the constitution of any corporeal being is its unique (and nigh potentially infinite) set of potencies—the potencies which belong to a thing insofar as it is not only observably in some motion but **essentially** mobile. In so grasping this *quid*, the *intellectus agens*

known are only the things sensed; I cannot sense the government of the United States of America, nor can I sense God, and yet I know both exist. Cf. Thomas 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.84, a.6, ad.3: “sensitiva cognitio non est tota causa intellectualis cognitionis. Et ideo non est mirum si intellectualis cognitio ultra sensitivam se extendit”; cf. q.84, a.7, ad.3.

145 Thomas Aquinas, c.1273: *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, proem.

constitutes in the *intellectus possibilis a species intellectae*, which is no longer **potentially**, but now **actually** intelligible.

We would contrast this presentation against that given in a recent article, namely that the intellect has an intuitive, non-discursive grasp of being (*ens*) consisting in understanding a thing's act of existing (*actus essendi*), which constitutes the proper object of the power of the intellect as a whole; and a further, discursive act of apprehension, a kind of operation of the intellect by which it grasps the essence of a material object.¹⁴⁶ First, textual evidence in St. Thomas for an operation, activity, or primordial intuition of being belonging to the intellect as a whole which is distinct from the ordinary first act of the intellect called apprehension is dubious. Second, to assert that this primordial intuition is of a thing's act of existence, were it the initial presentative content given to the intellect, would necessitate that the initial grasp of being includes a distinction; i.e., it would be taking something which is a part rather than considering a whole, and making of it a whole.¹⁴⁷ Third, and finally, *actus essendi* or *esse* as that by which a thing actually is, is not itself included in all subsequent apprehensions: purely cognition-dependent beings, such as non-being, have *esse* only inasmuch as they are existing on the basis of a cognitive act, and not in the objective content of what is considered in such an apprehension.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, *esse* could not be included in its apprehension. As Poinsoot says, *ens ut primum cognitum*, although it is encountered through the quiddity of a material thing, and although it is realized because the thing has an act of existing on the basis of which it is able to be engaged in a disclosive relation,

146 Evangelist 2011: "Aquinas on Being and Essence as the Proper Objects of the Intellect", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, in *passim* but especially p. 387.

147 Cf. i.1254–7: *Quodlibet* IX, q.2, a.2.

148 When Thomas says that "truth is founded more in the *esse* of a thing than its quiddity", (c.1252/56a.: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.19, q.5, a.1, c.) he is speaking of discursive knowledge. Moreover, the term "thing", as Thomas understands it, by way of Avicenna, relates principally to something having an intelligible structure, i.e., a quiddity or quidditative quality, than to being an *ens concretum*. Cf. i.1259/65; *SCG* I c.60, n.5, and c.1252/56a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.37, q.1, a.1: "Similiter autem et nomen rei dupliciter sumitur. Simpliciter enim dicitur res quod habet esse ratum et firmum in natura; et dicitur res hoc modo, accepto nomine rei secundum quod habet quidditatem vel essentiam quamdam; ens vero, secundum quod habet esse; ut dicit Avicenna distinguens entis et rei significationem. Sed quia res per essentiam suam cognoscibilis est, transumptum est nomen rei, ad omne id quod in cognitione vel intellectu cadere potest, secundum quod res a reor reris dicitur: et per hunc modum dicuntur res rationis quae in natura ratum esse non habent, secundum quem modum etiam negationes et privationes res dici possunt, sicut et entia rationis dicuntur, ut Commentator in 4 Metaph. dicit."

the complete lack of any specification or distinction proper to it, the complete lack of any separation of it from anything else, is not only truly the teaching of St. Thomas, but is “common among Thomists”.¹⁴⁹

3.2.3.3 The *Ratio Abstractionis*

Several distinctions stemming from the work of the Thomistic tradition can help us to understand more clearly the realization of the *species intelligibile*: first, with regard to the different kinds and degrees of abstraction, and second between the *species impressa* and the *species expressa*. However, we will wait until the next chapter to look at these distinctions. First, we need to discover what is essential to the notion of abstraction.

We can begin this by taking note of the ways in which Thomas himself speaks of abstraction. The most important point to note is that the term is used in a manner which does not signify a specific operation, or even a genus of operations, but rather a mode of operating.¹⁵⁰ This is why Thomas says that both the understanding of indivisibles and composition and division entail an abstraction—that is, abstraction is something which occurs to the object of intellectual consideration, and so is something which the intellect does necessarily. Thus, while the distinctions employed by Cajetan, Poinso, and others, between distinct **kinds** of abstraction may be helpful—as though *abstractio* is a genus to which *totalis*, *formalis*, with and without precision, etc., are added as specific differences—there is no definite route for mapping them on to the *ipsissima verba Thomae*. Of course, this does not mean that there is no correlation between such terms and the language of Thomas—only that the distinctions proposed by later thinkers must be taken as attempts at development, rather than simple exposition.

Indeed, we can see some of the similarity between Thomists and Thomas in the way in which the latter considers the objects which are thus abstracted. Thomas often speaks of abstraction in reference to the universal whole or the integral whole.¹⁵¹ Like Cajetan, and in the proper Aristotelian modality of

149 Poinso 1633: *DPC* (R.II 24a42–24b13): “Prima ratio cognoscibilis a nostro intellectu naturaliter et imperfecto modo procedente est quidditas materialis sub aliquo praedicato maxime confuso, quod praedicatum est ens, non gradus aliquis specificus vel genericus, et hoc est cognoscere totum cognitione actuali cofnus, id est cognoscendo aliquid confusum, quod ipsi actu convenit non potentialiter et in ordine ad interiora, ut statim explicabimus. Haec conclusio est D. Thomae 1. p. q. 85. Art. 3. et q. 88. art. 3., et in prologo de Ente et Essentia, ubi late tractur a Caietano, et videri potest Mag. Soto 1. Phys. q. 2. art. 2. concl. 5. et communiter apud alios thomistas.”

150 E.g., c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.5, a.3, c. and 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.1, ad.1.

151 Cf. De Koninck 1960a: “Abstraction from Matter (II)” in *Laval theologique et philosophique*, 16.1, 55: “Now there is still another way the mind performs abstractions, namely, when

proceeding from objects to acts in discerning the nature of the latter, we will take our orientation from this distinction—and, in so doing, we do not look, as many do, towards either Thomas' early *De ente et essentia* (in which he discusses understanding both of wholes, but without any distinctions as to kinds of wholes, and of integral parts, but of neither universal, subjective parts, nor integral wholes)¹⁵² or his *Super de Boetium de Trinitate*, q.5, as the guiding texts on abstraction, but rather towards *Summa theologiae prima pars* q.79, q.84 and q.85; for in the commentary on Boethius, Thomas is not discussing the overall role of abstraction in human intellection, but is rather concerned with the role abstraction has in the specific speculative sciences. While all intellectual knowledge stands open to consideration in speculative science, that does not mean that all intellectual knowledge is scientific. Since our concern in this chapter is not scientific knowledge—on which we do touch in the following chapter—but rather the role of “abstraction” in the incipient stages of concept formation, we want to look at where Thomas speaks more generally. We should note that abstraction, as a way of disengaging or dissociating the object, so as

something can be considered apart from something else because the one is prior to the other, even though in subject they be one and the same thing. For instance, I can consider man as an animal, abstracting from the fact that he is an animal of a very special kind; and I can consider man without considering this one who is Socrates. But I cannot conceive man without conceiving animal, nor this man without conceiving man. Animal is prior to man inasmuch as an animal is not necessarily a man, even as a man is not necessarily Socrates. Both examples convey abstraction of universal from particular. In the first case we abstract a universal, animal, from a less universal, man; in the second, the particular is a singular. It is likewise called abstraction of the whole from the subjects or 'subjective parts' of which it can be said. (This term 'part' is an analogical term, for Socrates is not part of man in the sense that his head is part of the whole that is Socrates; nor is horse a part of animal in this early sense of part.)” and, in the same, 57: “This second type of definition differs radically from the first. The first was abstract in the sense that we left aside the individual sensible thing, like the bones and flesh of Socrates, but did retain bones and flesh; for, without these, man can neither be conceived nor exist. By 'exist' we mean that man could not exist even in the mere sense of truth; since 'what it is to be a man' is to be of bones and flesh, and no propositions about man as such are true which do not so consider him. The second is abstract in the sense that the definition disregards both individual sensible matter and common sensible matter.”

152 As will hopefully become clear in the following pages, it seems that the young Thomas, in writing the *De ente*, operates from a standpoint of confusion regarding the relationship between universal wholes, subjective parts, integral wholes, and integral parts. Thus, c.2 of the c.1252/6b: *De ente* provides only an incomplete picture of the Thomistic theory of abstraction—to discuss merely that which is grasped without precision, where Thomas makes no clear distinction between grasping a whole as universal or as integral, and that which is grasped with precision, by which he seems to signify only the integral part, is to present a blurred snapshot of his later distinctions.

to make it actually intelligible, is spoken of in many closely related but nevertheless distinguishable ways.

First, in q.85, a.1, Thomas lays out the fundamental position that the human intellect “understands material things by abstracting from phantasms”.¹⁵³ As explained in the reply to the first objection, this means that abstraction is “to consider the nature of the species without consideration of the individual principles, which are represented through the phantasms”.¹⁵⁴ That is, “abstraction from the phantasms” means to have an absolute consideration which considers one thing apart from or separately from the others. In this one aspect of its act, the *intellectus agens* separates out the intelligibility of the material thing, provided by the determinate specification present in the phantasm, and simultaneously by so doing, places in the *intellectus possibilis* the intelligible species whereby the thing can be ultimately understood.

Second, in q.79, a.3, Thomas states that the *intellectus agens*, necessary to make material things actually intelligible, accomplishes this task by “abstraction of the species [or specifying forms] from material conditions”.¹⁵⁵ In the subsequent, article, he states that such an abstraction is of “universal forms from particular conditions”.¹⁵⁶ These are not two sets of conditions, but two different ways of considering one and the same set—we should include the “individual principles” mentioned in q.85, a.1 as a third way of considering the set¹⁵⁷—which can be essentially described as the motive potentialities present in the thing from which abstraction is made. What particularizes a thing as material, intrinsically but not efficiently, is the way in which it is subject to change, and especially the way in which it is subject to change of place—either as a whole or in its parts.

Third, in q.84, a.1, two points leap to our notice: **one**, that Thomas gives as a reason against the Platonic theory, of knowing material beings by apprehending their separate immaterial forms, that such a cause of knowledge would prohibit “cognition of motion and matter from science (which knowledge is proper to natural science)”.¹⁵⁸ **Two**, that the “intellect, according to its own mode, receives immaterially and without motion the species of bodies, which

153 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1, c.: “intellectus noster intelligit materialia abstrahendo a phantasmatisibus”.

154 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1, ad.1: “considerare scilicet naturam speciei absque consideratione individualium principiorum, quae per phantasmata repraesentantur”.

155 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.79, a.3, c.: “per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus”.

156 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.79, a.4, c.: “abstrahere formas universales a conditionibus a particularibus”.

157 See m61.

158 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.1, c.: “excluderetur a scientiis cognitio motus et materiae (quod est proprium scientiae naturalis)”.

are material and mobile”.¹⁵⁹ In other words, there is a science of corporeal, natural things, which are themselves both enmattered and subject to motion, but that science is still achieved in the subject by the reception of immaterial and immobile forms.

Fourth, in q.84, a.2, Thomas states that “the intellect, which abstracts the species not only from matter, but also from the individuating material conditions, knows more perfectly than the senses, which receive the form of the thing known without a certain matter, but with material conditions.”¹⁶⁰ This provides an important corroboration of our earlier point, in 3.2.2, that the abstraction from matter begins in sensation.

But what is really being “separated out” or “left behind”? We brought this concern up earlier, in addressing Maritain’s treatment of abstraction. As should be recalled, Maritain emphasized the positive aspect—that is, the discovery of the intelligibility, the very *being* of the thing considered—over the “disengaging” aspect. But as aforementioned, there is a correlativity to the materiality of something being made cognitively present and to the necessity of motion in producing the cognitive presence. In other words, a thing is cognitively grasped without matter to the degree that motion is not required for the cognitive grasping of it, and, conversely, the degree to which the cognitive power which grasps it is independent of the here and now determines the degree to which the object is grasped in a similar independence. Because the exterior sense powers are entirely dependent upon the here and now moving conditions for the apprehension of their objects—and, the reason Thomas explicitly gives, because that which readily receives materially does not readily retain materially¹⁶¹—it is necessary to posit an entirely separate power for the

159 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.1, c.: “intellectus species corporum, quae sunt materiales et mobiles, recipit immaterialiter et immobiliter, secundum modum suum”. Note that the translation of *immobiliter* as “without motion” is to convey, on the one hand, the below consideration about the distinctive mode in which intellectual abstraction is a separation from the conditions of matter—as well as to preserve the adverbial function of the Latin—and on the other hand, to avoid the awkward translational neologism of “immobily”. The translation of the Dominican Fathers, “under conditions of immateriality and immobility”, while it avoids an awkward sound, nevertheless includes an amphiboly as to whether those conditions pertain to the intellect itself or to the *species*.

160 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.2, c.: “intellectus, qui abstrahit speciem non solum a materia, sed etiam a materialibus conditionibus individuantiis, perfectius cognoscit quam sensus, qui accipit formam rei cognitae sine materia quidem, sed cum materialibus conditionibus”.

161 c.1268c: *In libros de Memoria et Reminiscentia expositio*, lec.1, n.302: “Videmus autem in corporalibus, quod illa, quae difficiliter et tarde recipiunt impressionem, bene retinent eam, sicut lapis; quae vero de facili recipiunt non retinent bene, sicut aqua”; lec.2, n.321:

retention of their objects (i.e., the imaginative power). Thus, there are actually two degrees of abstraction which obtain in the sense powers: that whereby the exterior senses abstract inasmuch as the intentional object received does not reduce to the material immutation whereby it is received—and thus there is an abstraction of the intentional form from the particular material conditions whereby the material immutation occurs—and that whereby the interior senses abstract from the particular matter presently precisely as *hic et nunc* in the object, i.e., though the object is always temporally constrained by the very nature (the material organ of the brain) of the subject in which it is known, such that it is known with a certain material determination, its subsequent objective presence is not dependent upon any direct presence of the thing.¹⁶²

The distinction between the powers of the *intellectus agens* and the *intellectus possibilis*, however, is for a different reason than that whereby the exterior and interior senses are distinguished: namely, that what is active respects its object as a terminus and an end, whereas what is passive—or possible, the broadest sense of “passive”—respects its object as a moving (or specificative) cause and principle.¹⁶³ In other words, the *intellectus agens* is entirely directed towards the material things, bringing to bear on them the light of illumination and to abstract some intelligible specifying form, such that making things intelligible is its end, whereas the *intellectus possibilis* is that in which the intellectual apprehension—the grasping of the *species intelligibilis* as a *species*

“Cum enim potentiae sensitivae sint actus corporalium organorum, necesse est ad diversas potentias pertinere receptionem formarum sensibilium quae pertinet ad sensum, et conservationem earum, quae pertinet ad phantasiam sive imaginationem; sicut in corporalibus videmus quod ad aliud principium pertinet receptio et conservatio: humida enim sunt bene receptiva, sicca autem et dura bene conservativa.” Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.78, a.4, c.

162 We propose this as an alternative to the interpretation proposed by Barker 2012: “Aquinas on Internal Sensory Intentions”, 210–213, that “immateriality” is said of sense cognition in an extrinsically analogous manner. Barker takes “immaterial” as in its proper signification to be “for that which is ontologically (as opposed to merely mentally) separable or separate from matter” (213); and while this is true inasmuch as there is a greater perfection signified in such positively immaterial realities, the word itself, in its mode of signification, refers more immediately to the negation of the known motive potency pervasive to the corporeal. Thus, the use of the term “immaterial” by Thomas is not simply based upon an “obsolete scientific justification”, nor does it fail to admit of degrees (213).

163 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.76, a.3, c.: “Ratio autem actus diversificatur secundum diversam rationem obiecti. Omnis enim actio vel est potentiae activae, vel passivae. Obiectum autem comparatur ad actum potentiae passivae, sicut principium et causa movens, color enim in quantum movet visum, est principium visionis. Ad actum autem potentiae activae comparatur obiectum ut terminus et finis, sicut augmentativae virtutis obiectum est quantum perfectum, quod est finis augmenti.”

intellecta—actually occurs. In both cases, motion is not required, except inasmuch as motion is required for the formation of the phantasm, which, as Thomas says, functions most properly as a material cause for intellection.¹⁶⁴

What the *intellectus agens* does, therefore, in abstracting from phantasms, is attain the cognitive grasp of the intelligible specification of the object entirely apart from the conditions which are attendant upon being in particular matter—that is, apart from the motive potentiality of not only the *hic et nunc* concrete individual,¹⁶⁵ from the essential mobile condition of its actual existence, but apart also from the *hic et nunc* conditions of our own concrete, material existence.¹⁶⁶ This “separation” of the intelligibility does not mean that the object of consideration comes to exist as an incorporeal form as some entity or object which is itself abstract from the concrete conditions in which it is found, nor even that the intelligibility so-grasped even actually exists in the thing itself (as the phantasm may be a misrepresentation, despite nevertheless adequately preparing some specification to be so abstracted).¹⁶⁷ But whenever

164 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.84, a.6, c.: “Sed quia phantasmata non sufficiunt assignari intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem; non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quoddammodo est materia causae.” The point made by Poinset, and reinforced by Simon (1934: *Introduction a l'ontologie du connaitre*, 123–125), that the phantasm or “image” is a specifying objective cause (*obiectum movens*) with a kind of secondary, instrumental, efficient causality, is not mitigated, but does need to be qualified—for it is not the phantasm itself that does this, but what is taken from the phantasm. In itself, it is the “that out of which” or “from which” the intelligible specification is taken. Cf. De Koninck 1960b: “Abstraction from Matter (III)” in *Laval theologique et philosophique* 16.2, 169: “The reason, then, why science requires abstraction from movement is that science concerns that which cannot be otherwise and is necessarily true, while whatever is in motion is unceasingly otherwise in the respect in which it is in motion.”

165 Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.46, a.2, c.: “Unumquodque autem, secundum rationem suae speciei, abstrahit ab hic et nunc, propter quod dicitur quod universalialia sunt ubique et semper.”

166 Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.79, a.6, ad.2, wherein Thomas discusses the memorative power of sense cognition as remembering itself as having sensed in the past and in that, having “some past sensible thing.” Contrariwise, it is entirely accidental to the intellectual part whether the object exists in the past, present, or future. Because the operations of the intellect are not, in this life, actually separate from the body, and occur in cooperation with the body, those operations do occur in the here and now conditions of our concrete, material existence; but the here and now, or the then and there, for that matter, are entirely accidental to the objects as abstracted (a) in absolute consideration and (b) as preserved in the impressed intellectual species.

167 Consider, for instance, the celestial spheres. It was considered their property to be (at least as far as their intrinsic principles went) eternal. This property was based upon a hypothetical necessity: if there is exists some matter the substantial potency of which is

something is seen as properly irreducible to our own relations to it—which is accomplished by the illumination of the *intellectus agens*—the *intellectus possibilis* does indeed receive an intelligible specification corresponding to and instigated by that object, determined as some kind of *what* or *quid* by the abstraction of the *intellectus agens*, in a way which is entirely immaterial. This specification is received, however, not by a transference of the determinate specification found in the phantasm, but rather by a kind of intentional reception not unlike the intentional reception which occurs in sensation: that is, by the illumination of the *intellectus agens*, the determination presented by the phantasm seen as irreducible to our relations to it allows for an intellectual sight of some *what* which is separate from the mutability of the conditions in which it is presented to sense cognition. The determination which the phantasm presents is the preparation needed for an abstraction.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, this abstraction is not solely a one-off action whereby the full intelligibility of a thing, its essential nature, is grasped all at once. Rather, various abstractions are discursively employed within a certain ordering—though not an essential ordering¹⁶⁹ regarding the objects apprehended—inasmuch as the intellect needs first always to apprehend some whole before it apprehends the parts which belong to that whole. This discursive ordering, however, belongs principally to the elaboration whereby a concept is formed and brought to greater degrees of perfection; hence its consideration belongs to the following chapter.

Before proceeding, however, allow one final word on terminology. We have shown thoroughly in what sense the intellect can be said to “abstract” its objects, such that there should be no confusion about the meaning of the term itself. Nevertheless, the etymology encourages one to slide carelessly into thinking of the object as itself something abstract, as though a quasi-Platonic form held up before the sight of the intellect, entirely separated from all

fully actualized by the presence of its form, then the composite cannot undergo substantial change. That there exists no such matter—as near as can be told, at any rate—indeed obliterates the consequence; but it does not invalidate the understanding of the *what* which is signified, if considered in itself and apart from some judgment as to its existence or reality, i.e., a celestial sphere.

168 1271: *ST* Ia–IIae, q.50, a.4, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod, quia vires apprehensivae interiorius praeparant intellectui possibili proprium obiectum; ideo ex bona dispositione harum virium, ad quam cooperatur bona dispositio corporis, redditur homo habilis ad intelligendum.” Cf. George Klubertanz 1947: *The Discursive Power*, 259.

169 i.e., that we must first grasp this or that aspect of a thing’s being before proceeding to the others. The process of abstracting the various intelligibilities proper to a thing is not linear. See c.4.

particularity, immaterial and universal in itself. Thus, while it is exceedingly cumbersome to use an alternate term when discussing the texts of St. Thomas or those in his school, it does seem fitting to occasionally use a term better suited to the meaning we have outlined here. Unfortunately, no single English word which captures the sense and stands out as unique. Consequently, we will make use of the phrases “the distinctively human intellectual discovery”, “intellectual discovery of a quiddity”, or simply “intellectual discovery” when it is clear what is meant or not too awkward or ponderous.

The Discursion of Concept Formation

In this chapter, we look to unite the insights gleaned from the Thomist tradition surveyed in the first two chapters with the exposition of the texts of St. Thomas himself in the previous chapter. Moreover, we intend through such composition to sharpen our perception of human understanding, using this sharpened perception as a lens through which we might more clearly grasp the importance and significance of *ens primum cognitum*. In particular, we will emphasize and elaborate upon one aspect of St. Thomas' teaching, an aspect well-recognized by the tradition but underdeveloped, namely, the involvement of discursion in the intellectual operations of the human being.

As such, we will begin (4.1) by extending the discussion of abstraction or intellectual discovery which concluded the previous chapter, showing, first (4.1.1) in what ways specifically human intellectual cognition involves an ordering and a subordination of its objects and acts, from pre-philosophical to philosophically-scientific cognition; second (4.1.2.1), how the properly scientific intellectual discovery of quiddities occurs in various ways and with respect to various objects; and third (4.1.2.2–3), how these two points, the ordering of human cognition and the general manner of a properly scientific intellectual discovery, clarify the previously-mentioned *via resolutionis* and *via inventionis*.

After this we will consider the formation of the *species expressa* or *verbum mentis* (4.2) in four parts. First (4.2.1), we will examine the primary concepts which are formed by the intellect. Second (4.2.2), we will elaborate on how this composition and division relates to the twofold role of the *species expressa* as an entitative *terminus* and intentional *fundamentum*. Third (4.2.3), we will consider the role of composition and division in the *verbum mentis* and its relation to the act of understanding. Fourth (4.2.4), the meanings of definition and quiddity as related to the *species expressa* will be considered.

Finally, we will make an analysis of the formation of such a *species expressa* (4.3). This analysis will allow us to see both to what degree a human intellect is capable of understanding the essence of a thing, as well as how the unfolding of a known object ultimately requires a consideration of that object's relational and objectively-constituted being.

4.1 The Discursion of Intellectual Discovery

Thomas contrasts, in human cognitive activity, the possession of intellectual knowledge as a kind of **rest** with the unfolding of the ratiocinative operation as a kind of **motion**. For the latter he ascribes as necessary the “particular reason” or cogitative power;¹ but it should be noted that, while the motion of the ratiocinative process requires the cogitative power, this motion begins from and proceeds towards the intellect. The intellect is both the *terminus a quo* and the *terminus ad quem* of the cogitative power’s specifically-human movement (this innate relatedness of the cogitative to the intellect, indeed, seems to be the reason for Thomas’ distinguishing it from the alloanimal estimative power). It is within this context, of reasoning from principles to conclusions through syllogistic comparisons,² or of relating the intellectual insight to the cognition of particulars,³ that Thomas most frequently speaks of a human cognitive discursion. This could lead to a misapprehension: that the intellect itself requires no discursion for its own progress, beginning from the grasp of wholes to an understanding of the parts, that the intellect grasps each quiddity it knows at one moment in time, immediately, and that the discursion occurs entirely without any direct involvement of the intellect.

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- 1 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.24, q.2, a.2, ad.2: “scientificum et ratiocinativum non omnino distinguuntur sicut ratio superior et inferior: quia scientificum nullo modo ad praxim pertinet, sicut pertinet ratio superior, ut dictum est, in quantum scilicet aeterna consulit, et praeter hoc scientificum ad quaedam se extendit quorum non est ratio superior, prout hic accipitur, scilicet ad res creatas necessarias: quia philosophus scientificum animae non tantum sapientia quae divinorum est proprie, sed scientia et intellectu, quae creatorum sunt, in 6 Ethic. perfici docet. Cognitio autem rerum temporalium sive quantum ad ea quae ad nos agenda pertinent sive quantum ad ea quae in his necessariis demonstrationibus considerantur, ad rationem inferiorem pertinet, quae scientia perficitur, quam Augustinus extendit tam ad speculativam quam ad practicam considerationem rerum temporalium; unde distinctio superioris et inferioris rationis non est idem cum distinctione scientifici et ratiocinativi, quavis scientificum secundum aliquid sui, cum ratione superiori conveniat, et ratio inferior cum ratiocinativo.” Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.78, a.4, c.; q.79, a.2, ad.2.
 - 2 i.1256–59: *DV* q.11, a.1, ad.4: “ex sensibilibus signis, quae in potentia sensitiva recipiuntur, intellectus accipit intentiones intelligibiles, quibus utitur ad scientiam in seipso faciendam. Proximum enim scientiae effectivum non sunt signa, sed ratio discurrens a principiis in conclusiones, ut dictum est.” 1271/2b: *In Posteriorum*, lib.1, lec.41, n.363: “Ad cuius evidentiam considerandum est quod, sicut iam dictum est, progressus scientiae consistit in quodam motu rationis discurrentis ab uno in aliud: omnis autem motus a principio quodam procedit et ad aliquid terminatur; unde oportet quod in progressu scientiae ratio procedat ex aliquibus principiis primis.”
 - 3 E.g., 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.20, a.1, ad.1: “Et sicut in nobis ratio universalis movet mediante ratione particulari”.

This is not true. As just mentioned, the ratiocinative discursion not only begins from the intellect, it also returns to it and is, indeed, subordinated to the intellect's perfection. This discursive progression characterizes the whole enterprise of human intellectual knowledge. Even when human beings, *in statu vitae*, attain properly intellectual knowledge or insight, this occurs only within the broader context of the ratiocinative discursion, of the endless cycling between wholes and parts through which we constitute our actual understanding of all objects.

4.1.1 *From Pre-Philosophical Cognition to Philosophical Science*

While Thomas speaks in the *De ente et essentia* of intellectually apprehended wholes without making distinction from the integral whole, in the *Summa theologiae* he explicitly discusses wholes as both universal and integral.⁴ As noted above in the discussion of Cajetan,⁵ universal wholes are those which can be divided into their subjective parts, which parts are, like the universal wholes from which they are understood, capable of being predicated of both more particular universals as well as of an individual—as “animal” is predicable of “human” and “dog”, and “human” of “Aristides”. The reason for this, Thomas says, is that the “universal whole is in each part according to its full power and essence”,⁶ or, as we might rephrase it, the universal whole, wherever it is found, is found completely, according to its full intensional meaning.

Integral wholes, on the other hand, are divisible into integral parts, of which the whole cannot be predicated, for it is not fully present in them, as “human” is not fully present in the animality of an individual human, nor in an individual human's hand or head.⁷ We can see this distinction between universal and integral wholes by looking at *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3:⁸

4 I take this as a clear indication that there is a more mature and developed consideration in the *Summa theologiae* over the *De ente et essentia*.

5 Cf. c.1.2.1.1.

6 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.77, a.1, ad.1: “Totum enim universale adest cuilibet parti secundum totam suam essentiam et virtutem”. Cf. 1272/3a: *ST* IIIa, q.90, a.3, c.; c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.9, q.1, a.3, ad.1.

7 It should be noted that, by St. Thomas' time, there were a number of distinct ways of considering the whole beyond the integral and universal, including the potential (mentioned, for instance, in the three texts cited above, n.6) and quantitative (in, e.g., 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.76, a.8, c.; c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.30, q.2, a.1, c., etc.), among others (cf. Andrew W. Arlig 2010: “Mereology” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*, vol. 1, ed. Henrik Lagerlund, 763–771, esp. 765). It seems, however, that with regard to his consideration of the advancement of knowledge, the universal and integral wholes alone are important, as the others seem to go unmentioned in any text dealing with cognition.

8 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3, c.: “in cognitione nostri intellectus duo oportet considerare. Primo quidem, quod cognitio intellectiva aliquo modo a sensitiva primordium sumit. Et quia sensus

[1] In the cognition of our intellect it is necessary to consider two things. The first is that intellectual cognition in some mode arises primordially from sense cognition. And because the senses are concerned with the singular, but the intellect with the universal, it is necessary that the cognition of the singular, for us, is prior to cognition of the universal. [2] The second thing necessary to consider is that our intellect proceeds from potency to act. For everything which proceeds from potency to act first attains to an incomplete act, by which it is between potency and act, and then proceeds to perfect act. The perfect act to which the intellect attains is complete knowledge [*scientia completa*], through which things are known distinctly and determinately. The incomplete act is imperfect knowledge [*scientia imperfecta*], through which things are known indistinctly as under a certain confusion; which is for something to be known in a certain respect as it is known in act, and in a certain respect as it is known in potency. [3] Thus, the philosopher says in *Physics* I, that “what is clear and manifest to us is first known more confusedly; and afterwards we know by distinctly distinguishing its principles and elements.” It is manifest that to know something in which many are contained, without having the proper notion of each thing which is contained in that something, is to know something under a certain confusion. Not only is the universal whole able to be known thus, in which the parts are contained

est singularium, intellectus autem universalium; necesse est quod cognitio singularium, quoad nos, prior sit quam universalium cognitio. Secundo oportet considerare quod intellectus noster de potentia in actum procedit. Omne autem quod procedit de potentia in actum, prius pervenit ad actum incompletum, qui est medius inter potentiam et actum, quam ad actum perfectum. Actus autem perfectus ad quem pervenit intellectus, est scientia completa, per quam distincte et determinate res cognoscuntur. Actus autem incompletus est scientia imperfecta, per quam sciuntur res indistincte sub quadam confusione, quod enim sic cognoscitur, secundum quid cognoscitur in actu, et quodammodo in potentia. Unde philosophus dicit, in I *Physic.*, quod sunt primo nobis manifesta et certa confusa magis; posterius autem cognoscimus distinguendo distincte principia et elementa. Manifestum est autem quod cognoscere aliquid in quo plura continentur, sine hoc quod habeatur propria notitia uniuscuiusque eorum quae continentur in illo, est cognoscere aliquid sub confusione quadam. Sic autem potest cognosci tam totum universale, in quo partes continentur in potentia, quam etiam totum integrale, utrumque enim totum potest cognosci in quadam confusione, sine hoc quod partes distincte cognoscantur. Cognoscere autem distincte id quod continetur in toto universali, est habere cognitionem de re minus communi. Sicut cognoscere animal indistincte, est cognoscere animal in quantum est animal, cognoscere autem animal distincte, est cognoscere animal in quantum est animal rationale vel irrationale, quod est cognoscere hominem vel leonem. Prius igitur occurrit intellectui nostro cognoscere animal quam cognoscere hominem, et eadem ratio est si comparemus quodcumque magis universale ad minus universale.”

in potency, but also the integral whole, for each kind of whole is able to be known in a certain confusion, without the parts being distinctly known. [4] To know distinctly that which is contained in a universal whole is to have cognition of the thing less common, as to know “animal” indistinctly is to know animal insofar as it is animal, while to know “animal” distinctly is to know animal insofar as it is rational or irrational, i.e., to know it as “human” or “lion”. Therefore, it occurs first to our intellect to know “animal” before it occurs to our intellect to know “human”, and the same rationale holds if we compare anything more universal to what is less universal.

We have broken this text into four parts, for ease. The first part [1] deals with the chronological priority of the singular over the universal. Since all our intellectual knowledge comes from sensation, and sensation is of the singular, the singular must be first in our overall cognition.

The second part [2] attends to the intellect’s procession from potency to act: that is, that it does not have its perfection immediately, either in itself or in regard to its objects, but rather must move through several stages and acquire that perfection gradually, over time. As with all things that proceed there are intermediate steps—identifiable distinct moments—between the first potentiality and the final actuality. This is, indeed, the meaning of “proceeding”. That Thomas is talking about the procession of not only the intellect as a whole, with regard to its final perfection, but also about the procession in knowledge of particular things seems clear from the fact that he speaks of the “complete knowledge [*scientia completa*] through which things are known distinctly and determinately”. That is, the intellect proceeds towards a *scientia completa* of this or that material object⁹ by a more thorough and complete grasp of the formal object(s) pertaining to it, though this completeness is only *secundum quid*.¹⁰

In the third part [3] of the text, Thomas connects the procession of the intellect from potency to act with the assertion of Aristotle that we first know things more confusedly, and only later distinguish their “principles and elements”, i.e., their causes, both extrinsic and intrinsic. This vague initial grasp, Thomas shows, consists in knowing the thing in a state of confusion as to its parts, whether that knowledge be through the conceptual lens of a universal

9 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV*, q.14, a.9, c.: “Quaecumque autem sciuntur, proprie accepta scientia, cognoscuntur per resolutionem in prima principia, quae per se praesto sunt intellectui; et sic omnis scientia in visione rei praesentis perficitur.”

10 As explained throughout 4.3.

whole or of an integral whole. In other words, such a knowledge has no distinct grasp of the parts, but only sees the whole: the parts are contained within a manifold impression, but not recognized in themselves. In the fourth part [4], Thomas explains that to have distinct knowledge pertaining to what is, in a way, contained in the universal whole is to grasp of things which are less common than that whole itself. No further mention is made of the integral whole.

Thus, Thomas, to show how Aristotle's claim in the *Physics* applies to both sense and intellect, explains that cognition in general proceeds from the more common to the more particular.¹¹

And because the senses proceed from potency to act as does the intellect, likewise the same order of cognition appears in the senses. For according to the senses we first judge of the more common and then the less common, according to both place and time. According to place, as when something is seen remotely, it is first apprehended to be a body, then apprehended to be an animal; and first it is apprehended to be an animal before it is apprehended to be a human; and first a human before Socrates or Plato. According to time because a child in the beginning first distinguishes human from non-human, before he distinguishes this human from another human; and thus, children first call all men father and afterwards they determine each of them, as is said in *Physics* I. And the rationale for this is clear: because someone knows something indistinctly insofar as he is in potency as regards knowing the principles of distinction, as he who knows a genus is in potency as to knowing the differences. And thus it is clear that indistinct cognition is in the middle between potency and act. Therefore, it must be said that cognition of the singular is prior for us to the cognition of the universal, so too, just sensitive cognition is prior to intellectual cognition. But according to both sense

11 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.3, c.: “Et quia sensus exit de potentia in actum sicut et intellectus, idem etiam ordo cognitionis apparet in sensu. Nam prius secundum sensum diiudicamus magis commune quam minus commune, et secundum locum et secundum tempus. Secundum locum quidem, sicut, cum aliquid videtur a remotis, prius deprehenditur esse corpus, quam deprehendatur esse animal; et prius deprehenditur esse animal, quam deprehendatur esse homo; et prius homo, quam Socrates vel Plato. Secundum tempus autem, quia puer a principio prius distinguit hominem a non homine, quam distinguat hunc hominem ab alio homine; et ideo pueri a principio appellant omnes viros patres, posterius autem determinant unumquemque, ut dicitur in I *Physic*. Et huius ratio manifesta est. Quia qui scit aliquid indistincte, adhuc est in potentia ut sciat distinctionis principium; sicut qui scit genus, est in potentia ut sciat differentiam. Et sic patet quod cognitio indistincta media est inter potentiam et actum.” Cf. 1633: *DPC* (R.II 20a–22b).

and intellect, the cognition of the more common is prior to that of the less common.

While this confirms the progression from potency to act, and that indistinct cognition is somehow in the middle between the pure potential for knowledge of something and a complete actual grasp, there is nothing given by Thomas which provides the desired clarity on **how** this is accomplished.

To provide such clarity seems to have been the intent of Cajetan, which we discussed in Chapter 1 in the section, “Cajetan’s Four Cognitions and Three Abstractions”.¹² Cajetan accomplished an insightful description of the results and a clear categorization of the kinds of knowledge. He left unsaid, however, precisely how these kinds, or results of the kinds of knowledge, are obtained; that is, the nature of the process remains unclear in Cajetan, as it does in Thomas.

Not only the initial abstraction which grasps some whole, but every intellectual discovery of what pertains to some quiddity or of what can be considered quidditatively derives from the content contained within a phantasm, for every intellectual discovery requires an objective presence from which the intelligible specification can be discerned. There is no direct analysis of concepts for St. Thomas, as, indeed, there is no direct knowledge of concepts.¹³ At the same time, the subsequent intellectual discovery of quiddities does not occur in a vacuum of previous intellectual considerations.¹⁴ In other words, if we discover some further specification belonging to the nature of some thing, beyond the vague and confused grasp obtained earlier in the process of

12 See c.1.2.1.

13 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.2, c.: “quia intellectus supra seipsum reflectitur, secundum eandem reflexionem intelligit et suum intelligere, et speciem qua intelligit. Et sic species intellectiva secundo est id quod intelligitur. Sed id quod intelligitur primo, est res cuius species intelligibilis est similitudo.” The intellect, in reflecting upon itself, understands both its own act of understanding and the species by which it understands—but secondarily, for that which is understood primarily is the thing of which the intelligible species is a similitude. This secondary understanding should not be understood as temporal, but as something which cannot be prescinded from the primary understanding. Cf. c.1.3.1.2.1 above, “Distinction between First and Second Intentions”.

14 Cf. C.S. Peirce 1868: “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, vol. 1, eds. Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel, 11–27. Peirce notably takes a broader conception of prior experience; but his arguments against what he terms intuition bolster my argument here. Cf. James Maroosis 2003: “Poinsot, Peirce, and Pegis: Knowing as a Way of Being” in *Thomistic Tapestry: Essays in Honor of Étienne Gilson*, ed. Peter A. Redpath (New York: Rodopi B.V.): 157–176.

understanding, we do so under the light of that vague and confused grasp. Any intellectual discovery which allows for the distinction of a part, or the understanding of something as a part, requires that there be some previous abstraction of a whole, in light of which the distinguished part can be seen as it is.

The first such whole grasped by every human being is none other than *ens ut primum cognitum*, according to the greatest possible confusion of any cognition. Under the light provided by this first conception of the intellect—however vaguely and indiscriminately *ens* is grasped initially—subsequent notions can be conceived as pertaining to this or that particular instance of being. All intelligible distinctions are discerned by the intellectual perception of *ens*. As Thomas says, *ens* “is the proper object of the intellect, and thus is the first intelligible, just as sound is the first audible”.¹⁵ Just as sound commonly underlies hearing both a C-sharp minor and a B-flat major, a cry and a whistle, so too *ens* commonly underlies understanding dog and man, substance and accident, thing and object, the celestial spheres, quasars, quarks, relations and negations. How precisely *ens primum cognitum* becomes involved or entailed in these further conceptions will be considered in the final chapter; for now, we need only note that it is somehow both **prior** and **integral** to all other apprehensions of the intellect.

There is a curiosity easily overlooked in the procession from universal and common to particular and distinct, namely, that while we might first know things by means of a common conception, that concept itself is not immediately known to us at all. Our attention is focused entirely on that which is made known by the concept. Such cognitions belong to what we would call a pre-philosophical attitude, in which persons possess an intellectual understanding—they are engaged in a world over and above the merely animal *Umwelt*, and considering things as they are in themselves and not according to mere subjective and utilitarian consideration—and yet have not reached a point where philosophical inquiry has begun.¹⁶ As such, despite being engaged

15 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.5, a.2, c.: “est proprium obiectum intellectus, et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonus est primum audibile.”

16 Consider the difference even unreflective intellectual cognition makes in the everyday experience of life: for instance, Simon 1934: *Introduction a l'ontologie du connaitre*, 115: “How strange the world when it is merely sensed! How familiar nature when it has become intelligible. If we pay attention to these convergent facts, we come to realize that the universe of pure sensation is an inhuman universe that becomes human only to the extent that sensation is penetrated by thought. The customary universe of human perception owes its appearance, its consistency, and its humanity to the presence of thought in human perception... Pure sensation, even aided by the richest train of images, can never explain the slightest thought.” Cf. Maritain 1953: *Creative Intuition*, 5: “in a deeper though

in a cognitive context which transcends the merely animal evaluation of objects, the pre-philosophical attitude gives little consideration to objects as things in their own right. Though there this attitude includes some awareness that the objects do not reduce to our experience of them and a proximate possibility for a properly philosophical consideration, the objects so known are often treated only with regard to how they are related to ourselves.¹⁷ In other

improper sense, art by itself involves a species of magic, which has become purified in the course of centuries, and is pure, and purely aesthetic, when the invasion of man by Nature pertains exclusively to the joy of a vision or intuition, that is, of a purely intentional or suprasubjective becoming." And again, 6–7: "what about the great spectacles of wild Nature? Something of man is still involved—this time a certain feeling (related of itself to no aesthetic perception, I would say a brute feeling, or a merely subjective feeling) which is produced in us, and projected by us into things, and reflected upon us by them: especially, with respect to Nature in her own fierce or solitary, unpierceable selfhood, the feeling of an infinite disproportion between Nature and man: this is not simply crushing and astounding, it also stirs in us, obscurely, vague and indeterminate heroic potentialities—we wonder in the dark through what kind of frightful experiences we might possibly overcome the very disproportion. Hence an impression both of awe and of challenge, which causes, I think, the sensation of the sublime, but which makes this sensation far distant from the pure perception of beauty, and, I would say, defective in aesthetic value." See also the discussion of the "magical sign" in "Sign and Symbol", 227f in 1941: *Ransoming the Time*.

- 17 This is at the core of the distinction which Heidegger makes between concern (*Besorgen*), both as it is commonly used in regards to the particular interaction which we have with tasks, an ontical signification which refers to determinate modes, and as designating an ontological *existentiale* (i.e., specifically-human mode of Dasein's relating itself to something else) and care (*Sorge*) in 1927a: *SZ*, 56–57/83–84: "Dasein's facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining....All these ways of Being-in have *concern* as their kind of Being—a kind of Being which we have yet to characterize in detail. Leaving undone, neglecting, renouncing, taking a rest—these too are ways of concern; but these are all *deficient* modes, in which the possibilities of concern are kept to a 'bare minimum'. The term 'concern' has, in the first instance, its colloquial signification, and can mean to carry out something, to get it done, to 'straighten it out'. It can also mean 'to provide oneself with something'. We use the expression with still another characteristic turn of phrase when we say 'I am concerned for the success of the undertaking'. Here 'concern' means something like apprehensiveness. In contrast to these colloquial ontical significations, the expression 'concern' will be used in this investigation as an ontological term for an *existentiale*, and will designate the Being of a possible way of Being-in-the-world. This term has been chosen not because Dasein happens to be

words, the specifically-human *Umwelt* becomes, as it were, dimly lit by a more profound cognitive activity, but with a subordination of that light, for the most part, to a mode of concern which belongs more properly to the *Umwelt* than to a mode of concern which belongs to world disclosed by the distinctively human engagement.¹⁸ Alternatively, we could say that the human intellect,

proximally and to a large extent 'practical' and economic, but because the Being of Dasein itself is to be made visible as *care*... Because Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein, its Being towards the world is essentially concern." 192/237: "The formal existential totality of Dasein's ontological structural whole must therefore be grasped in the following structure: the Being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world). This Being fills in the signification of the term 'care' [*Sorge*], which is used in a purely ontologico-existential manner. From this signification every tendency of Being which one might have in mind ontically, such as worry [*Besorgnis*] or carefreeness [*Sorglosigkeit*], is ruled out."

