



Aquinas' Philosophy of Knowledge

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The aim of the present article is to state briefly, not to discuss, a theory. It does not purpose to justify, but simply to interpret it in a reliable and trustworthy manner, in strict conformity with the tenets of the venerable system which for several centuries was the prevailing philosophical doctrine of the Western World.

Thinkers of to-day begin to realize that there is more to be found in the works of the great authors of the scholastic period than was formerly supposed, and accordingly there may perhaps be aroused in some reflective minds a desire to look into the depths of the thought of a period, in which it has been too commonly supposed that nothing was stored up but rubbish and useless subtleties. The difficulty, however, is to get at the right meaning of those early scholastic philosophers, so as to understand their doctrines as they themselves understood them. Separated as they are from our times by a distance of several centuries, they are enclosed, so to speak, within the walls and barriers of a special dialect framed, used, and available for scholastic purposes only. The conciseness, as well as, at times, the prolixity of their style, altogether devoid of pretension to any literary merit, and the summary, rather algebraical character of their formulas, that aimed at nothing but expressing an idea with the greatest possible precision, often make interpretation a task of great uncertainty for the uninitiated.

To such persons, therefore, as may care for a faithful and reliable exposition, one that does not substitute the private views of the exponent for the genuine conceptions of the author, we offer the present essay as a contribution intended to convey to their minds the authentic doctrine of Aquinas, a doctrine which, on this particular subject, was that of his contemporaries generally, concerning what may be considered, and has in fact become, since the days of Kant, the most controverted and most important of speculative problems — that of the philosophy of knowledge. But since St. Thomas's views on human knowledge are essentially connected with his psychological system, it will first of all be necessary to give a short summary of the latter.¹

I

If we should attempt to give a definition of the human soul, as St. Thomas himself would have formulated it, we should define it: "The substantial form of a physical organic body endowed with rational life." Anyone who is at all acquainted with the *De Anima* of Aristotle will, at the first glance, have discovered in the first member of the foregoing definition the equivalent of that which the celebrated Peripatetic gave of the soul considered in its generic aspect as the vital principle common to every living being, or as "the first entelechy (fundamental constitutive perfection) of a physical organic body;"² that is to say, that first fundamental constitutive perfection that raises the body in which it resides to the dignity of a real living organic body, by generating in it the vital impulse, the vital activity. What Aristotle called 'first entelechy' the scholastics used to render by the synonymous expression 'substantial form,' an expression which we cannot avoid and which we shall therefore explain somewhat more fully.

Spectroscopic analysis shows us that matter is everywhere identical throughout the sidereal world, while chemical analysis reveals to us the fact that all things are made of the same elementary principles, the so-called simple bodies. If we omit for the present the question as to whether the given number of simple bodies that we admit nowadays cannot or will not eventually be reduced to some smaller number, there is one thing, at all events, that we may safely assert, viz., that those simple bodies, whatever their real number may be, are all but various, primitive forms of one and the same nature, matter. For even granting that they are chemically quite unanalyzable through any material agency, there are still some features that all have in common, those that are characteristic of materiality. All, indeed, have more or less extension; all have weight, density, and the other properties that are inseparable from matter, wherever and under whatever form it can be found. We are therefore led by the simple observation of facts to conceive of some generic element common to all, attainable indeed by reason only, but which reveals itself to us under the primary forms of the simple bodies of which it is the common and radical substratum, the simple bodies being merely its primitive and original forms. This substratum was the primary matter, *materia prima*, of the Scholastics.³

Furthermore, experience reveals to us that, whenever, either in the organic or inorganic realm, some new combination takes place, the elements thus combined, either compound or simple bodies, seem to disappear — to melt mysteriously together into some new entity into which they are absorbed, the total sum of which has indeed the same weight, but, seemingly at least, properties of a quite different nature from those of the component elements. The qualities of water, for instance, are admittedly altogether different from those of its elements, the gases hydrogen and oxygen. Water, therefore, may be considered as being only virtually contained in both before combination. On the basis of this experimental fact, that matter, as it is found under any form whatsoever, either in simple or compound bodies, may always be transformed chemically so as to be brought under some other, which is seemingly, at least, essentially different from the preceding one, the Scholastics laid down as a general principle that any natural being, either organic or inorganic, ought reasonably and upon good experimental grounds to be considered as made of two constitutive substantial elements, the original matter and its own proper form. The first was ever identical under all possible forms; but the forms were always different from one another, either specifically, as the form of a dog is from the form of a tree, or numerically, as those of different trees of the same species.⁴

Let us also remark here in passing that the Scholastics distinguished between the substantial form, which was a constitutive essential part, and the accidental form; the latter being only an accessory and complementary determination supervening in the individual upon his constituted nature. Fluidity, for instance, or, in the case of frozen water, solidity, were only accidental forms of the water that was in itself substantially constituted by matter and the ‘watery form.’ The human soul also was a substantial form, the first act or entelechy of that physical organism, the human body.⁵ It was the soul that generated in it the ensemble of activities, regularly and harmoniously cooperating, which we call life; without the indwelling and immanent agency of the soul, that body would have remained inanimate, lifeless; through it, it became a real ‘physical