Cf. Sokolowski 2000: *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 42–51 for a similar contrast between what Sokolowski calls the "natural" and "phenomenological" attitudes.

- 18 The extreme example of this subordination the consideration of what things are, independently of human cognition, to the plans or pursuits of a human environment, such that even the human intellect becomes subservient, is exemplified in what Heidegger calls "technological thinking". What characterizes technological thinking, although dependent upon *techne*, is not the revealing of *techne* as an intellectual virtue; rather it is "a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such". (1953b: "Die Frage nach der Technik", 296). Where *techne* is, although not incapable of being abused, essentially a kind of know-how which is towards the revealing of something for the sake of the good of man according to right reason (and thus within the realm of *phronesis*), technological thinking is a challenging which seeks to dominate nature for the sake of imposing upon it some pre-conceived ordering. (cf. Maritain 1959: *DK*, 3: "Three centuries of empirio-mathematicism have so warped the intellect that it is no longer interested in anything but the invention of apparatus to capture phenomena—conceptual nets that give the mind a certain practical dominion over nature, coupled with a deceptive understanding of it; deceptive, indeed, because its thought is resolved, not in being, but in the sensible itself.") Such a challenging may be incited by a desire to improve man's condition in life, to ease the burden of labor and/or to increase pleasure. This challenging once adopted, however, alters the relationship between human beings and *physis*. Rather than engaging the beings of nature as things to be disclosed and understood, the challenge of technological thinking to nature is for the latter to become a "standing-reserve", i.e., resources to be used for human projects.

This challenging, Heidegger claims, has been heralded since the dawn of classical physics: "It remains true, nonetheless, that man in the technological age is, in a particularly striking way, challenged forth into revealing. That revealing concerns nature, above all, as the chief storehouse of the standing energy reserve. Accordingly, man's ordering attitude and behavior display themselves first in the rise of modern physics as an exact

operating under this dim light, concerns itself primarily with matters practical rather than speculative.¹⁹

The first broad division, then, in the orders of the process of human cognition which we find is that between the practical and the speculative. It should be noted that these two orders are not entirely distinct from one another: for while there are kinds of knowledge entirely speculative, and there are acts of knowledge essentially practical, there can be and often is an overlap,

science. Modern science's way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces. Modern physics is not experimental physics because it applies apparatus to the questioning of nature. The reverse is true. Because physics, indeed already as pure theory, sets nature up to exhibit itself as a coherence of forces calculable in advance, it orders its experiments precisely for the purpose of asking whether and how nature reports itself when set up in this way." (1953b: "Die Frage nach der Technik", 303).

The experimental framework of classical physics, of the empirio-mathematical (or physico-mathematical) approach to investigation is such that it sets up in advance a conclusion for which it is looking. The question of its investigation, then, is not "What is the nature of this?" but "How can we make X do Y?" or "How can we achieve Z with X and Y?"

Because the method of technological thinking consists in the subjugation of the natural world to the designs of man, "the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself." (1953: "Die Frage nach der Technik", 308). When technological thinking "holds sway", i.e., becomes prevalent, man begins to see things only insofar as they are objects for him; their existences in themselves, their proper essences, are no longer objects of revelation, but only their usefulness. Given a technological interpretation of *physis*, such that there is no essential difference between the product of *physis* and that of *techne*, that the former is simply an "autonomous artifact", then there is no distinct good in understanding the interior principle of a physical being for its own sake. (Cf. Edward Engelmann 2007: "The Mechanistic and the Aristotelian Orientations toward Nature and Their Metaphysical Backgrounds" in *The International Philosophical Quarterly*, 47.2, 200: "Unlike the Aristotelian scientist, therefore, the mechanical philosopher is not interested in apprehending an inner principle for its own sake, since the inner principle of an autonomous artifact does not itself exist for its own sake. Rather, the mechanist is interested in finding the inner cause only for the sake of explaining the phenomenal effect for the sake of which the inner cause exists." Cf. Hans Georg Gadamer 1960a: "The Nature of Things and the Language of Things" in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 70–71). In the terminology of *Sein und Zeit*, the readiness-to-hand of what is encountered within the world utterly prevails over their presence-at-hand.

19 Cf. c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.5, a.1, c.: "theoricus sive speculativus intellectus in hoc proprie ab operativo sive practico distinguitur quod speculativus habet pro fine veritatem quam considerat, practicus vero veritatem consideratam ordinat in operationem tamquam in finem."

depending upon the object considered, by the mode of consideration, namely, whether the consideration deals with attributes or parts which are separable in the existence of the thing (*secundum rem*) or by intellectual consideration alone (*secundum rationem*), and by the end of the consideration.²⁰

While this subordination of a higher function to a lower end can be a detriment to the fulfillment of the intellect's natural inclination, this does not mean that to philosophize one must live in the philosophical attitude and forsake a pre-philosophical attunement to the environmental world. Rather, through regularly engaging in the kind of speculative inquiry proper to the philosophical attitude, the pre-philosophical comes to be habitually informed: the more clearly *quod quid est* is intellectually grasped, the more one can act in a manner which is fittingly towards *id quod est*.

It belongs to the philosophically scientific (or cenoscopic) inquiry to clarify this intellectual grasp—to move human beings from opinion to knowledge not in the realm of factual certitude about some empirically-observable reality, but as regards the significance of some phenomenon for human existence. Cenoscopic inquiry, though it does not have a hard and fast line of demarcation from the pre-philosophical attitude, is educed from the pre-philosophical state by conceptual reflexivity. That is, the philosophically scientific inquiry is distinguished by considering not merely the things made known by the objectivization wrought through the concept, but also includes the relation between the concept itself and the thing as objectivized. It is only by investigating this relation that the confused grasp of the integral whole can be winnowed out into distinct material and formal objects. As we showed Maritain pointing out above, we first consider things as distinct objects of inquiry, and as grounding different inquiries, on the basis of the *ratio formalis objecti ut res*.²¹ Grasping such a *ratio formalis* is the first step in the cenoscopic inquiry.

What has not been clarified is precisely how this *ratio formalis objecti ut res* is discerned or grasped. Clearly, like all objects of intellectual apprehension, the *ratio formalis* must be (1) something universal and (2) grasped through an "abstraction", i.e., the intellectual discovery of some quiddity.

Regarding the first (1) point, we should examine what Thomas means by the term "universal". Before getting to the key texts in which he speaks about the

20 For a more detailed discussion of this division, see S. Edmund Dolan 1950: "Resolution and Composition in Speculative and Practical Discourse" in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 6.1, 9–62, especially 13–20. Here, drawing upon John Poinsot, Dolan provides a good organization of the different orders of practical and speculative; the chart at 17n2 is particularly helpful.

21 Cf. 2.2.1.2.

universal, it is important to note, on the one hand, that “universal” and “nature” are often, but not always, used to signify the same thing; and on the other hand, that Thomas’ teaching on this issue is neither perfectly consistent nor completely clear. Like Avicenna, he at times states that the universal is something which can be considered in three ways: in itself, in things themselves, or in the soul:²²

The universal is able to be considered in three ways, and according to each mode of consideration it is true that the universal is somehow eternal. It is able to be considered, in one way, as the universal nature insofar as it abstracts from every existence; and thus it is true that the universal is eternal, rather through a removing of the cause determining it to some time, than through the positing of the cause of its perpetuity, for it does not belong to the rationale of a universal nature that it belong to this time and not to another—it is in this mode that prime matter is also said to be one. In another way, the universal can be considered according to the existence that it has in singulars; and thus it is true that the universal is always, because it exists whenever its singular does. In the same way it is said to be everywhere, because it is wherever its singular is, even though there may be many places where its singular is not; for which reason, neither is the universal there. The universal is able to be considered in a third way, according to the existence which it has in the intellect, and thus it is true that the universal is eternal, especially in the divine intellect.

What requires clarification above all else, and which seems to be at the heart of the confusion in Thomas’ teaching, is the absolute or simple consideration of a nature—that is, what he calls here the abstracting “from every existence”. The phrase commonly used to denote the object, *natura absolute considerata*, “the

22 c.1265/6b: *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, q.5, a.9, ad.16: “quod universale tripliciter considerari potest; et secundum quemlibet modum considerationis aliquo modo verum est quod universale est semper. Potest enim uno modo considerari natura universalis secundum quod abstrahit a quolibet esse: et sic verum est quod universale est semper, magis per remotionem causae determinantis ad aliquod tempus, quam per positionem causae perpetuitatis; de ratione enim naturae universalis non est quod sit magis hoc tempore quam illo; per quem etiam modum materia prima dicitur esse una. Alio modo potest considerari secundum esse quod habet in singularibus: et sic verum est quod est semper, quia est quandocumque est suum singulare; sicut etiam dicitur esse ubique, quia est ubicumque est suum singulare, cum tamen multa loca sint ubi sua singularia non sunt; unde nec ibi est universale. Tertio modo potest considerari secundum esse quod habet in intellectu: et sic etiam verum est quod universale est semper, praecipue in intellectu divino.”

nature absolutely considered”, can be easily and incorrectly subsumed into a quasi-Platonic understanding. The idea that the nature can somehow be considered in itself—whether we call this consideration a simple or an absolute consideration, or some other such term—is the crux of the Avicennian solution to the problem of the unity of a common nature as something both universal and found in particulars.²³ But calling the object of such a consideration a “universal” is a misnomer, for while the object of an absolute consideration does not repudiate the possibility of either a universal or a singular intention being attached to it—i.e., that the object, some aspect or combination of aspects of the *quod quid est*, can be involved in further cognitional acts which include the consideration of that nature as pertaining to some *esse*, either in singular things or in the intellect—the object actually considered is neither said of one nor said of many.

If we take Thomas to mean that the “absolutely considered” nature is something held up as a terminal object—as the object actually considered itself²⁴—separate from any determination whatsoever, then either we are misunderstanding him or he contradicts himself; for all actual human understanding, Thomas is quite adamant, occurs only by a reversion of the intellect to the phantasms.²⁵ Since every phantasm is itself something determinate, the nature intellectually grasped cannot be actually understood apart from at least **some** determination.

It thus seems that there are two ways we can approach Thomas’ use of the phrase *natura absolute considerata*: **one**, that it pertains to an intellectual operation whereby some nature is grasped which precedes any act of composition or division of what is contained in that grasp itself, i.e., that it refers to the apprehensive grasp of some simple *quid*;²⁶ or **two**, that it refers to a non- or pre-critical consideration of the nature, as found in some phantasm, but without judging as to whether or not it actually exists in that phantasm, i.e., whether

23 See c.1, n21.

24 Such a confusion seems present, depending upon what he means by “represented in”, in Owens 1992: *Cognition*, 153: “the object of the concept is the thing itself as known in abstraction. In this way the human nature, the animal nature, and the vegetative nature of a perceived object are represented in separate concepts. They are represented apart from each other, even though in reality they are never found in separation from the really existent individual.”

25 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.7.

26 As Thomas often states, the intellect is deceived in neither its simple apprehension of the quiddities of material beings nor in its absolute consideration. Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1, ad.1; a.6, ad.3; q.94, a.4, c.; c.1268a: *In de anima*, lib.3, lec.11, n.762; i.1256–59: *DV*, q.15, a.3, ad.1; c.1252/6b: *De ente et essentia*, c.2.

or not it is actually composed in existence with the particular and material conditions which are objectively present in the phantasm. Both ways seem to be valid, regardless as to whether or not they were meant by Thomas himself.²⁷

We have to take into consideration, moreover, that the eternity of the universal in no way is tied to an actual eternity of the biological species: that is, the existence of the universal is actually eternal in the intellect and actually eternal in its meaning, but its eternity in existing singulars is only of a hypothetical necessity. Thomas signifies this by stating that “the universal is always, because it exists whenever its singular does”.²⁸

Another text in which Thomas speaks of the universal as capable of being considered in three ways, though in this case under the term “nature”, is in the earlier of the two *quodlibetal* series. Here, Thomas discusses the ordering of the threefold consideration of a nature, saying that, while the simple observation

27 For these two reasons, we prefer calling this act “simple observation” or “simple examination” to “absolute consideration”, despite the latter’s closer transliteration of the Latin, as “absolute consideration” implies holding up the object as though it were itself something simple—an impossibility for the human intellect, for which the proportionate and immediate object is always something composite. Contrariwise, **simple observation** or **examination** connotes the twofold sense mentioned above, i.e., the intellectual grasp which precedes composition and division and the non- or pre-critical consideration of the nature. Nevertheless, no short and simple term perfectly captures the action, which is, as it were a kind of incomplete intellectual understanding with a deferred existential judgment. Thus we say both “pre” and “non” to signify that in the simple observation one may either have not yet discerned the parts of some whole, and thus grasp it only as in a certain confusion, or one may be deliberately keeping oneself from so doing, focusing attention on some whole precisely as a whole, and, despite having awareness of its parts, deliberately ignoring them. This latter, the deliberate “non-precisive” consideration, seems to cohere with the description given in Knasas 2003: *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists*, 42: “Non-precisive abstraction [i.e., absolute consideration] involves understanding the nature both as not including particularities in the instances and as remaining open to them. Because we have to think two things of the nature at once, non-precisive abstraction is a subtle, nuanced, and delicate affair.” Knasas, however, seems to hold that all “absolute consideration” is of the deliberately non-precisive type.

Because it seems appropriate to keep a connection, however, to the Latin of Thomas, as well as the tradition common to Thomists, we will retain the phrase “absolute consideration” and use it interchangeably with our alternatives.

28 c.1265/6b: *De potentia*, q.5, a.9, ad.16, quoted in full above, this chapter, n.22. Cf. Wallace 1972: *Causality and Scientific Explanation: Volume One, Medieval and Early Classical Science*, 75: “On the supposition’ that any effect is to be produced, as the end or final cause of a natural process, one may be able to demonstrate *propter quid* the efficient and material causes required to produce that effect, and if so, such reasoning will produce truly universal knowledge even though the effect is not always occurring.”

and the observation of a nature existing in singulars always follows the same order, it is not so with the observation of a nature as existing in the intellect:²⁹

[1] It must be said, as according to Avicenna in his *Metaphysics*, that there is a threefold consideration of any nature. One, insofar as it is considered according to the existence which it has in singulars, as the nature of stone in this and in that stone. The second is the consideration of any nature according to its intelligible existence, as the nature of stone is observed insofar as it is in the intellect. The third is the simple consideration of the nature, insofar as it abstracts from each of these existences; according to which consideration the nature of stone, or of any other nature, is considered only in regards to those things which *per se* belong to such a nature. [2] Of these three considerations, two always preserve the same order: for the simple consideration of some nature is prior to the consideration of that nature according to the existence which it has in singulars. But the third consideration of a nature, which is according to the existence which it has in the intellect, does not always have the same order to the other considerations. For the consideration of a nature according to the existence which it has in the intellect, which is received from things, follows either of the other considerations. In this order, the knowable precedes knowledge, and the sensible precedes sense, just as moving precedes the moved, and the cause precedes the thing caused. [3] But the consideration of the nature according to the existence which

29 i.1254-7: *Quaestiones quodlibetales, Quodlibet VIII*, q.1, a.1, c: "Dicendum, quod, secundum Avicennam in sua metaphysica, triplex est alicuius naturae consideratio. Una, prout consideratur secundum esse quod habet in singularibus; sicut natura lapidis in hoc lapide et in illo lapide. Alia vero est consideratio alicuius naturae secundum esse suum intelligibile; sicut natura lapidis consideratur prout est in intellectu. Tertia vero est consideratio naturae absoluta, prout abstrahit ab utroque esse; secundum quam considerationem consideratur natura lapidis, vel cuiuscumque alterius, quantum ad ea tantum quae per se competunt tali naturae. Harum quidem trium considerationum duae semper uniformiter eundem ordinem servant: prior enim est consideratio alicuius naturae absoluta quam consideratio eius secundum esse quod habet in singularibus; sed tertia consideratio naturae, quae est secundum esse quod habet in intellectu, non semper habet eundem ordinem ad alias considerationes. Consideratio enim naturae secundum esse quod habet in intellectu qui accipit a rebus, sequitur utramque aliarum considerationum. Hoc enim ordine scibile praecedit scientiam, et sensibile sensum, sicut et movens motum, et causa causatum. Sed consideratio naturae secundum esse quod habet in intellectu causante rem, praecedit alias duas considerationes. Cum enim intellectus artificis adinvenit aliquam formam artificiatam, ipsa natura seu forma artificiatam in se considerata, est posterior intellectui artificis; et per consequens etiam arca sensibilis, quae talem formam vel speciem habet."

it has in the intellect as causing a thing precedes the other two considerations. When the intellect of an artificer invents some artificial form, that artificial nature or form observed in itself is posterior to its existence in the intellect of the artificer; and consequently also the sensible box which has such a form or species.

The first part [1] of this text provides a brief corroboration but nothing else beyond what was contained in the prior text from *De potentia*.

The second part [2] however, introduces the notion of an ordering in which these observations occur. A simple observation always precedes an observation of the nature existing in singulars. As regards the natures of things which have a cognition-independent being, one or the other, or both, of these two observations always precedes the observation of the existence of the nature as it exists intelligibly in the intellect. This point that a simple observation always precedes both the grasp of the existence of the nature in the singular and the existence of the nature in the intellect verifies the above interpretation that the simple observation can entail a pre-critical grasping of some *quid*, prior to any acts of composition or division. Additionally, this pre-critical grasp focuses entirely on the thing thereby made known; that is, by pointing out that the knowable precedes knowledge in this order, Thomas is saying there must be a consideration of the thing known before the means whereby it is known is itself an object considered, i.e., that we know the thing before we know ourselves to know it through some concept.

The third part [3] of the text discusses how this order is fundamentally altered in the case of things which are caused by their being in the intellect, as all things which follow from some plan. The archetypal case is that of the artificer and the artifact, who must in some manner consider the thing as it exists in his intellect before he proceeds to attempt production of it in a singular thing.

Another pair of texts, however, shows Thomas saying that the universal or nature is considered in two ways. These two texts, from the *Tractatus de Homine* in the *Summa theologiae prima pars*, q.85, and the *Sentencia libri de Anima*, are generally accepted to have been written around the same time,³⁰ and later than the earlier two texts.³¹

30 Torrell 1993: *L'Initiation a Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Sa personne et son oeuvre*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions du Cerf). References are to the English translation by Robert Royal, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Volume One: The Person and His Work*, revised edition (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 176, 341.

31 Torrell 1993: *L'Initiation a Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 1, at p.211, dates the *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* around 1265–6 and, at p.335, notes that, while some have considered

Why this reduction from three ways to two? Let us look at the texts. First, from the *De anima* commentary (emphasis mine):³²

It must be considered that the universal is able to be taken in two ways. In the first, the universal can be called the common nature itself, insofar as it is subject to the intention of universality. The second is according to itself. Just as white is able to be taken in two ways—either that to which it occurs to be white, or the very thing, insofar as it is underneath whiteness—so too the nature, to which the intention of universality comes, has a twofold existence: one, material, insofar as it is in natural matter; the other immaterial, insofar as it is in the intellect. Therefore, insofar as it has existence in natural matter, the intention of universality is not able to come to it, because it is individuated through matter. Therefore, the intention of universality comes to it, insofar as it is abstracted from material individuals. However, it is not possible that it be **really** abstracted from material individuals, as the Platonists claim. For human beings are not natural, that is, real, except as in **this** flesh and **these** bones, as the Philosopher proves in *Metaphysics VII*. It therefore remains that human nature does not have existence beyond the individuating principles, except in the intellect.

Here, we find a particularly strong insistence upon the fact that the universal exists in no separate, third way, as existing itself universally; there is no **real** “abstraction” from the material individuals, such that there is an abstract object apart from the concrete object. Universality is only something which comes to the so-called “universal”, which is really the intelligible determination, with

Quodlibet VIII to be as late as 1267, most place it in the middle of the 1250s, between 1254–7.

32 c.1268a: *In de anima*, lib.2, lec.12, n.378: “Circa secundum vero considerandum est, quod universale potest accipi dupliciter. Uno modo potest dici universale ipsa natura communis, prout subiacet intentioni universalitatis. Alio modo secundum se. Sicut et album potest accipi dupliciter: vel id, cui accidit esse album, vel ipsummet, secundum quod subest albedini. Ista autem natura, cui advenit intentio universalitatis, puta natura hominis, habet duplex esse: unum quidem materiale, secundum quod est in materia naturali; aliud autem immateriale, secundum quod est in intellectu. Secundum igitur quod habet esse in materia naturali, non potest ei advenire intentio universalitatis, quia per materiam individuatur. Advenit igitur ei universalitatis intentio, secundum quod abstrahitur a materia individuali. Non est autem possibile, quod abstrahatur a materia individuali realiter, sicut Platonici posuerunt. Non enim est homo naturalis, id est realis, nisi in his carnibus, et in his ossibus, sicut probat philosophus in septimo metaphysicae. Relinquitur igitur, quod natura humana non habet esse praeter principia individuantia, nisi tantum in intellectu.”

its existence in the intellect, with the intellectual discovery of the intelligible specifying form.

What we find in *ST Ia*, q.85, a.3, ad.1, is a similar statement, but one which does add something, namely, the consideration of priority and posteriority.³³

The universal is able to be considered in two ways. The first way is insofar as the universal nature is considered together with the intention of universality. And since the intention of universality, i.e., that which has one and the same relation to many, provenates from the abstraction of the intellect, it is necessary, by this fact, that this mode of considering the universal is posterior. For this reason, in *De anima* I, it is said that the universal “animal” is either nothing or it is posterior. But according to Plato, who posits subsistent universals, according to this consideration the universal would be before the particulars, which, according to him, do not exist unless through participation in the subsisting universals, which are called ideas.

The second way in which it is able to be considered is with regard to the nature itself, such as animality or humanity, insofar as it is found in particulars.

The consideration of the intelligible determination as it is in the intellect, i.e., as it is *capax universalitatis*, is posterior to the consideration of it with regard to the nature itself, **as it is found in particulars.**³⁴ What remains for

33 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.3, ad.1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod universale dupliciter potest considerari. Uno modo, secundum quod natura universalis consideratur simul cum intentione universalitatis. Et cum intentio universalitatis, ut scilicet unum et idem habeat habitudinem ad multa, proveniat ex abstractione intellectus, oportet quod secundum hunc modum universale sit posterius. Unde in I de anima dicitur quod animal universale aut nihil est, aut posterius est. Sed secundum Platonem, qui posuit universalia subsistentia, secundum hanc considerationem universale esset prius quam particularia, quae secundum eum non sunt nisi per participationem universalium subsistentium, quae dicuntur ideae.

“Alio modo potest considerari quantum ad ipsam naturam, scilicet animalitatis vel humanitatis, prout invenitur in particularibus”.

34 As Thomas goes on to add, in 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.85, a.3, ad.1, this is a temporal posteriority, the kind of posteriority proper to generation: “Et sic dicendum est quod duplex est ordo naturae. Unus secundum viam generationis et temporis, secundum quam viam, ea quae sunt imperfecta et in potentia, sunt priora. Et hoc modo magis commune est prius secundum naturam, quod apparet manifeste in generatione hominis et animalis; nam prius generatur animal quam homo, ut dicitur in libro de Generat. Animal. Alius est ordo perfectionis, sive intentionis naturae; sicut actus simpliciter est prius secundum

our interpretation is the precise nature of these two claims: that is, whether Thomas is claiming that the intelligible determination only **exists** in these two ways, or that it can only be **considered** in these two ways.

It is very strongly and clearly stated in the text from the *De anima* commentary that the universal, or intelligible determination, only exists in two ways, either in things or in the intellect. But what is meant by the text from the *Summa*? The language does not suggest only that the **existence** of the universal is twofold, but even that the mode in which the universal is **considered** is only twofold. Moreover, in both the *De anima* (*Alio modo secundum se*) and the *Summa* (*Alio modo... ad ipsam naturam*) texts, it appears that the observation of the universal as it is in particulars entails or includes the consideration of the nature itself—a simple observation or “absolute consideration”. But in a text definitively known as later than either of these two, the commentary on *De caelo et mundo*,³⁵ Thomas again reverts to positing the simple observation as one different from the consideration of the universal as it is in the particular.³⁶

It appears that there are three ways of interpreting Thomas on this change between two and three modes of consideration: (1) that, over time, Thomas changed his mind about whether or not there is such a thing as an absolute consideration; (2) that in the texts from the *De anima* and *Summa theologiae*, Thomas speaks exclusively of the ways in which the universal exists, and not properly of the ways in which it can be considered; (3) that Thomas struggled with the difficulty of rectifying the tension between an absolute consideration of some nature and the necessity of returning to the phantasm to complete the act of understanding.

naturam quam potentia, et perfectum prius quam imperfectum. Et per hunc modum, minus commune est prius secundum naturam quam magis commune, ut homo quam animal, naturae enim intentio non sistit in generatione animalis, sed intendit generare hominem.” Again, we note the presence of intellectual discovery in the pre-philosophical or pre-critical activity of human beings. Such knowledge is more imperfect and prior to the knowledge which comes later.

35 Cf. Torrell 1993: *L'Initiation a Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, vol. 1, 234, 344.

36 1272/3b: *In de caelo et mundo*, lib.1, lec.19, n.186: “Primus syllogismus talis est. In omnibus sensibilibus quae fiunt ab arte vel a natura, alia est consideratio formae secundum se consideratae, alia est consideratio formae prout est in materia; sed caelum est quoddam sensibile habens formam in materia; ergo alia est consideratio absoluta formae ipsius, prout consideratur in universali, et alia est consideratio formae ipsius in materia, prout consideratur in particulari.”

The third interpretation seems to us the most proper,³⁷ for even things not material in themselves are still understood by correlation with a material object. As is said in q.85, a.1, “it is proper to [the human intellect] to know a form existing individually in corporeal matter, but not insofar as it is in [individual] matter”.³⁸ Thus, even when something is known under a metaphorical or analogical predication, there is the inclusion of a particular, corporeal thing, represented through a phantasm in the act of understanding.³⁹ This inclusion of the corporeal is necessary for the actual understanding of the incorporeal.

We would distinguish, however, between the simple consideration of the nature and the consideration of the nature as it actually exists in particulars thus: the former includes no existential judgment, whereas the latter does. When I think of “human being”, as a universal, the particular individual in whom I am thinking of it does not alter my consideration of the universal, the formal object of my consideration, even if the individual is entirely fictitious, or that particular individual lacks many of the ordinary features of a human being. So long as the organization of the body, of the material parts, contained within the terminal object of consideration includes or at least does not prevent those things necessary for the proper operations of a human being to occur,⁴⁰ I can be actually considering that nature without considering whether or not what is signified by the nature exists in actuality, just as I can have a simple consideration of the nature of a centaur, while knowing that no such creature exists.

This coheres with the twofold absolute consideration or simple observation which we proposed above: namely, that it applies in both the pre- and non-critical instances. Certainly, before we can know this human individual precisely as human, we need first to have a consideration of what the human nature is itself, even if that consideration is vague and without clarity. But also, after having discerned what the parts are which are proper to “human being”—both in some degree as regards the subjective parts (individuals instantiating that nature or more particular specifications within some generic concept, such as “animal”) and as regards the integral parts (the necessary constitutive notions discerned as belonging to the definition of a concept, such as

37 For, indeed, it would seem unusual for Thomas to change his mind **twice**, late in life; and moreover, the language of the *Summa* does not suggest that Thomas is speaking only of existence.

38 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1, c.: “*proprium eius est cognoscere formam in materia quidem corporeali individualiter existentem, non tamen prout est in tali materia*”.

39 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.7, ad.3.

40 Cf. c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.5, a.3, c.: “*Forma autem illa potest a materia aliqua abstrahi, cuius ratio essentiae non dependet a tali materia. Ab illa autem materia non potest forma abstrahi per intellectum, a qua secundum suae essentiae rationem dependet.*”

“animality” to “human”) or of some actually existing whole, as a brain belonging to **this** human individual—we can nevertheless deliberately consider the nature without taking those parts into account.

This view of the nature as it is in either the pre-critical simple observation or in the existence which it has in the singular belongs not only to the pre-philosophical intellectual attitude, but to the incipient stages of any concept formation, including those which belong to the scientifically philosophical understanding. This is not to say that there is not a concept whereby such a thing is actually known, i.e., that there is no *species expressae* of the pre-scientifically known object. Indeed, if the thing is understood at all, it must be in some way conceived and “spoken”.⁴¹ But this conception is pre-philosophical; it is preliminary to or remote from a distinct expression of the discernible intelligibility of the thing. What we want to see is how the rest of the pieces required for the formation of the distinct expression, the properly philosophical understanding, are grasped and how they are incorporated into that expression.

The first notion which must be excluded is that the distinctions or the parts which belong to some whole are somehow directly derived from the concept of the whole itself. No concept is distinguished into parts by an analysis of the concept itself, as the direct object of analysis. Indeed, the knowledge had of concepts is always attained by a certain reflexion; there is no direct knowledge of our concepts themselves, and they are never directly known in themselves, but only by their relation to the things which they make known.⁴² Rather, it is by the light provided through some concept—the objective light of the

41 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.4, a.2, ad.5: “in nobis dicere non solum significat intelligere, sed intelligere cum hoc quod est ex se exprimere aliquam conceptionem; nec aliter possumus intelligere, nisi huiusmodi conceptionem exprimendo; et ideo omne intelligere in nobis, proprie loquendo, est dicere.”

42 Cf. 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.84, a.7; q.87, a.2–3; Poincot 1632b: *TDS* 324–333 (R.I 741b4–746b14) *in passim*, but especially 325/22–31 (R.I 742a16–26): “In potentiis ergo intellectivis tota ratio reflexionis oritur ex eo, quod noster intellectus et eius actus non est obiective intelligibilis pro hac vita, nisi dependenter a sensibilibus, et ita conceptus noster licet formaliter sit praesens, non tamen obiective, quamdiu non formatur ad instar quidditatis sensibilis, quod solum potest fieri per reflexionem ab obiecto sensibili desumptam” and 326/47–327/10 (R.I 743a6–20): “Cum autem obiectum proprium nostri intellectus sit quidditas rei materialis secundum se, illud non est directe praesens obiective, quod non est quidditas rei materialis, et ut eam induat, indiget reflexione. Et ita conceptus nostri licet secundum se sint intelligibiles, non tamen secundum se sunt intelligibiles ad modum quidditatis materialis, et ideo primario et directe non sunt praesentes obiective, nisi prout accipiuntur ad modum quidditatis sensibilis, quod utique ab obiecto sensibili accipere debent.” See also 1.3.1.2 above.

ratio formalis obiecti ut objectum—making the phantasm to be seen under that light, that a subsequent distinction can be made. This distinction can be through either another intellectual discovery consisting in a simple observation, or it can be an intellectual discovery made through what Thomas calls composition and division.⁴³ For instance, when the distinctively intellectual activity of the human being is discerned in itself—the discursive, ratiocinative progression of understanding in the light of *ens primum cognitum*—as having some intelligible quiddity or whatness in which it consists, there is required some simple observation, albeit without much depth or distinction, of that activity in itself; when it is distinguished from the cognitive activity common to all animals, there is a separation, or intellectual discovery by division. When we grasp all of the various parts, as wholes, through pre-critical simple observations and discover their precise distinctiveness from one another, then we can reverse course and compose those things which fit together, delineating what things grasped belong as parts to other wholes.

Or as another instance, in discerning what a piano is, we first grasp that it is some sort of musical instrument. In returning to the phantasm, under the conceptual light of “musical instrument”, we can progress to discern further distinguishing characteristics of the piano—such as that it is a percussion instrument, which could be grasped by a consideration of what is occurring in the hammer hitting the string, or through a more roundabout way, through seeing that it produces its sound in a way distinct from a wind instrument—and form a more precise quidditative understanding of “piano”. It would thereby be distinguished from a harpsichord (wherein the string is plucked, rather than struck), and a pipe organ (wherein pipes are opened to move sound-producing wind through them). The distinguishing, essential features which distinguish one musical instrument from another, inasmuch as they can commonly produce intentionally organized patterns of sound by different means (resulting in different kinds of sound), can be discerned only under the light of the more general concept of “musical instrument”. We compose the concepts of “percussion” with “musical instrument”, and thereby divide off the piano from the harpsichord and organ.

It is through such a process of composition and division that the intellectual discovery of the *ratio formalis obiecti ut res*⁴⁴ occurs—grasping not only all of the parts but also their relations to one another, including and most especially

43 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.85, a.1, ad.1: “abstrahere contingit dupliciter. Uno modo, per modum compositionis et divisionis; sicut cum intelligimus aliquid non esse in alio, vel esse separatum ab eo”.

44 See 2.2.1.2 above.

that through which the thing is intelligibly distinguishable from all others—and consequently that properly philosophical scientific understanding, cenoscopic science in its broadest consideration, is attained.⁴⁵ We do not and cannot possess a near-complete quidditative or properly scientific understanding of a material, composite being by a single, simple action; and indeed, a complete quidditative understanding of any materially-bound being is impossible, inasmuch as that being remains ineluctably *in potentia*.

4.1.2 *Intellectual Discovery and the Philosophical Sciences*

This activity of composition and division, whereby the precise *ratio formalis obiecti* is discovered, however, is not by some immediately penetrative insight into the nature of the thing itself. Rather, the discovery proceeds through the reflexive insight on one's own knowledge. The thing itself as known under some vague universal concept, or even under a more specific concept employed in a pre-philosophical attitude, does not suffice for distinguishing objects in the manner necessary for arriving at definitional knowledge. It is for this reason that Thomas asserts that a knowledge of logic is prerequisite to the exercise of any of the philosophical sciences, i.e., to cenoscopic inquiry⁴⁶ which proceeds on the basis of the second intentions provenated by logical conceptions. In other words, without some grasp of concepts themselves, properly philosophical speculative thinking cannot occur. Scientific thinking cannot occur without including also a consideration of one's own knowledge. It is this kind of thinking which Thomas discusses in his commentary on the *De trinitate* of Boethius, and it is to this kind of thinking we now turn our attention, to expose further the range of *ens primum cognitum*'s objective illumination.

45 Cf. c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.5, a.2, c.: "Quaedam ergo speculabilium sunt, quae dependent a materia secundum esse, quia non nisi in materia esse possunt. Et haec distinguuntur, quia quaedam dependent a materia secundum esse et intellectum, sicut illa, in quorum definitione ponitur materia sensibilis; unde sine materia sensibili intelligi non possunt, ut in diffinitione hominis oportet accipere carnem et ossa. Et de his est physica sive scientia naturalis."

46 c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.6, a.1, c.2, ad.3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod in addiscendo incipimus ab eo quod est magis facile, nisi necessitas aliud requirat. Quandoque enim necessarium est in addiscendo incipere non ab eo quod est facilius, sed ab eo, a cuius cognitione sequentium cognitio dependet. Et hac ratione oportet in addiscendo a logica incipere, non quia ipsa sit facilius ceteris scientiis, habet enim maximam difficultatem, cum sit de secundo intellectis, sed quia aliae scientiae ab ipsa dependent, in quantum ipsa docet modum procedendi in omnibus scientiis. Oportet autem primo scire modum scientiae quam scientiam ipsam, ut dicitur in II metaphysicae."

4.1.2.1 The Orders of Intellectual Proceeding⁴⁷

The progress of human knowledge, and specifically of human cenoscopic knowledge, is clarified by considering the two primary orders of learning, or ways, in which Thomas speaks of intellectual discovery: namely, the *via resolutionis*, which can be most broadly described as the discerning of a simple commonality from a multitude, and the *via inventionis* (sometimes also called the *via inquisitionis*⁴⁸ or *via compositionis*⁴⁹), the discerning of a multitude within some unity.⁵⁰ As we noted in the introduction to the first chapter, *ens primum cognitum* is said to be both that into which all other concepts are resolved and that which is included in all other concepts. We interpret this twofoldness respectively to correspond to the *viae resolutionis et inventionis*. The priority of *ens primum cognitum* in the *via inventionis* is fairly straightforward—but only if we first clarify, against the common conflation or inappropriate association of *ens primum cognitum* and *ens in quantum ens*,⁵¹ in what sense the first-known is also first in the order of resolution.

47 A survey of Thomistic literature concerning Thomas' methodology will show how various are Thomist interpretations regarding the use and meaning of the *viae resolutionis et inventionis*. The most thorough systematic approach of which I am aware is Jan A. Aertsen 1988: *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought*. Aertsen considers a multitude of ways, including the *via resolutionis* and *via inventionis*, and his work should be read by any serious scholar of Thomas. See also Aertsen 1989: "Method and Metaphysics: The *via resolutionis* in Thomas Aquinas" in *The New Scholasticism*, 63.4, 405–418; Michael Tavuzzi 1988: "Aquinas on the Operation of *Additio*" in *The New Scholasticism*, 62.3: 297–318; S. Edmund Dolan 1950: "Resolution and Composition in Speculative and Practical Discourse" in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 6.1: 9–62; Ralph McNerny 1956: "The Prime Mover and the Order of Learning" in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 30: 129–137; Henri Renard 1956: "What is St. Thomas' Approach to Metaphysics" in *The New Scholasticism*, 30.1: 64–83; Tad Guzie 1960: "Evolution of Philosophical Method in the Writings of St. Thomas" in *The Modern Schoolman*, 37 (January): 95–120. See also n55 below for more on the *via resolutionis*.

48 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.79, a.8, c.; i.1256–59: *DV*, q.24, a.10, c.

49 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.35, q.2, a.2, qc.3, c.; 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.79, a.8, c.; *ibid.*, a.9, c.; i.1269–72: *Quaestiones disputate de malo*, q.6, c.; c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.6, a.1, c.3.

50 c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.6, a.1, c.3: "rationalis consideratio ad intellectualem terminatur secundum viam resolutionis, in quantum ratio ex multis colligit unam et simplicem veritatem. Et rursus intellectualis consideratio est principium rationalis secundum viam compositionis vel inventionis, in quantum intellectus in uno multitudinem comprehendit."

51 It is one of the curiosities of Thomistic thought over the past century that many Thomists, despite being well-aware of the statements of both Aristotle and Thomas that *ens* or *to on* is said in many ways, all too-often seem, consciously or not, to take any statement of Thomas concerning *ens* to pertain exclusively or at the very least primarily to the study of metaphysics, and legitimately subject only to a metaphysical interpretation.

Contemporary Thomist literature on these two modes of proceeding,⁵² while often insightful, nevertheless generally inclines towards interpreting Thomas in accord with a metaphysical realism akin to Gilson's; that is, a metaphysical realism which stands in stark opposition to modern epistemological idealism, and which all too readily assumes every mention of *ens* by Thomas is necessarily a metaphysical one.

4.1.2.2 The *Via Resolutionis*

Thus, while it is true that Thomas does say that the *via resolutionis* is most properly suited to the science of metaphysics, this does not necessitate that the *loci classici* of Thomas' assertion that *ens* is the first intellectually conceived and that into which all other conceptions of the intellect are resolved (such as *De veritate* q.1, a.1)⁵³ are referring strictly to the metaphysical resolution. Indeed, "resolution" is a term used generically by Thomas, specified in each case by the **term** of the resolution.⁵⁴ In other words, that into which a resolution is made, the unity to which the consideration is reduced, determines the specific nature of the resolving movement. Claiming that the resolution of all concepts into *ens* as first conceived is a **metaphysical** resolution presumes that *ens ut primum cognitum* is the same as *ens inquantum ens*.⁵⁵ Because the

52 Cf. n55, below.

53 i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1, c.: "Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens".

54 Cf. McNerny 1956: "The Prime Mover and the Order of Learning", 133, especially n14. Also Dolan 1950: "Resolution and Composition in Speculative and Practical Discourse", 9–12; 47.

55 The difficulty of this point can be seen by a brief survey of the literature on the *via resolutionis*. Aertsen (1989: "Method and Metaphysics", 414–416; 1988: *Nature and Creature*, 252–255) speaks only of the *via resolutionis* as metaphysical. Wippel (1990: "The Latin Avicenna as a Source for Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics" in *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 37, pp. 51–90, republished in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007], especially 39–43; 2000: *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 40–44; and 2014: "Maritain and Aquinas on Our Discovery of Being" in *Studia Gilsoniana*, 3, 419 and 424–425) denies that *ens primum cognitum* is first in a temporal order, and posits instead that the kind of resolution proper to the sciences is necessary to understanding the resolution of all things into *ens primum cognitum*: "whatever it is we may conceive about a given object of our understanding, if we pursue our analysis [i.e., resolution] far enough we will discover that the thing in question must enjoy being, either real being (whether actual or possible) or at least being in the intellect." (43). (Against which, see 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.6, n.605: "in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens" and below

expressions of this claim are grounded on widely divergent premises and interpretations of the relevant Thomistic texts, a systematic refutation of each cannot be provided.

Rather, we wish to show that the resolution of all concepts into *ens* becomes metaphysical **only** when engaged in a scientifically philosophical consideration of *ens inquantum ens*, and only *secundum quid*. For it appears to be true that both the *via resolutionis* and the *via inventionis*, while they occur deliberately and formally within the philosophical sciences, nevertheless also occur in the pre-philosophical intellectual progression as well. This should not be dismissed as irrelevant to a consideration of the philosophical sciences, for the data upon which such philosophical considerations operate are more often derived from the pre-philosophical engagement with the world than from within an explicitly philosophical framework or viewpoint, for which a logical perspective, and therefore reflexive concepts engendering the provenation of second intentions, is a necessary prerequisite. The conclusions of philosophical sciences, therefore, rest upon logical considerations wrought through second intentions, and thus, even when those conclusions are themselves resultant in considerations through first intentions, the distinctive character of how they make things known with scientific precision is necessarily posterior to the antecedent intellectual discovery in a pre-philosophical mode, which discovery still requires resolution.

Further, the *via resolutionis* as employed in the sciences of metaphysics and natural philosophy results in two conclusions. Aertsen shows this clearly, with

6.2) Tavuzzi (1988: "Aquinas on the Operation of *Additio*") claims a twofold meaning to *ens primum cognitum*: that which belongs to the "psychological order", which "corresponds to the content of our preliminary grasp of being" and which is "no more than a vague and confused notion of being" (297), and that which belongs to the "logical order", which "corresponds to the 'abstract' concept of being in general" (ibid). Tavuzzi discusses the *via resolutionis* as applying **only** to this "logically" first *ens*. Even when the *via resolutionis* is not expressly mentioned, the resolution of *ens primum cognitum* seems to be assumed by Gilson and Maritain (as evidenced in c.2) as well as by Klubertanz (1952a: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 39–47) and Wilhelmson (1956: *Man's Knowledge of Reality: An Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology*, 15–37) as metaphysical. McNerny (1956: "The Prime Mover and the Order of Learning"), while he clearly distinguishes between *ens primum cognitum* and *ens inquantum ens*, considers resolution only in the metaphysical order (133–134); Dolan (1950: "Resolution and Composition in Speculative and Practical Discourse") likewise considers the *via resolutionis*, and the *via inventionis*, only in regard to the sciences (both speculative and practical). Thomas Joseph White (2009: *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity*), has adroitly grasped the nature of the *via resolutionis* in Thomas' understanding of transcendentals and causes considered scientifically, although he does not make fully explicit the nature of *ens primum cognitum* (141–145; 157–160).

regard to the science of metaphysics, such that the *via resolutionis* there divides in a twofold manner as to its **mode**:⁵⁶

The way of resolution, which is typical of man, goes in two directions.

First, there is a resolution in the order of reality (*secundum rem*), a progression from the one thing to the other, a reduction to the *extrinsic* causes (“for causes are more simple, unchangeable, and uniformly permanent than their effects”). The ultimate end of this analysis is attained when man arrives at the highest and simplest causes, which are the separated substances. Secondly, there is a resolution in the order of reason (*secundum rationem*), a reduction to the *intrinsic* causes. It proceeds from the more particular to the most universal forms. “Now that which is most universal is common to all beings”. The ultimate end of this analysis is therefore the consideration of being (*consideratio entis*).

Thus, there is one process *via resolutionis* which, through considering the intrinsic causes of its objects, resolves these objects into the subject matter of the science—the intelligible principle of that science’s undertaking, its distinct intellectual light; and another process *via resolutionis* which, through considering the extrinsic causes of its objects, resolves them into the highest principles of the science. We can see this in physics, where the *via resolutionis secundum rationem* unifies its objects, through the intrinsic causes of matter, form, and, derivatively, privation, in the notion of *ens mobile*; whereas the *via resolutionis secundum rem* discerns the unified extrinsic cause of all its objects in the first mover (and thereby gives occasion for the science of metaphysics).⁵⁷ Thus we could say that there is, in resolving *secundum rem*, a kind of movement “upwards”, towards the highest causes belonging to the science or cognitive realm being considered, and, in resolving *secundum rationem* a movement “downwards”, towards what grounds the whole expanse of the cognitive realm, i.e., the “subject matter”. The former “upwards” movement is concerned with the principles of *res extra animam*, whereas the latter “downwards” movement deals with the subjective-cognitive basis for consideration. We find this echoed

56 1988: *Nature and Creature*, 254–255.

57 Notably, the *via resolutionis* does not seem to be as relevant to the mathematical science as it is to either natural philosophy or metaphysics, except inasmuch as, having separated form from matter, there is a resolution into the consideration, *secundum rationem*, of quantitative being as the subject matter. To insist upon a resolution *secundum rem* seems superfluous.

in Maritain's distinction between the grasp of the *ratio formalis objecti ut res* and *ut objectum*.

As we noted above, however, the procession of the *via resolutionis* is specified principally not by its mode, but rather by its **term**. The ultimate term of the entire human endeavor of proceeding by the *via resolutionis* is, indeed, a metaphysically considered *ens*, either according to its extrinsic causes, and thus, the *via resolutionis secundum rem* terminates in an understanding of the highest causes; or to its intrinsic causes, so that the *via resolutionis secundum rationem* terminates in an understanding of *ens inquantum ens*, in "the consideration of being and of those things which are of being in such a manner"—i.e., discovered intellectually as over and above, or not confined to, material being.⁵⁸ However, **not every term is an ultimate term**.⁵⁹ If that were not true, there would be no *via resolutionis* in any intellectual endeavor other than the science of metaphysics and metaphysics would subsume all other knowledge. To be sure, metaphysics extends to all objects of consideration, inasmuch as the properties which belong to "being as such" are common to all. But this does not mean that all objects of consideration then **belong** to the science of metaphysics; only that they can be considered as material objects with regard to the formal object attained through the so-called third degree of abstraction.⁶⁰

This schema, however, can be understood in an opposite manner: that is, whereas the *ens* considered in metaphysics, *ens inquantum ens*, represents the ultimate term of resolution of things known—or objects known

58 c.1257/8: *In de Trin.*, q.6, a.1, c.3: "Et ideo terminus resolutionis in hac via ultimus est consideratio entis et eorum quae sunt entis in quantum huiusmodi".

59 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.5, a.6, c.: "Cuius quidem motus terminatio considerari potest ex consideratione motus corporis naturalis. Terminatur autem motus corporis naturalis, simpliciter quidem ad ultimum; secundum quid autem etiam ad medium, per quod itur ad ultimum quod terminat motum, et dicitur aliquis terminus motus, inquantum aliquam partem motus terminat." Cf. 1271: *ST* Ia–IIae, q.12, a.2, c.: "In motu autem potest accipi terminus dupliciter, uno modo, ipse terminus ultimus, in quo quiescitur, qui est terminus totius motus; alio modo, aliquod medium, quod est principium unius partis motus, et finis vel terminus alterius. Sicut in motu quo itur de a in C per B, C est terminus ultimus, B autem est terminus, sed non ultimus."

60 An extended discussion of the beginning of the subject matter of metaphysics would be unsuitable here. Therefore, I will assert that however one grasps the precise intellectual formality requisite to engaging in the cenoscopically scientific consideration of metaphysics, this formal object is what is grasped in the third degree of abstraction—whether or not such an abstraction is the means whereby the formal object is initially attained.

as things, as much as possible, according to the principles of their own cognition-independent constitutions—*ens ut primum cognitum* conversely represents the ultimate term of resolution for the cognitional attainment proper to the *whole* intellectual life of the human being. In other words, there is a metaphysical and scientific resolution into the principles, extrinsic and intrinsic, of beings as they are in themselves, *in re extra animam*, as Thomas often says, **and** a resolution into the intrinsic principle whereby beings are intellectually grasped, *res quae sunt intra animam*, the “objective light”, as Maritain put it,⁶¹ of *ens primum cognitum*.

We do not pretend that this is the clearly expressed opinion of St. Thomas, for he does not make it explicit; we only point out that it is implied in his own words:⁶²

Just as it is necessary in treating of demonstrable things to make a reduction to some principle which is *per se nota* to the intellect [and thus proceed by the *via resolutionis*], so too in investigating “what” anything is; otherwise, each kind of knowledge would regress infinitely, and thus every science and cognition of things would perish.

The reduction to a principle *per se nota* to the intellect in treating of demonstrable things is the employ of the *via resolutionis* in the sciences; to a principle *per se nota* to the intellect in investigating “what” things are is the *via resolutionis* in the general human cognition of things. Thus, in both metaphysics and cognition as a whole, *ens* is the ultimate term of reduction. But in metaphysics, it is *ens in quantum ens*, including the things that belong to *ens in quantum ens*⁶³—or the highest causes, depending upon the mode of resolution; whereas in intellectual cognition as a whole, it is to *ens ut primum cognitum*.⁶⁴ The metaphysical reduction is “supremely intellectual”, whereas the reduction to the *primum cognitum* is proportionate to the cognitive activity of the human being and the infinite potency natural to the human intellect/*intellectus*

61 Cf. 2.2.3, n119.

62 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.1, a.1, c.: “sicut in demonstrabilibus oportet fieri reductionem in aliqua principia per se intellectui nota, ita investigando quid est unumquodque; alias utrobique in infinitum iretur, et sic periret omnino scientia et cognitio rerum.”

63 Cf. 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.11, lec.5, n.2211.

64 Or, it might be said, that metaphysics resolves towards what is *ens simpliciter quoad se*, whereas the resolution into the *primum cognitum* is towards what is *ens simpliciter quoad nos vel quoad praedicationem*.

possibilis.⁶⁵ It is a reduction not to the highest principles considered in themselves, but rather a return to the first basis of all intellectual experience.⁶⁶

4.1.2.3 The *Via Inventionis*

This primacy of *ens primum cognitum* in a general cognitional resolution becomes even clearer when we consider that Thomas evidently holds *ens primum cognitum* to also be the first principle absolutely of the *via inventionis*. As seen in the text from the very beginning of *De veritate* q.1, a.1,⁶⁷ Thomas opposes scientific knowledge, which deals with demonstrable things, and the cognition of things which proceeds by investigating “what” they are. In each case, it is necessary to have resolution to some first principle; but whereas scientific knowledge is characterized principally and primarily by the *via resolutionis*⁶⁸ (as the resolution to principles in a demonstration shows the universality and necessity of the conclusion), the investigation of the natures of things proceeds primarily by the *via inventionis*. Both must necessarily reduce

65 We might chart the schema of the whole thus:

Cognitive Realm	Term of Resolution	Mode of Resolution
Science of Metaphysics	<i>Prima causae</i>	<i>Secundum rem</i>
	<i>Ens inquantum</i>	<i>Secundum rationem</i>
Science of Physics	<i>Ens primum movens</i>	<i>Secundum rem</i>
	<i>Ens mobile</i>	<i>Secundum rationem</i>
Science of Mathematics	<i>Ens quantitativum</i>	<i>Secundum rationem</i>
Cognition in general	<i>Quod quid est</i>	<i>Secundum rem</i>
	<i>Ens primum cognitum</i>	<i>Secundum rationem</i>

Mathematics, the formality of which is of things precisely as they do not exist except as cognitive objects, does not have a resolution *secundum rem*.

66 Cf. L.M. Regis 1959: *Epistemology*, 460–461: “The role of analysis in the critique of the truth of conclusions consists therefore in making the evidence of the conclusion to be present to the intellect, by showing that this conclusion is essentially a participation in first evidence, a sort of attenuated luminosity of the same evidence.”

67 Above, n.62.

68 Cf. Aertsen 1988: *Nature and Creature*, 255: “The consideration in which human reason, following the way of resolution, ends is supremely intellectual. It is attributed to the divine science—not because it does not proceed by reasoning but because its reasoning most closely approaches intellectual consideration. For the object of this science is two-fold: being as being, and the highest causes.”

to first principles,⁶⁹ and ultimately to *ens* as what is the first in every process of intellectual understanding.

It is our interpretation that this kind of priority of *ens* in the *via inventionis* is signified by Thomas saying, in *ST Ia-IIae*, q.94, a.2, that “that which first falls into the apprehension is being, which the intellect includes in everything whatsoever which it apprehends”,⁷⁰ and in *DV* q.1, a.1, that “it is necessary that every other conception which arises in the intellect is from some addition to being”.⁷¹ Most especially is it evident at *In Metaphysicorum*, lib.4, lec.6, n.605: “In each [of the operations of the intellect] there is something first. In the first operation, there is something which first falls into the intellect, namely that which I call ‘being’; nor can something be conceived by the mind in this operation, unless *ens* is understood.”⁷²

This priority of *ens* as the *primum cognitum* in the *via inventionis* can be considered in two ways: **first** in terms of the intelligibility of the object itself, inasmuch as *ens* is the *primum intelligibile*, for whatever it is that we discover intellectually is necessarily apprehended primarily through its being; and **second** in terms of *ens* as the first conceived, to which other conceptions are added, for additions to *ens primum cognitum* are only *secundum rationem tantum*, whether that be through a special mode (as in the categories) or in a

69 c.1257/8: *In de Trin.* q.6, a.4, c.: “in scientiis speculativis semper ex aliquo prius noto proceditur tam in demonstrationibus propositionum quam etiam in inventionibus diffinitionum. Sicut enim ex propositionibus praecognitis aliquis devenit in cognitionem conclusionis, ita ex conceptione generis et differentiae et causarum rei aliquis devenit in cognitionem speciei. Hic autem non est possibile in infinitum procedere, quia sic omnis scientia periret et quantum ad demonstrationes et quantum ad diffinitiones, cum infinita non sit pertransire. Unde omnis consideratio scientiarum speculativarum reducitur in aliqua prima, quae quidem homo non habet necesse addiscere aut invenire, ne oporteat in infinitum procedere, sed eorum notitiam naturaliter habet. Et huiusmodi sunt principia demonstrationum indemonstrabilia, ut omne totum est maius sua parte et similia, in quae omnes demonstrationes scientiarum reducuntur, et etiam primae conceptiones intellectus, ut entis et unius et huiusmodi, in quae oportet reducere omnes diffinitiones scientiarum praedictarum.”

70 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.94, a.2, c: “Nam illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit”.

71 i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1, c.: “oportet quod omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens”.

72 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.6, n.605: “in utroque est aliquod primum: in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens.”

common mode (as in the transcendentals).⁷³ Thus, it is both first in the sense of that which is discovered, and first in the sense of that with which things discovered are subsequently composed, i.e., that which enters into the composition of all other concepts. *Ens primum cognitum* is both that unity under which a multitude can be comprehended and into which the many can be resolved.

In sum, a constant moving back and forth between these two methods axiomatically unfolds within the development of human understanding: we neither proceed in some *via resolutionis* ending in a metaphysical understanding, and only then revert through the *via inventionis*; nor do we proceed through the *via inventionis* until we have discovered the concepts of *ens in quantum ens* and the highest causes and subsequently begin resolving things into these notions. Rather, we are constantly discovering and resolving in a pattern which moves back and forth.⁷⁴

To see how this composition of *ens primum cognitum* enters into the intellectual composition of all things, let us now turn our attention to the formation of concepts.

4.2 Formation of the *Verbum Mentis*

As noted above in 1.3.1, the concept or *verbum mentis* is the *species expressa*, that is, what is conceived by, fecundated, and expressed by the intellect. Thomas says that it is something properly **ours**. Moreover, it is essentially and formally a sign; but it is also in a way that which is understood. The Thomistic doctrine of the formation of the *verbum mentis* is complex and requires clarification to

73 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1, c.: “Sed enti non possunt addi aliqua quasi extranea per modum quo differentia additur generi, vel accidens subiecto, quia quaelibet natura est essentialiter ens; unde probat etiam philosophus in III Metaphys., quod ens non potest esse genus, sed secundum hoc aliqua dicuntur addere super ens, in quantum exprimitur modum ipsius entis qui nomine entis non exprimitur.” 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.5, a.1; q.11, a.1. 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.8, lec.5, n.1763: “Et ponit exemplum: quia cum decem praedicamenta non hoc modo se habeant ex additione ad ens, sicut species se habent ex additione differentiarum ad genera, sed hoc ipsum quod est ens, manifestum est quod ens non expectat aliquid additum ad hoc quod fiat hoc, idest substantia, vel quantum, vel quale; sed statim a principio est vel substantia, vel quantitas, vel qualitas.” Cf. diagram on p.149, c.3.1.1.

74 I.e., in what one might describe as a “hermeneutic circle” or as a “semiotic spiral”. Neither phrase perfectly captures the idea, but the latter more accurately depicts the process—as in going back and forth, we also, as it were, move “in and out”, “away from” and “back towards” the concept of *ens*, considered both metaphysically and *ut primum cognitum*.

be properly understood. Fortunately, Bernard Lonergan's *Verbum* lays out the core points of emphasis clearly:

1. The inner word is efficient cause of the outer word; the outer word is a sign of the inner word.⁷⁵
2. Inner words are "outside all particular cases" and therefore they refer "to all from some higher view-point". [I.e., inner words have an immateriality and thus a universality proper to them.]⁷⁶
3. The inner word is divided among definitions and [a certain kind of] judgments, both of which are referred to as concepts.⁷⁷
4. The object of thought is supplied by the inner word.⁷⁸
5. In and through the inner word, the intellect comes to knowledge of things.⁷⁹

75 Lonergan 1946: "The Concept of *Verbum* in the Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas", *Theological Studies* 7:3, (hereafter "Concept of *Verbum* 1", 352: "Aquinas... asked what outer words meant and answered that, in the first instance, they meant inner words. The proof was quite simple. We discourse on 'man' and on the 'triangle.' What are we talking about? Certainly, we are not talking about real things directly, else we should all be Platonists. Directly, we are talking about objects of thought, inner words, and only indirectly, only in so far as our inner words have an objective reference, are we talking of real things."

76 Lonergan 1946: "Concept of *Verbum* 1", 353: "since the inner word is in the intellect, and since apprehension of the singular involves the use of a sensitive potency, it should seem that the correspondence of realities to inner words is, at best, like the correspondence between a function and its derivative; as the derivative, so the inner word is outside all particular cases and refers to all from some higher view-point."

77 Lonergan 1946: "Concept of *Verbum* 1", 353: "the *De veritate* argues that there is a processio operati in the intellect, though not in the will, on the ground that 'bonum et malum sunt in rebus, sed verum et falsum sunt in mente.' [DV q.4, a.2, ad.7]. This clearly supposes that the judgment is an inner word, for only in the judgment is there truth or falsity. On the other hand, while Aquinas does refer frequently to the inner word as a *conceptio*, *conceptum*, *conceptus*, one must not give this term its current exclusive connotation; Aquinas employed it to denote judgments."

78 Lonergan 1946: "Concept of *Verbum* 1", 354: "A fourth element in the general notion of an inner word is that it supplies the object of thought. What is abstract, what is true or false, is not, as such, either a real thing or a mere copy of a real thing. It is a product of the mind. It is not merely a product but also a known product; and as known, it is an object."

79 Lonergan 1946: "Concept of *Verbum* 1", 356: "A fifth element in the general notion of an inner word is that in it and through it intellect comes to knowledge of things". 357: "For just as the inner word is a medium between the meaning of outer words and the realities meant, so also the inner word is a medium between the intellect and the things that are understood."

6. The inner word is necessary for the act of *intelligere*.⁸⁰
7. The inner word emerges at the end of thoughtful inquiry, simultaneously with the act of understanding, though distinct from that act; it is the product and effect of the act of understanding, an expression of the cognitional content of the act of understanding, and the more perfect the act of one understanding, the more numerous the inner words it embraces in a single view.⁸¹

Though all of these points are important for understanding the nature of the *verbum mentis*, and we will rely upon all of them, we wish here to expound primarily upon the third: that the inner word comprises both definitions and judgments.⁸² Both definitions and judgments entail acts of composition and division, and thus necessarily include some discursion. Before proceeding, however, we feel it necessary to make some terminological clarifications: for different authors use the same terms to signify different things, or the same authors use different terms to signify the same things, or different authors use different terms to signify the same things.

Thus, we will use the term “concept” most properly to signify the intellectual apprehension ordered towards ever deeper understanding of its object’s internal constitution, signified vaguely through terms and more specifically, accurately, through definitions and descriptions—what we might signify as the progression from confused to distinct knowledge, as according to Cajetan. Concepts are not, as will be seen, ever altogether simple (4.2.1, 4.2.3)—except, in a sense, *ens primum cognitum*—but always entail some measure of internal composition. In other words, the object which such a concept signifies is itself grasped through a process of conceptual composition. In such a case, there is an act which is **like** judgment; and so we can say that such judgments “are” concepts, as does Lonergan, inasmuch as they result in concepts.

80 Lonergan 1946: “Concept of *Verbum* 1”, 358: “A sixth element in the general notion of an inner word is its necessity for an act termed *intelligere* which, I believe, is to be taken as meaning ‘understanding’”.

81 Lonergan 1946: “Concept of *Verbum* 1”, 358: “A seventh element in the general notion is that the inner word of the human mind emerges at the end of a process of thoughtful inquiry, that, until it emerges, we do not yet understand but are thinking in order to understand, that it emerges simultaneously with the act of understanding, that it is distinct from understanding, that it is a product and effect of the act of understanding, that it is an expression of the cognitional content of the act of understanding, that the more perfect the one act of understanding, the more numerous the inner words it embraces in a single view.”

82 We will consider points 6 and 7 more thoroughly below in 4.3.

The term “propositional judgment” will be used to signify a judgment wherein two concepts are composed or divided, but without any composition signifying an internal composition—what is signified by the propositional judgment is not itself something conceptually composite, but is rather two somethings conceptually conjoined. Nevertheless, the resulting proposition can be called, improperly, a concept. This roughly equates to the notion of the “enunciation” discussed by Poincot.⁸³

“Judgment” will be used broadly to signify any compositive operation of the intellect, and specifically, with a qualification, to refer to that act whereby the intellect judges one thing of another as considering the truth or falsity of the composition or division—that is: a judgment, properly speaking, is concerned with the reality of its composition or division, as something existentially independent of one’s own conception.

4.2.1 *The Derivation of Primary Concepts*

The necessity of composition to every concept can be seen in those few places where Thomas describes the derivation of our primary concepts, following from *ens ut primum cognitum*. The clearest case of this is to be found at Thomas’ *In Metaphysicorum*, lib.4, lec.3, n.566:⁸⁴

Although unity conveys an implied privation, nevertheless it must not be said to convey the privation of plurality: since privation is naturally posterior to that of which it is the privation, it would follow that unity would

83 See the end of 4.2.1.

84 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.3, n.566: “quamvis unum importet privationem implicitam, non tamen est dicendum quod importet privationem multitudinis: quia cum privatio sit posterior naturaliter eo cuius est privatio, sequeretur quod unum esset posterius naturaliter multitudi. Item quod multitudo poneretur in definitione unius. Nam privatio definiri non potest nisi per suum oppositum, ut quid est caecitas? Privatio visus. Unde cum in definitione multitudinis ponatur unum (nam multitudo est aggregatio unitatum), sequitur quod sit circulus in definitionibus. Et ideo dicendum quod unum importat privationem divisionis, non quidem divisionis quae est secundum quantitatem, nam ista divisio determinatur ad unum particulare genus entis, et non posset cadere in definitione unius. Sed unum quod cum ente convertitur importat privationem divisionis formalis quae fit per opposita, cuius prima radix est oppositio affirmationis et negationis. Nam illa dividuntur adinvicem, quae ita se habent, quod hoc non est illud. Primo igitur intelligitur ipsum ens, et ex consequenti non ens, et per consequens divisio, et per consequens unum quod divisionem privat, et per consequens multitudo, in cuius ratione cadit divisio, sicut in ratione unius indivisio”. Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.24, q.1, a.3, ad.2; c.1265/6b: *De potentia*, q.9, a.7, ad.15; and 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.11, a.2, ad.4, for parallel passages.

be naturally posterior to plurality, and likewise that plurality would be posited in the definition of unity: for a privation is not able to be defined except through its opposite, as in the case of the question, “What is blindness? The privation of sight”. Thus, since unity is posited in the definition of plurality (for a plurality is the aggregation of unities), it would follow that there is circularity in the definitions. And therefore it must be said that unity includes the privation of division, though not the kind of division which is according to quantity, for this division is determined to one particular genus of being, and is not able to fall into the definition of unity. But the sense of unity which can be converted with being includes the privation of formal division, which is made through opposites, of which the primary root is the opposition of affirmation and negation. For those things are divided against one another which have a relation such that the one is not the other. Therefore, the first thing understood is being itself, and consequently from this, non-being; and following this, division; then the unity that is the privation of division; and then plurality, in which the rationale of division falls, as in the rationale of unity falls indivision.

While the list of concepts here derived—being, non-being, division, unity, and plurality—numbers only five, we could also include two propositional concepts: being is not non-being (the principle of non-contradiction), and a being is the same as itself (the principle of identity).⁸⁵ Though all seven are concepts—for propositional judgments are themselves concepts of a kind—the four listed by Thomas in the commentary on the *Metaphysics* just cited, after the grasp of *ens primum cognitum*, all have an integral composition or division in their meaning as well, such that the other concepts with which they are composed or from which they are divided are intrinsic and inexorable from the signification of the thing or object which it is the purpose of the composite concepts to signify; whereas the propositional judgments, while they necessarily follow given the meanings of the terms, have an extrinsic composition or division, inasmuch as the terms are not included necessarily in one another’s meanings or are held as at least logically distinct.⁸⁶

85 Deely 2001: *Four Ages*, 355–356.

86 I believe that this point about the integral judgment and the extrinsic judgment greatly simplifies a difficulty which Lonergan adequately addresses, but which borders upon an equivocal use of the term “concept”; for while he asserts that both definitional *verba mentis* and judgmental *verba mentis* are concepts (Lonergan 1946: “Concept of *Verbum* 1, 353–354), he holds the “synthetic” character of composition not to merge the conceptual

In other words, there is, at least implicitly, composition and division in the “simple expression” of concepts, even concepts as simple as “unity”.⁸⁷

This notion of composition and division as belonging somehow to the process of apprehension is further developed by John Poinsoot, namely in the distinctions he draws between judgments properly speaking, which are existential, and enunciations, which refer to internal compositional or divisional acts. Poinsoot’s teaching on enunciations—spread out over two sections of the *Artis Logicae* and one of the *Philosophia Naturalis* of the *Cursus Philosophicus*—emphasizes the suspension of judgment or opinion which can follow upon a propositional intellectual formation, and therefore distinguishes

content, but to produce a new intelligibility, a higher unity: Lonergan 1947a: “Concept of *Verbum* 11”, 39–40: “Note the nature of the conjunction: it is not that two concepts merge into one concept; that would be mere confusion; concepts remain eternally and immutably distinct. But while two concepts remain distinct as concepts, they may cease to be two intelligibilities and merge into one... How do two concepts become one intelligibility? Not by a change in the concepts but by a coalescence or a development of insights: where before there were two acts of understanding, expressed singly in two concepts, now there is but one act of understanding, expressed in the combination of two concepts. This combination of two, as a combination, forms but a single intelligible, a single though composite object of a single act of understanding.” While this is an insightful depiction, it is all the more forceful when we make clear distinctions between the composition of the intellect regarding the integral elements of a definitional kind of concept and the composition which pertains to non-essential factors; for while it is certainly true that simple concepts are never effaced in any subsequent compositions in which they are entered, definitional or extrinsic, the deliberate non-critical absolute consideration of such a concept is an unusual task, undertaken only in the consideration proper to the philosophical sciences: as pertains to the pre-philosophical attitude, such a consideration is unlikely to ever be performed.

87 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.24, q., a.3, ad.2: “Primum enim quod cadit in apprehensione intellectus, est ens et non ens: et ista sufficiunt ad definitionem unius, secundum quod intelligimus unum esse ens, in quo non est distinctio per ens et non ens: et haec, scilicet distincta per ens et non ens, non habent rationem multitudinis, nisi postquam intellectus utrique attribuit intentionem unitatis; et tunc definit multitudinem id quod est ex unis, quorum unum non est alterum; et sic in definitione multitudinis cadit unitas, licet non e converso.” Cf. 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.11, lec.5, n.221: “Necesse est enim quod sicut omnia entia reducuntur ad aliquod primum, ita oportet quod principia demonstrationis reducantur ad aliquod principium, quod principalius cadit in consideratione huius philosophiae. Hoc autem est, quod non contingit idem simul esse et non esse. Quod quidem ea ratione primum est, quia termini eius sunt ens et non ens, qui primo in consideratione intellectus cadunt.”

between broad and strict senses of how the term “judgment” is used.⁸⁸ While Thomas speaks similarly to Poinset in many places, as the latter philosopher points out, there is not as precise a use of terminology in Thomas.⁸⁹

4.2.2 *Terminus of Intellectual Operation and Intentional Fundamentum*

One of the more problematic notions introduced by Cajetan and other later Thomists is the division of the concept into “formal” and “objective”. Undoubtedly, this twofold notion was introduced as a way of attempting to resolve some of the ambiguities present in Thomas’ *De veritate*; as the Angelic Doctor writes in q.4, a.2, “the word of our intellect, according to which we are able to speak of the divine word by a likeness, is that at which the operation of our intellect is terminated, which is that which is understood itself, which is called the conception of the intellect”⁹⁰ and again, that “the conception of the intellect is not only that which is understood, but also that by which a thing is understood”.⁹¹

Poinset clarifies this ambiguity by stating that “a concept is known as ‘that which’, not as an extrinsic thing is known, but as that in which the thing is contained within the intellect”.⁹² The concept is not a terminal object, or a mediate object, but the means serving as a basis for the provenation of the intellectual

88 See 1632a: *Artis Logicae Prima Pars*, lib.2, c.6, (R.I 23b1–25a11); q.d., q.5 *in passim*, esp. a.1 (R.I 144a40–150b18); and 1635: *Philosophia Naturalis Quarta Pars*, q.11, a.3, (R.III 369b19–372a6). Cf. Edward J. Furton 1997: “The Constitution of the Object in Immanuel Kant and John Poinset”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 51 (September), 55–75, esp. 61–63.

89 The term “enunciation” is ubiquitous in Thomas’ work, and a survey of its use would require significant further study. As an example of the varied use, which is not necessarily at odds with Poinset’s interpretation (or, rather, clarification), see for instance c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.4, q.2, a.1, c.; *ibid.*, d.8, q.2, a.3, c.; *ibid.*, d.19, q.5, a.3, ad.5; *ibid.*, lib.4, d.38, q.1, a.1, qc.1, ad.1; 1271a: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.53, a.1, c.; a text which seems explicitly to militate against Poinset’s interpretation of the enunciation—or at least, of the term *enunciatio*—as suspending judgment of existence is to be found in 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.14, a.14, both in the *corpus* and in ad.2. Recall that Lonergan (1947a: “The Concept of *Verbum II*”: 35–79) signifies the same idea in his extensive discussion of *compositio* as a kind of “mental synthesis” (38) or judgment, which he calls not “two concepts” but “one intelligibility” (39).

90 i.1256–59: *DV* q.4, a.2, c.: “verbum intellectus nostri, secundum cuius similitudinem loqui possumus de verbo divino, est id ad quod operatio intellectus nostri terminatur, quod est ipsum intellectum, quod dicitur conceptio intellectus”.

91 i.1256–59: *DV* q.4, a.2, ad.3: “conceptio intellectus non solum est id quod intellectum est, sed etiam id quo res intelligitur”.

92 1632b: *TDS* 250/22–25 (R.I 705b31–35): “conceptus autem est cognitum ut *quod*, non tamquam res cognita extrinseca, sed tamquam id, in quo continetur res cognita intra intellectum”.

relation to the properly terminal object.⁹³ As mentioned above in the seventh point in our summary of Lonergan's interpretation, the *verbum mentis* is a reality distinct from the act of understanding, such that what is produced is not something outside the agent, but which further perfects the agent by making it properly united to the object.⁹⁴

93 Cf. 1632b: *TDS*, 224/27–36 (R.I 694a16–27): “Et primum medium in quo facti cognitionem mediatam, id est alio cognito vel cognitione deductam pertinetque ad signum instrumentale, secundum vero medium cognitionem mediatam non constituit, quia non duplicat obiectum cognitum neque cognitionem. Ceterum vere et proprie est medium repraesentans obiectum, non ut medium extrinsecum, sed ut intrinsecum et formans potentiam.” – Deely's translation reads: “And the first means-in-which makes a cognition mediate, that is, drawn from another known thing or cognition, and it pertains to the instrumental sign, but the second means-in-which does not constitute a mediate cognition, because it does not double the object known nor the cognition. But indeed it is truly and properly a means representing an object, not as an extrinsic medium, but as one intrinsic and forming the cognitive power.”

94 Cf. Deely 2008: “How to Go Nowhere with Language: Remarks on John O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn*”, in *ACPQ*, 82.2, 339: “In his *Summa* at I.87.3c, St. Thomas says that the highest perfection of an intellect is its operation as remaining in itself, in contrast to actions which produce something external, and that this achieved perfection is or provides *within the intellect itself* the first object of which an intellect becomes aware. He then goes on to say that both angels and God grasp their own essential natures in this way, but that human understanding grasps first—that is, has as its *objectum primum*—something *outside itself*, namely, the nature of material being.

“Now, how can the ‘first object’ of any intellect be necessarily ‘something internal’ (something ‘remaining in the one cognizing as its perfection and act’), if in the case of the human intellect the ‘first object’ is the external being of the material surroundings? The appearance of contradiction is removed as soon as we understand that a concept is always the foundation of a cognitive relation, while an object is rather the terminus of that same relation. If we understand that the human intellect by its immanent activity produces a concept as a quality of the soul on the basis of which (*id in quo*, not *id quo*) the intellect stands in a relation the terminus of which is material being, the apparent contradiction is removed: the foundation of the relation is within the human knower and produced by the act of understanding, the relation itself is over and above the knower and linking the human knower to what is other than himself or herself, namely, the object at which the relation terminates—which, in the case of the human intellect, is external to the knower.”

O'Callaghan, in response to Deely's article (2010: “Concepts, Mirrors, and Signification: Response to Deely”, *ACPQ*, 84.1: 133–162) denies the distinction between the act of understanding and the *verbum mentis*—a debate into which I see no need here to enter at length, as it would require an extensive consideration of the imagery used by both Thomas and Poinsot in explaining the nature of concepts as representational, as means, and as objects, not to mention the continuity of the Thomistic commentary tradition

Thus, we can consider what Thomas means by stating that the concept is the *terminus* of the intellectual operation in two ways: **first**, and only in certain contexts, with regard to the so-called “objective concept”, i.e., what is really the formal object as made known by the formal concept, as that which is illumined reflexively or consequently by the *intellectus agens* in the intellect’s overall return to the phantasm, such that the formal object is seen actually in the material object. **Second**, and more properly a terminus, as the final result of the intellect’s operation, such as to be an **entitative terminus**, an accident residing in the soul. The *verbum mentis*, in being “uttered”, accomplishes the final step in the act of understanding.⁹⁵

with the work of Thomas himself, a discussion far beyond the confines of this chapter—despite what I see as a rather simple and clear evidence in Thomas that the *verbum* must necessarily be distinct from the act of the intellect, namely at 1266–68: q.28, a.1, ad.4: “Ad quartum dicendum quod relationes quae consequuntur solam operationem intellectus in ipsis rebus intellectis, sunt relationes rationis tantum, quia scilicet eas ratio advenit inter duas res intellectas. Sed relationes quae consequuntur operationem intellectus, quae sunt inter verbum intellectualiter procedens et illud a quo procedit, non sunt relationes rationis tantum, sed rei, quia et ipse intellectus et ratio est quaedam res, et comparatur realiter ad id quod procedit intelligibiliter, sicut res corporalis ad id quod procedit corporaliter.” In other words: if the *verbum intellectualiter procedens in nostro* is engaged in a **real** relation with the intellect itself, **following the operation of the intellect**, would it not necessarily have to be something distinct from both the intellect itself **and** from its act? One could argue that it is really distinct only from the act whereby it is formed, but in that case—i.e., that it is not really distinct from the act of understanding as something subsequent to its formation—then we would retain habitually only impressed species, and never what is contained in the expressed; which has the obvious absurd conclusion that we compose every element in understanding any complete thing every time we actually understand it, and that our intellect has no process of resolving to higher unities. See also the rest of question 28 from the *Prima pars*, especially, a.4, ad.1: “Sed tamen relatio ad verbum est realis, quia verbum intelligitur ut procedens per actionem intelligibilem, non autem ut res intellecta. Cum enim intelligimus lapidem, id quod ex re intellecta concipit intellectus, vocatur verbum,” as well as 1266–68: q.34 *in passim* and i.1256–59: q.4, a.2. See also Poinsett 1632b: *TDS* 324–333 *in passim*, but especially 325/22–31 and 326/47–327/10, quoted above in n.42 (4.1.1).

95 Cf. Gadamer 1960b: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 383: “It is true that no temporality enters into the relations of the divine persons to one another. But the successive quality that is characteristic of the discursiveness of human thought is not basically temporal in nature. When human thought passes from one thing to another, ie thinks first this thing and then that, it is still not swept along from one thing to the other. It does not think a simple succession of first one thing and then another, which would mean that it would itself constantly change in the process. If it thinks first of one thing and then of another, then that means that it knows what it is doing, and is able to connect the one thing with

What this essentially means, however, is that while an entitative *terminus*, and thus an end of operation, the *verbum mentis* is also and more importantly the *fundamentum* of the intentional relation whereby the knower and known are fully united, such that the known is actually objectively present to the knower. The understanding does not grasp the concept in its entitative being, but only through its intentional function. Like the lenses of our eyes, our intellectual sees through concepts, but these concepts themselves are seen

the other. Hence it is not a temporal relation that is involved, but a mental process, an emanatio intellectualis.

“Thomas uses this neoplatonic concept to describe both the processual character of the inner word and the process of the Trinity. This brings out a point not contained in the logos philosophy of Plato. The idea of emanation in neoplatonism contains more than the physical phenomenon of flowing out as a process of movement. The primary image, rather, is that of the fountain. In the process of emanation, that from which something flows, the One, is not deprived, nor does it become less. The same is true of the birth of the Son from the Father, who does not use up anything of himself in the process, but takes something to himself. And this is likewise true of the mental production that takes place in the process of thought, of speaking to oneself. This kind of production is at the same time a total remaining within oneself. If it can be said of the divine relationship between word and intellect that the word does not partially, but wholly (totaliter) have its origin in the intellect, then it is true also with us that one word originates totaliter from another, ie has its origin in the mind, like the deduction of a conclusion from the premisses (ut conclusio ex principiis). Thus the productive process of thought is not a process of change (motus), not a transition from potentiality into action, but an emergence ut actus ex actu.” Gadamer goes on to incorrectly claim that the word is not distinct from the act of understanding, but is itself the act of understanding. Nevertheless, Gadamer’s comments continue in an insightful vein, 385: “A person who thinks something, ie says it to himself, means by it the thing that he thinks. His mind is not directed back towards his own thinking when he forms the word. The word is, of course, the product of the work of his mind. The mind forms it in itself by thinking the thought through. But unlike other products it remains entirely within the mental sphere. Thus the impression is given that it is an attitude towards itself that is involved and that speaking to oneself is a reflexive thing. It is not so, in fact, but this structure of thought is undoubtedly the reason why thought is able to direct itself reflectively towards itself and can thus become an object to itself. The inwardness of the word, which constitutes the inner unity of thought and speech, is the reason for its being easy to miss the direct and unreflective character of the ‘word’. In thinking, a person does not move forward from the one thing to the other, from thinking to speaking to himself. The word does not emerge in a sphere of the mind that is still free of thought (in aliquo sui nudo). Hence the appearance is created that the formation of the word arises from the movement of the mind towards itself. In fact no reflective process operates when the word is formed, for the word is not expressing the mind, but the intended object. The starting-point for the formation of the word is the intelligible object

themselves only by means of reflection—that is, in and through another.⁹⁶ There is a focal disappearance to not only the sense organs and the brain,⁹⁷ both bodily means through which intentional realizations occur, but also and even more thoroughly to the intellectual means, both the *species impressa intellecta* and the *species expressa intellecta*. Nevertheless, since we grasp whatever intelligibility belonging to the thing according to its proper actuality solely on the basis of the *verbum mentis*, the *species expressa intellecta* may also be called “that which” is understood. In other words, the concept serves as an instrument of intellectual focusing, attuned only to the actualities which have been apprehended and formed into a *species expressa*.⁹⁸

4.2.3 *Necessity of Composition*

As noted above (4.2.1), aside from the concept of *ens*, every other concept of the intellect involves some composition and/or division. Even the simple expressions of “unity” and “division” entail some intellectual operation beyond merely passive apprehension; indeed, even *non ens* includes, implicitly, the notion of *ens* combined with its negation. Much more so, then, do the other concepts which the intellect forms (those further removed from the primary concepts) entail an integral composition to their meaning. As understanding progresses discursively, back and forth by the *via inventionis* and *via resolutionis*, it discovers with greater clarity and precision the integral parts through distinct acts of intellectual discovery, and subsequently resolves them into the unified concepts to which are given simple expressions: as the vague concept of “animal” comes to be clarified by the discovery of the sentience integral to animality, which sentience is then resolved into the same concept of “animal”, adding to it a greater degree of precision and distinction.

(the species) that fills the mind. The thought seeking expression refers not to the mind, but to the object. Thus the word is not the expression of the mind, but is concerned with the similitudo rei. The object thought (the species) and the word belong as closely together as possible. Their unity is so close that the word does not occupy a second place in the mind beside the species, but is that in which knowledge is completed, ie that in which the species is fully thought. Thomas points out that in this the word resembles the light in which a colour becomes visible.”

96 Cf. Sokolowski 2008: *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, 225–237.

97 Cf. Sokolowski 2008: *Phenomenology of the Human Person*, 197.

98 We could perhaps, as an analogy, consider the sense in which the concept is the *terminus* of intellectual understanding, not simply of the act but as the object, in comparison with the way in which our eyes can only contribute to the perception of colors to which they are attuned.

Now every concept, every interior word, has a composition with *ens*. Even *non ens*, as mentioned, requires that it be considered in some way as integrally including *ens* in its meaning, for any privation includes in its notion that of which it is a privation: “And thus it occurs that a multitude is a kind of unity, and evil is a kind of good, and non-being is a kind of being.”⁹⁹ We know *non ens* as an object, despite it being cognition-dependent—consisting in the complete negation of being, as there is nothing itself making *non ens* known¹⁰⁰—just as we know all privations by the absence of something that ought to be within something existing; the very concepts of those privations, although they are of nothing positive, have existences of their own¹⁰¹ through the act whereby they are intrinsically composed or divided and thus made into *species expressae*, just as negations are known by the denial of an extrinsic composition. In any case, there is necessarily some inclusion of *ens* in every concept. Even more strongly, Thomas states:¹⁰²

In order to make this clear [that *ens* is not itself grasped by a discursive effort, but has a “natural” reception into the intellect], it must be known that, since the operation of the intellect is twofold—one, by which what “that” is, is known, which is called the understanding of indivisibles, and the other, by which it composes and divides—in each there is something first. In the first operation, there is something which first falls into the intellect, namely that which I call “being”; nor can something be conceived by the mind in this operation, unless *ens* is understood.

99 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.11, a.2, ad.1: “Et exinde contingit quod multitudo est quoddam unum, et malum est quoddam bonum, et non ens est quoddam ens”.

100 1266–68: *ST Ia*, q.16, a.3, ad.2: “Ad secundum dicendum quod non ens non habet in se unde cognoscatur, sed cognoscitur in quantum intellectus facit illud cognoscibile. Unde verum fundatur in ente, in quantum non ens est quoddam ens rationis, apprehensum scilicet a ratione.”

101 1252/56: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.19, q.5, a.1, ad.5: “Ad quintum dicendum, quod, secundum Avicennam, de eo quod nullo modo est, non potest aliquid enuntiari: ad minus enim oportet quod illud de quo aliquid enuntiatur, sit apprehensum; et ita habet aliquod esse ad minus in intellectu apprehendente; et ita constat quod semper veritati respondet aliquod esse; nec oportet quod semper respondeat sibi esse in re extra animam, cum ratio veritatis compleatur in ratione animae.”

102 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.6, n.605: “Ad huius autem evidentiam sciendum est, quod, cum duplex sit operatio intellectus: una, qua cognoscit quod quid est, quae vocatur indivisibilium intelligentia; alia, qua componit et dividit: in utroque est aliquod primum: in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens.”

And elsewhere: “the *ens* which is first through commonality, since it is essentially the same as any thing whatsoever, does not exceed the proportion of anything. And therefore in the cognition of anything whatsoever, this *ens* is known.”¹⁰³

Certainly, any thing (“thing” said transcendently) which is known is known through some *species expressa* or *verbum mentis*.¹⁰⁴ Even *entia rationis* have to be known in this manner, regardless of whether those *entia* are grasped through the intentions of logic, i.e., genera and logical species, or are privations or negations. Consequently, everything known, beyond the formal object grasped through the vague, general concept of *ens ut primum cognitum*, entails some sort of composition. The actual knowledge, however, whereby *ens ut primum cognitum* is first immediately grasped as an object of the intellect, likewise involves a composition: for the formal object of *ens primum cognitum* is composed, perhaps not in an **intellectual** composition, but with the phantasmal representation whereby the material object is made present.

The most significant consequence of this necessary composition to every concept is that **every *species expressae* therefore is an interpretation**. This necessity of interpretation does not mean that the interpreter necessarily involves something **new** of his or her own in the interpretation, or that there is some introduction of a foreign element into the conceptual structure; but, rather, that every composition impresses a limitation on the conceptual content, such that the terminal object of the cognitive act becomes an object precisely as what correlates to the concept.¹⁰⁵ In other words, we never, in *species expressae*, make of a thing an object without some qualification, and therefore, we always objectify it “as”.¹⁰⁶ This objectifying or “taking-as” is the essential

103 i.1256–59: *DV* q.10, a.11, ad.10: “ens quod est primum per communitatem, cum sit idem per essentiam cuiuslibet rei, nullius proportionem excedit; et ideo in cognitione cuiuslibet rei ipsum cognoscitur”.

104 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.4, a.2, ad.5: “in nobis dicere non solum significat intelligere, sed intelligere cum hoc quod est ex se exprimere aliquam conceptionem; nec aliter possumus intelligere, nisi huiusmodi conceptionem exprimendo; et ideo omne intelligere in nobis, proprie loquendo, est dicere.”

105 See c.5.2.2.

106 This is true not only in intellectual objectivizations, but in any cognitive action; as Robert Sokolowski puts it (1978: *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being*), there is both a perceptual “taking-as” and a syntactical—i.e., intellectually-structured—“taking-as”. Cf. 41–45 and 52–54, but as a kind of summary, 44: “The assertion that an object is something or other is fused with our internalized ‘taking’ of the object ‘as’ such and such. The fusion or identification is a kind of repetition. The perceptual or imaginative ‘taking as’ is a more passive procedure: we accept an object as having this or

and common element to the meaning of the term “interpretation” as we are using it here.¹⁰⁷

This universal objectification “as” is what produces the idiosyncrasies of personal interpretation, the individual worldview of any given human person: for, although the objectification of *entia naturae* need not incorporate any elements specifically constituted by the acts of objectification,¹⁰⁸ the compositions wrought by each individual can vary widely. There can, consequently, be a multitude of legitimate interpretations concerning one and the

that aspect, we take the mint as sweet. Then we repeat this motion, distinguishing the object and its aspect, but we do it now with grammatical articulation. We say the mint is sweet. Moreover, we do not carry out these two processes side by side; what is presented in the second is experienced as ‘the same’ as what had been given in the first. The same condition of the object—the object with this aspect—is there in both, with two important differences: it is now penetrated by the grammar made available in the language we speak, and it is explicitly guaranteed by us as speakers of the language and as perceivers who claim to have seen what condition the things are in.”

107 Here we have some parallel with Heidegger’s notion of interpretation. Cf. 1927a: SZ, 150/190–191: “In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation.” This “involvement” is, as Heidegger would later point out, partly due to the fact that we do not experience sensible things as “a throng of sensations”, but rather always as a something: 1960: “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes”, 25–26: “We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g., tones and noises, in the appearance of things—as this thing-concept alleges; rather, we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly.” In other words, we are never **merely** taking things in—except perhaps in moments of cognitive deficiency—but rather always already trying to take things “as” this or that, even from our earliest days, even before we engage in explicitly intellectual conceptual formation.

Cf. 1929–30: *GM*, 274: “The manifestness of beings as such, of beings *as* beings, belongs to world. This implies that bound up with world is this enigmatic ‘as’, beings *as* such, or formulated in a formal way: ‘something *as* something’, a possibility which is quite fundamentally closed to the animal. Only where beings are manifest *as* beings *at all*, do we find the possibility of experiencing this or that particular being as determined in this or that particular way—experiencing in the broader sense which goes beyond mere acquaintance with something, in the sense of having experiences with something.”

108 See c.5.1.2.1, 5.1.3, and 5.2.2 for more on this.

same *ens naturae*, provided that how the objects are taken does not result in contradiction. The sharable quality of our interpretations—what is expressed by or made known by any *species expressae* being something public in principle, inasmuch as the process of formation is common to all, and *entia naturae*, from which all intelligibility is ultimately derived, being universally accessible for the formation of *species impressae*—allows for our interpretations to be held in common, and thence for social culture to arise.¹⁰⁹ In the development of socially-constituted realities, culture—and even individuals—are capable of even greater divergence from one another, by adding further complexity to each and every interpretation.

But how, precisely, does this continual process of concept formation occur?

4.2.4 *Definition and Quiddity*

While the definitional methodology used by Thomas and imbued in the Western tradition by Porphyry is now known to be applicable only generically, rather than specifically (as stated in the previous chapter,¹¹⁰ anything **strictly** material cannot be identified as belonging to an absolutely distinct knowable species through the discovery of a singular specific difference), we can nevertheless adopt certain aspects of the method, and, as we shall see in the following section, expand upon it in a way more pertinent and useful in our own time.

The applicability of the method can be seen from the earlier analysis of the statements of Thomas that *quod quid est* and the *quidditas rei* are the objects of intellectual understanding.¹¹¹ As we noted, these are not claims that there is

109 Cf. Gadamer 1960b: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 388: “We must consider then the natural formation of concepts that takes place in language. It is obvious that speech, even if it involves a subordination of what is meant in each particular case to the universality of a pre-established verbal meaning, cannot be thought of as the combination of these subsuming acts, through which something particular is subordinated to a universal concept. A person who speaks—who, that is to say, uses the general meanings of words—is so orientated towards the particular features of the observation of an object that everything he says acquires a share in the particular nature of the circumstances that he is considering.

“But that means, on the other hand, that the universal concept that is meant by the meaning of the word is enriched by the particular view of an object, so that what emerges is a new, more specific word formation which does more justice to the particular features of the object. Just as speech implies the use of pre-established words which have their universal meaning, there is at the same time a constant process of concept formation by means of which the life of a language develops.” It is to be noted that this constant process to which Gadamer refers occurs initially on the basis of the individual’s particular observations—that is, the idiosyncratic interpretation.

110 See c.3.2.3.2.

111 See c.3.1.2–3.

a direct access to the internal constitutive principles of a thing's essence, and certainly not that there is an abstractive separation of the form as intelligible, held up as an object distinct in being from the unintelligible matter. The *quid* that is the proportionate object of understanding, for the human intellect, is the actuality which can be considered separately, as something universal, from the potency of some material being. This is the "immaterializing" which the *intellectus agens* produces in "abstraction" from matter, i.e., the intellectual discovery of a determinate mode of being, apart from the inexorable variability intrinsic to its existence as something material. The intellectual discovery of a determinate mode of being according to a simple notion separates that which is in reality conjoined to something else; only by some intellectual act of composition can the intellect form for itself a concept capable of making known the thing as it actually is, even if that composition attains no more than a very vague representative approximation.

Thus, a definition is not simply the grasp of the closest genus and the singular specifying difference, but rather the attempt to best formulate, intellectually and conceptually, the quiddities which belong to the proper objects of our cognition—which objects are not only cognition-independent, substantially-constituted beings, but also the cognition-dependent beings which receive in some measure not only their existence, but also some aspect of their determination from cognitive acts.¹¹² In other words, there are definitions not only of *entia naturae*, but also *entia rationis*; and not only *entia rationis* as the objects studied specifically in logic, but *entia rationis* which exist only on the basis of intersubjective cognitive and objective awareness, grasped in their proper being as relative.¹¹³

112 Cf. Maritain 1937: *An Introduction to Logic*, 78–79: "Likewise in the first operation of the mind which is made up of two different acts: the act of forming a concept, and the act of forming a definition, the formation of concepts is only, so to speak, the first halting place, or phase, of mental activity. Thus simple apprehension should be considered as ordained to the definition as to its most evolved and perfect product, the first operation of the mind itself being ordained to the judgment, and the latter in turn to the reasoning. Such is the unvarying teaching of St. Thomas; the acts of the mind are not isolated one from the other, we must beware of pigeon-holing them, of shutting them up in little compartments to work for themselves alone. They are vital and synergetic, they converge dynamically towards one end...*the knowledge of things*". See also Deely 1969: "The Philosophical Dimensions of The Origin of Species", Parts I and II in *The Thomist* 33 (January) and 33 (April), each throughout, for a discussion of the difficulties of definition.

113 Cf. Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 95: "this whole experience of objectivity as able to reveal the world of nature as well as worlds of fiction and the socio-cultural world (the *Lebenswelt* as a whole, we might say, as the species-specifically human *Umwelt*) wherein *ens reale* and *ens rationis* inextricably intertwine, as we further shall see in the

4.3 A Recursive Analysis of the *Species Expressa*

The complexity of the *species expressae* can be easily seen by examining the nature of those which we commonly employ. For the most part, the kinds of concepts we engage diurnally entail a significant degree of complexity. This complexity can be either with regard to the integrally-composed definitionally-significant *verbum mentis*, in which the elements conjoined signify the same reality, or to the extrinsically-composed propositionally-significant *verbum mentis*, in which the conjunction is not of two parts of the same reality, but of two things genuinely distinct in their nature or mode of being.¹¹⁴ Simple expressions of the exterior word can signify either kind of compositionally complex *verbum mentis*. Only in explicitly logical considerations and the aforementioned non-critical acts of absolute consideration do we entertain concepts making known objects of absolute simplicity. In order, therefore, to see the precise nature of the complexity of the *species expressae* in daily use, we must look further at the elements included in the discursive process of concept formation, both in terms of actions and objects.

4.3.1 *True and False Concepts*

As mentioned above, all intellectual concepts aside from *ens primum cognitum* require some composition. Thus we can, and indeed very frequently do, arrive at incorrect or false concepts. As Thomas says, in explaining how falsity enters the human intellect's first operation:¹¹⁵

next Chapter, is possible only in and through the ontological constitution of relation as positively indifferent to its provenance in being always suprasubjective, even when it is sustained by a single psychological subjectivity here and now. For it is in *adesse*, not *in-esse*, that the two orders of being (*ens reale*) and nonbeing (*ens rationis*), of subjective and intersubjective realities objectified and purely objective reality, meet and penetrate one another."

114 This twofold notion of the propositionally-significant utterance is to be found in three places in Poinsoot (1632a: *Artis Logicae Prima Pars*, lib.2, c.6, [R.I 23b1–25a11]; q.d., q.5 *in passim*, esp. a.1 [R.I 144a40–150b18]; and 1635: *Philosophia Naturalis Quarta Pars*, q.11, a.3, [R.III 369b19–372a6]), who distinguishes between the **enunciation**, or the compositive act which is involved in apprehension or in representations to the awareness, and the **judgment properly speaking**, which has to do with truth or falsity, and therefore with some cognition-independent measure. Cf. 4.2.1, n.88 above.

115 i.1259/65: *SCG* III c.108, n.5: "Quod quidem contingit in quantum intellectus noster non statim, sed cum quodam inquisitionis ordine ad cognoscendam quidditatem alicuius rei pertingit: sicut cum primo apprehendimus animal, et dividentes per oppositas differentias, altera relicta, unam generi apponimus, quousque perveniamus ad definitionem speciei. In quo quidem processu potest falsitas accidere, si accipiat ut differentia

This [falsity] occurs as our intellect does not immediately attain to the knowledge of the quiddity of some thing, but with a certain order of inquiry; as when we first apprehend animal, and dividing it through its opposite differences, we leave the others aside and place one difference with the genus, until we come to the definition of the species. Falsity may occur in this process if something is taken as a difference in the genus which is not a difference in the genus. To proceed thus to the knowledge of what something is belongs to an intellect reasoning discursively from one thing to another.

This composition of simple quiddities, leading to the formation of the definition, may or may not result in a concept accurately related to an independently existing thing. Yet by being formed through acts of division and composition, it should be observed that the concept includes in itself the relation of two or more simple notions. In other words, although it is a first intention related to a thing existing outside the mind, the quiddity, inasmuch as it is an entitative modification within the human intellect, is itself a composite structure composed by the understanding.¹¹⁶ Every **true** quiddity as intellectually possessed and revelatory of the **what** belonging to something, although dependent upon and derived from independently existing things, dependent upon cognitive acts for the reality of its intelligible being—“as even the being of a quiddity is a certain cognition-dependent being [*esse rationis*]”¹¹⁷—inasmuch as that quiddity is understood by the intellect and formed through the relating of things impressed upon the mind as distinct notions (i.e., through a process of composition such that the aspects of the object which the intellect has separated out in the process of intellectual discovery, which are actually united, one, and as a whole in the subjective constitution of the being) is intellectually reconstituted as a whole object but not necessarily in the same way that these aspects are united subjectively. For instance, what we understand by “living body” is

generis quod non est generis differentia. Sic autem procedere ad cognoscendum de aliquo quid est, est intellectus ratiocinando discurrentis de uno ad aliud.” While this argument is presented in the midst of a contrary position, Thomas does not include it in his refutation. Moreover, this position is confirmed in a positive light, cited below in n.118.

116 i.1256–59: *DV* q.3, a.2, c.: “unde ipsa quidditas formata in intellectu, vel etiam compositio et divisio, est quoddam operatum ipsius, per quod tamen intellectus venit in cognitionem rei exterioris; et sic est quasi secundum quo intelligitur.” Cf. to the “formed intention” which is discussed in i.1259/65: *SCG* I, c.53 *in passim* and i.1259/65: *SCG* IV c.11, n.13 as the *interioris verbi* (i.e., *verbum mentis*).

117 Cf. c.1252/56a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.19, q.5, a.1, ad.7: “sicut etiam quidditatis esse est quoddam esse rationis”.

not in any way a separate or even separable component of what we understand in the actually living animal; nor, for that matter, is “best friend” in any way a component to be actually found, implicitly or virtually, in the subjective constitution of a dog.

If we simply apprehended the full quiddities of things as they actually exist, such that the subjective constitution of a being were replicated exactly, without the influence of the discursive powers of the human person, then error would belong only to propositions of a judgmental kind, consequent to the formation of *species expressae* of the definitional kind, which is not only patently false—as we would then never have incorrect definitions or *species expressae* of such things and we most certainly do—but also contrary to the explicit teaching of St. Thomas:¹¹⁸

But falsity is not adjoined to [the truth of the first operation of the intellect] in its very act, because the intellect has a true judgment of its proper object, towards which it naturally tends, which is the quiddity of a thing, just as sight is of color; but falsity is adjoined accidentally, through the application of an affirmation or negation, which happens in two ways: either from the comparison of the definition to the defined, and thus the definition is said to be false not simply but in respect of something, as the definition of a circle is false of a triangle; or with respect to the parts of the definition to one another, in which there is implied an impossible affirmation—as the definition of a vacuum, which is “a place in

118 c.1252/56a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.19, q.5, a.1, ad.7.: “Sed huic veritati non adjungitur falsitas per se, quia intellectus habet verum iudicium de proprio objecto, in quod naturaliter tendit, quod est quidditas rei, sicut et visus de colore; sed per accidens admiscetur falsitas, scilicet ratione affirmationis vel negationis annexae, quod contingit dupliciter: vel ex comparatione definitionis ad definitum, et tunc dicitur definitio falsa respectu alicujus et non simpliciter, sicut definitio circuli est falsa de triangulo; vel in respectu partium definitionis ad invicem, in quibus implicatur impossibilis affirmatio; sicut definitio vacui, quod est locus in quo nullum corpus est; et haec definitio dicitur falsa simpliciter, ut in 5 *Metaphys.* dicitur.” Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.3, c. : “Et inde est quod veritas per prius invenitur in compositione et divisione intellectus. Secundario autem dicitur verum et per posterius in intellectu formante quidditates rerum vel definitiones; unde definitio dicitur vera vel falsa, ratione compositionis verae vel falsae, ut quando scilicet dicitur esse definitio eius cuius non est, sicut si definitio circuli assignetur triangulo; vel etiam quando partes definitionis non possunt componi ad invicem, ut si dicatur definitio alicuius rei animal insensibile, haec enim compositio quae implicatur, scilicet aliquod animal est insensibile, est falsa. Et sic definitio non dicitur vera vel falsa nisi per ordinem ad compositionem, sicut et res dicitur vera per ordinem ad intellectum.”

which there is no body”—and this definition is called false simply, as is explained in *Metaphysics* book 5.

The first of these two ways of falsehood requires the act of judgment involving things extrinsic to each other; the second, and the more pertinent for our point, respects the composition and division of notions integral to the definitional conception of a thing: the simple falsehood of a definition. This latter kind of falsity is common: as a prime example, take the post-Humean conception of human nature, in which “reason”, as the purported specific difference of human beings, is understood to be no different in kind from the cognitive abilities of alloanimals, but only in degree. The realization of the dimension of *ens*, as that cognitive realm in which the objects are understood as things in their own right, is incorrectly kept absent from the definitional concept Hume and nearly every English-speaking person after him take to be signified by the term “reason”.¹¹⁹

Likewise, consider the way in which many people respond to the term “discrimination”: to a large number of people in our present day, the term corresponds to a concept including, incorrectly, the notion of injustice, as though every act of discriminating is an unjust act, i.e., as though “injustice” is an integral part of “discrimination”. The extrinsically compound *verbum mentis* of “unjust discrimination” (which can be expressed propositionally, “discrimination which is unjust”) has been mistakenly identified with the definitional *verbum mentis* of “discrimination”, of which “unjust” is not an integral part. The unfortunate consequence of this mistaken identification is that any act which ostensibly includes some discrimination, even if such discrimination is right and appropriately made, many perceive as unjust.

Though always detrimental to consider as integral that which is extrinsic (as it is with “unjust” and “discrimination”), inasmuch as this produces falsehood and confusion, we can nevertheless gain an insight into the socially-constituted nature of many concepts which are commonly-held at any given time by identifying these mistaken conceptual formations. There is a fundamental continuity in the process of the conception of both the true definition and the false definition—namely in the actuality which is proper to the things on whose pattern and through experience of which beings are conceived—which lends itself to a kind of overlap. In other words, the acts involved in the formation of a true definition are no different in kind than either those acts resulting in the

119 Hume 1748: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, based on the posthumous 1777 edition, modernized by Eric Steinberg, 1977 (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 1993), 23–25; 69–72.

formation of a false definition or those acts which are somehow contributory to the constitution of the object defined (i.e., such that the objective constitution is in some measure cognition-dependent).¹²⁰ Moreover, such mistakes in concept formation can further illuminate the contextual place of that which is truly signified by the correct integral and definitional concept of a thing. Since we do not deal with things in a world of abstractions, but in a world of particular, material contingency, we deal with things in a contextual whole, much of which is not only determined by relations to other cognition-independent beings, but—and this is increasingly the case for human beings, living as they are in societies increasingly perfused primarily by cultural rather than by natural beings¹²¹—also by relations to cognition-dependent beings.¹²²

4.3.2 Species Expressae and Cognition-Dependent Objects

Moreover, the potential intelligibility of subjective beings exists coextensively with the degree to which such cognition-independent being has actuality; seldom, if ever, does the actualized quiddity formed by the cognitive powers of the human being become adequate to the whole potency of the potentially intelligible.¹²³ Consider the typical Aristotelian philosopher's conception of the human being: "rational animal". To be rational, in the tradition of Aristotelian

120 Cf. below, 5.1.3.

121 Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 38: "While our knowledge and experience begin in sensation and sensations are always of bodies ('material substances', in Aristotle's sense), yet not everything we know and experience is of a bodily nature. Indeed, much of what we know and experience does not reduce to nature at all, but exists only in society and culture. So we encounter against the ancient problem of *physis* and *nomos*, the famous 'two spheres' also of Vico and modern philosophy, where, from within the latter (according to the moderns, the philosophers, not the scientists, for the most part), we vainly try to gain access through understanding to the former as well."

"The early humans, we may be sure, had a great deal of *physis* and only a small part of *nomos*. But that small part would grow, and our first ancestors would no doubt be astonished to find an epoch, after Descartes, in which *nomos* had not merely overtaken *physis* in size and importance for everyday life, but veritably swallowed up and eclipsed *physis* in the noxious modern idea of the 'thing-in-itself', the subjectively existing entia realia of the environment and physical universe at large, as unknowable beyond its 'thatness'."

122 We will return to this point more fully in c.5.2.

123 Perhaps it is this disparity between the actualized intelligibility of cognition-dependent being and the unrealized potential intelligibility of independent being that led Thomas, in an early text (c.1252/56a: *In Sent.*, lib.4, q.1, a.4, qc.2, c.), as well as other scholastics (cf. Armand Maurer 1950: "*Ens Diminutum*: a Note on its Origin and Meaning", in *Mediaeval Studies* no.12, 163f.) to refer to *ens rationis* as an *ens diminutum*; i.e., that no understanding grasped by the human mind would be, could be, wholly adequated to the actuality of the

understanding, is to be capable of proceeding intellectually from the grasping of simple quiddities and forming judgments of them to arriving at new conclusions; to be animal is to possess powers of sensation, perception (i.e., *phantasiari*), and self-motion corresponding to the particular judgments following upon perception. The various aspects of intellectual procession, however, are—as we have shown throughout—incredibly complex (different objects of the simple intellectual discovery occurring in various degrees of abstraction, different kinds of judgment, different orders of procession engaged in a discursive back and forth, etc.), and can be understood with seemingly ever-greater precision, just as the processes proper to the animality present in humans—the neurological, chemical, and electrical processes of the brain, the functioning of the nervous system as a whole, the determination of appearances and traits through genes, the evolutionary development of the organism and the impact of subatomic particles on the structure of organic material beings—present an inexhaustible depth to the object's subjective constitution. Even the most limited of concretely existing beings can be understood with every greater precision.

And yet, on the basis of these actualized intelligibilities of independent being, the intellect may ascertain intelligibilities not **in** any independent being according to its **individual** subjective constitution, but **between** the intelligibilities of a plurality of beings. On the basis of the way in which a being exists, according to what we know of it, we may ascertain a relation of that being to another, because it has in its way of existing either some similarity or dissimilarity to the other; but moreover, we may also grasp these relations—as objects of our intellectual attention and therefore in some measure together with their fundamentals and termini as forming a kind of whole and thus as related to beings other than their immediate fundamentals and termini—in either their subjective or their objective constitutions. While the first relation does not itself serve as a fundament to further relations, the triadic structure of the relation is itself, as an object, a distinct and intelligible actuality capable of being made actually understood by a single complex *species expressa*.¹²⁴

Thus we have so-called “real relations”, potential intelligibilities between two independent beings (“A is larger than B”), and perhaps better named “cognition-independent relations”;¹²⁵ we also have relations founded upon something actual in one independently existing thing but not in the other

thing in the order of independent existence. Cf. Deely 1992: “Philosophy and Experience” in *ACPQ*, 66.3, 306 (cited below, n.131).

124 Cf. below 5.2.

125 Cf. below 5.2.3.

(e.g., knowledge, in which the knower is dependent upon the known in order for the relation to subsist, whereas the known is not in anyway affected by being known—a “one-directional” or “mixed” relation);¹²⁶ and finally we have relations not immediately founded upon anything in any independently existing thing but entirely dependent upon being in the mind (“‘Animal’ is a species of the genus ‘living body’”; “Ivan Karamazov is smaller than his brother, Dmitri”).¹²⁷ These relations inasmuch as they can be postulated all have an existence as potentially intelligible, not, precisely as relation, in any cognitively-independent existing thing, but **between** two or more of them; and moreover, the existence of these relations are not limited to the domain of the intersubjective, i.e., between two independent beings, but can also obtain “interobjectively”, i.e., between two cognition-dependent beings.

Purely cognition-dependent beings, *negationes* and *privationes*—though their objectivity is linked to and inexorable from an inter- and supersubjective world of objects realized according to the properly intellectual dimension, that dimension illumined by the “objective light” of *ens ut primum cognitum*—are not known or made into objects by a structuring in the intellect qualitatively different from the knowledge had of beings which have independent subjective constitutions.¹²⁸ The fundament of knowledge is in each case (i.e., both

126 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.4, a.5, c.: “quod quandocumque aliqua duo sic se habent ad invicem, quod unum dependet ad alterum, sed non e converso; in eo quod dependet ab altero, est realis relatio; sed in eo ad quod dependet, non est relatio nisi rationis tantum; prout, scilicet, non potest intelligi aliquid referri ad alterum quin cointelligatur etiam respectus oppositus ex parte alterius, ut patet in scientia, quae dependet ad scibile, sed non e converso.”

127 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.28, a.1, c. See below, 5.1, for more on the nature of relation.

128 The opposite is the claim of Owens 1968: *An Interpretation of Existence*, 41: “These two ways of existence, real and cognitional, are known by means of different judgments, each radically irreducible to the other. To know whether a thing exists in the external world, you have to ‘look outside and see’. The ‘look’, on the intellectual level, is the judgment that grasps real existence. Correspondingly, to know that one is thinking or feeling or deciding, one has to look *in* and see. One has to reflect on one’s own activities. The inward look also is a judgment, in the technical sense of the term as an intuition of existence. Again, the existence known is real existence, existence of the really occurring activity in oneself. But within the cognitional activity one is aware of the existence it gives the objects known. Reflexively, one judges that they exist in one’s cognition. It is this judgment that is the knowledge of cognitional existence. It is a new and different judgment from the judgment by which the thing’s real existence is grasped.” Owens’ error, as I perceive it, is to attempt to “box things up” nicely into self-contained packages of existential boundaries, such that the “real” is hypotetically divided from the “cognitional”; such that the former impacts the latter, but not vice versa. On Owens’ interpretation, I cannot see how one can account

towards the purely objective and towards the cognition-independent subjective) an accident in the knower, produced by the intellect through apprehension, composition, and division; what differs are the *termini* to which they are related, the objects of their intentionality.¹²⁹

The truth (*veritas*) convertible with being (*ens*) comes, Thomas states, more from the *esse* of a thing than from its quiddity; for the *ratio* of truth consists in the accurate relation of the *species expressa* to that known by it.¹³⁰ The kind of knowledge we have of a thing by the act of simple consideration is said to be “true” only *secundum quid*; for the simple consideration cannot even possibly be false, inasmuch as the object it considers is nothing about which one makes a judgment—just as if we make a simple consideration of even a fictional

for the occurrence of falsity in the intellect, except insofar as it judges concerning things as they exist outside the intellect. Contrariwise, consider that the intellectual judgment concerning the so-called “real” is already impacted by a cognitional objectivization, i.e., through the interior sense power called cogitative or estimative. Before being known as a “real” thing, everything of which we make intellectual judgments is first an object. On this point, see Deely 2007: 18, 55, 91, and 81–100 *in passim*. See also c.5.2.3 on the meaning of “real”.

129 Poinsoot 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.2, a.1 (R.I 285a19–285b11): “Ens rationis in omni sua latitudine, si nominis significationem attendamus, dicit id, quod dependet aliquo modo a ratione. Potest autem dependere vel ut effectus a causa vel ut obiectum a cognoscente.

“Primo modo invenitur aliquid dupliciter dependere a ratione, vel quia est ab ipsa ut ab efficiente, sicut opera artis, quae per rationem excogitantur et fiunt, vel quia est in ipsa ut in subiecto et causa materiali, sicut actus et habitus sunt in intellectu. Sed uterque iste modus pertinet ad ens reale, quia ens sic dictum habet veram et realem existentiam, dependentem tamen ab intellectu.

“Quod autem secundo modo ab intellectu dependet, scilicet ut obiectum, dicitur proprie ens rationis, ut pertinet ad praesens, quia nullum esse habet extra rationem, sed solum obiective dicitur esse in ipsa, et sic opponitur enti reali. Quod quidem licet aliqui negaverint, communi tamen theologorum et philosophorum consensu dari constat, cum omnes distinguant ens reale ab ente ficto seu rationis, quia illud existit in rerum natura, hoc non habet existentiam in re, sed solum cognoscitur et fingitur. Imo ipsa experientia sufficienter id probat, cum videamus multa nos imaginari et cognoscere, quae omnino impossibilia sunt, et talia sunt entia ficta. Entia quidem, quia cognoscuntur ad modum entis, ficta vero, quia non correspondet illis aliquid esse verum a parte rei.”

130 c.1252/56a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.19, q.5, a.1, c.: “Cum autem in re sit quidditas ejus et suum esse, veritas fundatur in esse rei magis quam in quidditate, sicut et nomen entis ab esse imponitur; et in ipsa operatione intellectus accipientis esse rei sicut est per quamdam similitudinem ad ipsum, completur relatio adaequationis, in qua consistit ratio veritatis. Unde dico, quod ipsum esse rei est causa veritatis, secundum quod est in cognitione intellectus.”

essence, there is no falsehood in our consideration, since we are not considering it in terms of whether or not it can or does exist.

Just as we form *species expressae* of cognition-independent beings' quiddities through a process of composition and division, so too do we form our *species expressae* of purely cognition-dependent beings through composition and division—indeed, even more so. For, whereas our formation of concepts of independent beings ends with a composite principally positive in its characteristics, purely cognition-dependent conceptualizations of negations or privations end with a composite concept marked by some negation; the *esse* of such a negation consists in being the terminal object of the cognition-dependent *species expressae*. Likewise, we know relations not because they have a being (*ens* or *esse*) established within the substantial order of being as actually within the constitution of **this** or **that** entity, but because they have *esse*, which, although different in kind as an *esse ad* rather than an *esse in*, is also intelligible. This *esse ad* falls within the vague and confused knowledge of the fact of *esse* which is constitutive for initial grasp of the *primum cognitum*. Whether or not the *esse ad* is towards an established existing particular *ens*, a potentially existing *ens*, or an **impossibly** existing *ens*, the intelligibility of any relation, including the relation of *species expressae* to objects, consists in its having some *esse* which, with regard to the intellect's ability to grasp it, requires only that there be one existing fundament.

The human intellect, while it may fabricate, never creates; and as such it never exceeds reality; yet it does exceed the reality of cognitively-independent existing being; or rather, to speak more accurately—since the human intellect never encompasses the whole extension of cognitively-independent existing being, nor penetrates to the fullest depth of **any** individually existing cognition-independent being—we must say that the human intellect properly and proportionately extends to the reality also of cognition-dependent being.¹³¹ Indeed, such being is necessary to bridge the lacunae in our typically-deficient understanding of the subjective constitutions of most beings. How

131 Deely 1992: "Philosophy and Experience", 306: "the universe of things always exceeds the universe of objects, not in principle, but by the matter-of-fact limitation of the finite knower; whereas the universe of objects exceeds the universe of things in principle, because many things can exist objectively but not at all, or not in the same way, physically as a mind-independent being." Cf. Gadamer 1960b: *Wahrheit und Methode*, 385: "The word of human thought is directed towards the object, but it cannot contain it as a whole within itself. Thus thought moves towards constantly new conceptions and is fundamentally incapable of being wholly realized in any. The positive side of this negative quality is the true infinity of the mind, which constantly passes beyond itself in a new mental process and in this finds also the freedom for constantly new developments."

impoverished would human knowledge be without cognition-dependent conceptions! This poverty would be not only because of the absence of fictional and institutional objects,¹³² but even more so because our grasp of cognition-independent beings would be robbed of the contextual environment, and especially human-dependent context, in which such beings are actually encountered. The penetration of the human intellect into the subjective constitution of independent being is seldom more than superficial, and attains any profound depth only with prolonged and recursive study. For instance, a man may own dogs for his entire life, care for them from the time he is capable, and yet know next to nothing concerning the subjective constitution of their cognition-independent being, at least in terms of their corporeal constitution, aside from what is manifest immediately to the senses. Nevertheless, having lived with and trained them for decades, he would likely know that there is a certain mean between anger and nonchalance to adopt when they misbehave; that they can be good companions in times of loneliness; and that some dogs are poor at estimating their own physical prowess when it comes to conflict with other animals. In short, he will likely know much more about dogs from apprehending the intersubjective relations which obtain between them and other beings than from ascertaining the “innersubjective” constitution which belongs to each alone. Biologically, he may know next to nothing of the difference between a dog and a wolf. In terms of the relationships of dogs and wolves to other things, especially to humans, he will likely know considerably more, principally under the umbrella of the relationship of domestication. The character traits of loyalty and obedience, universally possible in domesticated dogs and typically associated with them, are principally relational—inasmuch as the presence of a human being to whom the dogs are related is necessary for their emergence—and only secondarily biological, as the subjective basis upon-which these characteristics can be founded.

There is a way, however, in which these non-essential traits become habitually attached, by convention, by society, by circumstance, and perhaps even by evolution so as to become intrinsic to what is at least signified by the concept, and in the case of evolution, even to the subjective constitution itself, such that the relations have a proper place in the conceptual totality whereby we know dogs. This is not to say that they are necessarily integral parts of the nature, but they are integral parts of the nature-in-context.

Likewise and moreover, we know much more of human beings from those patterns of relations which are not only intersubjective but based upon the reality of *species expressae* which are towards purely or largely objective realities:

132 See c.5.2.

the institutions of society or the Church, such as marriage or the priesthood,¹³³ the political constitutions of governments, the philosophical traditions of Western civilization, Universities, and so on, are all largely dependent upon the ability of human beings to know realities which are constituted, at least in part, from a cognitive fundament relating to a terminus which is not a *res absoluta*, at least, not purely.

4.3.3 *What is Inessential to Things is Essential to Our Concepts*

Our knowledge of what belongs properly to an independently existing thing, i.e., its essence or its what it is for it to be in order for it to be that kind of being at all, is not only mediated but is also enriched by our knowledge of its “non-essential” and suprasubjective existence. Indeed, in a text I have seldom seen cited, from his commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De divinis nominibus*, Thomas has this interesting bit to say concerning the manner of our coming to know:¹³⁴

For the truth of what exists radically consists in the apprehension of the quiddity of things, which quiddity rational souls are not able to immediately apprehend in itself. Rather, the rational souls diffuse themselves through the properties and effects which surround the essence of the thing, and from this they proceed to the proper truth. They make this process circular when, from properties and effects, they discover causes, and from these causes they make judgments concerning the effects.

By this discursive, circular diffusion into and through its properties and effects which are **not** the essence properly speaking, but related to it and surrounding it, we come to realize the kind of being proper to this or that cognition-independent thing.¹³⁵ And yet realizing this “proper truth”, we turn back to

133 The public institutions of which are largely objective considered in themselves, but instantiations of which are based upon accidents coming to inhere in each individual person.

134 c.1268b: *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, c.7, lec.2: “Veritas enim existentium radicaliter consistit in apprehensione quidditatis rerum, quam quidditatem rationales animae non statim apprehendere possunt per seipsam, sed diffundunt se per proprietates et effectus qui circumstant rei essentiam, ut ex his ad propriam veritatem ingrediantur. Haec autem circulo quodam efficiunt, dum ex proprietatibus et effectibus causas inveniunt et ex causis de effectibus iudicant.”

135 Reminiscent of the all-too-brief text of Thomas cited in n134 (*De Divinis Nominibus*, c.7, lec.2) is the notion of an “identity in a manifold” which Sokolowski presents, 2000: *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 27–33. Contrast this point with that of Peifer 1952: *The Mystery*

those properties and effects through which we encountered the deeper truth and make judgments of them, ascertaining them more clearly; and so on we proceed, moving deeper into the “hidden” truth of the thing.¹³⁶ The relatives through which this discursive uncovering proceeds are not, however, merely the relations *secundum dici* of accident to substance which subsist within the independently existing being, but also those relations *secundum esse* which subsist between that being and others, both cognition-independent and cognition-dependent.¹³⁷

The central role of relation in our coming to know nearly anything, not merely as the means through or by which the human soul in some way becomes all things, but as a constitutive part of those objects known themselves, should now be obvious. That is, relation is itself, *relativum secundum esse*, an important and inexorable aspect of most things grasped by the human understanding. The *species expressae* we form are not typically limited to what is contained in their substantially-constituted being, but extends to include the relations in which they are engaged, whether those relations follow as a kind of property (i.e., as according to the natural ordering which a substance has) or attach to it by circumstance. Most especially, therefore, are relations constitutive for our manner of understanding objects in the pre-philosophical cognition, wherein fewer distinctions concerning the nature of our objects are made; but no less important is the constitutive role of relation in the objects of scientific knowledge, both cenoscopic and ideoscopic, especially those which

of Knowledge, 114: “The proper object of the human intellect in its present state is the whatness, the essence of material things. Its preoccupation with essences is comparable to vision’s exclusive concern for color. In its quest for the essentials, the basic determinants of things, the intellect is unconcerned with accidentals, and can ignore them.”

136 Cf. 1271a: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.8, a.1, c.: “nomen intellectus quandam intimam cognitionem importat, dicitur enim intelligere quasi intus legere. Et hoc manifeste patet considerantibus differentiam intellectus et sensus, nam cognitio sensitiva occupatur circa qualitates sensibiles exteriores; cognitio autem intellectiva penetrat usque ad essentiam rei, obiectum enim intellectus est quod quid est, ut dicitur in III de anima. Sunt autem multa genera eorum quae interius latent, ad quae oportet cognitionem hominis quasi intrinsecus penetrare. Nam sub accidentibus latet natura rerum substantialis, sub verbis latent significata verborum, sub similitudinibus et figuris latet veritas figurata: res etiam intelligibiles sunt quodammodo interiores respectu rerum sensibilibus quae exterius sentiuntur, et in causis latent effectus et e converso. Unde respectu horum omnium potest dici intellectus.”

137 There is an extra layer of complexity which I would be remiss not to mention, although its full expression is too long for here; namely, that there are added objective elements based upon the percepts of the interior sense powers which also enter into the discursive diffusion of our investigations into what things are. Cf. Deely 2007: *IS* 66–75.

deal with the species-specifically human-contributed aspects of experience, such as government.

This importance of relation is not simply for the sake of human intellectual knowledge, however, but is indeed an integral though non-essential part of the subjective constitution of any given finite being.¹³⁸ In other words, mere insight into the essence of something, rare as it is, does not suffice for a complete understanding of a finite being. The full progression of understanding—the intellectual discovery of its being, the compositive actions of concept formation, and the resolutions whereby we cohesively integrate the objects of our experience—must extend into relation.

138 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.45, a.7, c. (emphasis mine): “Sed in creaturis omnibus invenitur repraesentatio Trinitatis per modum vestigii, inquantum in qualibet creatura inveniuntur aliqua quae necesse est reducere in divinas personas sicut in causam. **Quaelibet enim creatura subsistit in suo esse, et habet formam per quam determinatur ad speciem, et habet ordinem ad aliquid aliud.** Secundum igitur quod est quaedam substantia creata, repraesentat causam et principium, et sic demonstrat personam patris, qui est principium non de principio. Secundum autem quod habet quandam formam et speciem, repraesentat verbum; secundum quod forma artificiatum est ex conceptione artificis. Secundum autem quod habet ordinem, repraesentat spiritum sanctum, inquantum est amor, quia ordo effectus ad aliquid alterum est ex voluntate creantis. Et ideo dicit Augustinus, in VI Lib. de Trin., quod vestigium Trinitatis invenitur in unaquaque creatura, secundum quod unum aliquid est, et secundum quod aliqua specie formatur, **et secundum quod quendam ordinem tenet.** Et ad haec etiam reducuntur illa tria, numerus, pondus et mensura, quae ponuntur Sap. XI, nam mensura refertur ad substantiam rei limitatam suis principiis, numerus ad speciem, pondus ad ordinem. Et ad haec etiam reducuntur alia tria quae ponit Augustinus, modus, species et ordo. Et ea quae ponit in libro octoginta trium quaest. quod constat, quod discernitur, quod congruit, constat enim aliquid per suam substantiam, discernitur per formam, **congruit per ordinem.**”

Relation and *Ens Primum Cognitum*¹

Reducing the phenomenon of *ens primum cognitum* to principles within the substantial order of cognition-independent existence has been a perennial seduction to philosophers in all traditions: either to some combination of substantial essence and *actus essendi* (or essence alone) or to the cognitive faculties themselves. Stumbles into this temptation, often unconscious, occur even in Thomism, as evidenced by some of the theories of cognition mentioned above.² A perspective which considers *ens* as over and above any of the variously limited ways in which it is encountered in human experience alone safeguards philosophical inquiry from the bewitchment of this particular oversimplification. Because *ens primum cognitum* itself is, however, something indivisible, primary, and simple, it remains indefinable and we must therefore find in the limited objects of experience some alternative route to its description and by means of which we can discern and intelligibly disclose its true nature.

Thus this chapter will see us examine the nature of relative being—incorporating the work of John Poinsoot's *Cursus philosophicus* as an explanation and elaboration of Thomas Aquinas' most important texts on the nature of relation, specifically from q.17 of Poinsoot's *Secundae Partis Artis Logicae*³—as both what permeates finite subjectivity (what is expressed as *relativa secundum dici*) and as what in itself opens to a potential infinity the species-specifically-human relatedness to being (*relativa secundum esse*). Whereas the relativity within the order of finite subjectivity grounds and gives rise to the various cognition-independent relations⁴ through understanding of which

1 A note on terminology: throughout this chapter (as we have throughout the entire dissertation), we use “terms” broadly to signify both the *fundamenta* and *termini* of relations, in the sense of *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*, respectively. “Terminus” is used most properly to designate something which is specifically that-at-which a relation terminates.

2 See c.1–2. It is also this failure of which Heidegger accuses Husserl in his attempt to frame all philosophical inquiry as scientific in terms of the eidetic reduction; the distinction being that, rather than in the subjectivity of the cognition-independent which exist in some way outside the constitution of the human being, Husserl attempts to ground the transcendental of knowledge, as reaching out to the things beyond the self, in the nature of human consciousness. Heidegger 1925: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*, 102–123.

3 Including the “Second Preamble” to the edition of the 1632b: *Tractatus de Signis* prepared by John Deely, 80–115.

4 The pervasiveness of relativity in substances has been highlight by Norris Clarke in his 1992: “To Be Is to Be Substance-in-Relation” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person*

the human cognitive agent attains its peculiar distinction within the corporeal realm, relations as they are in themselves—i.e., in their proper nature or *ratio*—are irreducible to this order of subjectivity. This irreducibility establishes the full breadth of the human intellect's openness to the intelligibility of *ens*, under the aspect of *verum*, as the formal object of the intellect, ordered not only to the constituents of subjectivity, but also to the *entia rationis* which exhaustively consist of **negations** (including privations) and **relations**,⁵ each of which is a cognition-dependent concept formed on the basis of some object or objects of experience but nevertheless irreducible to those objects. Thus, we will conclude our chapter by showing how relations, both those said to be “of reason” and “real”, i.e., cognition-dependent and cognition-independent or in the order of substantial constitution, enter into the discursion of the intellect in its process of forming the *verbum mentis*.

The examination presented in this chapter will show how relation is equiprimal with substance in the constitution of the realities of finite beings, and opens the door for considering how relation is key to the socially- or culturally-constituted realities which have become the prevalent means and channels of experience in the lives of human beings today. What this ultimately reveals, for

(Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 104: “Hence, what is needed, it seems to me, is first to retrieve the classical notion of substance as *active* and *self-communicative*. This would be a corrective of the principle distortions of substance that have become endemic to modern thinking about it. Secondly, it is necessary to retrieve the full value of the *relational* dimension of being, as intrinsically complementary to substance and of equal importance with it. This dimension, left too much in the shadow in classical thought, has been one of the most brilliant and fruitful contributions of modern thought, but by losing its roots in substance, in the ‘in-itself’ of being, has become overdeveloped in a one-sided way and upset the dyadic balance of being. To sum up the point of this communication in a word, to be real is to be a *dyadic synthesis* of substance and relation; it is to be *substance-in-relation*. This is true both of God and of all other beings, in analogously different ways. It belongs to the very nature of being itself, both in its supreme instance and in all the finite images thereof”. We wholeheartedly agree with Clarke on this point; however, our intent in this chapter is to take the consideration of relation to a deeper level in order to show how this helps open the door to dealing with socially-constituted realities as within the scope of *ens primum cognitum*.

- 5 i.1256–59 : *DV* q.21, a.1, c. (emphases mine): “Id autem quod est rationis tantum, non potest esse nisi duplex, scilicet **negatio** et aliqua **relatio**. Omnis enim positio absoluta aliquid in rerum natura existens significat. Sic ergo *supra* ens, quod est prima conceptio intellectus, unum addit id quod est rationis tantum, scilicet negationem: dicitur enim unum quasi ens indivisum. Sed verum et bonum positive dicuntur; unde non possunt addere nisi relationem quae sit rationis tantum. Illa autem relatio, secundum philosophum in v *Metaph.*, invenitur esse rationis tantum, secundum quam dicitur referri id quod non dependet ad id ad quod refertur, sed e converso, cum ipsa relatio quaedam dependentia sit, sicut patet in scientia et scibili, sensu et sensibili”.

our overall purpose, is the fundamentality of *ens primum cognitum* as a wholly undifferentiated grasping of being to all kinds of knowing.

5.1 What is Relation?⁶

John Poinset, building upon the discussion given in Aristotle's *Categories* c.7

6 Nearly every Thomistic author has had something or another to say concerning relation. Cajetan, for instance, has a pertinent discussion in his *Commentaria in Summa Theologiae Prima Pars*, q.13, a.7 and Poinset dedicates q.17 of his *Ars Logicae Prima Pars* to relation, providing much of use towards what I am saying in this chapter. Within the manualist tradition, Gredt, Mercier, Van Steenberghe, De Raeymaeker, Coffey, and Klubertanz are all at minor variance with one another (see nn.16–17 below). Clifford Kossel penned two articles in the late 1940s (“Principles of St. Thomas’s Distinction Between the *Esse* and *Ratio* of Relation (Part I)”, *The Modern Schoolman* 24.1 (1946), 19–36; “Principles of St. Thomas’s Distinction between the *Esse* and *Ratio* of Relation (Part II)”, *The Modern Schoolman*, 24.2 (1947), 93–107), where he attempted to solve the difficulty of how relation is an accident and yet does not subsist “in” a substance, and later contributed to a session at the 1965 meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (“Order and Relations”, *Proceedings of the ACPA* [1965], 140–145), in which he strove to clarify relation’s importance for the notion of order which permeates Thomas’ discussion of the good of the universe. Recognizing (Part I, 24) that relation’s placement among the Aristotelian categories seems, *prima facie*, at odds with relation (particularly as something which is not “in”, but which is “towards”, as well as its being said of the Divine Persons), Kossel nevertheless misses the mark, and attempts to explain away the apparent discrepancy between relation-as-*ad* and yet as-an-accident by attributing the former characteristic, its being-towards, to the *ratio* of relation, but ultimately claims that “the *esse* of relation lies primarily in that openness and tendency of beings to other beings” (Part II, 99). As he goes on, “St. Thomas also makes clear that when it is said that things are relative whose *esse* is *ad aliud*, and in the term relation *secundum esse* signifies neither the act of existing nor the verbal copula. It is, in fact, a third sense in which he uses the term, and it signifies here what it was opposed to in the other meanings. Here it indicates the *ratio*, quiddity, or nature... Hence it is the *ratio*, not the existence of relation which is *ad aliud*” (101). Further, “relation by its *ratio* does not signify something but *to* something...and it does not signify being either *in se* or *in alio* but simply *ad aliud*. Certainly its *ratio* does not exclude the signification of a reality—then there would be no real relations. Real and nonreal are simply notes which are outside its *ratio* and must be determined by another means” (102). And finally, “relation in that which makes it real, its *esse* (here its act of existing, not its nature), is not a medium. In creatures it is an accident which therefore has *esse* in its subject making a distinct relation in each term to the other.... Yet that reality of relation in each term is somehow open or tending to the other term and this founds the *ratio*, *ad aliud*, of relation” (107). The argument is here painted into a corner: if the reality of relation is the “openness” or “tendency” in the terms, the reality of the relation is different than its *ratio*; it is an existence *in alio*, and the reality or actuality of the towardness is not explained (since

(*in passim*) and *Metaphysics* book v, c.15,⁷ as well as the use made of relation by Thomas Aquinas and the elaboration of Thomas' use in Cajetan's commentary on the Angelic Doctor's *Summa theologiae*, defines relation as "that whose whole being is towards another."⁸ In contradistinction to many others, however, Poinsoot sees that this definition of relation is not confined to consideration within the confines of categorical or predicamental relation, which kind of relation he defines more specifically as, "a cognition-independent form [*forma realis*], the whole being of which is toward another."⁹ The categorical is the primary kind or instance of relation, for it can obtain without any act of a finite cognitive being, and therefore has an existence constituted within the cognition-independent subjective order, though it is itself not subjective, but rather **intersubjective**. The existence of the predicamental relation is, therefore, still more tenuous than that of the subjects between which it obtains, inasmuch as the relation could cease to exist without a destruction of either subject (although there is necessarily some change in the substances' accidents simultaneous with the destruction of the relation); though it is less tenuous than a cognition-dependent relation. Poinsoot directs most of his attention in the *Cursus Philosophicus*¹⁰ to cognition-independent or predicamental relations, evidently aiming at overcoming the nominalist reduction of all relations to the status of cognition-dependence.

Despite Poinsoot's focus upon relations as they obtain between *res absolutae*, both the insight into the nature of such relations as well as the contrasts

there is no intrinsic difference in the existence of a term given the destruction of its correlate). The mere character of being open to a relation with something else does not explain the existence of the relation.

- 7 Especially c.348/7b: *Μετὰ τὰ Φυσικά*, vi.2, 1020b26–31 (Ross trans.): "Relative terms which imply number or potency, therefore, are all relative because their very essence includes in its nature a reference to something else, not because something else involves a reference to it; but that which is measurable or knowable or thinkable is called relative because something else involves a reference to it". (Sachs trans.): "So the things that are said to be relative by number or potency are relative because the very things that they are refer to something else, but not because something else is related to them, but what is measured or known or thought about is said to be relative because something else refers to it".
- 8 Cf. 1632b: *TDS* 81/19–21 (R.I 574a25–28): "Aristoteles vero definiens relata dicit, « quod sunt illa, quorum totum suum esse se habet ad aliud »".
- 9 1632b: *TDS* 91/34–7 (R.I 579a42–44): "definitur relatio praedicamentalis, quod sit forma realis, cuius totum esse est ad aliud".
- 10 See in particular 1632b: *TDS*, Second Preamble, 80–115, and 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.17, a.4, (R.I 573–608).

whereby he delineates it against the nature of cognition-dependent relation provide ample material for insight into the underlying nature of relation as a whole. Since John Deely has written extensively on relation,¹¹ developing the insights of Poincaré—particularly the equiprimordiality of relation with substance—we will limit ourselves to a summary of its key attributes, before proceeding to consider the division of relation into *secundum dici* and *secundum esse*, and how this division pertains to the cognitive procession following the grasp of *ens ut primum cognitum*.

We have distilled our summary into the four following points:

- I. The fundamental nature of relation is that it consists in the being-towards (*esse ad*) another, a mode of existence (*esse*) irreducible to the subjectivities from which it is provenated.
- II. Consequently, every relation is essentially **suprasubjective**, inasmuch as it extends to some object (a *terminus*), inherently public, beyond the subject upon which it is founded (the *fundamentum*), even if that object is not itself a subjectively constituted being.
- III. The suprasubjectivity intrinsic to the proper rationale of relation is open to specific determinations and can therefore terminate either at another subject, and is thereby constituted an intersubjective and cognition-independent relation, or at something which is purely objective, and is thus a still suprasubjective but cognition-dependent relation; or, as we will show more clearly below, the suprasubjective relation can terminate at another subject which is nevertheless considered, in its role as *terminus*, together with some element of an objective and cognition-dependent nature.¹²
- IV. All relations and patterns of relations which serve as terminal objects of cognitive acts require some cognition-independent being ultimately serving as the model for their constitutions, but are irreducible to the being of those models.

11 While a consideration of relation runs throughout many (one is tempted to say “nearly all”) of Deely’s works, see, in particular, 2010b: *Semiotic Animal*, 53–80; 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 17–53 and 69–83; 2007: *IS* 115–36, 143–146, 156–163, and 171–184. For a more succinct discussion, see 2014: “Subjectivity, Suprasubjectivity, and Semiosis” in *Chinese Semiotic Studies*, no.10, vol.4, 593–604 *in passim* but especially 594–596. The following summary is largely drawn from these texts.

12 We have already seen this, albeit in a narrower context, in 1.3.1.2, in discussing the nature of second intentions and what we there included under extrinsic denominations.

The first two points have been well-established in Deely's work, though their statement is a necessity for the consideration of the second two points with which we are principally concerned in this chapter.

Together, these four points open the way for a consideration of the disjunctively exhaustive modes in which relation can be considered: that is, *relativa secundum dici* or "transcendental relation" and *relativa secundum esse* or "ontological relation", terms introduced in the 5th century AD by Boethius which have been notoriously difficult to express, to understand, and most especially to translate into English.¹³ One common mistake, which results in a great error, is to consider these as two different modes of relation itself. Rather, each signifies a way of denominating being as relative: the denomination of *relativa secundum esse* occurs whenever we have a *verbum mentis* which signifies—at least principally—the being proper to a relation itself, i.e., the "quiddity" of a relation, whereas the *relativa secundum dici* signifies something principally as having its own nature and secondarily as being related to another.

Another mistake¹⁴ which it behooves us to point out now, is the conflation of the *relativa secundum esse* with predicamental or "real" relation. This muddling misportrays *relationes rationis* as somehow excluded from reality, which portrayal—although true if such relations are considered prescissively in themselves, as they do not in any way enter into the constitution of *res absolutae*—egregiously misleads: for a *relatio rationis* can have a very real impact.

5.1.1 Relativa Secundum Esse

In order to discuss the *relativa secundum esse*, we have to be precise concerning the term's employment. Thus, distinction must be made between the terms of the relation, i.e., the fundament and the terminus, and the relation itself. The terms of the relation are not the relation itself, though they are involved in the relation as it actually exists; and, both terms are, in a way, changed by it, though not necessarily in their own individual constitutions. Both terms are also contributory to the constitution of the relation itself. The fundamentals of relations between finite beings can be either proximate, i.e., the accidents from which the relation provenates, or they can be remote, i.e., the substances in which

13 Consider, for instance Owens 1963: *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 188–189, especially 189n31 and Deely 2010a: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, 96–104.

14 Kossel 1946: "Principles of St. Thomas's Distinction Between the *Esse* and *Ratio* of Relation (Part 1)" in *The Modern Schoolman* 24.1; 1947: "Principles of St. Thomas's Distinction between the *Esse* and *Ratio* of Relation (Part 1)", *The Modern Schoolman*, 24.2; 1965: "Order and Relations", *Proceedings of the ACPA*; Mercier c.1910: *A Manual of Modern Scholasticism*, vol.1, 501; Coffey 1914: *Ontology*, 346.

those accidents inhere. But neither the proximate nor the remote fundamentals as what they are in themselves constitute the relation itself—for they can exist precisely as they are in themselves without the relation existing. The door to one building, a substance (in an extended sense; at the very least, composed from substances), is heavier than the door to another, and “being heavier than” is a relation between the two, based upon the accident of weight, which relation ceases to exist if either one of the doors ceases to exist; yet the cessation of one’s existence changes nothing about the weight of the other, nor does it destroy any substantiality present therein, despite ceasing to be a fundament. In other words, the relation to one another depends upon circumstances extrinsic to either relate.

If the relation itself were something identical with or internal to the subjectivities on which it is founded, in either existence or its proper essence, it would entirely cease to exist along with them. Relation is, however, both in its own proper existence and precisely as an object of cognition, indifferent to whether or not it is a *relatio realis* or a *relatio rationis*.¹⁵ Any observer-free relation between non-cognitive beings can only be a *relatio realis*; in a universe without cognitive agents, there would only be relations between things interacting with one another in a physical manner. However, the story changes when cognitive observation enters: the intelligible content grasped in a relation—i.e., the intelligibility it possesses and in which, through which, on the basis of which it is known as it is in itself—can be present to consciousness regardless of whether it is cognition-independent or cognition-dependent. In other words, while the **determination** of the relation is dependent upon the terms—as to the quiddity of the relation (“what” the relation is, e.g., paternity or maternity, gravitational pull or the presidency), as to the actual denomination of the

15 Cf. Deely 2007: *IS*, 133–134: “Consider the case of a parent whose child has died. Is that person still a parent? Obviously in one sense not. And yet the relation to the child which under previous circumstances was real continues under present circumstances as mind-dependent. Many interesting examples of this point can be given—the child mistaken about who the father is; the ‘father’ mistaken about whose the child is—but the point is that while some relations exist physically in nature, yet are wholly unknown, and other relations exist wholly in thought and could not exist outside though (like logical or grammatical relations), in between these extremes of relations purely physical and relations purely objective are many relations which are both physical and objective under one set of circumstances that become purely objective or purely physical under another set of circumstances. The point is that there is nothing in the positive structure or essence of relation which determines whether any given relation as suprasubjective belongs to the physical order or the objective order, but only surrounding circumstances external to the relation in its proper being determine this”.

relativa secundum dici as being relatives, and as to the actual existence of the relation—the **constitution** of the relation is not.

To fully explain the nature of relation according to its own proper being, *relativa secundum esse*, therefore, we need to elaborate our technical use of the terms **constitution**, **determination**, and what we will call **existential modulation**. The meaning of these terms will become clear in this Section (5.1.1), as we provide a brief historical overview of the scholastic treatment of relation's nature, including its distinction from its fundament (5.1.1.1), the taxonomic division of distinction (5.1.1.2) and meaning of the term "mode" (5.1.1.3), and what it means to say that predicamental relation is modally distinct (5.1.1.4). In the following Section (5.1.2), we will examine *relativa secundum dici*, specifically as an element of the determination of a relation, and subsequently, we will (5.1.3) give a summary of what is meant by the constitution of a cognition-dependent relation.

5.1.1.1 A Brief Historical Synopsis of Medieval Theories on Relation's Nature

Some authors have held that there is no such thing as a relative being, in the sense that relation does not exist independently of or distinguishably from the subjectivities through which relations are constituted, but only by an act of the mind.¹⁶ In other words, it has been held that relation is not itself a mode

16 See, for instance, Coffey 1914: *Ontology*, 352: "The great majority of scholastics, however, espouse the second alternative: that the relation, considered *formally*, 'secundum esse ad', is a product of our mental comparison of subject with term. It is not itself a real entity or a real mode, superadded to the reality of extremes and foundation".

"In the first place there is no need to suppose the reality of such a relative entity. *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*. It is an abuse of realism to suppose that the *formal* element of a relation, its '*esse ad*' is a distinct and separate reality. The reality of the praedicamental [sic] relation is safeguarded without any such postulate. Since the predicamental relation, considered *adequately*, *i.e.* not merely formally but fundamentally, not merely *secundum esse ad* but *secundum esse in*, involves as its foundation an absolute accident which is real independently of our thought, the predicamental relation is not a *mere ens rationis*. It has a foundation in reality. It is an *ens rationis cum fundamento in re*. This is a sufficient counter-assertion to Idealism, and a sufficient reason for treating relation as a distinct category of real being".

Coffey's arguments are based upon a narrow definition of "reality", one which thoroughly ignores Thomas' arguments concerning the reality of relations in the Divine Trinity (*ST* 1a, q.28). While Coffey acknowledges one of the primary texts for the reality of the *relativa secundum esse* in *De potentia* q.7, a.9 ("Relatio est debilioris esse inter..."), he nevertheless dismisses the claim of Thomists such as John Poinsot without addressing any of them directly, and instead, seems to rely upon a more modern understanding of "reality"

of being, but rather **only** a mode in which being can be understood; that the relation is not in any way something really distinct from the subject of which it is a relation, but only “logically” so, i.e., by a consideration of the intellect. Numerous other Thomists have insisted that a predicamental relation is somehow really distinct from that which it relates, though often this is only implied inasmuch as they insist upon the reality of relation.¹⁷ Both of these groups of Thomists, however, appear either to be ignorant of or seem to have chosen to ignore the more sophisticated theories of **distinction** which occurred in the later periods of Scholasticism,¹⁸ in which accounts *distinctiones realis* and

as the concrete substantial or substantially-grounded beings of experience which can be intellectually grasped as having natures.

See also Van Steenberghe 1946: *Ontology*, 252–253: “The scholastics asked whether there were *real* predicamental relations, that is, relations which would constitute *real accidents*, distinct from the two related subjects. Such entities however are superfluous. The relation as such is an abstraction, the work of the intelligence. It is real when it rests upon real foundations. Thus the relation of filiation between a son and his father is real, because this son was actually begotten by this father. It is based upon a real biological activity, of which the father is the principle and the son is the result”. Cf. De Raeymaeker 1947: *The Philosophy of Being*, 202: “The question arises for us to discover whether this relativity finds its reason in an ontological accidental principle, i.e., the real predicamental relation which would be really distinct from the principles of quality and quantity, its immediate foundations, and a fortiori from the principle of substantiality”.

“We must give a negative answer to this question. Every particular being *is*, and it is *this*; we must admit the fundamental structure of the real principle of being and of that of the substantiality...”.

- 17 For example, see: R.P. Phillips 1935: *Modern Thomistic Philosophy*, vol.2, 228–231; Owens 1963: *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 186–188; Owens 1965: “The Real Distinction of a Relation from Its Immediate Basis” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 134–140; Kossel 1948, “St. Thomas’s Theory of the Causes of Relation” in *The Modern Schoolman*, vol.25, no.3, 151–172; Klubertanz 1952a: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 240 (Sweeney [see below in this note for citation] places him in the opposite camp, 201n28; 202n32); Mercier c.1910: *A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy*, vol.1, 500–505; Koren 1955: *An Introduction to the Science of Metaphysics*, 216–226; Charles Hart 1959: *Thomistic Metaphysics*, 232–239; Maurice R. Holloway 1959: *Introduction to Natural Theology*, 350–352 and 360–361. Leo Sweeney 1965: *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism*, 193–211, has an extended discussion of both the denial of the reality of predicamental relations and its affirmation, siding himself with the latter (though, notably, he mistakes the position of John Poinot, following the erroneous analysis of Krempel [201n30], evidently due to an mistaken or insufficient understanding of the nature of the modal distinction).
- 18 Even the typically perspicacious Josephus Gredt, well-versed in Poinot’s work, reduces the discussion of the nature of relation’s distinction from its fundament to a simple

distinctiones rationis are not only distinguished from one another generally, but further degrees are distinguished within each general category.¹⁹

In short, the difficulty of the reality of predicamental relation begins with two statements of Aristotle: first, in his description of relation given in *Categories* c.7,²⁰ and second, his assertion in *Physics* V, c.2, that there is no motion in

distinction of logical and real, and also fails to distinguish between the remote and the proximate *fundamenta* of a relation; see 1899: *Elementa Philosophiae*, vol.2, 140–145.

- 19 Juan Jose Urraburu, a 19th century Suarezian, gives a list of prominent Thomists prior to his own time, divided according to whether or not they held predicamental relations to be really distinct from their subjects and fundaments; 1891: *Ontologia*, 994–995: “Difficultates istas alii aliter enodant pro varietate sententiarum circa praedicamentalis relationis quidditatem. Primo enim celebris est opinio pleorumque Thomistarum et Scotistarum, qui relationem reponunt in entitate realiter distincta a subjecto, termino et fundamento ac ratione fundandi, cujus aliud non sit munus, quam respicere terminum. Non tamen conveniunt hi acutores in definienda natura illius entitatis, in qua volunt relationem consistere; quidam enim cum Banez et Araujo et Joanne a S. Thoma, tenent relationem esse modum, ideoque modaliter distingui a fundamento; alii putant cum Capreolo, Dominico a Flandria, Cajetano, Dez, Ferrariensi, Ripa et Complutensibus, relationem esse entitatem quamdam non pure modalem, sed realem, quae suam habeat essentiam et existentiam ab essentia et existentia fundamenti re distinctas; Massius vero et Aquarius, licet concedant relationem et fundamentum habere diversas essentias realiter distinctas, non tamen existentias. Denique Dominicus Sotus, quamvis nec realem nec modalem distinctionem admittat inter relationem ac fundamentum ejusdem proximum, admittit tamen formalem ex natura rei. At vero plures alii, nec sane ignobiles Thomistae, ut Aegridius, Hervaeus, Sylvester Prieras, Paulus Soncinas, Chrysostomus Javellus et Zumel, quibus adstipulantur, paucis exceptis, nostri auctores cum Suarez, Conimbricensibus, Hurtado, Rhodes, Semery, Antonio Mayr, et Lossada, negant relationem consistere in hujusmodi entitate a fundamento distincta. Et conveniunt e recentioribus cl. P. Sanctus Schiffini, cl. Van der Aa, cl. De San, cl. Lepidi, et cl. P. Lahousse; ut omittam nunc e veteribus Ockamum, Gregorium Ariminensem, Marsilium Joannem Major, aliosque Nominales”.
- 20 c.360BC: Κατηγορίαι 8a32–34: “The former definition does indeed apply to all relatives, but the fact that a thing is explained with reference to something else does not make it essentially relative”. And 8b15–21: “Now the head, the hand, and such things are substances, and it is possible to know their essential character definitely, but it does not necessarily follow that we should know that to which they are related. It is not possible to know forthwith whose head or hand is meant. Thus these are not relatives, and, this being the case, it would be true to say that no substance is relative in character”. An explanation of this definition is long and complex, and has already been demonstrated at greater length by John Deely (see 1985: “Editorial Afterword” to the 1632a *TDS* of Poinsot, 472–479 and 2010a: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined* 97, especially 162–3, and 99–100). In brief, while Aristotle does not lay out a positive definition for relation, he notes that the fact that things, substances included, are explained by their relation to others does not make them essentially relative, and therefore we can conclude—as Boethius later would—that what

relation, for one related thing can change without causing any effect on the other related thing.²¹ A coherent interpretation of these two passages poses a difficulty: for if one presumes an identification of “reality” with the “things”, *res*, which are related, it would seem that, if a change in the relation involves no change in one of the terms of the relation, then the relation is not something “real” apart from the substantially-inherent accidents upon which the relation is founded. In other words, the *esse ad* in which relation solely consists seems to be no different than the *esse in* of the accidents of quantity, quality, action, or passion upon which the categorical relation is founded; the relation is not something, evidently, independent of them or possessing any reality of its own. According to such an interpretation, the *esse ad* is distinguished only by the mind. This interpretation is the distinguishing mark of nominalism: for if one denies the existence of relations apart from the activity of a finite cognitive agent, then realism—as having true knowledge of what is, as it is, independently of its constitution according to cognition—is impossible.²²

Despite never directly raising the question himself, Thomas Aquinas clearly held a different interpretation. For the Angelic Doctor, the existence of cognition-independent relations is unquestioned: the being of relation itself—*relativa secundum esse*—consists entirely in *esse ad*, whether that existence is constituted through cognitive acts or among *res absolutae*:²³

is essentially relative (*relativa secundum esse*) is other than, outside of, and in some measure independent of the relativity necessary to explain absolute things (*relativa secundum dici*).

21 c.348/7ABC: Φυσικὴ ἀκρόασις, V.2, 225b11–14: “Nor indeed is there a motion of relation, since when one of the relative things changes, it is possible for the other, not changing at all, to be true or become untrue, so that the motion of them is incidental”.

22 Cf. Deely 2010a: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined*, 130–134 and 324–326.

23 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.28, a.1, c.: “considerandum est quod solum in his quae dicuntur ad aliquid, inveniuntur aliqua secundum rationem tantum, et non secundum rem. Quod non est in aliis generibus, quia alia genera, ut quantitas et qualitas, secundum propriam rationem significant aliquid alicui inhaerens. Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud. Qui quidem respectus aliquando est in ipsa natura rerum; utpote quando aliquae res secundum suam naturam ad invicem ordinatae sunt, et invicem inclinationem habent. Et huiusmodi relationes oportet esse reales. Sicut in corpore gravi est inclinatio et ordo ad locum medium, unde respectus quidam est in ipso gravi respectu loci medii. Et similiter est de aliis huiusmodi. Aliquando vero respectus significatus per ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid, est tantum in ipsa apprehensione rationis conferentis unum alteri, et tunc est relatio rationis tantum; sicut cum comparat ratio hominem animali, ut speciem ad genus”.

It must be considered that only in relations [*his quae dicuntur ad aliquid*] is there to be found something according to cognition alone, and not according to the being of things. This is not to be found in the other genera, because the other genera, such as quantity and quality, according to their proper rationales, signify something inhering. Those things which are called “relations” [*ad aliquid*], according to their proper rationales, signify only according to the respect of being towards another [*respectum ad aliud*]. Such a respect sometimes exists in the nature of things; as, for instance, in those things which are ordered to one another according to their nature, and have a mutual inclination to one another. And these kinds of relations are necessarily real [*reales*], as in a heavy body there is an inclination and order to the central place, and thus there is a respect in heavy bodies as to the central place, and similarly of other such things. But when the respect signified through those things which are said as relations is only in the cognitive apprehension [*apprehensione rationis*] as comparing one thing to another, and in such a case the relation is entirely dependent on cognition [*est relatio rationis tantum*], as when reason compares “human” to “animal”, as species to genus.

The first thing to note is that the proper rationale [*proprium rationem*] of relation signifies only the *esse ad*, or “the respect of being towards another” [*respectum ad aliud*]. This does not mean that relation is its own *esse*, or that what is *relativa secundum esse* somehow has or signifies an *esse*, as *in actu exercito*, independent of substantial being.²⁴ Rather, it means that relation alone has for its proper rationale something which does not exist “in” something, either *in se* or *in alio*; it alone can signify something outside of what is in the being of an absolute thing, and therefore it alone can be constituted in its existence according to its proper rationale by cognition, without an existence in *res absolutae*. According to its proper rationale, relation is indifferent to the source of its constitution.

24 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.8, q.1, a.5, ad.2: “Ad secundum dicendum, quod philosophus non accipit esse secundum quod dicitur actus entis (sic enim relatio non habet esse ex eo ad quod dicitur, sed ex subjecto, sicut omnia alia accidentia), sed accipit esse pro quidditate, vel ratione, quam significat definitio. Ratio autem relationis est ex respectu ad alterum.” i.1254–7: *Quodlibet* 1X, q.2, a.3, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum, quod in illa philosophi descriptione esse ponitur pro ratione essendi, secundum quod definitio dicitur realis secundum genus, quod est esse; unde non oportet quod habeat esse relatio ex respectu, sed ex causa respectus; ex respectu vero habet propriam rationem generis vel speciei”.

Second to note is that, although the respect by which one thing is towards another can be founded in some *res absoluta*, what is signified in speaking of the relation according to its proper rationale is the towardsness itself which exists between things, not the element which is internal to the thing-related and which serves as that-from-which the relation is provenated. In other words, when we use words which signify a relation properly, we are not signifying merely a consideration of the inherent accidents as existing in the mode of a relation, but, rather, the relation itself; we are not signifying the thing which exists “in” considered as “towards”, but that “towards” itself.

Poinsot notes three ways in which this text of St. Thomas (*ST* 1a, q.28, a.1, c., cited in n29) has been interpreted: (1) that a *relatio realis* divides into two concepts, namely that of an accident, the *esse in*, which is in the order of the subjective and independent, and the respect, *esse ad*, which is either cognition-dependent or something abstracted from both the cognition-dependent and independent; (2) that Thomas meant one could “excogitate” a *relatio rationis* from a *relatio realis*; and (3) that Thomas signifies a relation as abstracted from both the cognition-dependent and independent orders of being.²⁵ Poinsot denies the first interpretation because, in that case, being towards, *esse ad*, would not be instantiated in the order of subjective constitution, and thus, being *ad aliud* would not exist “in the nature of things.” The second interpretation is rejected because the excogitation of a cognition-dependent being from something cognition-independent is common to all the categories.²⁶ It is thus with the third interpretation that Poinsot sides:²⁷

Therefore, the third exposition is the truest as to one thing, namely that Thomas is speaking of relation in its whole latitude, as abstracted from

25 1632b: *TDS*, 94/2–13 (R.I 580b20–33).

26 1632b: *TDS*, 94/14–23 (R.I 580b34–44).

27 1632b: *TDS*, 94/24–95/2 (R.I 580b45–581a21): “Quare tertia expositio quantum ad unum verissima est, scilicet quod D. Thomas loquitur de relatione in tota sua latitudine, ut abstrahit a reali et rationis. Neque enim dixit S. Doctor, quod in praedicamento ad aliquid inveniuntur alia secundum rationem, sed absolute dixit ‘in his, quae sunt ad aliquid’; ut significaret se no loqui de relatione, ut determinate est genus, sed absolute secundum se... Itaque loquitur Divus Thomas de relatione sub formalissimo conceptu *ad* et significat, quod ex illa parte, qua consideratur ad terminum, et positive se habet et non est determinate realis forma, sed permittit, quod sit ens reale vel rationis; licet *ad* praedicamentale et fundamentatum reale sit. Et ita non voluit D. Thomas significare, quae relatio sit realis vel quae reationis, sed ex qua parte habet relatio, quod possit esse realis vel rationis, scilicet ex parte, quae est ad terminum”. Cf. the *dubia* considered by Cajetan 1507: *Commentaria in summa theologicam. Prima pars*, q.28, a.1 (Leon. 4.319–20).

the subjectively-constituted and from the cognition-dependent. For the Sainly Doctor did not say that there are found, in the category of relation [*ad aliquid*], somethings according to cognition, but rather says absolutely that “in those things, which are being-towards-something,” in order to signify that he was not speaking of relation as a determinate genus, but absolutely, according to itself... And therefore, St. Thomas is speaking of relation under the most formal concept of being-toward [*ad*], and he signifies that, from that content, by which it is considered as towards a terminus, it both exists positively and is not a determinate form in the order of subjective constitution, but is open to that which is a subjectively-constituted being or a cognition-dependent being, even though a predicamental being-towards would also be subjectively-constituted. And therefore it was not the desire of Thomas to signify which relation was subjective and which cognition-dependent, but the rationale relation has which allows it to be existing in the subjective order or in the order of cognition, namely the rationale whereby it is toward a terminus...

We still have here, however, a problem of language: what we have translated in the quoted passage from Thomas above as “things which are said as relations”, *ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid*, does not contain the word “things”, *res*; but how else should we translate *ea quae* in *ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid*? English does not conventionally use relative pronouns without some referent, and contains no word more general for indicating finite beings than “things”. Thus, we need to distinguish, as Thomas does on rare occasion,²⁸ between “things” said in its usual meaning, as *res absoluta*, and “things” said in an extended sense, including *res relativa*.²⁹ We will return to this point below (5.2.3 and, more generally, 5.2 *in passim*). In the meantime, we note that, given the signification proper to relations themselves as irreducible to the things related, it seems clear that, for Thomas, relations—at the very least cognition-independent relations—are somehow really distinct from their fundamentals and termini, falling within what we are here considering *res relativae*.

28 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.2, q.1, a.5, ad.2; i.1256–59: *DV*, q.4, a.5, ad.2 (note that Thomas here uses *secundum rem* in a sense opposed to *secundum dici*, and therefore seemingly synonymously with *secundum esse*; that is, *secundum rem* here means “according to the [relative] thing”); c.1265/6b: *De potentia*, q.9, a.5, ad.14; 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.28, a.3, c.

29 Deely has pointed out (2007: *IS*, 140–141) that even *res absoluta* are not really *absoluta*; that is, substantial finite beings are still themselves dependent on God, and therefore not really and truly absolute, though they are what we principally and primarily signify by the term “thing”/*res*.

Giles of Rome, a student of Thomas during the Angelic Doctor's life, upheld Thomas' implicit defense of a real distinction between a relation and its foundation. He argued for such a distinction from the notion that:³⁰

in all beings, there are two things to consider: existence and quiddity... Relation, although according to its existence is neither attendant to nor extrinsically affixed (because it is "in" as are other accidents), seems nevertheless to be extrinsically affixed in the rationale of its quiddity, for the whole rationale of a relation arises from that it is toward another [*ad aliquid*], not from the fact that it is in another [*in alio*].

Thus, Giles appears to have correctly assessed the point of St. Thomas, namely that the proper rationale of a relation consists in being-towards. He seems, however, to be confined by the consideration of relation as existing *strictly* within the categorical paradigm of self-standing substance (*in se*) and standing-in-another accidents (*in alio*), and thus there is an at-least-partial conflation of the existence of a relation with the existence of its fundament, i.e., an inherent accident. In other words, Giles seems only to distinguish the **conceptually grasped** *ratio* of relation, the quiddity, from the existence of the inherent accident, and so his defense works only if the existence and quiddity are considered two **really** distinct things—*res et res*, an assertion of Giles which infamously caused much confusion and dispute in the following centuries—and thus Giles seems to fall either into a nonsensical position (that the quiddity of a relation has its own existence, apart from that *esse* whereby it is) or within the first interpretation aforementioned which Poinset repudiates.

Henry of Ghent defends the notion of a real distinction between predicamental relations and their fundaments, but does so on the back of what he calls an "intentional distinction",³¹ which, as will be shown below, is in fact a kind of logical distinction. This "intentional distinction" was introduced by Ghent as an attempt at discerning a mean between purely logical and purely real distinctions. The formula which he proposed as integral to an "intentional"

30 Giles of Rome c.1271: *In I Sent.*, d.26, q.1, 141^G: "in omni re est considerare duo: esse et quidditatem... Relatio autem licet secundum esse suum non sit assistens nec extrinsecus affixa quia inest sicut cetera accidentia insunt, tamen ratione quae quidditatis videatur extrinsecus affixa. Nam tota ratio relationis sumitur ex eo quod est ad aliquid, non ex eo quod est in alio".

31 Cf. Henninger 1989: *Relations*, 40–58; Wippel 1981: *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*, 66–89; Marrone 1958: *Truth and Scientific Knowledge in the Thought of Henry of Ghent*, 115–117.

distinction is that if one thing (a) and another (b) are really the same, but that the concepts whereby we understand them, i.e., (a^c) and (b^c), neither mutually comprehend nor exhaust one another, such that each signifies the same thing but with different intelligible content, then there is an intentional distinction.³²

The “reality” of a relation—by which we do not interpret Henry to mean the existence belonging to some entity independently of cognition, i.e., a *res absoluta*, but rather the intelligible content whereby any entity is identified or known—Henry claims, is “contracted” from its fundament, and therefore the relation cannot be properly called a thing of itself, but is only a **mode** of a thing (*solummodo modus rei*).³³ Henry does say that “thing” could be said **improperly** of a relation, inasmuch as relations are not “things” on account of what they themselves are—namely, a circumstance or a mode—but that, in much the same way that “thing” is said of a *res rationis* (and not a *res simpliciter*), “thing” could be said of a relation,³⁴ if we “extend the term ‘thing’ so that ‘thing’ may be said even of the mode of a thing” (*extendo rem ut etiam modius rei dicatur res*).³⁵ For Henry, then, relation itself is, properly speaking, a mode as of an inherent accident or substance.

32 Cf. Henninger 1989: *Relations*, 47; Raymond Macken 1981: “Les diverses applications de la distinction intentionnelle chez Henri de Gand”, *Sprache und Erkenntnis im Mittelalter*, 769–776. That Henry lists the distinction between relation and its fundament as a minor intentional distinction (between something in itself one made known by two different concepts, one of which includes the other, but not vice versa) does not change the underlying rationale as to what constitutes the possibility of such a distinction, and therefore it remains a logical distinction.

33 Henry of Ghent 1285: *Quodlibet* XI, q.3, 56/85–9: “Propter quod saepius alibi diximus quod relatio realitatem suam contrahit a suo fundamento, et quod ex se non est nisi habitudo nuda, quae non est nisi modus quidam rem habendi ad aliud, et ita non res quantum est ex se, sed solummodo modus rei, nisi extendo rem ut etiam modius rei dicatur res, secundum quod alibi exposuimus”.

34 Henry of Ghent i.1281–4: *Summa*, a.55, q.6, 405/202–5: “Sed dubium est utrum, cum hoc quod sunt reales, relationes possint dici res. Et est verum proculdubio quod in quantum includunt in se suum fundamentum, quod sicut reales dicuntur quia fundantur in re, sic et res sunt, quia rem sui fundamenti in se includunt”.

35 Cf. Henry of Ghent i.1281–4: *Summa*, a.55, q.6, 403/153–60: “Relatio enim et res est et est modus, sed ex se non est nisi circumstantia sive quidam modus, nisi aliquis sic velit extendere rem ut rem appellet etiam modum rei, maxime qui sequitur rem ex natura rei et non ex natura intellectus, qui etiam res rationis appellatur cum habet esse a solo intellectu, licet non appellatur res simpliciter, quod etsi respectus qui sequitur ex natura rei, possit dici res vera aliquo modo, hoc non venit ei ratione illa et comparatione qua est ad aliud, sive ex eo quod est respectus aut relatio. Aliter enim non esset una res sed plures, neque una realitas sed plures, respectus ille qui esset ad plures terminos. Et sic non esset una

It seems evident, however, that among Thomas, Giles of Rome, and Henry of Ghent—all near contemporaries—the precise meanings of the terms *res* and *modus* as applied to relations and their distinction from their fundamentals was a difficulty left unresolved. More specifically, none give us a fully satisfactory answer as to whether *res* is said of relations analogically or equivocally, in what way *realitas* is dependent upon or derivative from the nature of what a *res* actually is, and what it means to designate something as a mode, or in what way “mode” is said of a relation. This lattermost, the meaning and predication of “mode”, is of the most immediate concern, for it is, as we will see, of the most fundamental importance in understanding relation itself as an *esse ad* distinct from *esse in*.

Before we can turn our attention to the notion of “mode”, however, we must briefly include a consideration of the opinion of Francisco Suarez, who held a complex and intricate theory of distinctions, including modal, as will be detailed in the following section. Suarez asserted that a modal distinction of relation from its fundament was possible, and could be argued for convincingly, but denied the argument that relations were **really** distinct from their fundamentals as distinguished into *esse in* and *esse ad*, by two arguments of his own:³⁶

relatio secundum rem qua unus est aequalis duobus, neque una paternitas qua unus est pater duorum filiorum in creaturis, cum sint duo termini ad quos, quod falsum est”.

36 Suarez 1597, *DM* XLVII: 791–92/71–72 in translation by Doyle, n.19–20: “*Primum*.—Quapropter haec sententia multa involvit impossibilia, et quae non satis intelligi possunt. Primum, quia ex illa sequitur, in una et eadem relatione distinguenda esse actualiter et ex natura rei, esse in, et esse ad; nam esse in, dicitur esse in re idem et indistinctum a fundamento, esse autem ad, dicitur actu distinctum in re a fundamento; ergo esse in, et esse ad, erunt inter se actu distincta, nam quae ita comparantur ad unum tertium, ut unum sit idem cum illo, aliud vero minime, neque etiam inter se possunt esse idem. Consequens autem est impossibile, quia esse in, et esse ad, comparantur tanquam superius et inferius, seu tanquam commune vel transcendens, et modus determinans seu modificans illud, quae impossibile est esse in re distincta, ut in superioribus traditum est”.

“*Secundum*.—Secundum inconueniens est, quia sequitur, esse ad, relationis realis creatae ut sic, non esse accidens alicujus, et consequenter non constituere verum accidens reale, quod est contra rationem hujus praedicamenti. Sequela patet, quia illud esse ad, non includit essentialiter esse in, cum ab illo ex natura rei distinguatur et praescindatur. Item, quia si illud esse ad, esset accidens alicujus, illud afficeret, et de novo ei adveniret, et ita redit difficultas quam tractamus, quod, nimirum, ex resultantia ipsius esse ad, mutaretur res seu fundamentum ex quo resultat. Sed aiunt, esse ad ut ad, non esse aliquid reale, et ideo mirum non esse quod neque sit accidens, neque insit, neque immutet relativum quod denominat. Sed hoc neque est vere, neque consequenter dictum, si univoce terminis utamur, et praesertim juxta dictam sententiam, quae supponit relationem realem esse aliquid in re ipsa, quod in rebus sit, et secundum aliquid sui in re ipsa a fundamento

First: this opinion involves many impossibilities and things which are not able to be understood satisfactorily. First, it follows from it that in one and the same relation there must be actually distinguished, from the nature of the thing [*ex natura rei*], both the *esse in* and the *esse ad*; for *esse in* is said to be in reality the same and not distinct from the foundation, but *esse ad* is said to be actually distinct in reality from the foundation. Therefore *esse in* and *esse ad* will be actually distinct from one another, for things that are so compared to one third thing that is the same with one of them, while the other is not, cannot themselves be the same. But the consequent is impossible, because *esse in* and *esse ad* are compared as superior and inferior, or as common or transcending, and a mode determining or modifying that; which is impossible to be distinct in reality, as was shown above [i.e., that by its modal determination of some being, relation adds nothing to the reality of a *res absoluta*, and therefore cannot be something really distinct from the *res absoluta*].

Second: There is a second inconsistency, because it follows that the *esse ad* of a created real relation as such is not the accident of something, and consequently does not constitute a genuine real accident, which is against the rationale of the category. The consequence is clear, because that *esse ad* does not essentially include *esse in*, since it is really distinguished and prescinded from that. Again, if that *esse ad* were an accident of something, it would affect that something would come to anew, and then the difficulty we are treating returns, namely that from the advent of that *esse ad* the thing or the foundation from which it results would be changed.

But, they say, *esse ad*, as *ad*, is not something real, and therefore it is not strange that it is not an accident, or that it does not exist *in*, or that it does not alter that which it denominates relative. But this is said neither truly, nor logically, if we are using terms univocally, and especially to just stated opinion, which supposes a real relation to be something in reality itself, which is in things, and to some extent is distinguished in those things from the foundation. Although one be speaking of *esse ad*, as

distinguatur. Quamvis enim loquendo de esse ad, ut attribuitur relationibus rationis, illud non sit aliquid reale, tamen, ut *infra* ostendam, illud solum aequivoce, vel ad summum secundum analogiam quamdam proportionalitatis, appellatur esse ad, de quo nunc non est sermo, sed de vero esse ad, quod reale praedicamentum accidentis constituit; illud autem non potest non esse aliquid reale, alias quomodo posset verum accidens reale constituaere? Aut quomodo posset relatio esse intrinseca forma referens suum subjectum ad terminum, si non afficeret illud secundum propriam rationem suam et consequenter etiam secundum ipsum esse ad?"

attributed to relations of reason, that is not something real, nevertheless, as I will show below, but rather is only equivocally, or at best according to a certain analogy of proportionality, called “*esse ad*”, about which we are not talking here, but rather of **true** *esse ad*, which constitutes a real accidental predicament; how could something truly constitute a real accident otherwise, if it were not able to be something real? Or in what way could relation be an intrinsic form referring its own subject to a terminus, if it would not affect that according to the proper rationale and consequently according to the very *esse ad*?

The first argument rejects the notion of a real distinction between relation and its fundament on account of the notion that relation is a mode of the accident, and, since it is merely a modulation of an accident, adding nothing real to the founding accident’s internal constitution, the relation cannot be really distinct from the fundament. The second argument centers around the notion that the *esse ad* of a relation is not an accident, for, if it were, then it would affect some change in the intrinsic constitution of a thing, which it does not. That is, the *esse ad* is not a real thing in itself, standing outside the accident of which the relation is a modulation.

Ultimately, Suarez himself held instead that the distinction between a relation and its fundament was a mere distinction of reason with a certain foundation *ex natura rei*, but only as it requires a distinct conception from the conception of its fundament in order to be understood, rather than any actual distinctions in the cognition-independent thing itself.³⁷

It is John Poinset, who gives us many of the essential considerations for understanding the nature of relation, to whom we will turn principally in the following pages. Poinset adopted the Suarezian taxonomy of distinctions, but followed St. Thomas in holding that the distinction of predicamental relations is real, not as between two *res absolutae*, but rather as between a *res absoluta* and a *res relativa*; that is, he held to a modal distinction.³⁸ This term “modal”, however, can easily be mistaken as to its meaning, particularly as applied to relation; indeed, the Suarezian conception, as we will show, is incomplete. To

37 Suarez 1597: *DM XLVII*, 792/72–73, n.21–22.

38 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.17, a.4 (R.I 593a11–19): “Respectu fundamenti proximi probabilius videtur in sententia S. Thomae, quod relatio non distinguitur ab illo tamquam res a re, sed ut modus, mediante tamen hoc fundamento, cum quo identificatur, non repugnant realiter distingui a subiecto, si tale fundamentum realiter a tali subiecto distinguatur”.

resolve this difficulty, let us briefly lay out the Suarezian taxonomy and explain the meaning of “mode”.

5.1.1.2 The Suarezian Taxonomy of Distinctions

In his *Disputationes metaphysicae* VII, Suarez establishes his system of distinctions based upon the fundamental division into those which are *distinctiones rationis* and those which are *distinctiones realis*. (Poincot seems to adopt this system without much alteration or difference, though he does perhaps, incidentally, add some clarification.) Within these two categories, *rationis* and *realis*, Suarez notes further distinctions constituted by reason or founded upon some reality. Thus, there are distinctions which are more and less properly said to be either *rationis* or *realis*. While we do not fully adopt the reasoning or application which Suarez himself would make of his taxonomy, it nevertheless provides a useful framework.

Distinctions of reason are defined generally as those in which the completion of some distinction is not only formally constituted by the mind, but comes into existence only on account of the mind’s activity. Therefore, that which is most properly a *distinctio rationis* is an “intrinsic distinction of the reason reasoning” (*distinctio intrinsice ratio ratiocinantis*), as if we were to say “Peter is himself”, wherein there is no basis in the subject considered, Peter, whereby he is distinguished from himself, the nominative predicate. Less properly, Suarez claims, is an “extrinsic distinction of the reason reasoning” (*distinctio extrinsice ratio ratiocinantis*), such as between two second intentions, e.g., between “animal” and “living body”. The concepts formed by the intellect pertaining to these two notions are never actually separate in reality, inasmuch as there are no such things as “animal” or “living body” precisely as signified in the consideration proper to a second intention.

Even less properly a *distinctio rationis*, however, is that of the “reasoned reason” (*distinctio ratio ratiocinatae*), which “is not entirely from the operation of the intellect alone, but from the occasion, which the thing presents itself, about which the mind is reasoning”.³⁹ Thus, one and the same thing is considered under different and inadequate concepts: “Although the same object is apprehended in each concept, the whole reality contained in the object is not adequately represented, nor is its entire essence and objective notion exhausted, by either of them”.⁴⁰ In this way, there is some foundation in

39 Suarez 1597: *DM* VII, 231/18 in the translation by Vollert, n.4: “non est omnino ex mero opera rationis, sed ex occasione, quam res ipsa praebet, circa quam mens ratiocinatur”.

40 Suarez 1597: *DM* VII, 251/19, n.5: “licet per utrumque eadem res concipiatur, per neutrum tamen exacte concipitur totum id, quod est in re, neque exhauritur tota quidditas, et ratio objectiva ejus”.

the thing itself, inasmuch as it may have differing relations to other substances or beings, but most often the source of the distinction is primarily in the limitations of the intellect whereby conceptions of the thing are formed, such that what is one in reality requires a multitude of concepts to be understood. As an example, Suarez posits the concepts we have of God's justice and His mercy,⁴¹ or, more famously, *esse* and *essentia* in created beings.⁴² In every case of distinction by a *ratio ratiocinatae*, it is necessarily something about the thing's relation to other things, either in observed external intersubjective relations or to the cognitive agent itself, which allows the finite intellect to form from it two distinct conceptions.⁴³

Among *distinctiones reales*, Suarez distinguishes between the modal—an improperly real distinction, similar to but slightly differentiated from the

41 Cf. Suarez 1597: *DM VII*, 251/19, n.5: "This occurs [a *distinctio ratio ratiocinantae*] frequently when we conceive an object in terms of its bearing on different things, or when we represent it in the way we conceive these different things. Hence such a distinction invariably has a foundation in fact, even though formally it will be said to spring from inadequate concepts of the same thing. Thus in God we distinguish His justice from His mercy, because we do not conceive the sublimely simple virtue of God as it is in itself and according to the full range of its energy. We partition it into concepts in line with the various effects of which that eminent virtue is the principle, or by analogy with various virtues which we find distinct in man, but which in an effably eminent manner are found united in the absolutely simple virtue of God".

42 Suarez 1597: *DM XXXI*.

43 Cf. Poinset 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.2, a.3, (R.I 294b8–23): "Dividi autem solet haec distinctio rationis in distinctionem rationis *ratiocinantis* et rationis *ratiocinatae*. Illa *prima* dici solet distinctio, quae fingitur ab intellectu sine fundamento in re, et ita solum est distinctio quoad modum significandi et intelligendi, sicut quando idem apprehenditur praedicari de se et distingui a se. *Secunda* vero dicitur formata ab intellectu cum fundamento in re, ut quando distinguimus in Deo attributa et in eadem forma seu natura gradus seu praedicata essentialia, quae sunt eiusdem entitatis". 295b41–296a2: "Distinctio rationis ratiocinantis est illa, quae inter extrema, quae distinguit, nullam identitatem tollit ex parte obiecti, neque materialiter seu entitative neque formaliter, atque adeo distinctionem virtuales non supponit, sed tota distinctio est in ipso modo significandi et concipiendi.—Distinctio vero rationis ratiocinatae est, quae relinquit ex parte obiecti identitatem materialem, sed non formalem seu virtuales". (R.I 296a47–b4): "Ad fundamentum distinctionis ratiocinatae non sufficit distinctio earum rerum ad quaram instar fit distinctio, sed in ipso obiecto requiritur fundamentum distinctionis". (R.I 296b23–31): "Distinctio rationis ratiocinatae non supponit distinctionem aliquam ex natura rei actuales ex parte obiecto, nec illa datur. Quando vero actualiter fit ab intellectu ista distinctio, ex conceptibus intellectus resultant diversi conceptus obiectivi, non in esse rei, sed in esse obiecti et representati".

distinctio ratio ratiocinatae—and the properly real, between two things (*inter duas res*), which is further subdivided into that wherein one term includes the other and adds something real to it—again subdivided into the intrinsic and extrinsic—and those things which are in every way distinct, the most proper sense of a real distinction.⁴⁴ Overall, we could characterize the schema of distinctions thus:

- *Distinctiones rationis*
 - *Ratio ratiocinantis (proprie)*
 - *Intrinsic (proprissime)*—e.g., *Petrus et ipse*
 - *Extrinsic—duas secunda intentiones*—e.g., *animale et vitale*
 - *Ratio ratiocinantis (improprie)*—*ex natura rei*—e.g., *esse et essentia*
- *Distinctiones realis*
 - *Modalis (improprie)*—*ex natura rei*—e.g., *materia et quantitas*
 - *Inter duas res (proprie)*
 - *Unum includit alterum, et addit aliquid reale*
 - *Intrinsic*—e.g., *Petrus et sua materia*
 - *Extrinsic*—e.g., *risibile a homine*
 - *Omnes distinctas (propissime)*—e.g., *Petrus et Ioannes*

Described succinctly, every real distinction in the Suarezian taxonomy requires that at least one of the terms related survives their separation. Thus, a real distinction between two things which are in every way distinct, as between Peter and John, for instance, is the most proper form of a real distinction. For those things which are distinct, but such that one includes the other, and the other adds something real to it, Suarez distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic compositions of the things distinct: the intrinsic being where the two coincide in one and the same being (as Peter and his matter, each of which survive the separation, but are changed in their separation), and the extrinsic, where the one thing terminates outside the other (as risibility, Suarez claims, is extrinsic to the nature of human being).⁴⁵

44 Cf. Poinset 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.2, a.3, (R.I 294b24–37): “Distinctio realis dividitur in realem *simpliciter*, ut inter duas res, v.g. Petrum et Paulum, quantitatem et qualitatem, et in realem *modalem* seu *formalem*, ut inter rem et modum, v.g. inter hominem et sessionem vel ubi, sive inter duos modos, qui realiter identificantur cum subiecto, id est ab illo realiter non differunt, modaliter autem distinguuntur”.

45 This appears problematic, as risibility does not seem to survive a separation from humanity, but this issue is irrelevant to our current concern.

The modal distinction is not fully a real distinction in the Suarezian sense, seeing as only one term survives the separation: as, for instance, matter and quantity, for matter may undergo a change of quantity, such that it is separated from one quantity (A) and receives another (B), in a way that the matter survives, but the first quantity (A) does not. Such a distinction is formally completed by the mind, but arises from what is in some way actually distinct within the being, inasmuch as one thing considered by the mind can continue in existence when the other does not. It is also called modal, for those following the Suarezian understanding, inasmuch as the one thing (quantity, in this instance) seems to be a mode belonging in some way to the other (matter).

5.1.1.3 The Meaning of “Mode”

But what is properly meant by a “mode”? As will be seen in 5.1.2 below, “mode” is an important term for Thomas as an element in what we are here calling the “constitution” of every being—that is, mode, species, and order, as the three elements through which every being is constituted in actuality—and as has already been seen,⁴⁶ it is an important term in the divisions of “being” in the way in which it is conceived, following *ens ut primum cognitum*, as given in *De veritate*, q.1, a.1.

Thus, while the term “mode”, which appears ubiquitously in Thomas’ works,⁴⁷ is often used in a sense which seems vague or general, the term also possesses a technical sense and application, found in *De veritate* q.1, a.1.⁴⁸ This

46 See c.3.1.1, especially diagram at p. 149.

47 John Tomarchio 2001: “Aquinas’s Division of Being According to Modes of Existing” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 54 (March): 585–613, points out (590n11) that the term *modus* appears somewhere between 11,460–16,891 times (the precise number being ambiguous due to the omission of dative and ablative instances on account of a homographic similarity to an adverb).

48 Tomarchio makes the claim (2001: “Aquinas’s Division of Being According to Modes of Existing”) that (585): “there is a properly metaphysical sense of the term ‘mode’ in Aquinas’s existential metaphysics”, of which (586): “the term’s primary sense is existential determination, and in particular the determination of an individual being’s act of existing, and that by analogy he extends the term to essence and to any potential principle of entitative determination”. While I agree with Tomarchio that “mode” does have a technical and proper signification, and that it is used in other senses improperly and by a kind of extension, I do not agree that the effect of a being’s mode should be considered a “determination”, for determination signifies the limitation of being to a specific mode through an intrinsic principle, as by a form or an essence. What occurs in a mode seems rather to be the alteration of existence, co-extensive with it, which does not determine or limit the existence itself; thus, rather than calling the effect of a mode an “existential determination”, it will here be called an “existential modulation”. While “determination” seems to

technical use can also be seen in a second text of importance, wherein Thomas gives a kind of categorization and therefore indirect exposition of what is meant by “mode”, from his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.⁴⁹

The aforementioned “modes of being” are able to be reduced to four. The first of these [1], which is the weakest, is what is cognition-dependent [i.e., that which exists only on the basis of reason, *est tantum in ratione*], namely negation and privation, which we say is “to exist in cognition”, because it belongs to the notion of these that they are dealt with as though they are certain beings, inasmuch as something is affirmed or denied of them. The next weakest [2] is that according to which generation and

indicate a kind of delineation of the extensive boundaries of some being, “modulation” indicates rather a variation in amplitude, frequency, or intensity, which, given the distinction between *esse in* (and within that, *esse in se* and *esse in alio*) and *esse ad*, there being a kind of hierarchy of existential presence (as what is *in se*, among finite beings, is most properly said “to be”, as it is most independent of others for its existence, while what is *esse ad* is most dependent and thus least properly said “to be”), seems to be a fitting if nevertheless still inadequate image.

Contrary to Tomarchio, who claims that existence needs first a mode before it can be composed with an essence (60r: “To be in composition with essence, whether with a pure form or a material composite, existence must be modified, determined to a certain kind of existence”), a claim which omits explanation of what the principle of such a modification is, it would seem that an existential modulation has to depend upon the intrinsic principles determining what kind of being a thing is; after all, what is *ad aliud* cannot be without fundament and terminus, and fundament and terminus, considered as *in alio*, cannot be without what is *in se*.

49 1271/2a: *In Metaphysicorum*, lib.4, lec.1, n.540–3: “Sciendum tamen quod praedicti modi essendi ad quatuor possunt reduci. Nam unum eorum quod est debilissimum, est tantum in ratione, scilicet negatio et privatio, quam dicimus in ratione esse, quia ratio de eis negociatur quasi de quibusdam entibus, dum de eis affirmat vel negat aliquid. Secundum quid autem differant negatio et privatio, *infra* dicitur. Aliud autem huic proximum in debilitate est, secundum quod generatio et corruptio et motus entia dicuntur. Habent enim aliquid admixtum de privatione et negatione. Nam motus est actus imperfectus, ut dicitur tertio physicorum. Tertium autem dicitur quod nihil habet de non ente admixtum, habet tamen esse debile, quia non per se, sed in alio, sicut sunt qualitates, quantitates et substantiae proprietates. Quartum autem genus est quod est perfectissimum, quod scilicet habet esse in natura absque admixtione privationis, et habet esse firmum et solidum, quasi per se existens, sicut sunt substantiae. Et ad hoc sicut ad primum et principale omnia alia referuntur. Nam qualitates et quantitates dicuntur esse, in quantum insunt substantiae; motus et generationes, in quantum tendunt ad substantiam vel ad aliquid praedictorum; privationes autem et negationes, in quantum remouent aliquid trium praedictorum”.

corruption and motion are called beings. They have something admixed with privation and negation; for motion is an imperfect act, as is said in the third book of *The Physics*. The third way [3] in which something is called a mode has nothing of non-being admixed with it, but nevertheless has a weak existence, because it exists not through itself, but in another; such as qualities, quantities, and the properties of substances. The fourth kind [4] of the modes of being is the most perfect, namely that which has existence in a nature without the admixture of privation, and has a form and solid existence, as existing through itself, as those things which are substances. And to this as to the first and principal all others are referred. For qualities and quantities are said to be, insofar as they are in substances; motion and generation, insofar as they tend towards substance or to the other aforesaid [mode of being]; privations and negations, insofar as they remove something from the aforesaid three [modes of being].

These four modes of being are arranged from the weakest to the strongest in terms of existential presence: [1] negations and privations, though considered a mode of being, depend upon cognitive acts for their being constituted in existence, and therefore have a most-tenuous existence; [2] motions of any kind, inasmuch as they have an admixture of act and potency, of being and non-being, have an incomplete existence; [3] inhering accidents, while they are dependent upon substances for their existence, nevertheless do not have any mixture of non-being in their proper existence; and [4] substances, as those which are “most perfect”, inasmuch as they have existence in a nature without any admixture of non-being. While privations and negations have no existence of themselves, inasmuch as they are given being through the mind’s recognition of how they “remove something” from the other three modes, they are said to be a “mode” of being.

The picture here of “modes of being”—like that found in *De veritate* q.1, a.1, in which “modes” are broadly divided into the “special”, what occurs *secundum rem*, and the “general”, what occurs *secundum rationis*—omits a consideration of *esse ad*. Moreover, the division of *De veritate* q.1, a.1, does not map on to the fourfold division drawn from the commentary on *Metaphysics* lib.4, c.1. This incompatibility follows quite naturally: for in the *De veritate*, Thomas speaks of the modes which follow upon *ens ut primum cognitum*, whereas in the *Metaphysics* commentary he speaks of the modes proper to *ens ut existens*. This twofold distinction of modes, one according to how being is conceived, the other according to how beings exist, suggests that a “mode” does not determine a being’s existence, but rather alters its existence as a modulation: for a mode

can belong either to a thing insofar as it exists objectively, as grasped through a concept, or it can belong to a thing insofar as it exists in itself, i.e., according to its independent subjective constitution. Hence, in the *De veritate* text, no explicit mention is made of negations or privations, since their conceptual mode of existence falls broadly within the general mode of “truth”, a mode *secundum rationis*.

Nevertheless, negations and privations are included in the modes of beings’ existence in the *Metaphysics* commentary, despite having no independent subjective constitution, because they are nevertheless, in some way, “outside” the soul. Thomas confirms this point a little farther on in *De veritate* q.1:⁵⁰

Outside the soul, two things are found: namely, the thing itself, and negations and privations of the thing; which two things are not related to the intellect in the same mode. For the thing itself is adequated to the divine intellect on account of the species which it has, as the artifact is related to the artificer; and by virtue of the same species is able to be adequated to our intellect, insofar as, through the reception of its similitude in the soul, makes the thing to be known. But non-being, considered as outside the soul, neither has anything by which it can be adequated to the divine intellect, nor anything by which cognition of it can be made in our intellect. Thus, if any such non-being is adequated to the intellect, it is not from the non-being itself, but from the intellect, by means of which the rationale of the non-being arises in itself. Therefore, the thing which is something positive outside the soul, has something in itself on account of which it is able to be called “true”. This is not the case, however, with the non-existence of a thing, but rather whatever truth is attributed to such is from the part of the intellect. Therefore, when it is said that “it is

50 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.1, a.5, ad.2: “extra animam duo invenimus, scilicet rem ipsam, et negationes et privationes rei; quae quidem duo non eodem modo se habent ad intellectum. Res enim ipsa ex specie quam habet, divino intellectui adaequatur, sicut artificiatum arti; et ex virtute eiusdem speciei nata est sibi intellectum nostrum adaequare, in quantum, per similitudinem sui receptam in anima, cognitionem de se facit. Sed non ens extra animam consideratum, neque habet aliquid unde intellectui divino coaequetur, neque unde cognitionem sui faciat in intellectu nostro. Unde quod intellectui cuicumque aequetur, non est ex ipso non ente, sed ex ipso intellectu, qui rationem non entis accipit in seipso. Res ergo quae est aliquid positive extra animam, habet aliquid in se unde vera dici possit. Non autem non esse rei, sed quidquid veritatis ei attribuitur est ex parte intellectus. Cum dicitur ergo: veritatem non esse, est verum; cum veritas quae hic significatur, sit de non ente, nihil habet nisi in intellectu. Unde ad destructionem veritatis quae est in re, non sequitur nisi esse veritatem quae est in intellectu”.

true that truth does not exist”, since the truth which this signifies is about a non-being, it has nothing [of its own] except what it has from the intellect. Hence, from the destruction of a truth which is in a thing, nothing follows except for there to be a truth which is in the intellect.

Esse ad, being dependent upon something which has *esse* in a subjective manner for its existence—relying either on some determinate *res absoluta* or some cognitive act—cannot be placed neatly into either a special or general mode of existence; *esse ad* transcends all such divisions, but does not necessarily embrace all instances.⁵¹ That is, *esse ad* exists both between *res absolutae*, and therefore among the consideration of beings *secundum rem*, and as the patterning which is a *res relativa*, including (but not limited to) negations and privations, and therefore within the consideration of beings *secundum rationis*.

This further illustrates why *res* likewise cannot be neatly situated into the *De veritate* schematization of modes: for while *res absoluta* can be said properly of substance and by extension of the accidents, and thus of all things considered in special modes *secundum rem*, the general modes of considering being can be said of not only *res absoluta*, but also *res relativa*; but *res* cannot be said of infinite being, whereas “true”, “one”, and “good” can. Further, *res relativa* suffers the same difficulty as does *esse ad*, for even the concepts whereby negations and privations are made objects, and thus “being” in the weakest of the four senses from *In Metaphysicorum* lib.4, c.1, are based upon the concepts of being conceived *secundum rem*, and yet, fall within the transcendental modes of conceptualization, which are *secundum rationis*.

Instead, *esse ad* constitutes its own kind of mode, equiprimordial with *esse in*—both of which are contraposed to the modes of conceptualization.⁵²

5.1.1.4 Predicamental Relations and the Modal Distinction

Poinsot holds a predicamental relation to be distinct from its fundament according to a modal distinction.⁵³ The Suarezian denial that what is modally distinct is not a fully “real” distinction implies a confusion to be immediately

51 Cf. Cajetan 1507: *Commentaria in summam theologicam. Prima pars*, q.28, a.1 (Leon. 4.319a, n.2): “Ratio primi est differentia inter *ad aliquid* et alia genera: quoniam ceterorum generum omnia sunt secundum rem; *ad aliquid* vero aliqua sunt secundum rationem tantum, et aliqua secundum rem.—Et nascitur haec differentia ex una alia, scilicet quod cetera secundum propriam rationem significant aliquid alicui inhaere; *ad aliquid* vero secundum propriam rationem significant tantum respectum ad aliud”.

52 Cf. diagrams 3 and 4 in Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 42 and 53, respectively.

53 1632a: *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, q.17, a.4, (R.I 590b41–595b23).

obviated—for the Suarezian terminology is one which defines “real” in accordance with a strict meaning of *res*, i.e., as admitting only the *res absolutae* within the realm of the “real”: meaning that the relation has no true and proper distinction from the fundament. This confusion could stem easily from that which Suarez takes as his exemplar of a modal distinction, that is, of quantity from matter. For matter is a principle of a natural substance in which quantity inheres, and quantity is thus a modulation of the material substance. But relation, considered *secundum esse*, does not have *esse in* for its mode of existence, and so is not an inhering accident. As modally distinct from the accident which is its foundation, then, it is not a modulation of substance, nor is it principally or directly a modulation of the founding accident, but rather it is modularly differentiated as a **mode of being or esse**.

Thus we can say that the predicamental relation consists in the *esse ad* which is proper to the relation itself, what is said as *relativa secundum esse*, being in some way added but nevertheless external to the *esse in* of the fundament (what is, as we will see below, thus capable of being considered as *relativa secundum dici*)—not as a further inherence, but as a tenuous and dependent extra-substantial existence, determined in its kind by the fundament—so that it produces a determinate effect on the being of the terminus. In a properly “real” predicamental relation—which Poinset denominates a “mutual” (or “reciprocal”) relation⁵⁴—each fundament is also a terminus, and each terminus also a fundament; *res ad invicem ordinantur*. In other words, each term of the relation produces an effect on the other term. There must be a causal relation between the fundament and the terminus, such that the fundament is in some way, through the relation, the cause of some effect in the terminus.⁵⁵

There is a kind of hierarchically nested meaning when we talk about a predicamental relation, both when we are discussing it as involving the explicit notion of relation itself, as *esse ad*, as well as when we are discussing it as modally distinct: for whenever we are talking about a concrete mutual relation as what is said *relativa secundum esse*, as between a professor and student or between father and son, we do so in a way such that the *fundamenta* and *termini*

54 1632b: *TDS*, 100/6–8 (583b15–17).

55 Cf i.1256–59: *DV* q.4, a.5, c.: “Dicendum, quod quodcumque aliqua duo sic se habent ad invicem, quod unum dependet ad alterum, sed non e converso; in eo quod dependet ab altero, est realis relatio; sed in eo ad quod dependet, non est relatio nisi rationis tantum; prout, scilicet, non potest intelligi aliquid referri ad alterum quin cointelligatur etiam respectus oppositus ex parte alterius, ut patet in scientia, quae dependet ad scibile, sed non e converso”.

are, even though secondarily, included in the signification.⁵⁶ This inclusion of the terms in speaking of concrete predicamental relations is necessary, for the *ratio* proper to relation itself is **modally undifferentiated** as to the nature of its terminus—i.e., whether it is an *ens naturae* or an *ens rationis*—and thus, to speak of any relation in the concrete, we need to include some signification of that at which the relation terminates.⁵⁷ Consequently, while the relation itself, considered *secundum esse*, is part of the **constitution** of the predicamental relation, and therefore is what makes the terms relative, the concrete actuality of any such relation includes **more** than just the *ratio* proper to relation, because the **determination** can only come from the terms.

This is precisely why relation considered *secundum esse* does not fit into any schematization of being, either conceptually or existentially: for the proper rationale of *esse ad* is of itself unlimited, but not, because of the necessary determination of its actual existence by its termini, as a transcendental.

As such, when it is said that the predicamental relation is modally distinct, there are two things to consider: **first**, the distinction of the relation itself from the **proximate** fundament, i.e., the accident on which the relation is based; and

56 This is what Thomas means in saying that 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.13, a.1, ad.1: “lord, servant, father and son, and such things, are called *relativa secundum esse*”, for what is signified in each case is the “relative habitude” itself—that is, not simply the accidents or substances related, nor the mere notion of relation itself, but the relation-as-relating. Cf. Poinsett 1632b: *TDS* 89/47–90/9 (R.I 578b5–14): “relation *secundum dici* is constantly distinguished from relation *secundum esse*, in St. Thomas, in that the principal significate of a relation *secundum dici* is not the relation, but something other, from which a relation follows. But whenever the principal significate is the relation itself and not something absolute, then it is a relation *secundum esse*”. —“relatio secundum dici in hoc perpetuo distinguitur a relatione secundum esse ex D. Thoma, quod principale significatum relationis secundum dici non est relatio, sed aliquid aliud, ad quod sequitur relatio. Quando autem principale significatum alicuius est relatio ipsa et non aliquid absolutum, tunc est relatio secundum esse”.

57 1632b: *TDS*, 95/26–34 (R.I 581b1–10): “Sola relatio habet esse ens et ad ens, et pro ea parte, qua se habet ad ens, positive se habet, nec tamen inde habet entitatem realem. Sed aliunde relationi provenit realitas, scilicet a fundamento, aliunde positiva ratio *ad*, scilicet ex termino, ex quo non habet esse ens, sed ad ens, licet illud *ad* vere reale sit, quando fundatum est.” Cf. William J. Kane 1958: *The Philosophy of Relation in the Metaphysics of St. Thomas*, 12: “relation may be defined without including its subject, for *respectus ad aliud* does not say inherence as, for instance, quantity says ‘the measure of substance’”. Ibid, 14: “if we look for the principle in relation that will determine its existence, we will not find it; and we will not find it precisely because the *ratio* of relation itself implies no limitation of itself. In the case of relation, it is to the cause [i.e., the terms] that we must look for limitation, since it is by reason of its cause that relation will be circumscribed”.

second, the distinction of the relation, whenever we are speaking of it as a certain whole, i.e., including both that which is signified as *relativum secundum esse* and those things which are signified as *relativa secundum dici*, from the **remote** fundament, i.e., the substance considered in its essential being. With regard to the first consideration, we have shown (throughout 5.1.1, especially 5.1.1.3 and 5.1.1.4) that the modal distinction of the *relativa secundum esse* is due to the fact that *esse ad* is a distinct mode of *esse*. With regard to the second i.e., the distinction of the relation not just according to its proper *ratio*, but according to the relation as a certain whole from the things related, let us now turn our attention to the nature of the *relativa secundum dici*.

5.1.2 Relativa Secundum Dici

In a footnote to his *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, Joseph Owens points to the distinction between the *relativa secundum dici*, or “transcendental relation”, and the *relativa secundum esse* or “ontological relation” as causing a myriad of problems in understanding the nature of relation itself. The former sort of relation, Owens claims, does not express any kind of relation at all, but simply an aspect or a characteristic of things which leads to or founds some subsequent relation.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, Owens is correct in this assertion; but it leads Owens seemingly, and perhaps unintentionally, to minimize the importance of the *relativa secundum dici*, crucial not only in understanding the

58 Owens 1963: *Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 189n3: “In later Scholasticism this situation gave rise to the mistaken concept of a ‘transcendental relation,’ that is, of a real relation really identical with an absolute reality. It was called transcendental because it was regarded as really present in various categories. It became solidified in the Thomistic tradition through John of St Thomas (1589–166). It makes the impossible identity of absolute reality and relative reality in creatures....”

“For St Thomas, a real relation in creatures is confined to the one category of relation... For him, something relative *secundum esse* is a relation, either real or merely conceptual; while something relative *secundum dici* is not a relation, but is something absolute that is related to something else either by a superadded real relation or by a relation of reason... These expressions have given rise to what Krempel...calls a ‘tragi-comedie’ of interpretations through the centuries”.

As a prime example of the kind of confusion Owens meant to dispel, see Klubertanz 1952a: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Being*, 239: “In some cases, the whole reality of one thing is referred to another, such that the relation is really the same as that which is related. For example, the whole reality of potency lies in its order to act; so, too, matter is real inasmuch as it is the capacity of receiving form, essence is real inasmuch as it is wholly ordered to the act of existing, and so on. Such relations we call ‘transcendental relations’”. And again, at 252: “Transcendental relation is a principle of being whose whole reality lies in its orientation to another. (For example, matter whose whole reality lies in its orientation to form.)”.

subjective natures of cognition-independent beings, but also central role that such relativity plays in the formation and intellectual apprehension of socially-constituted realities. In other words, while the terms may have in fact caused a great deal of confusion, that does not make them, nor the distinction they signify, to be useless in principle.

The innate relativity of all finite being is an aspect of Thomas' philosophy of the created universe seemingly underappreciated, as evidenced by the paucity of Thomistic authors endeavoring to approach the topic systematically. This is not to say that the relationality of finite beings has gone unnoticed; indeed, many authors have brought attention to the fact. However, they have done so primarily with a focus on how relation plays a role in the subjectivity of finite beings, subordinated as an accident—an important consideration, to be sure—with little to no consideration of how the innate relationality of all things affects our conceptualization of those substances, nor has much consideration been given to the nature of relation itself—either in its distinction from its fundament nor in the often glossed-over meaning of the phrase *relativa secundum esse*—as pertaining to this pervasively relational dimension of the universe.⁵⁹

Therefore, we will examine the nature of the *relativa secundum dici* in two aspects: (1) as it signifies something in the categorical order of cognition-independent being, and (2) as it signifies something in the conceptual order.

59 Oliva Blanchette's 1992 *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas: A Teleological Cosmology*, which although it takes the threefold constitution of finite beings—and particularly their good—as consisting in *modus, species, et ordo*, nevertheless approaches the question primarily in a framework of substances, with little attention paid to relation itself, or the distinctively relational character of substances. Aside from Blanchette's otherwise excellent work, Norris Clarke has drawn attention to the innate relativity of substances, both in his little 1993 Marquette Aquinas Lecture, *Person and Being* (see especially c.1, §2–3 and c.2, §4–5), as well as his 1992 essay, “To Be Is to Be Substance-In-Relation”, in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being-God-Person*, 102–122. Adrian Pabst's 2012: *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy*, though written primarily from an Augustinian perspective, highlights the importance of the relativity of individuals for Thomas (247–258), particularly as it pertains to the attainment of the good for individuals and the diffusiveness of the Divine Goodness. Van Steenberghe 1946: *Ontologie*, emphasizes that all finite beings are relative (135–138) and that all finite beings, taken as a whole order, is likewise entirely relative (138–140). De Raeymaeker 1947: *Philosophy of Being*, distinguishes between static (or the relative permanence of what is substantial) and dynamic (or the relative impermanence of the accidental, through act and potency) orders of finite (or particular) beings, but, as aforementioned (n.16 above) mistakes the nature of relation, particularly in terms of its distinction from the fundament.

5.1.2.1 *Relativa Secundum Dici* within the Categories

In *Intentionality and Semiotics*, John Deely proposes a rearrangement of *esse* as divided not primarily into *in se* and *in alio*, i.e., substance and accident, but as into *esse in*, which is then subdivided into *in se* and *in alio*, and *esse ad* or *ad aliud*. This division highlights both the singularity of relation among the other categories, in itself a modal differentiation of *esse* rather than of a substance, as well as the fact that, among the categories, only substance and relation cannot be perceived, but must be discovered intellectually.⁶⁰ As Deely points out, “if the scheme of the traditional ten categories is examined in detail from this point of view, it turns out that four of the ten categories—when, where, posture, and vestition—presuppose relation, and only five fully qualify as *inesse*—substance, quantity, quality, action, and passion.”⁶¹

In other words, “when”, “where”, “posture”, and “vestition” (or “habit”, which English term fails to capture the meaning of the Greek ἕξις) all presuppose intersubjectivity and consequently cognition-independent relations; each corresponding reality is constituted in that category by a relation. To say that a pair of glasses are worn, and thus are an accident of vestition, presupposes the relation of the glasses to the wearer; to say that a professor is in his office presupposes the relation of the professor to the walls, building, etc., which are identified as his office. Furthermore, “quantity”, “quality”, “action”, and “passion” are all proximate fundamentals of relations, while substance is the remote fundament of every relation. Relativity, therefore, permeates each of the categories, inasmuch as certain “relative habitudes” [*habitudines relativas*] or relationships⁶² either follow from them, or are prerequisite to their constitution.⁶³

Thomas, though it was not evidently his intention, nevertheless draws the attentive reader to notice this relative ubiquity in his frequent comments upon the threefold structure of all things’ constitution, namely that, as Augustine

60 Deely 2007: *IS*, 123–124.

61 Deely 2007: *IS*, 123n14. Cf. Deely 2001: *Four Ages*, 73–77.

62 Generally, though with some overlap, we distinguish between a **relation**, as said of what obtains between every fundament and terminus, and a **relationship**, as a relation which follows from certain *fundamenta* always, for the most part, or with at the very least a certain regularity. As such, *ad aliquid* is typically translated “relation”, signifying either categorical relation or relation as a mode of *esse*; *habitus* will typically, in those places where Thomas is using it to signify some sort of relativity, be translated “relationship”, to convey the “holding” which is implied by the etymological connection to *habeo*.

63 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.13, a.7, ad.1: “Quaedam vero sunt imposita ad significandas res quas consequuntur quaedam habitudines, sicut movens et motum, caput et capitatum, et alia huiusmodi, quae dicuntur relativa secundum dici”.

said, all things are constituted by mode, species, and order.⁶⁴ **Mode**, as part of a thing's constitution, pertains to whether or not something subsists in the relatively-independent condition known as substance, as a person (that is, an individual substance endowed with the faculties of intellect and will⁶⁵) as something incidentally inhering in another, an accident, or even, as we indicated above, as a relation, which, indeed, includes both negations and privations.⁶⁶ **Species** indicates the specification wrought upon a thing by the form which determines and limits the mode of existence to a particular and intelligible actuality. **Order** signifies the innate relativity—or inclination to relationality—following upon every determination of being, and expressly the relativity inclining a determinate thing towards that which is perfective of it.

This threefold constitution of finite being belongs not only to substances, but also to accidents, as these have not only the mode of *esse in alio*, but also their own species and order:⁶⁷

64 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.3, q.2, a.2, c.: “Et sic sumuntur illa verba Augustini: quod constat, quod discernitur, quod congruit. Constat enim res per ipsa sua principia, discernitur per formam, congruit per comparisonem ad alterum: et quasi similiter sumuntur ista, modus, species et ordo; ita quod modus pertineat ad principia determinata sub esse principiati, species ad formam, ordo ad comparisonem ad alterum”—“And thus are taken the words of Augustine, ‘what subsists, what is discerned, [and] what agrees.’ For a thing subsists through its own principles, it is discerned through its form, and it agrees through a relationship to another; and in a similar way do we take the meaning of ‘mode, species, and order’; for, likewise, ‘mode’ pertains to the determinate principles under the primary principle of existence, ‘species’ to the form, and ‘order’ to the relationship to another”.

65 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.29, a.1, c.

66 Cf. Deely 2007: *IS*, 133–136; 2010b: *SA*, 75–76: “The model *after which* negations are formed is an *ens reale*. But *their being*, their own being as ‘negations’, is a being-modeled—that is to say, a ‘being patterned after’ (that is to say: a relation positively speaking). Precisely this consequence is what needs to be drawn out: that, accordingly, ‘negations’ as objective are themselves mind-dependent relations, no less than are the mind-dependent relations directly patterned after mind-independent relations, and for one and the same reason, to wit, that relation is the only form of being capable as such of existing objectively outside the order of *ens reale*, of finite being as mind-independent”.

67 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.5, a.5, ad.3: “Ad tertium dicendum quod quodlibet esse est secundum formam aliquam, unde secundum quodlibet esse rei, consequuntur ipsam modum, species et ordo, sicut homo habet speciem, modum et ordinem, in quantum est homo; et similiter in quantum est albus, habet similiter modum, speciem et ordinem; et in quantum est virtuosus, et in quantum est sciens, et secundum omnia quae de ipso dicuntur. Malum autem privat quodam esse, sicut caecitas privat esse visus, unde non tollit omnem modum, speciem et ordinem; sed solum modum, speciem et ordinem quae consequuntur esse visus”.

Anything which exists does so according to some form; therefore, the mode, species, and order follow according to the existence of a thing—as human beings have their species, mode, and order insofar as they are human; and similarly, insofar as they are white, they have a similar mode, species, and order; and insofar as they are virtuous, and insofar as they have knowledge, and according to whatever things which may be said of them. Evil, however, deprives a certain existence, as blindness deprives vision of being, whence it does not destroy every mode, species, and order, but only the mode, species, and order which follows upon the existence of sight.

As such, we can see that not only every finite being, but every aspect of a finite being has its own mode, species, and order. Accidents can thus be considered as *relativa secundum dici*, not only as grounding intersubjective predicamental relations, but further in an improper manner, by a kind of logical distinction with a foundation in the nature of the thing, as “related” to the substances in which they inhere, for they too have an order, as subordinate to the good of the substance as a whole. That this threefold constitution belongs also to accidents is evidenced by the deprivation which follows upon the loss of an accident. The loss of its eyes deprives an animal of the power of sight, and thereby are destroyed the mode of being a property, the specific range of light-receptivity to which the animal is determined (i.e., the species), and the ordination to acts of seeing whereby an animal engages the visible objects in its *Umwelt* and thereby alters its internal subjective psychological constitution or *Innenwelt*.

Further, this deprivation of existence, whether it be the existence of a substance or an accident, Thomas tells us, can occur through a destruction of each or any of the elements of the threefold constitution:⁶⁸

It is of the rationale of goodness that it be intended, because the good is that which all things desire, and, on the other hand, it is said that evil is “without intention”. And these three [sources of evil] are able to be reduced to mode, species, and order, which Augustine posits; for “incommensuration” is through the privation of mode; “sin”, through the

68 c.1268b: *In de Divinis Nominibus*, c.4, lec.22: “Est etiam de ratione boni quod sit intentum, quia bonum est quod omnia appetunt et, per oppositum, dicit quod malum est sine intentione. Et haec tria possunt reduci ad modum, speciem et ordinem, quem ponit Augustinus: nam incommensuratio est per privationem modi; peccatum, per privationem speciei; hoc autem quod dicit: sine intentione, per privationem ordinis”.

privation of species; and what we are here talking about, “without intention”, is through the privation of order.

Of particular interest here is the notion of being “without intention”—that is, the privation of order. Since the goodness of a thing consists in its mode, species, and order, the lack of any of these things deprives a being of its total and complete good. In other words, while the first good or perfection of a thing consists in its mode and species, what we might call the internal constitutive elements of its actual existence, the “second” good or perfection of a thing, while still including the internal elements, requires also the fulfillment of the order through which it is united to another—that is, a relationship uniting it to what is perfective.⁶⁹

Thomas also upholds this threefold constitution to be, in all created beings, a representation of the Divine Trinity, though in two different ways:⁷⁰

69 Cf. Blanchette 1992: *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 55–72, in which Blanchette discusses this perfection and the constitutive factors of it at length.

70 1266–68: *ST* Ia, q.45, a.7, c.: “Respondeo dicendum quod omnis effectus aliquid repraesentat suam causam, sed diversimode. Nam aliquis effectus repraesentat solam causalitatem causae, non autem formam eius, sicut fumus repraesentat ignem, et talis repraesentatio dicitur esse repraesentatio vestigii; vestigium enim demonstrat motum alicuius transeuntis, sed non qualis sit. Aliquis autem effectus repraesentat causam quantum ad similitudinem formae eius, sicut ignis generatus ignem generantem, et statua Mercurii Mercurium, et haec est repraesentatio imaginis”.

“Processiones autem divinarum personarum attenduntur secundum actus intellectus et voluntatis, sicut *supra* dictum est, nam filius procedit ut verbum intellectus, spiritus sanctus ut amor voluntatis. In creaturis igitur rationalibus, in quibus est intellectus et voluntas, invenitur repraesentatio Trinitatis per modum imaginis, in quantum invenitur in eis verbum conceptum et amor procedens”.

“Sed in creaturis omnibus invenitur repraesentatio Trinitatis per modum vestigii, in quantum in qualibet creatura inveniuntur aliqua quae necesse est reducere in divinas personas sicut in causam. Quaelibet enim creatura subsistit in suo esse, et habet formam per quam determinatur ad speciem, et habet ordinem ad aliquid aliud. Secundum igitur quod est quaedam substantia creata, repraesentat causam et principium, et sic demonstrat personam patris, qui est principium non de principio. Secundum autem quod habet quandam formam et speciem, repraesentat verbum; secundum quod forma artificiatum est ex conceptione artificis. Secundum autem quod habet ordinem, repraesentat spiritum sanctum, in quantum est amor, quia ordo effectus ad aliquid alterum est ex voluntate creantis”.

“Et ideo dicit Augustinus, in VI Lib. de Trin., quod vestigium Trinitatis invenitur in unaquaque creatura, secundum quod unum aliquid est, et secundum quod aliqua specie formatur, et secundum quod quandam ordinem tenet. Et ad haec etiam reducuntur illa tria, numerus, pondus et mensura, quae ponuntur Sap. XI, nam mensura refertur ad

Every effect somehow represents its cause, but diversely. For some effects only represent the causality of the cause, and not the form of it, as smoke represents fire, and such a representation is said to be a vestigial representation. For a vestige shows the motion of something which has passed through it, but not what kind of thing the represented being is. Some effects, however, represent their causes through a similitude of the form of the cause, as fire generated represents fire generating, and the statue of Mercury represents Mercury, and this is the representation of an image.

The processions of the Divine Persons are attained according to the acts of the intellect and the will, as aforesaid, for the Son proceeds as the word of the intellect and the Holy Spirit as the love of the will. Therefore, in rational creatures, in whom there is intellect and will, there is found a representation of the Trinity in the mode of imaginative representation, insofar as the conceptual word and the proceeding of love are found in them.

But in all creatures there is found a representation of the Trinity in the vestigial mode, insofar as in all creatures there are found some things which it is necessary to reduce to the Divine Persons as to their cause. For every creature subsists in its own act of being, and has a form through which it is determined to a species, and has an ordination to something other. Therefore, according insofar as it is a certain created substance, it represents its cause and principle, and thus shows the person of the Father, who is the “principle from no principle”; insofar as it has a certain form and species, it represents the Word, inasmuch as the form of the artifact is from the conception of the artificer; and insofar as it has an ordering, it represents the Holy Spirit, insofar as it is love, because the order of the effect to something other is from the will of the created.

And therefore, Augustine says in *De trin.* 6 that a vestige of the Trinity is found in any creature whatsoever, inasmuch as it is something one, and inasmuch as it is formed by some species, and insofar as it holds a certain ordering. And to this are also reduced those three of number, weight, and measure, which are posited in Wisdom XI, for measure refers to the limitation of the substance of a thing by its principles, number to species, and weight to order. And to this are also reduced the three which Augustine posits, mode, species, and order. And those things which he posits in the

substantiam rei limitatam suis principiis, numerus ad speciem, pondus ad ordinem. Et ad haec etiam reducuntur alia tria quae ponit Augustinus, modus species et ordo. Et ea quae ponit in libro octoginta trium quaest. quod constat, quod discernitur, quod congruit, constat enim aliquid per suam substantiam, discernitur per formam, congruit per ordinem. Et in idem de facili reduci possunt quaecumque sic dicuntur”.

book of 83 questions, “what subsists, what is discerned, and what agrees”, for something subsists through its substance, is discerned through the form, and agrees through ordering. And everything whatsoever which can be said thus is able to be reduced easily to what is said above.

Thus, persons have a representation in the mode of an image of the Trinity, inasmuch as created persons have intellect and will, and therefore have a formal similarity—as much as can be had by any created and finite being—to the processions, i.e., the real relations, of the Trinity, and thus a person within itself has not only a representation of the causality of the Trinity, but also of the reality proper to it. For the Son proceeds as the Word, just as the finite personal intellect proceeds in the *verbum mentis*; and the Spirit proceeds as Love, just as the finite personal will proceeds in acts of love whereby the beloved is in the lover.⁷¹ Worth noting is that the Trinity itself is composed of persons, constituted through relations. “Person” is a term which signifies, in reference to the Divine, a relation directly and the essence indirectly; with regard to humans and angels, “person” signifies the individual as possessing intellect and will⁷² through which the person is, in a potential way, all things, just as the Trinity is actually all things in a supereminent way—and thus signifies the innate relationality of the person indirectly. Thus, the mode of a finite personal existence encompasses a potential relationality to all things.

Non-personal created beings, however, have in them the vestigial representation of the Trinity, in which they bear the mark of Trinitarian causality, but not a formal similitude. Nevertheless, this vestigial representation includes order as an intrinsic element of the constitution of all beings; the relativity permeating the order of *esse in* is not absent from non-intelligent, non-cognitive, or even non-animate beings:⁷³

71 Cf. 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.27, a.1 *in passim*, esp. ad.1; *ibid.*, a.3, c.: “Secundum autem operationem voluntatis invenitur in nobis quaedam alia processio, scilicet processio amoris, secundum quam amatum est in amante, sicut per conceptionem verbi res dicta vel intellecta, est in intelligente”.

72 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.29, a.4, c.: “Persona enim in communi significat substantiam individuum rationalis naturae, ut dictum est. Individuum autem est quod est in se indistinctum, ab aliis vero distinctum. Persona igitur, in quacumque natura, significat id quod est distinctum in natura illa sicut in humana natura significat has carnes et haec ossa et hanc animam, quae sunt principia individuantia hominem; quae quidem, licet non sint de significatione personae, sunt tamen de significatione personae humanae”.

73 i.1259/65: *SCG*, lib.2, c.24, n.4: “Amplius. Secundum philosophum, in 1 Metaph., ordinare sapientis est: ordinatio enim aliquorum fieri non potest nisi per cognitionem habitudinis et proportionis ordinatorum ad invicem, et ad aliquid altius eius, quod est finis eorum; ordo enim aliquorum ad invicem est propter ordinem eorum ad finem. Cognoscere

According to the Philosopher in *Meta 1*, to order belongs to the wise man: for ordination is not able to be given to something except through cognition of the relationship and proportion of the ordered things to one another, and to something other than either of them, which is the end of them; for the order of things to one another is on account of the ordering of them to an end. To know the relationships and proportions of things to one another belongs only to those having intellect; and to judge of those things through the highest causes belongs to wisdom. And thus it is necessary that every ordering of things through wisdom is by some intelligent being. Whence, even in mechanical things, the architects of buildings are called the wise men of their art. Things which are produced by God do not have an order to one another in a casual way, since they are always or for the most part.

Nevertheless, this innate relationality of the non-personal finite beings is limited in its ordination; while all things in the universe may ultimately be related somehow, as the signate matter from a star exploded 10 billion years ago may in another form be present in our bodies today, such relations are through limited causal chains. The matter from the star is contingently related to the matter in our bodies; the discrete count of intervening causes, of intervening forms, between its presence in the star and its presence in us is practically innumerable. Contrariwise, the innate relationality of the finite personal being is essentially related to all intelligible being.

As such, the threefold constitution of every being by mode, species, and order reveals, on the one hand, a distinctive teleological character to persons⁷⁴ as well as a pervasive teleological ordering to the universe as a whole,⁷⁵ without

autem habitudines et proportiones aliquorum ad invicem est solius habentis intellectum; iudicare autem de alicuius per causam altissimam sapientiae est. Et sic oportet quod omnis ordinatio per sapientiam alicuius intelligentis fiat. Unde et in mechanicis ordinatorum aedificiorum sapientes illius artificii dicuntur. Res autem quae sunt a Deo productae, ordinem ad invicem habent non casualem, cum sit semper vel in pluribus”.

74 See my 2013: “Wojtyła: Nature, Person, and Teleology” in *Thomas Aquinas: Teacher of Humanity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015): 68–84. Cf. Norris Clarke 2009: “The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism” in *The Creative Retrieval of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press): 226–231.

75 Cf. i.1259/65: *SCG III*, c.64 *in passim*, esp. n.9: “Id autem quod est maxime bonum in rebus causatis, est bonum ordinis universi, quod est maxime perfectum, ut Philosophus dicit: cui etiam consonant Scriptura divina, *Gen. I*, cum dicitur, *Vidit Deus cuncta quae fecerat, et*

some grasp of which, neither persons nor non-personal beings are intelligible in their actual existence. Without a total comprehension of the various relations obtaining in both orders—impossible, given the incredible complexity of parts involved—neither the personal nor non-personal can be fully understood. Because of the limitations inherent in all material things—the persistent potency which accompanies all material being—the innate order corporeal things have to a relationship perfective of their existence is not always accomplished and they remain always open to other relationships. Additionally, their individual perfection is subordinated to the whole perfection of the universe, which does not require that each part has its individual perfection. Consequently, understanding corporeal beings as they actually are—as dynamically constituted not only by the intrinsic elements of mode and species, but also relationally by their order to others—is better attained by considering their overall context in the whole of the universe—as Clarke puts it: as substances-in-relation.⁷⁶ It is also an oversimplification to say that the good of a purely material substance consists in any **single** relation, for, since its individual good is subordinate to and constituted by its place in respect to the good of the whole universe, the good of an individual material substance is manifold, both in its proximate environmental circumstances and remotely to the whole.

Most importantly for our own point, however, is that the perfective good at which all things are directed by this intrinsic ordination includes relationality in its very nature:⁷⁷

erant valde bona, cum de singulis operibus dixisset simpliciter quod erant bona”. Blanchette 1992: *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas*, 72–73. See also the discussion of matter and form above, 3.2.2.

76 Cf. n.4 and n.59, above.

77 i.1256–59: *DV* q.21, a.6, c.: “Responsio. Dicendum, quod ratio boni in tribus praedictis consistit, secundum quod Augustinus dicit. Ad huius autem evidentiam sciendum est, quod aliquod nomen potest respectum importare dupliciter. Uno modo sic quod nomen imponatur ad significandum ipsum respectum, sicut hoc nomen pater, vel filius, aut paternitas ipsa. Quaedam vero nomina dicuntur importare respectum, quia significant rem alicuius generis, quam comitatur respectus, quamvis nomen non sit impositum ad ipsum respectum significandum; sicut hoc nomen scientia est impositum ad significandum qualitatem quamdam, quam sequitur quidam respectus, non autem ad significandum respectum ipsum”.

“Et per hunc modum ratio boni respectum implicat: non quia ipsum nomen boni significet ipsum respectum solum, sed quia significat id ad quod sequitur respectus, cum respectu ipso. Respectus autem importatus in nomine boni, est habitudo perfectivi, secundum quod aliquod nomen est perficere non solum secundum rationem speciei, sed etiam secundum esse quod habet in rebus; hoc enim modo finis perficit ea quae sunt ad finem.

The rationale of goodness consists in the three things aforementioned, according to what Augustine says. For evidence of this, it must be known that some name is able to convey a relation in two ways. In the first way, a name is imposed to signify that very relation itself, as, for example, the name “father”, or “son”, or even “paternity”. But some names are said to convey the relation because they signify a thing of some kind, which is accompanied by the relation, although the name is not imposed to the signifying of that relation; as the name “science” is imposed for signifying a certain quality, which follows from a particular relation, but which is not imposed to signify that relation itself.

And in this manner the rationale of goodness includes a relation, not because the name of “good” signifies the relation alone, but because it signifies that from which the relation follows, along with the relation itself. The relation conveyed by the name of “good” is the relationship which perfects, according to which something is intended to be perfected not only according to the rationale of its species, but also according to the existence which it has in things; for it is in this way that the end perfects those things which are towards that end. Since creatures are not their own existence, it is necessary that they have a received existence; and thus their existence is finished and terminated according to the measure of it in those things by which it is received.

Thus, therefore, among the three things Augustine posits, the last, namely order, is the relation which the name “good” conveys; but the other two, namely species and mode, cause that relation. For species pertains to the rationale of the species, which according to that in which something has existence, is received through some determinate mode, since everything which is in something, is in it through the mode of the receiver. Likewise, therefore, whatever good, insofar as it is perfective simultaneously according to the rationale of the species and the existence, has a mode, species, and order: species as to the very rationale of the

Cum autem creaturae non sint suum esse, oportet quod habeant esse receptum; et per hoc earum esse est finitum et terminatum secundum mensuram eius in quo recipitur.”

“Sic igitur inter ista tria quae Augustinus ponit, ultimum, scilicet ordo, est respectus quem nomen boni importat; sed alia duo, scilicet species, et modus, causant illum respectum. Species enim pertinet ad ipsam rationem speciei, quae quidem secundum quod in aliquo esse habet, recipitur per aliquem modum determinatum, cum omne quod est in aliquo, sit in eo per modum recipientis. Ita igitur unumquodque bonum, in quantum est perfectivum secundum rationem speciei et esse simul, habet modum, speciem et ordinem. Speciem quidem quantum ad ipsam rationem speciei; modum quantum ad esse; ordinem quantum ad ipsam habitudinem perfectivi”.

species, mode as to the existence, and order as to the relationship which perfects.

So while “good” conveys relationality in a secondary manner, as something following from a *res absoluta*, it does so necessarily. It follows then, that if we are thinking about the order which is constitutive of all things, we need to think also of the relation: the order of a thing is unknown except by some actuality of the relationship, i.e., the good of the thing is unknown without including a consideration of the relationship whereby the thing is perfected beyond the intrinsic perfection it has through mode and species.

From this, we can deduce that the suprasubjectivity inherent to relation pertains not only to the *relativa secundum esse*, but also to those things signified as *relativa secundum dici* within the categorical order of cognition-independent being. Consider: when we talk about this or that predicamental relation, we can include the proximate *fundamentum* and *terminus* (considered in themselves, *relativa secundum dici*) as distinct *res absolutae* together with the relation itself as a *res relativa* (considered in itself, what is *relativum secundum esse*) in the meaning of the term. This signification can either take something of the *res absolutae* as primary and the relation secondarily, as in the case of “good”, or it can take the relation as primary and its *termini* as secondary, as in the case of “paternity”. While the predicamental relation is constituted by the *esse ad* of the relation itself, it includes in its signification the things which the relation itself makes relative, i.e., the accidents and even the substances which are rendered actually *relativa secundum dici* by the *esse ad* proper to the relation itself. The predicamental relation thereby signifies a twofold distinction: one, the distinction of the *esse ad* from the *esse in*, of a *res relativa* from *res absolutae*; and two, the modal distinction rendered in the *esse in* of accidents inasmuch as they are constituted actually denominable *relativa secundum dici* by the *esse ad* of a relation.

5.1.2.2 *Relativa Secundum Dici* within Objectivity

The cognitive grasp of *relativa secundum dici* extends, however, not only to the subjectivity of finite beings in both their substantiality and accidental features, but also to the objects grasped precisely in their objectivity and even the objects which are *purely* objective. This fact, the innate relativity of both partially and purely objective realities, serves as the fundamental basis for the constitution of social realities; for a social (or cultural, the species-specifically human product of social development) reality, while made **social** through intersubjectivity, has relation as its mode, and its species or determination is given to it in the way it is made an object. In other words, the socially-constituted reality is itself

a relation, determined by realities at least partially constituted through the objectivization of a cognitive agent.⁷⁸ The question of the socially-constituted reality's order is one which can be considered only in the light of the teleological character proper to the beings constituting it, but which can be described, generally, as always necessarily being for the sake of those constituting beings.

In the meanwhile, to restate our point concerning the innate relativity of objects: every concept, both as an entitative modification residing within the soul and as that which makes known some object,⁷⁹ exhibits the same structure of pervasive relativity which is found within categorical being. It is clear that concepts, as accidental modifications of the entitative being of a subject, share in the threefold constitution of all things, including the relativity common to all accidents; less clear is the case of the objectivity wrought through concepts, for to be the object of a finite cognitive agent, particularly one requiring matter as part of the cognitive apparatus, is to be something tenuous and ephemeral, dependent upon a limited cognition. Nevertheless, just as every finite subjectivity, substantial or accident, is constituted by mode, species, and order, i.e., so too every finite objectivity, considered precisely as it is an object, although

78 Cf. Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 45–46: “Mind-dependent beings, however, objects of awareness which are without subjective counterpart or substructure, are not commonly thought to consist merely in relations. Dracula, Cerberus, and the Minotaur are examples that come readily to mind, as does Santa Claus and leprechauns, and a host of other fictions, not to mention Hamlet. These are not relations of reason but rather, as it were, ‘substances of reason,’ fictional individuals, mind-dependent, indeed, but not mind-dependent relations, surely.” To this we would agree, but only with a qualification: that is by the strength of convention, we **treat** these fictional characters as individuals, but **in truth**, each is constituted as a **quasi**-individual by a pattern of relations—such that we can say some fictional portrayal is fitting or not to a character, or how a character can even be changed somewhat by a re-organization or -constitution of the pattern of relations. Consider, for instance, the difference between Chaucer’s and Shakespeare’s Troiluses, or between Marlowe and Goethe’s Faustus, or, in a more contemporary example, the two recent screen adaptations of Sherlock Holmes, one played in movies by Robert Downey Jr., wherein Sherlock is a kind of playboy narcissist, and the other a British television production, played by Benedict Cumberbatch, which preserves the original bored sociopath portrayal; one can say that both are re-presentations of the character, but one is more faithful to the original, inasmuch as the characteristics given him are in accord with, although somewhat different (e.g., Cumberbatch’s Holmes smokes cigarettes instead of opium), how he has consistently been presented, since the original work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

79 I.e., what corresponds to the distinction between the formal concept and the objective concept, discussed in c.1 and c.2.

its species is determined extrinsically by the stimulating object (*obiectum movens*), necessarily requires an order or *habitus* for its constitution as well.

Thus, the concept considered **entitatively** has an accidental mode, the form or actuality which has been intellectually discovered and contracted to a *verbum mentis* as its species, and its ordination the making known of an object. Considered **intentionally**, it has a relational mode, its species as the determination of that relation through the entitative basis,⁸⁰ and an ordination back towards the knower, proximately as what completes (or contributes to the completion of) the knower's immanent perfection, and remotely what contributes to the overall perfection of a human being—including subsequent actions which one may take on the basis of what is known. But just as the ordination of finite entitative being is manifold—including a plurality of relations beyond a simple relationship to one good, and a connected chain of relations intermediated by various forms—so too the manner of finite objective being's ordination involves a multitude of relations, through which it attains its good.

In the case of finite subjectivities, the ultimate good towards which they are innately ordered requires, to at least some degree, that they first become engaged in intersubjective, predicamental relations. This requirement is clear in subordination of the good of material beings to the good of the whole universe—which good is itself an enormously complex network of predicamental relations—inasmuch as the capacity for any one individual to contribute to that good requires that it be engaged in relations with others. For instance, the interaction between a hydrogen molecule and an oxygen atom whereby water is formed requires an intersubjective relation of action and passion between the two elements, and water in turn requires, for its fulfillment in the overall structure of the universe, an intersubjective relation of action and passion with those living beings that derive their nourishment from it, which living beings in turn become nourishment for others, and so on. Similarly, the gravitational pull of the Sun on the Earth keeps the latter in an orbit preserving an appropriate environment for carbon-based life.

Likewise, objectivities constituted by the *verba mentis* are proximately ordered towards interobjective *relationes rationis*, but primarily and ultimately towards the perfection of the knower. This proximate ordination to interobjectivity is evident in second intentions, for the object of the reflexive concept is itself the relation between a direct object and the direct concept whereby it is known. As aforementioned,⁸¹ a second intention results in a purely cognitive denomination, wherein the object thereby constituted (such as “animal”)

80 See 5.2.2 below.

81 See 1.3.1.2.2.

cannot fit the existence of the actual being (i.e., “animal” in its exact signification is not found in any *re extra animam*, only virtually), but only as it exists in cognized being. Thus the object of the second intention—that towards which the second intention directs the intellect’s consideration—is the relation between the object of the reflexive concept and the object of the direct concept.

Whereas the pervasiveness of the *relativa secundum dici* within the categorical order, the entanglement of all beings in a relativity through which perfections both of individuals and of the whole, indicates and reveals the teleological ordination of the whole of creation, the total suffusion of relativity in the conceptual order, both as accidental modifications of a substance and in the sphere of objectivity, always at least suggests and at times even illustrates the teleological ordination of the cognitive nature of a specific creature,⁸² and, for our purposes, most especially of the human being (since the cognitive faculties of brute animals do not extend to all things, their intrinsic perfection is still in a certain way wholly subordinate to the perfection of the universe as a whole). For example, human beings are political animals by nature. But this political nature is partially manifested and fulfilled through government, a being the reality of which is constituted not only through social interactions, but social interactions based around commonly-conceived objective realities. In other words, objectively-constituted realities are necessary to the terrestrial ordering of human beings, to the limited fulfillment which we may attain on earth.

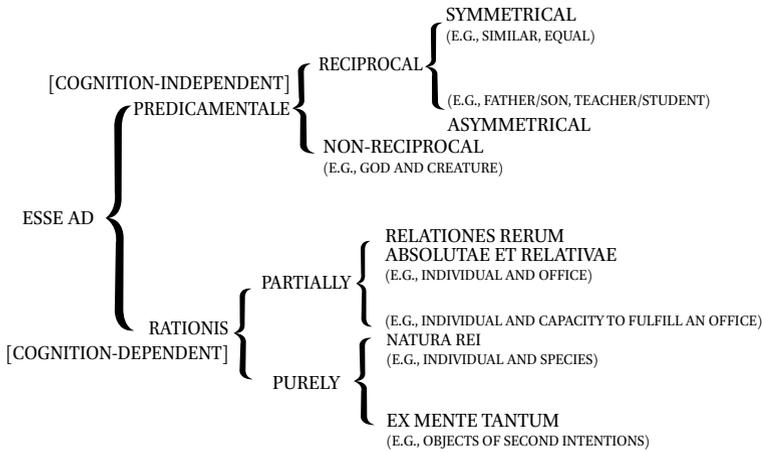
5.1.3 *The Constitution of Cognition-Dependent Relative Being*

Relative being, it should be evident, deserves its own schematic ordering: for within the formal rationale of relation itself, *esse ad*, there exists on the one hand the predicamental relation, divided into the reciprocal and non-reciprocal, and the reciprocal divided into the symmetric and the asymmetric. On the other hand, there exists the cognition-dependent relation, divided into what is specified by a form produced in the mind but not found in reality, including things which are specified in their being purely by convention, the objects made known by second intentions, i.e., the relation between direct concept and formal object; and those things which are modally distinct and what is partially specified by mind, including both those things *ex natura rei* as phenomenological moments⁸³ and the relations between *res absolutae* and *relativae*.

Thus, we can have a schematic organization of the being of *esse ad* as found in figure 2.

82 Specifically, of the *Innenwelt*, or internal psychological constitution determining cognitive and cathectic relations to the world.

83 Cf. Sokolowski 2000: *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 23.

FIGURE 2 *Divisions of esse ad.*

Poinsot has insightfully elucidated the kinds of predicamental relation at some length.⁸⁴ The kinds of cognition-dependent relation, however, while they could likely be further distinguished—almost *ad infinitum*, given the way in which things can be cognitively-divided⁸⁵—can be considered according to what is partially dependent upon cognition for the constitution of the object, and partially constituted in its objectivity on the basis of something cognition-independent. Such an object could either be the relation between “an absolute thing and a relative thing”, i.e., a *res absoluta* and a *res relativa*, or between “what arises from the nature of a concrete thing and that thing itself”. An instance of the former would be between an individual and a socially-constituted, recognized, institutionalized office, as when we speak of this or that “professor” or “judge”. For an instance of the latter, i.e., what arises from the nature of a concrete thing, we could consider the individual and his or her capacity to fulfill such an office. Whereas the former may be arbitrary—a professor or judge being entirely unqualified for the intended purpose of the office—the latter objectivity, partially cognition-dependent and yet arising partially from the cognition-independent nature of the thing, entails an element of fittingness neither explicitly included nor excluded from the former, i.e., the relation between absolute and relative things.

There can also be objectivities which are purely cognition-dependent, i.e., constituting purely objective realities, which arise either *ex natura rei*, such as

84 1632b: *TDS*, 100–112 (R.I 583b1–590b32).

85 As stated above in 3.2.2, every material being can be considered as infinitely divisible (or expandable) in some way or another.

those things which we conceive of according to separations impossible in their real existence, as the species from its animal, or directly from cognition alone, such as the objects of second intentions, the relation between a direct concept and its object. Those purely objective realities arising *ex natura rei*, though the actual constitution of the object is arrived at purely through cognition, since they exist as relations, involve some object the species of which is determined by a cognition-independent reality. As aforementioned, the second intention considers not the direct concept and the concrete object itself as actually existing, but rather as abstracted, and therefore, the specifications are—though ultimately always dependent upon some cognition-independent reality—directly and immediately given by cognitive acts.

To more fully explain these non-predicamental relations, let us elaborate on the constitution of objective beings, both those purely and those partially objective.

5.1.3.1 Constitution of Purely Objective Beings

Every purely objective being has *esse ad* as its mode of existence. This might be missed inasmuch as every purely objective being also has a proper species, apart from its mode; but species is always consequent to mode in the constitution of a being, as, while there might be modulation consequent to the species, the primary role of the species is to determine the *esse*, which must first already be *in* or *ad*.⁸⁶ As an example, we can take the government of the United States of America. Its mode is *esse ad*, relation: for the government exists *in* no substance—not in the physical document of the Constitution or its many reproductions, not in the president or other members of the executive branch, the members of Congress, the judiciary, or the various officials of the States. It is, rather, something which exists *between* all of these various parts.

The species of the government is a complex wrought from a number of principles concerning the ordering of human relations which are subsequently enacted through human law. This complex species does not exist *in se*, or, for that matter, *in alio*; it is, rather, an *ens rationis*. There is no individual subject, or subjects, upon whom the denomination “United States government” falls, or can fall, for it is determined in terms of laws, which institute offices, which offices are filled by individuals but are in principle separable from those individuals. This does not preclude the government from being considered positively,

86 The existence *ad* of something is, of course, already dependent upon some prior *esse in*, as a kind of ontological priority, but that existence *in* may be external to the thing existing as *ad*.

as a “thing”, a kind of *res*, despite it not existing independently of cognitive awareness;⁸⁷ only that it is a *res relativa* and not a *res absoluta*.

The order of the government is ultimately being-for the common good: that is, any government, as what gives order to human societies, exists for the sake of protecting and promoting the good of the whole. The specifying elements of the government, human laws, even when based on the natural law, are determined in their particular being by convention; for while law is generally defined as an ordinance of reason promulgated by one entrusted with the care for the common good,⁸⁸ the social efficacy of a law depends upon its intersubjective acceptance.⁸⁹ The codification of these laws, at least in most modern nations and by legitimate governments, is so that there may be a semblance of permanence, independent of the vagaries of (inter)subjective dispositions and interpretations; this is to protect the ordering of the government, for the individual is, as Aristotle says, less capable of judging, and particularly in the moment.⁹⁰

While it is necessary, in the constitution of a government, to attempt minimizing the alterations which may arise through individual interpretation, interpretation nonetheless forms an essential aspect in the constitution of any purely objective being, inasmuch as interpretation is an integral element to intellectual composition, and purely objective beings have existence only, as pure termini, on the basis of *verba mentis*.⁹¹ The more complex a concept, the more interpretation involved in its formation. Thus, it is entirely possible for a government to come into existence while nevertheless deprived of its proper order, because of a flaw in the species, given as it is by an interpretatively-formed *verbum mentis*. Such is the case with all tyranny. Other forms of government

87 1632b: *TDS*, 95/34–42 (R.I 581b11–19): “Quod ergo aliquid possit considrari positive, etiamsi non entiative realiter, proprium relationis est. Et hoc solum voluit dicere Caietan cit. loco, cum dixit relationem rationis esse veram relationem, non veritate entitatis et formae informantis, sed veritate obiectivae et positivae tendentiae ad terminum.” Cf. Cajetan 1507: *In ST Ia*, q.28, a.1, n.9.

88 Cf. 1271a: *ST Ia–IIae*, q.90, a.4, c.

89 Cf. Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 116: “The most important point in the social construction of reality, no doubt occurs in the political order, when the semiotic animals sit down together to try to decide how to govern themselves, how to decide what is to be permitted and what not permitted in social behavior and arrangements. Thus the constitution of a state, for example, the document, I mean, which details what the arrangement shall be for a given human community, is a prime example of a purely objective reality which can yet be realized in the subjective order of living and interacting individuals”.

90 i.367–47BC: Πητορικύ, I.1, 1354a22–b22.

91 Cf. 4.2.3.

may have some partial privation of order, being aimed at the common good in an incomplete manner, or being incorrect in the understanding of that in which the common good consists. Consequently, interpretation is at the basis of the determination of a government's existence, both as to its order and to its species, but never as to its mode.

The same is true of all purely objective beings: it belongs to the proper rationale or *ratio* that their mode is that of a relation, while their species and their actual ordering are determined by the interpretative *verbum mentis*. Consequently, the many parts of a complex purely objective being, such as a government, can be cognition-independent subjectivities existing in the order of *esse in*, and involved in further predicamental relations, existing in the order of *esse ad*, but are actually instantiated into the governmental structure, into the specification of the form through which it actually exists, into the complete cognition-dependent objectivity, as cognition-dependent relations. All finite things which have *esse ad* as their mode of existence are necessarily founded, ultimately, on something which exists as *esse in*, upon some being in the subjective order of relative-independence (“relative” because the Divine alone can be truly independent). Thus, though their species and order are given by the *verbum mentis*, the whole of such a cognition-dependent relative being is itself subordinated in its order to that *ens naturae* upon which it is founded. The ordination of such a purely-objective being is therefore subordinated, or ought to be, to the ordination belonging to the *ens* or *entia naturae* from which its being is provenated.

5.1.3.2 Constitution of Partially-Objective Beings

We have already indicated the nature of the partially-objective being,⁹² namely, that which belongs to an object both in cognized being and in its actual existence, but not in its individual subjective constitution. Such a being requires a *verbum mentis* combining both the grasp of the cognition-independent subject—a direct concept of some *ens naturae*—and that of the purely-objective cognition-dependent reality. If we take, for instance, the example of a professor, we involve in the *verbum mentis* a multitude of concepts, even in the abstract: for to be a professor requires being human, which requires having a gender, the capacity for discursive intellectual thought, as well as the capability for teaching—which, though accidental to the subjectively-constituted individual, is essential to the fulfillment of the ordination of the cognition-dependent construct in which being a professor is a recognized socially-constituted reality, belonging to the context of some purely-objective

92 See 1.3.1.2.2.

reality, such as a university. Therefore, the concept requires not only that there be certain aspects belonging to the individual, but includes also an extrinsic denomination, in part derived from the purely-objective realities established to facilitate the natural ordination of the human being. For “being a professor” is predicated of someone not purely on his or her capability for teaching, but rather upon the recognition so-given within a social context, oftentimes including certain other socially-constituted requirements, such as a degree in the field in which one is hired.

Thus, on the one hand, the specification of the partially-objective reality by a *verbum mentis* includes both that which is derived from (i.e., intellectually discovered or “abstracted”) and returns to (judged, through phantasms) an *ens naturae*, and that which is produced as an *ens rationis* or cognition-dependent objectivity. The vast majority of our social interactions involve, to some degree or another, such a combination, and overemphasis on one or another of the two primary aspects—the cognition-dependent or independent—can disrupt the ordination of society. For instance, when employers or companies start treating their employees **purely** as employees, their humanity is denigrated; likewise, when a student treats a professor **purely** as a human, the professorial distinction and the authority, function, and dignity of his position are mitigated. Certainly, the former example of employer and employee is more destructive; but the latter is still something requisite to the continued functioning of an established social order. Nevertheless, that social order can be altered, changed, and shifted over time, in some ways to be more fitting to the overall ordination given it by its dependent relation to human nature, in other ways to be less.

5.2 Relations and Objectivity

By now, it is clear that the *relativa secundum dici*—in itself, something existing in the categorical order, but, as considered *in re*, indicative of the need for relation in all finite being—is crucial to the completed understanding of finite beings as they exist in their actual contexts. In other words, relativity permeates the constitution of beings as objectivized. What remains to be seen is how relations themselves, the *relativa secundum esse*, actually come into apprehension, how they are integrated into our concepts, and what effect they have upon the total cognitive endeavor of human beings, enveloped as that endeavor is by *ens primum cognitum*. The apprehension of relations—both cognition-independent and cognition-dependent—does not differ in kind from the intellectual discovery of the quiddities of substantial being, as the object is still a

quid, albeit differently constituted than the *quid* found in the order of substantial being. This sameness-in-kind of the intellectual acts involved is due to the all-embracing foundational unity of *ens primum cognitum*.

5.2.1 *Intellectual Apprehension of Relations*

Given that there is no material being from which a relation might be abstracted, it is a worthwhile question: how does the human being intellectually discover relation? What is the illuminated source in which the intellect is capable of discovering such a *quid*?

Just as the essential aspects of substances are not discerned through an extractive process of separating some form from matter, but in discovering those forms through the accidents and properties more immediately evident to sensation—“looking” or “reading” into much more than “extracting” out from—so too relation is discerned through what is found in sense; but just like the substantial form of anything, it is not discovered in sense. We can no more see substantial realities than we can relational realities, but whereas the intrinsic principles of substances are discerned through a kind of “reading in”, an *inter legere* as Thomas would have it,⁹³ principally through what is revealed by the inherent, immanent accidents of things, cognition-independent relations are discovered by the transivity of action and passion. This reveals, on the one hand, the nature of the accidents and substances involved in such an intersubjective relation as *relativa secundum dici*. On the other hand, it partially shows the nature of relation itself, as a mode of existence distinct from what is found within the substantial order.⁹⁴ That is, we see the accidents of

93 1272: *ST* 11a–11ae, q.8, a.1, c.: “nomen intellectus quantum intimam cognitionem importat, dicitur enim intelligere quasi intus legere”.

94 Cf. Gloria Wasserman 2007: “Thomas Aquinas on Truths about Nonbeings” in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, vol.80: 101–113, wherein purely objective beings—particularly negations and privations—rather than being recognized in their essential relativity, are ascribed to the psychological subjectivity of the knowing intellect, such that the truth of the proposition about such a non-being has a reflexivity to the knower. Wasserman does encroach upon the truth in stating (108–109): “The intellect is not merely a passive recipient of the structures that exist in the world. Its own activity is a necessary condition of its coming to be fully adequated with that which does not depend on itself. Without the intellect’s activity of forming conceptions of that which does not exist in reality, there can be no adequation and consequently, no true propositions about what is not”. We would suggest, and have suggested (5.1.3) that, likewise, without such activity of the intellect, neither can there be true propositions about things which are, but which are only on the basis of cognitive activity: as fictional characters, governments, and any socially-constituted realities. When we realize the possibility of existential modulation into *esse in* and *esse*

action and passion, of the signs of cause and effect, as revealing first of all the necessary relativity of accidents within the order of subjectivity, as well as of the subjects themselves, and secondly as revealing the *esse ad* which is proper to the relation itself.

The full revelation of relation's nature, however, requires also a grasping of the indifference of relation as such to its being cognition-dependent or independent. Thus, a realization of cognition-dependent relations is also required for a complete understanding of relation itself. The explicit awareness of such relations requires a reflex concept; for while we might recognize certain cognition-dependent relations in common experience, we do so only in regards to those relations which arise in some manner from the nature of the case—what, in the Suarezian taxonomy, is a *distinctio ratio ratiocinantae*.

That is, the realization of relation's proper nature occurs only in a scientifically-philosophical understanding, wherein one has engaged in conscientious reflection upon concepts themselves. What is grasped through such a realization is a mode of being the nature of which does not reduce to cognition-independent realities; that is, although our grasp of the *ratio* proper to relation itself begins in sensation, it does not reduce to what is discovered in sensation, even less so than does the realization of substantial form.

5.2.2 *Interpretation and the Constitution of Objective Realities*

As aforementioned, purely and partially objective realities are specified through *verba mentis*,⁹⁵ inasmuch as every cognitive intention is founded upon such a *verbum*.⁹⁶ Such a species determines not only the particular form of the object, but also the actual ordination (though not the ideal ordination) to some extent or another. We saw before that the *species expressae* of cognition-dependent beings are formed through the same process whereby we form *species expressae* of cognition-independent beings.⁹⁷ What was not fully explored was just how the interpretation integral to the formation of such *species expressae*⁹⁸ actually shapes the objective reality: for the *species expressae* pertaining

ad, and realize that both are the objects of conceptualization in the same manner, we can free ourselves completely from the “internal” / “external” paradigm of knowledge that caused so much trouble for modernity. In the words of Robert J. Henle 1982: “The Basis of Philosophical Realism Re-examined” in *The New Scholasticism* 56.1, 1: “I am not thinking of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ our awareness. Such language surreptitiously imposes spatiality on our consciousness and distorts all subsequent analysis”.

95 Above, 5.1.3.

96 Cf. 4.2.2.

97 Cf. 4.3.2.

98 Cf. 4.2.3.

strictly to cognition-independent beings do not shape that reality—they are either accurate or inaccurate, correct or incorrect, adequated or not—though they do determine how the cognition-independent reality is made present as an **object**, which determination is the result of an interpretative act. This essentially interpretative nature of concept formation, as we stated, results immediately in the individual idiosyncratic perspective, and, through social interaction, in the development of culture.

This constitutive role of the interpretatively-formed *verbum mentis* finds a comparable notion in what Heidegger calls the “world-forming” nature of the human being: that is, human beings, always involved in a context of cognition-independent beings, do not merely acknowledge the presence of such beings, but by giving interpretation to these beings—and further, by giving being through interpretation to objectively-constituted realities—form the objectivity which is constitutive of their own worlds.⁹⁹ The objectifying or taking of things “as”, aforementioned as essential to all interpretation,¹⁰⁰ is what Heidegger calls a “structural moment of manifestness”, crucial to the formation of a world. In his own words, interpretation is, for Heidegger, a kind of laying-out of what is in some way there:¹⁰¹

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a “signification” over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation. ... An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us.

This “world” is what Heidegger means by the “there” of Dasein. Now, although “world” is principally used by Heidegger to signify (1) the actual context of beings in which a given Dasein lives, and thereby encounters Being, there are three other closely related meanings: (2) the totality of beings which can be present-at-hand (i.e., perceived as things in their own right and not merely

99 This notion is prominent in all of the early Heidegger, but is to be found with its fullest exposition in 1929–30: *GM*, 274–365.

100 Cf. 4.2.3 above.

101 Heidegger 1927a: *SZ*, 150/190–92: “Sie wirft nicht gleichsam über das nackte Vorhandene eine »Bedeutung« und beklebt es nicht mit einem Wert, sondern mit dem innerweltlichen Gegnenden als soe ihm hat es je schon eine im Weltverstehen erschlossene Bewandtnis, die durch die Auslegung herausgelegt wird”.

objects); (3) the Being of those beings inasmuch as they are considered objectively, or things considered as objects in light of the possibilities which may be opened up for them in relation to Dasein; and (4) the possibility of such an environment of objective consideration.¹⁰² The principal signification of “world” (1), as it is used in the phrase “Being-in-the-world,” is in some way either dependent upon or inclusive of these other meanings, and the experience of these others are enriched for Dasein by Dasein’s experience of the primary signification.

In which of these senses, then, is Dasein said to be “world-forming”? Clearly, the second and fourth senses are in some way **prior** to the actual experience of the manifestation of some being for Dasein, and therefore refer more properly to a world which is not formed by Dasein. As such, we posit that the first sense is that in which Dasein is principally said to be world-forming, but through what the third sense signifies—that is, the illumination of beings (the “objective light” of *ens primum cognitum*) through the interpretative consideration whereby they are made objects, i.e., the taking-of-things-as in accord with certain possibilities of how Dasein may consider or approach those beings, which constitutes the actual context in which Dasein exists.¹⁰³ In other words, *ens ut primum cognitum* serves as an illumination for the various ways in which this or that being can be conceived, i.e., made an object through the formation of a *verbum mentis*, including those beings which are *entia naturae*, beings the existence of which is entirely independent of any cognitive acts on our part.

When cognition-dependent elements are added to the total content of the object considered by a *species expressa*, however—provided they are not mistakenly being taken as representative of the cognition-independent reality—the object becomes determined in its **being**, either partially, with partially-objective being, or completely, with purely objective being, by the taking “as” which is integral to the formation of a *species expressae*. That is, the formation of the world, proper to human beings in their distinctively human characteristic, i.e., Dasein, includes those objects which are *entia rationis*. The world, the actual context in which a human being lives and engages things intellectually is equally open to entities of both a cognition-independent and cognition-dependent constitution.

Thus, while interpretation is responsible for our bearing towards cognition-independent beings, though it has no direct or immediate impact on their reality, it is also, and much more importantly responsible for the very being of what is cognition-dependent, inasmuch as the latter’s constitution depends upon

102 Heidegger 1927a: SZ, 64–65/93.

103 Cf. 3.2.1.5 above.

the formation of a *verbum mentis* that is inherently an interpretation. Most important, however, is the fact that the world of our experience, the world which we form through these interpretations, can be constituted in a continuous manner: objective constitution can be coherent with, though always dependent upon and subordinate to, the cognition-independent constitutions of both things existing outside the intellectual creature and the intellectual creature itself.

We are therefore brought to a final question in this chapter: namely, what then do we really mean by “the real” in expressions such as “the real world”, or “dealing with reality”? How are we to define what is or is not “real” for a human being? Mere appeal to something being cognition-independent does not seem a sufficient explanation for our use of this term—nor does it seem that a broader use of the term is entirely illegitimate, for we are not likely to descry the reality of an institutional office such as that of a professor or a judge, a police officer, or the value of legally-recognized tender, of laws governing taxation, or the reality of the United Nations, though all of these things are cognition-dependent for their existence. “Reality as we experience it is neither purely objective nor purely subjective nor purely intersubjective, but rather a constantly shifting mixture and proportion of all three not at all easy (perhaps not even fully possible) to keep complete track of”.¹⁰⁴ Where are the points of demarcation in our experience of reality? Where do we divide between cognition-dependence and independence in the objects of our experience?

5.2.3 “Reality”, “The Real”, and Objective Constitution

To clarify our position against the restriction of the terms “reality” and “the real” to cognition-independent beings, we can turn our attention back explicitly to relation; for in mixed relations we can see that purely objective things can have influence on absolute reified reality, i.e., on cognitive agents: the knowledge that a man is a police officer is a cognition the content of which includes an element purely objective, and yet it induces me to act with increased deference to that man. There is, indeed, a reality to the mixed relations inasmuch as they are effectual on *res absolutae*, through the cognized *res relativae*.

But the denomination “real”, in regard to each ordering of one thing to the other, comes from the fact that there is an effect on the terminus—that the terminal *res*, by the *esse ad* of the relation itself, becomes in some way other than it was before. This is evident by looking at what constitutes a mixed relation, i.e., a relation which is “real” or cognition-independent in one regard and

¹⁰⁴ Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 116.

cognition-dependent in the other, in which the *esse ad* (1) considered in regard to the first fundament (A) is a *res relativa* producing an effect in the terminus (B), but in which the *esse ad* (2) considered in regard to the effected terminus-turned fundament (B) produces no effect in its correlative terminus (A); and so we say that in the first consideration of the *esse ad* (1), the relation is considered according to something cognition-independent, while in the second consideration of the *esse ad* (2), the relation is considered according to something cognition-dependent. This non-reciprocal reality of the relation is why we can say that knowers are really related to the known—even when the known is not something itself real—but not vice versa. That is, the knower (B) produces no effect in the known (A); so the *esse ad* (1) of knower to known is something real, inasmuch as (A) effects (B), but the *esse ad* (2) of known to knower is something cognition-dependent, inasmuch as (B) does not effect (A).

We can see the reality of relations themselves clearly—the *relativa secundum esse*—inasmuch as the relation itself can be named. That is, the *esse ad*, as a relative thing or *res relativa*, can be given a name proper to it: “Certain relative names are imposed for the signification of the relative habitudes themselves, such as ‘lord’, ‘servant’, ‘father’ and ‘son’, and things of this kind; and these are called relative according to relation’s proper existence”.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the term *res*, as a transcendental, applies to the *esse in* of beings apprehended as belonging to a special mode, but also to the *esse ad* which can obtain between them: “The term *res* is said transcendentially, and therefore it is related commonly to absolute things and to relative things”.¹⁰⁶

Though there is no cognition-independent relation of God to creature, God is not said to be “Lord” before there is a creature to whom He is Lord; until there exists something which is subject to Him, there is no *esse ad*, because, although no cognition-independent relation obtains from God to creature, without the *relatio realis* of creature to God, there is no basis for

105 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.13, a.7, ad.1: “relativa quaedam sunt imposita ad significandum ipsas habitudines relativas, ut dominus, servus, pater et filius, et huiusmodi, et haec dicuntur relativa secundum esse.” Cf. 1256/9: *DV*, q.4, a.5, c.: “In relativis autem invenimus quod quaedam nomina imponuntur ad significandum respectus ipsos, sicut hoc nomen similitudo; quaedam vero ad significandum aliquid ad quod sequitur respectus, sicut hoc nomen scientia imponitur ad significandum qualitatem quamdam quam sequitur quidam respectus”.

106 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.2, q.1, a.5, ad.2 (bold portion translated): “**res est de transcendentibus, et ideo se habet communiter ad absoluta et ad relata**; et ideo est res essentialis, secundum quam personae non differunt, et est res relativa sive personalis, secundum quam personae distinguuntur”.

the inverse *relatio rationis*.¹⁰⁷ Hence, the reality of the *esse ad* considered in itself is not identical in any way with the fundament itself, i.e., the accident existing according to the mode of *esse in*, but is its own reality. Nor could it be said that the relation is the “transcendental relativity”, i.e., the *relativa secundum dici*, which pertains to all finite things and which is necessary to the provenation of a cognition-independent relation; for without the relation, neither of the terms involved in a cognition-independent relation would be relative.¹⁰⁸

Thus, we can speak of a “hardcore” reality, i.e., reality as independent of cognitive experience, reality as what is in the order of subjective constitution—the basis of all finite existence—and of a broader sense of reality, including the cognitional, even purely cognition-dependent beings, inasmuch as these have a real effect on cognitive agents. The sense of hardcore reality is best found in what Thomas says: “it is not possible that [the universal] be really abstracted from material individuals, as the Platonists claim. For human beings are not

107 Except, of course, inasmuch as every possible reality exists virtually in the mind of God.

108 Henninger (1989: *Relation: Medieval Theories 1250–1325*, 13–39) points this out in his treatment of St. Thomas, albeit in different and more analytically-inspired terminology, and without drawing the connection between the *res relativa* and the notion of *relativa secundum esse*, nor between what he calls the *esse-in relationis*, i.e., the innate character of finite accidents to be engaged in real relations, and the *relativa secundum dici*. See especially p. 31: “According to (B) [if the *ratio* of *a* neither is the same as, nor is part of, nor follows as a necessary consequence from, the *ratio* of *b*, then *a* is really distinct from *b*] and (C) [if the *ratio* of *a* either is the same as, or is a part of, or follows as a necessary consequence from, the *ratio* of *b*, then *a* is not really distinct from *b*], is there a real distinction between a real relation and its foundation? Again, there is need to distinguish, and the results are the same as with criterion (A) [*a* is really distinct from *b* if and only if it is logically possible that *a* exist without *b*]. For by (C), on the one hand, there is no real distinction between the reality of an accident as an intrinsic perfection, e.g. *esse-in qualitatis*, and the reality of the accident as a foundation for possible relations, i.e. *esse-in relationis*. For from ‘*a* is white’ it follows as a necessary consequence ‘if another white thing *b* came to exist, *a* would be similar to *b*’.”

“But by (B) there is a real distinction between the foundation and the real relation with a respect, the *esse-ad*, to some particular thing. For *a*’s being really related to *b* is not the same as, nor part of, nor does it follow as a necessary consequence from, *a*’s being white. That is, ‘*a* is really similar to *b*’ does not follow from ‘*a* is white’ for it is contingent whether *b* comes to exist and be white. Both by (A) and by (B), then, there is a real distinction between a real relation and its foundation”. What Henninger does not express, however, is the essentially suprasubjective nature of relation itself, a nature not merely intersubjective, such that the *relativa secundum esse*, which consists purely in *esse ad*, is indifferent to whether it is a *relatio realis* or a *relatio rationis*.

natural, that is, real, except as in **this** flesh and **these** bones”.¹⁰⁹ But, as Deely writes:¹¹⁰

“Reality” is more than a word, but it is also more than hardcore reality as well. In fact, “reality”, even in the hardcore sense, would not be accessible at all in awareness were it not for purely objective relations necessary for animals to orientate themselves in the environment, objective relations which provide, just as did the intersubjective relations of the physical environment in the first place, that further interface whereby semiosis in the human animal becomes conscious of itself, and semiotics begins to exist as a postmodern perspective on “reality” as involving social construction, yes, but involving the hardcore elements of the physical universe as well. This is the awareness that enables the semiotic animal to expand the objective world to the infinite, in a semiosis asymptotically assimilating the whole of reality to the level of human understanding, a “reality” wherein truth is an accomplishment, not a given, and where the human responsibility for finding what is true and making what is true go together.

That is, every animal, in cognitively grasping some object, in that objectivization, in that cognitive grasp, includes some elements of hardcore reality in its object, but also some elements which are purely on the basis of objectivization: that is, though species-specifically based, it includes its idiosyncratic judgments as to the relation of the object to itself as consisting in a relation of benefit, harm, or neutrality. In the case of human beings, much more complexity can and often does become involved in the process of objectivization, inasmuch as we objectivize things not only in their basic relations to us, but as related to other beings as well, as within dynamic social, cultural, and idiosyncratic contexts; through our *verba mentis*, we form not only concepts of things, but concepts of things-in-worlds.

This expansion of “reality” beyond the hardcore is not something which will be found explicitly in Thomas, or even in Poinset. Nevertheless, one could only oppose either Thomas or the faithful John to such an interpretation by forcing their treatments of both relation and the term “reality” to a strictly univocal use. The notion of such an expansion of “reality” is latently present in Poinset’s

109 c.1268a: *In de anima*, lib.2, lec.12, n.378: “Non est autem possibile, quod abstrahatur a materia individuali realiter, sicut Platonici posuerunt. Non enim est homo naturalis, id est realis, nisi in his carnibus, et in his ossibus”.

110 Deely 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 118.

treatment of second intentions; that is, in the contrast between a second intention and the cognition-dependent extrinsic denomination which is fitting to the being of some *re extra animam*.

The understanding of “reality” which we are advancing here, however, is one which can only be developed on the back of a proper understanding of *ens primum cognitum*.

The Nature of *Ens Primum Cognitum*

We will now be able to illustrate the nature of *ens primum cognitum* in a manner which we believe both to be consistent with Thomas Aquinas and to provide a clarity which neither the great thinker nor his followers have yet given. Afterwards, we will conclude by indicating some of what we believe to be the most important consequences of this clarified perspective.

6.1 Summary of Argument

The preceding chapters have painted a complex picture. Perhaps this complexity seems unwieldy or unnecessary: but our opinion is that the reality with which we are here dealing—the whole unfolding of human cognition and its fundamental basis—is indeed rather complex, and requires a rich and multifaceted portrait. Painting a simple picture ignores many aspects of the reality of human cognition. Avoiding such misrepresentation—so common in the history of philosophy—has been our aspiration.

Consequently, before presenting our concluding remarks, I want to provide a summary to clarify the connection of the points which I have made in relation to the whole of the picture for my conclusion.

First: we showed that the earlier tradition of Thomism, exemplified by Cajetan and Poinset, seriously and deeply considered *ens primum cognitum*, contributing various insights to a genuine understanding; but that neither thinker fully answered the questions with which we began our inquiry, back in the introduction. Prompted by the Scotistic school's consideration of *ens* as first only as the final principle in the order of metaphysical resolution, neither fully distinguished *ens primum cognitum* from a metaphysically considered *ens*, nor the indifference of *ens primum cognitum* to the distinction between *ens naturae* and *ens rationis*. Cajetan ultimately asserts that knowledge does not unfold **within** *ens primum cognitum* but is rather **added** to it by a kind of accretion of parts which are not resolved **into** *ens* (cf. 1.2.3). Consequently, there is no ground for an integral human experience, save a resolution to the highest causes or principles of being. Thus, there is discontinuity between things which are natural, or substantially-constituted, and those things which are cultural, objectively-constituted and cognition-dependent realities.

Poinsot gives us a critical foundation, noting that *ens primum cognitum*, while realized in the material object of some particular thing, is a distinct formal object: that is, the limitations of the material object do not confine the formal object of *ens ut primum cognitum*. Poinsot does not, however, explicate the manifold implications for this distinction in regards to the unfolding of human knowledge, or show how there is continuity between the natural and the cultural. Nor, for that matter, does his discussion of *ens primum cognitum* answer Heidegger's question of *Sein* as prior to the division of the categories.

Second: we showed that the more recent Thomistic tradition, exemplified by two of the 20th century's greatest promulgators of St. Thomas' thought, Gilson and Maritain, also contributes to our understanding of *ens primum cognitum*, but under the difficult and constraining conditions of overcoming idealism. While Gilson did necessary work in showing that ideas cannot be the starting point of knowledge, his doctrine of metaphysical realism commits the opposed—albeit more forgivable—error: namely, it attempts to reduce an irreducibly complex reality, human intellectual experience, to a single mediate motivating principle. In other words, by asserting that the objects of human knowledge are divisible into the extra-mentally real (what exists in the order of subjective constitution, *ens reale*) and the mentally-fictive (what exists “logically”, *ens rationis*), such that the former is the proper object of the intellect existing really and the latter is derivative and deficient, and not something which enters into the “real” experience of human beings, Gilson's theory ultimately excludes from the status of legitimate objects of cognition a large portion of things engaged with in common experience.

Though Maritain was likewise concerned with overcoming the problems of idealism, and ultimately reduced the proper object of human knowledge to *ens reale*, he also provides us valuable clarifications on the nature of knowledge—with insights as to the essentially positive nature of the act commonly called “abstraction”, the distinction between objects considered *ut res* and *ut obiecti*, and the nature of the concept—and especially with strong clues as to the distinction between *species impressae* and *species expressae*, indicating much of the complexity involved in concept formation. Chief among all of his insights, however, is that *ens primum cognitum* is the objective light whereby all intellectual knowledge is seen. Few statements given by any Thomist can give us a better indication not only of what Thomas means, but of how human cognition itself proceeds.

Thus, the two preliminary chapters, considering the work of Cajetan, Poinsot, Gilson, and Maritain, show that each thinker contributed greatly to the understanding of *ens ut primum cognitum*, but that each also left some aspect or another un- or under-explored such that a cohesive grounding of all human

experience is not yet possible. Each is a giant of an intellect in the history of Thomism, upon whose shoulders we necessarily must stand if we are to see any further. This furthering of our sight has been the ambition of this dissertation.

Thus we **third** sought to clarify the operations of the *intellectus agens* in Thomas' theory of knowledge. We began this endeavor by demonstrating that Thomas' referring to the *obiectum intellectus* by a plurality of terms—*ens*, *verum*, *ens intelligibile*, *quod quid est*, *quid est*, *quod quid erat esse*, *quidditas rei*, and *quidditas rei materialis*—is only superficially inconsistent. The meaning of *ens* or *verum* includes that which is meant by *quidditas rei* or *quid est*, for in each case, the intellect always grasps something as independent of the materiality or changeability which characterizes a corporeal existence; that is, while the formal object grasped might be some *quidditas* belonging to a material being, this *quidditas* or *quid* is some specified instance of *ens*, and an instance of *ens* in its aspect of *verum*, an instance that so long as it is cannot be otherwise. Indeed, contemporaneous with the characteristic immateriality of the intellectual grasp is the consideration of an object as **not merely** an object of animal awareness—i.e., its relation to oneself as of potential benefit, harm, or neutrality—but according to what it is in itself, independently of its relationship to us. Grasping the “what” of something is grasping it in an immaterial and unchanging manner, since the meaning of a thing's “what” is eternal, even if the thing and its kind are not.

We showed this essential task of the intellect by first analyzing the terms Thomas uses to signify the intellect's object, followed by an examination of the twofold operation ascribed to the *intellectus agens*, namely *illuminare* and *abstrahere*. The first, *illuminare*, was shown to be the constant lighting of the objects of experience, both antecedently and consequently to the intellect's apprehensive and judicative operations, by the intellectual illumination of being, the openness to seeing things as they are in and of themselves independently of how they are in relation to our sensory relations to them.

The second aspect of the operation of the *intellectus agens*, *abstrahere*, was clarified against its misleading etymology, and shown to be that act whereby we grasp **what** things are specifically apart from their material variability; not “pulling away” some immaterialized form from matter, like an intellectual x-ray, but rather a consideration of the properly intelligible object apart from the change and instability coextensive with materiality. That is, “abstraction” is rather a kind of visualization, in the term favored by Maritain, whereby we discern the universal intelligibility proper to something apart from its actual mode of material existence, fraught as such existence is with the potentiality inexorable from the presence of matter. This reveals that human intellectual knowledge is concerned not so much with the grasp of immutable essences

extra animam, but rather with the being of things as things, i.e., in their own proper constitutions.

Fourth: it was shown that the process of intellectual concept formation—the production of the *verbum mentis* or *species expressae*—is a discursive process, involving not only recursion to the interior sense powers but also a multitude of intellectual acts in cohesion with that recursion to the sensory. This discursion was shown to pervade intellectual cognition in that even the primary intellectual concepts, apart from *ens primum cognitum*, involve some process of composition and division. Consequently, these discursions of intellectual concept formation occur in both pre-philosophical cognition, the domain of common experience or what is considered in the “natural attitude”, and philosophical science, but implicitly and without clear realization or critical evaluation in pre-philosophical cognition, and explicitly and critically in philosophical science.

Both kinds of cognition proceed reciprocatingly between the *via resolutionis* and the *via inventionis*, beginning ultimately with the discovery of *ens* as beyond mere objectivity and resolving all other discoveries into that first-known *ens*. All resolution is into one of two kinds: either *secundum rem*, in which there is an “upward” move towards the highest cause considerable within the respective cognitive realm, or *secundum rationem*, in which there is a move “downward” towards the foundation grounding the full expanse of what is or can be encompassed within the cognitive realm.

The key distinction of philosophical science from pre-philosophical cognition is the manner in which the object is considered: for pre-philosophical cognition is by first intentions, i.e., the bearing of a concept immediately upon its object, whereas philosophical science—or scientific cognition generally speaking—requires second intentions, i.e., the consideration of the **relation** between a concept and its object, and therefore of both concept and object, but through the mediation of the relation itself; awareness of the relation between concept and object is necessary to the kind of critical evaluation intrinsic to scientific awareness. Despite this distinction of objects and their modes of consideration, both kinds of cognition are ultimately involved in the *via resolutionis* of cognition in general. What is grasped scientifically, though proximately resolved in accord with the causes and subject matter specifically of that science, is nevertheless also always resolved into *ens primum cognitum* as the basis of all human intellectual experience. Whereas each specific science is illumined with regard to its own objects by its own principles, *ens primum cognitum* is conversely the basis for the initial insights necessary to all further intellectual discovery, as the light by which “abstraction” can occur, and is thus the first principle of the *via inventionis*, as well.

Fifth: since relations are the proper objects considered in philosophical science—not to say that things themselves are not also considered, but that they are considered on the basis of the conformity of the intellect to them as conceptually mediated, which conformity is a relation—we therefore proceeded to explain the nature of relation. We showed that relation is, essentially and in itself, a mode of *esse*, namely *esse ad*, which is dependent upon but irreducible to the other modal differentiation of *esse*, namely, *esse in*. In examining how it is that relations are intellectually apprehended, we showed that they are grasped in a way no different in kind from beings as they exist strictly in the order of individual subjective constitution, a grasping further indifferent to whether they are *relationes reales* or *relationes rationis*. That is, the intellectual process whereby we grasp a being in its own individual substantiality or its own inherent accidents, is no different than that whereby we grasp its relations. Furthermore, much of what we grasp concerning the individual subject depends upon our grasp of the relations; both the relational mode, *esse ad*, and the subjective mode, *esse in*, become entangled, intertwined in the majority of both our concepts and our percepts.

Thus, while, as we showed, interpretation is integral to all concept formation, in the case of objective realities, it is not only integral but constitutive, since such realities, while subordinated to the teleological ordering of their related substances, are nevertheless not judged as true or false against correspondent realities existing independently of cognition. The veracity of such interpretatively-constituted beings can be considered only within a larger ordering. Moreover, these cognition-dependent beings, constituted through interpretations, are themselves certain realities, though *res relativae* rather than *res absolutae*, for, despite not having subjective constitutions or natures in themselves independent of cognition, they can nevertheless be involved in *relationes reales*, dynamically changing and being changed by the intersubjective interactions of cognitive agents. “Reality”, in other words, expands beyond the confines of what is real *extra animam*, as substantially-constituted by cognition-independent intrinsic principles, to include those things which are cognitionally-constituted, such as governments, institutions, and even idiosyncratic considerations.

In all cases, there is a resolution of what is intellectually grasped to *ens ut primum cognitum*, a resolution which could not occur if *ens ut primum cognitum* were formally, and not just materially, *ens naturae*; for many cognition-dependent beings, consisting exhaustively of relations and negations, which are a part of our experience of “reality”, have no direct correlates in *ens naturae*.

6.2 The Nature of *Ens Primum Cognitum*

So how are we, finally then, to articulate the nature of *ens primum cognitum*? We can turn again to the texts of St. Thomas, particularly those three guiding assertions—*De veritate* q.1, a.1, *ST* 1a-11ae, q.94, a.2, and *In Metaphysicorum*, lib.4, lec.3, n.605—with which we began the first chapter. Indeed, we will return to these three texts momentarily, in the light of clarified doctrines of the operations of the *intellectus agens*, the *verbum mentis*, the *via resolutionis* and *inventionis*, and relation, as well as a handful of other relevant texts.

6.2.1 *St. Thomas and the Resolutio ad Ens Primum Cognitum*

Backlit by the above summary clarifying the process of the intellect and the nature of its objects, we can finally arrive with sufficient insight to the meaning of St. Thomas in saying that *ens* is the *primum cognitum*. To begin, let us clarify terminology. What is *ens* for Thomas contains within its most general meaning both *essentia* and *esse*; but this inclusion of *esse* cannot be limited to *esse* considered as the *actus essendi*, i.e., of what is most central to *esse in*, though this is principal. *Esse ad* is also included in the broadest signification of *ens*.

Now, while Thomas deals with *ens* primarily from the discovery of what is fundamental in the order of substantial constitution, that is, the *esse in* of a substantial act, the *actus essendi* of some being, and while the Common Doctor too fails to make explicit or clear his distinctions, he does not exclude the relational, disclosive aspect of *esse ad* from *ens* and does as we have endeavored to show throughout, in some places, give hints as to the distinction between *ens primum cognitum* and other senses of *ens*.

We clarified the meaning of *esse ad* in the previous chapter, by showing that that relation is, as Ratzinger puts it, “equiprimordial” with substance.¹ The perfusion of relation throughout all existence—considered both *relatio secundum esse* and *relatio secundum dici*—is an inescapable truth which cannot be omitted from a Thomistic interpretation of human cognition if one expects that interpretation to have true universality. In other words, the problem pointed out in the introduction—the insufficient framework for addressing socially-constituted reality—can only be grasped if we consider *ens primum cognitum* from a standpoint in some way indifferent to *esse in* and *esse ad*: for it is, in fact, the human intellect’s ability to engage with *esse ad* which allows it to understand *esse in* in the first place.

¹ Ratzinger 1970: *Introduction to Christianity*, 132.

6.2.1.1 *Ens Primum Cognitum's Intellectual Universality*

To achieve such a standpoint, we can never make of *ens* a closed concept. Indeed, it is one of Thomism's strengths that it retains a vibrant theory of concept formation without lending to that theory the fossilizing tendency of so many epistemological systems, both those that proceed *a priori* and *a posteriori*: that is, as Thomas so frequently points out, and as quoted above,² our knowledge of essences is always incomplete, and thence, our concepts are always, inherently, and by the very nature of the intellect's modes of proceeding, open to further development. The production of a *verbum mentis* is a terminus of an intellect's operation, but not of thinking; a terminus of the act whereby a thing is known, but not a terminus of its possible continued discovery.³

This allows us to identify that, while the terms "subjective" and "objective"—used here in the medieval sense of that which exists through some substantial act and that which exists through the cognitive act of another—are not used in this context by Thomas, there are in fact subjective and objective poles to what he identifies as *ens primum cognitum*, as we have attempted to indicate throughout by using the prepositional *ut* when the primary significant is the object-as-known, and not the subjective dimension of the activity of knowing it. This subjective dimension, since it never occurs independently of some object, is never indicated in itself apart from the grasping of the object, and thus its signification has always been included by the term *ens primum cognitum*, attempting to signify their simultaneous occurrence. Just as a relation never occurs without a fundament, so too *ens primum cognitum* never occurs in the intellect without some formal object instantiated to it by a *res* other than itself. There is no *a priori* grasp of *ens*. Simultaneously, there is no grasp of anything else without a prior grasp of *ens*.

Likewise, as we stated above in 4.1.2, *ens primum cognitum* is first in both the orders of intellectual progression: **first** in the *via resolutionis* which resolves to some one cognition, containing some multitude within it—signified in Thomas' assertion in *De veritate*, q.1, a.1: "That which the intellect first conceives as most knowable, and into which the intellect resolves all concepts, is being";⁴

² 3.2.2.

³ Cf. Heidegger 1947: *Brief über den "Humanismus"*, 197: "When thinking comes to an end by slipping out of its element it replaces this loss by procuring a validity for itself as *techne*, as an instrument of education and therefore as a classroom matter and later a cultural concern. By and by philosophy becomes a technique for explaining from highest causes. One no longer thinks; one occupies himself with 'philosophy.' In competition with one another, such occupations publicly offer themselves as '-isms' and try to offer more than the others".

⁴ i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1: "Illud autem quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum, et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit, est ens".

and also **first** in the *via inventionis*, which, from one thing discerns and discovers a multitude of other objects indicated in Thomas' statement in *ST* 1a–11ae, q.94, a.2: "For that which first falls into the apprehension is being, which the intellect includes in everything whatsoever which it apprehends".⁵ While *ens* is the ultimate term of resolution in the science of metaphysics, and the process of resolution is most proper to metaphysics because it is the most intellectual science, this does not preclude the necessary resolution of all intellectual cognition, including the non-scientific, into a sense of *ens* which is **not** the metaphysical. Indeed, if it were not the case that there is some resolution into a first known which is not metaphysical, then there could be no advancement in knowledge at all, according to one of the texts we indicated at the beginning of the first chapter to be a guiding principle for our inquiry: "In the first operation [of the intellect] there is something first, which falls in the conception of the intellect, namely this which I call being [*ens*]; nor is something able to be conceived by the mind in this operation, unless being [*ens*] is understood".⁶ In other words, every further conception requires a grasp of *ens*; is this merely as an element, as a first piece to the construction of a concept? Or is it a pervasive, inseparable aspect to every intellectual realization?

Two texts seem to corroborate the interpretation that *ens primum cognitum* pervades all intellectual knowing, in both orders: first, that "being is the proper object of the intellect, and thus is the first intelligible, as sound is the first audible"⁷ and second that "intelligible being is the proper object of the intellect, which comprehends every possible difference and species of being, for whatever is able to be, is able to be understood".⁸ As the proper object of the intellect, *ens* is an underlying necessity to every act of intellectual realization, just as sound is necessary to every act of auditory realization; and this is true of every contracted form of being which is realized, i.e., every difference and species. The language of "comprehending" or "falling under"⁹ which Thomas

5 1271a: *ST* 1a–11ae, q.94, a.2: "Nam illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit".

6 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.6, n.605: "in prima quidem operatione est aliquod primum, quod cadit in conceptione intellectus, scilicet hoc quod dico ens; nec aliquid hac operatione potest mente concipi, nisi intelligatur ens".

7 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.5, a.2, c.: "ens est proprium obiectum intellectus, et sic est primum intelligibile, sicut sonus est primum audibile".

8 i.1259/65: *SCG* II, c.98, n.9: "Est enim proprium obiectum intellectus ens intelligibile: quod quidem comprehendit omnes differentias et species entis possibles; quicquid enim esse potest, intelligi potest".

9 Cf. i.1269–72c: *De virtutibus*, q.1, a.2, ad.8: "Ad octavum dicendum, quod istud fallit in transcendentibus, quae circumeunt omne ens. Nam essentia est ens, et bonitas bona, et unitas

often uses in discussing the extent of *ens*, should not, as is well established,¹⁰ be taken to signify that *ens* is as a genus indifferent to its realizations—that is, neither is *ens inquantum ens* a genus, nor is *ens primum cognitum*. It is omnipresent both in the things intellectually realized and in the activity of their realization as objects of intellectual cognition.

A further but more difficult corroboration of the interpretation that *ens primum cognitum* is a pervasive aspect of every intellectual realization is to be found in a text wherein Thomas discusses the derivation of primary concepts:¹¹

The first thing which falls in the intellect is being; the second is the negation of being; from these two follows third the understanding of division—for, given that something is understood as being, and something is understood not to be this being, it follows that *this* is divided from *that* in the understanding. Fourth, the rationale of “one” follows in the intellect, namely insofar as this being is understood not to be divided in itself; fifth, multitude follows in the intellect, namely insofar as this being is understood to be divided from others, and each of them to be one in itself.

Each concept said here to be derived from *ens*—*non ens*, division, *unum*, and multitude—is something not only dependent upon *ens* as an antecedent object of intellectual realization, but is itself something including *ens* in its formation; that is, the realization of the concept requires that the material object in which it is completed be some thing present (or presenced) as an *esse*

una, non autem sic potest dici albedo alba. Cuius ratio est, quia quidquid cadit in intellectu, oportet quod cadat sub ratione entis, et per consequens sub ratione boni et unius; unde essentia et bonitas et unitas non possunt intelligi, nisi intelligantur sub ratione boni et unius et entis. Propter hoc potest dici bonitas bona, et unitas una”.

10 c.1252/6c: *De principiis naturae*, c.6; i.1259/65: *SCG* 1, c.25, n.3; c.1265/6b: *De potentia*, q.7, a.3, c.; 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.1, lec.9, n.138; lib.10, lec.8, n.2092; cf. Garrigou-Lagrange 1946: *La synthèse thomiste*, 43.

11 c.1265/6b: *De potentia*, q.9, a.7, ad.15: “primum enim quod in intellectum cadit, est ens; secundum vero est negatio entis; ex his autem duobus sequitur tertio intellectus divisionis (ex hoc enim quod aliquid intelligitur ens, et intelligitur non esse hoc ens, sequitur in intellectu quod sit divisum ab eo); quarto autem sequitur in intellectu ratio unius, prout scilicet intelligitur hoc ens non esse in se divisum; quinto autem sequitur intellectus multitudinis, prout scilicet hoc ens intelligitur divisum ab alio, et utrumque ipsorum esse in se unum”. It should also be noted that this text contradicts the linguistic claim made by Robert Wood 2014: “First Things First: On the Priority of the Notion of Being” in *The Review of Metaphysics*, 67 (June), 719–741, especially on 725 and 727, that, since Thomas uses the ablative rather than the accusative, *ens* arises in a spontaneous and *a priori* manner in the intellect.

present in the truth of a proposition. Clearly, the “being”, the *ens*, included in these concepts could not be simply the *actus essendi* of the object considered, for neither *non ens* nor division has some *actus essendi* on its own.¹²

Grasping this point requires understanding the differences between the notion of *esse* which signifies the truth of a proposition and the distinct notion of the “act” of *esse*, the *actus essendi*, a point mentioned ubiquitously by Thomas¹³ and emphasized as a crucial doctrine in the recent Thomistic development principally in the work of Cornelio Fabro.¹⁴ The *actus essendi* use of *esse* signifies the existential establishment of a being in the order of substantial constitution, whereas the *esse* belonging to the *veritatem propositionem* signifies the cognitive awareness of a knower of a being’s presence in the order of intentional realization;¹⁵ that is, the conformity of an intellect and a thing, *regardless* of whether that thing is a *res naturae* or a *res relativae*.¹⁶ The *veritatem propositionem* is signified by the copula,¹⁷ and can be grasped immediately

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- 12 Note that we are not talking about the “imposition” or “derivation” of the name—as Thomas repeatedly says (e.g., c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.1, d.8, q.1, c.; c.1252/6b: *De ente* c.1; 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.4, lec.2, n.553) that *nomen ens imponitur ab actu essendi*—but rather, the content of the cognition itself, of the cognitive act as it occurs prior to the scientific awareness.
- 13 In, e.g., i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.1, ad.1; 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.3, a.4, ad.2; and most especially i.1254–7: *Quodlibet* 1X, q.2, a.2, c. Heidegger seems, later in his career, to grasp this point, but it is unclear to me precisely what he means. Cf. 1952: *Was Heißt Denken?* in the English translation by J. Glenn Gray, *What is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), 220–228.
- 14 See Kevin White 2014: “Act and Fact: On a Disputed Question in Recent Thomistic Metaphysics”, in *The Review of Metaphysics* (December): 287–312; Fabro 1966: “The Transcendentality of *Ens-Esse* and the Ground of Metaphysics”, in *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 6.3 (September): 389–427; Fabro 1961: “The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man”, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 1.3 (September): 407–436.
- 15 c.1265/6b: *De potentia*, q.7, a.2, ad.1: “ens et esse dicitur dupliciter, ut patet v *Metaph.* Quandoque enim significat essentiam rei, sive actum essend’.
- 16 Cf. c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.2, d.37, q.1, a.2, ad.3: “ens dicitur dupliciter. Uno modo quod significat essentiam rei extra animam existentis; et hoc modo non potest dici ens deformitas peccati, quae privatio quaedam est: privationes enim essentiam non habent in rerum natura. Alio modo secundum quod significat veritatem propositionis; et sic deformitas dicitur esse, non propter hoc quod in re esse habeat, sed quia intellectus componit privationem cum subjecto, sicut formam quamdam”.
- 17 c.1252/6a: *In Sent.*, lib.3, d.6, q.2, a.2, c.: “Uno modo secundum quod significat veritatem propositionis, secundum quod est copula; et sic, ut Commentator ibidem dicit, ens est praedicatum accidentale; et hoc esse non est in re, sed in mente, quae conjungit praedicatum cum subjecto”.

in the case of principles without discursion.¹⁸ *Esse* said in this sense, Thomas seems to agree with Aristotle, does not belong to the subject of metaphysics.¹⁹

6.2.1.2 *Ens Primum Cognitum* and the Truth of Propositions

Now what is the truth of a proposition?²⁰ As shown above, truth is a relation;²¹ and indeed, while a false proposition is also a kind of relation, if we are considering *ens* primarily from the standpoint of the *actus essendi*, as does Thomas, the false proposition is “less” said “to be” than the true; the false proposition, indeed, once known to be false, ceases to be at all, except perhaps as a *flatus vocis*. If, however, we are considering *ens* from the standpoint of the cognitive awareness of the knower, the false proposition and the object constituted through such a proposition “is” something to the knower—the thinnest sort of existence, to be sure, but existence nonetheless, inasmuch as the object is in some way present to the knower, or, rather the would-be-knower.²² Though the *actus essendi* of some existent *extra animam* is ultimately responsible for all

18 i.1256–59: *DV* q.14, a.1, c.: “intellectus possibilis determinatur ad hoc quod totaliter adhaereat uni parti; sed hoc est quandoque ab intelligibili, quandoque a voluntate. Ab intelligibili quidem quandoque quidem mediate, quandoque autem immediate. Immediate quidem quando ex ipsis intelligibilibus statim veritas propositionum intellectui infallibiliter apparet. Et haec est dispositio intelligentis principia, quae statim cognoscuntur notis terminis, ut philosophus dicit. Et sic ex ipso quod quid est, immediate intellectus determinatur ad huiusmodi propositiones”.

19 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.11, lec.9. n.2283: “Deinde cum dicit quod autem ostendit, quod ens per accidens, et ens quod significat veritatem propositionis, praetermittendum est in ista scientia; dicens, quod est quoddam ens quod est ut vere ens, idest quod significat veritatem propositionis, quae in compositione consistit, et est per accidens. Sed primum consistit in compositione intellectus, et est quaedam passio circa operationem animae. Unde huiusmodi entis non quaeruntur principia in scientia, quae considerat de ente quod est extra animam, et est separabile, ut *supra* dictum est.” Cf. William H. Kane 1955: “The Subject of Metaphysics” in *The Thomist*, 18.4: 503–521.

20 Much has been written on the notion of being as a predicate, the “logic of being”, and the role of being—*est*—as both a predicate and the copula. See Ralph McInerny 1959: “Some Notes on Being and Predication” in *The Thomist*, 22.3 (July): 315–335; 1959: “Notes on Being and Predication” in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 15.2: 236–274; and 1986: *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations*; Hermann Wiedemann 1986: “The Logic of Being” in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*: 77–95; Russell Pannier and Thomas D. Sullivan 1993: “Aquinas on ‘Exists’” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 67.2: 157–166; Oliva Blanchette 2003: *The Philosophy of Being*, 87–114.

21 Cf. 3.1.1 and 4.3.3.

22 It is the phenomenon of this existence which Heidegger sought in his *Sein*; the ontological difference of *Sein* from *Seiendes* is not the *actus essendi* from the *essentia*, but rather the sense of being which is itself nothing.

such presence—even if that *actus essendi* is nothing other than the projection of the fictive mind of the would-be-knower—such a presence to a knower is itself nothing:²³

Therefore, to follow what Aristotle is saying, we must consider that he has said that not only does the verb *est* not signify a thing to be or not to be, but neither does *ens* itself signify a thing to be or not to be. And this is what he says, “that it [*est*] is nothing”, that is, that it does not signify something to be. Indeed, this is most clearly seen when I say *ens*; because *ens* is nothing other than “what is”. And thus it is seen to signify both a *res*, when I say “what”, and *esse*, when I say “is”. And if this word, *ens*, signified *esse* principally, as it signifies a *res* which has *esse*, it would without a doubt signify something to be; but the composition, which is implied when I say *est*, is not principally signified, but co-signifies existence insofar as it signifies a *res* having *esse*. Such a cosignification of composition does not suffice for truth or falsity, because composition, in which the true and false consist, is not able to be understood unless it connects the extremes of a composition.

23 i.1269–72: *In Perihermenias*, lib.1, lec.5, n.20–21: “Et ideo ut magis sequamur verba Aristotelis considerandum est quod ipse dixerat quod verbum non significat rem esse vel non esse, sed nec ipsum ens significat rem esse vel non esse. Et hoc est quod dicit, nihil est, id est non significat aliquid esse. Etenim hoc maxime videbatur de hoc quod dico ens: quia ens nihil est aliud quam quod est. Et sic videtur et rem significare, per hoc quod dico quod et esse, per hoc quod dico est. Et si quidem haec dictio ens significaret esse principaliter, sicut significat rem quae habet esse, procul dubio significaret aliquid esse. Sed ipsam compositionem, quae importatur in hoc quod dico est, non principaliter significat, sed consignificat eam in quantum significat rem habentem esse. Unde talis consignificatio compositionis non sufficit ad veritatem vel falsitatem: quia compositio, in qua consistit veritas et falsitas, non potest intelligi, nisi secundum quod innectit extrema compositionis”.

“Si vero dicatur, nec ipsum esse, ut libri nostri habent, planior est sensus. Quod enim nullum verbum significat rem esse vel non esse, probat per hoc verbum est, quod secundum se dictum, non significat aliquid esse, licet significet esse. Et quia hoc ipsum esse videtur compositio quaedam, et ita hoc verbum est, quod significat esse, potest videri significare compositionem, in qua sit verum vel falsum; ad hoc excludendum subdit quod illa compositio, quam significat hoc verbum est, non potest intelligi sine componentibus: quia dependet eius intellectus ab extremis, quae si non apponantur, non est perfectus intellectus compositionis, ut possit in ea esse verum, vel falsum”. Cf. Stephen L. Brock 2007: “Thomas Aquinas and ‘What Actually Exists’” in *Wisdom’s Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.*, ed. Peter A. Kwasniewski (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press): 13–39.

But if it is said that “nor would *esse* itself”, as our texts have it, the sense is clearer. For Aristotle proves through the verb *est* that no verb signifies a thing to be or not to be, since according to its meaning alone, *est* does not signify something [*aliquid*] to be, although it signifies *esse*. And because *esse* seems to be a certain composition, likewise the word *est*, which signifies something to be, can be seen to signify composition, in which there is truth or falsity; to exclude [this sense of composition from the precise meaning of *est*], Aristotle adds that this composition, which the verb *est* signifies, is not able to be understood without the things composed, because an understanding of this composition is from the extremes, which, if they are not added, the understanding of the composition is not complete, as in those things understood to be true or false.

Aristotle, as Thomas reads him, here says that *est* said within a composition, without the extremes of the composition, is of itself nothing. In other words, *est* considered in terms of its cosignification—i.e., with composition—signifies relation, *relativa secundum esse*, indeterminate in and of itself.²⁴

As Thomas goes on, “*est* does not signify composition principally, but consequently. Rather, it signifies that which first falls into the intellect in the mode of absolute actuality; for *est*, said simply, signifies ‘to be in act’”.²⁵ Since “to be in act”, even the act of a cognition-dependent reality, depends upon some *actus essendi*, it follows that the *actus essendi* is indeed the principal signification—but not, it has to be recognized with the cosignification of *est*, the exclusive signification. That is, *est* is said by Thomas primarily in mind of the *via resolutionis* which terminates in the metaphysical consideration, not in the *via resolutionis* which terminates in the ground of human experience. It is however, as always, easy to fall into the trap of taking the principal significate, which is explicitly discerned only through philosophically scientific consideration, to be the first object of knowledge. We must keep in mind that the first object of knowledge is something confused, vague, undistinguished in itself.²⁶ The formal object

24 Cf. 5.1.1 above, especially 5.1.1.4.

25 i.1269–72: *In Perihermenias*, lib.1, lec.5, n.22: “quia non eam principaliter significat, sed ex consequenti; significat enim primo illud quod cadit in intellectu per modum actualitatis absolute: nam est, simpliciter dictum, significat in actu esse”.

26 Cf. 1271/2a: *In Meta.*, lib.1, lec.2, n.45: “Sed contra hoc videtur esse quod habetur primo physicorum. Ibi enim dicitur quod magis universalia sunt nobis primo nota. Illa autem quae sunt primo nota, sunt magis facilia. Sed dicendum, quod magis universalia secundum simplicem apprehensionem sunt primo nota, nam primo in intellectu cadit ens, ut Avicenna dicit, et prius in intellectu cadit animal quam homo. Sicut enim in esse naturae quod de potentia in actum procedit prius est animal quam homo, ita in generatione

of such a cognition is undifferentiated by its material possibles,²⁷ because the cognitive agent has not yet unfolded the distinctions capable of realization under that formal object. It is grasped in what Cajetan terms an actual confused knowledge, the kind of knowledge which can be unfolded in successive intellectual acts.²⁸ This possibility of cognitive unfolding—the realization of the being-in-act of things signified both in composition and in actuality by *est*—is, considered from the subject knowing (rather than the object known), not anything itself at all.²⁹

These beings realized in or objectivized through the intellect are not always, as we have endeavored to show, *entia naturae*. When we say that “the earth is”, or “the earth is a planet”, in either case we are signifying the *actus essendi* of some *essentiam rei extra animam*, immediately in the first statement and mediately in the second. Contrariwise, when we say “the federal government is”, or “the federal government is constituted by three branches”, there is in neither case such an *actus essendi*; and yet, in a sense, there is an *essentiam rei extra animam*. That is, there is a quiddity, but the *actus essendi* does not reside in the order of substantial constitution, in something outside the soul. Rather, a pale

scientiae prius in intellectu concipitur animal quam homo.”—“But this seems to be contrary to what is held in the first book of the *Physics*. For there, it is said that the more universal are prior known to us. For those things which are first known, are known more easily. But it must be said that the more universal according to simple apprehension are the first known to us, for the first which falls in the intellect is being, as Avicenna says, and ‘animal’ falls into the intellect prior to ‘human’. For just as in the existence of nature, which proceeds from potency to act, animal is prior to human, likewise in the generation of knowledge, ‘animal’ is conceived in the intellect prior to ‘human’.”

27 Cf. 1.3.2.3 and 1.3.3 above.

28 Cf. 1.2.1, especially 1.2.1.3.

29 Here we have the clearest evidence in any text of St. Thomas for the tradition having broached the notion of *Sein* as pursued by Heidegger. Cf. Fabro 1961: “The Problem of Being and the Destiny of Man”, 420: “Being for Heidegger is no longer the mere verbal extrapolation of the copula of the judgment (as for Kant), or the highest formal note of all genera and species (as for rationalism), but the real in its very presences, which finds its limits only in nothingness. Accordingly, anything whatsoever that is not simply nothing, *is*, and hence nothingness ‘belongs for us to Being.’” Cf. Guagliardo 1993: “Being and Anthroposemiotics” in *Semiotics* 1993, 51: “In this primal phenomenon—as Heidegger saw—being ‘negatives,’ i.e., expresses an elemental ‘not,’ which allows the semiotic chain of meaning to develop beyond any mere ‘here’ or ‘now,’ ‘this’ or ‘that’ of the things of experience as well as to develop beyond the knower in his/her state of any actual knowing, opening up the realm of further possibility, further semiosis. All this is to say that ‘being’ is foundational to both the things known and the human knower who knows, to any determinate object or interpreting subject”.

imitation of such an *actus essendi* exists in the order of objective constitution. It is through the activity of finite cognitive agents. Propositions, both true and false, are; not because they are reducible to *ens inquantum ens*, but because they are reducible to *ens primum cognitum*. Likewise, with all things known but having no *actus essendi* of their own; it is the intellect itself which constitutes them through a *relatio rationis*.³⁰ Such constitution can be signified, Thomas tells us, by *est*: “[the use of] *ens* that signifies the truth of a proposition, which consists in a composition, is made known by the verb *est*, and this is the *ens* which answers the question ‘whether it is’. And thus we say that blindness exists in the eye, or any other such privation. And it is in this way, also, that evil is called *ens*”.³¹

Just as the question “whether it is” is the first question asked, so too *ens* in the sense of the truth of a proposition—made known by the verb *est*—is first in the intellect.

6.3 Conclusion

This reducibility to *ens primum cognitum* of those known objects which are not constituted solely *extra animam*, or at all, does ultimately, of course, have a reducibility to God; but not in a proximate or direct ordering. Rather, such objective beings must be reduced first to the human being—and some, it will

30 i.1256–59: *DV*, q.1, a.8, c.: “Res autem existens extra animam, per formam suam imitatur artem divini intellectus, et per eandem nata est facere veram apprehensionem in intellectu humano, per quam etiam formam unaquaeque res esse habet; unde veritas rerum existentium includit in sui ratione entitatem earum, et superaddit habitudinem adaequationis ad intellectum humanum vel divinum. Sed negationes vel privationes existentes extra animam non habent aliquam formam, per quam vel imitentur exemplar artis divinae, vel ingerant sui notitiam in intellectu humano; sed quod adaequantur intellectui, est ex parte intellectus, qui earum rationes apprehendit”.

“Sic ergo patet quod cum dicitur lapis verus et caecitas vera, non eodem modo veritas se habet ad utrumque: veritas enim de lapide dicta claudit in sui ratione lapidis entitatem, et superaddit habitudinem ad intellectum, quae causatur etiam ex parte ipsius rei, cum habeat aliquid secundum quod referri possit; sed veritas dicta de caecitate non includit in seipsam privationem quae est caecitas, sed solummodo habitudinem caecitatis ad intellectum; quae etiam non habet aliquid ex parte ipsius caecitatis in quo sustentetur, cum caecitas non aequetur intellectui ex virtute alicuius quod in se habeat”.

31 1266–68: *ST* 1a, q.48, a.2, ad.2: “ens, quod significat veritatem propositionis, quae in compositione consistit, cuius nota est hoc verbum est, et hoc est ens quo respondetur ad quaestionem an est. Et sic caecitatem dicimus esse in oculo, vel quamcumque aliam privationem. Et hoc modo etiam malum dicitur ens”.

be found, are incapable of a complete reduction to some principle outside the human being's cognitive basis of *ens primum cognitum*, either a principle of nature or one of the Divine. In other words, some partially and purely objective beings are fruitful, helpful, and are coherent with nature and the ordination of the universe towards God; others are at odds with this order, causing deviations in the progress of some being(s) towards that which is for their good. This impossibility of resolution is the root of all falsehood and error: when an object thus irreducible is accepted as true and believed, there is intellectual error; when it is accepted as good and pursued, there arises the possibility of moral evil.

The Thomist is capable of reducing the objects of his or her experience not only to *ens primum cognitum*, but also to God. *Ens* as the *primum intelligibile* is both the objective light of all human experience and the foundational principle of objectively-constituted realities. *Ens ut primum cognitum*, considered as the object known, is the presence of what exists, given to a cognitive agent ultimately on the basis of the *actus essendi* of some existent (and, for human beings, of a material existent) in the order of substantial constitution, but, as realized in the intellect, *ens primum cognitum* is not limited to such an order. It awakens the intellect not only to the existence of things outside of itself, but to itself; not only to the things that may be impressed upon it, but also to the things which it may itself constitute; not only to "real" being in the sense of what exists on the basis of the *actus essendi* informing some substance, but to the being constituted through cognitive activity. Understanding how the human being, through intellect, constitutes such beings is crucial to understanding how they may be resolved not only to the basis of intellectual experience, but also how they may be coherent or incoherent with human nature, considered in its fundamental orientation to the infinite, the Divine.³²

In sum, *ens primum cognitum* is the fundamental ground of human experience, that through which every human individual constitutes his or her species-specific world of objects understood as beings. It is the illumination of an open region of opposedness; the transcendence from subjective appropriation

32 Cf. i.1256–59: *DV* q.1, a.8, c.: "Patet ergo quod veritas in rebus creatis inventa nihil aliud potest comprehendere quam entitatem rei, et adaequationem rei ad intellectum vel adaequationem intellectus ad res vel ad privationes rerum; quod totum est a Deo, quia et ipsa forma rei, per quam adaequatur, a Deo est, et ipsum verum sicut bonum intellectus; ut dicitur in VI *Ethic.* quia bonum uniuscuiusque rei consistit in perfecta operatione ipsius rei. Non est autem perfecta operatio intellectus, nisi secundum quod verum cognoscit; unde in hoc consistit eius bonum, in quantum huiusmodi. Unde, cum omne bonum sit a Deo, et omnis forma, oportet absolute dicere, quod omnis veritas sit a Deo".

to unity with what is other; it is what enables pursuit of the true and the good, in orders both of substantial and objective constitution, as well as what clears the way to error and moral evil. Such errors and moral evils are certainly a part of the broader sense of reality which we mentioned in the final section of the previous chapter; only if we can explain their inclusion in such a reality can we proceed to explain how they lack a coherence with the true human good.

The question of further, properly metaphysical resolution—both to a highest cause and to a consideration of *ens inquantum ens*—is a further and more difficult problem, yet one entirely necessary for establishing a coherent doctrine of the whole of what is. On the other hand, we need also to understand the resolution of all objects of experience to *ens primum cognitum* as the foundational activity of all properly-human action and experience if we want to make sense of how and why both personal idiosyncratic objective and socially-constituted realities come into existence and are impactful on individuals—how they may be of contribution or detriment to the fulfillment of the meaningful human life.

Without such a perspective, philosophy will always be without one or another of its legs.

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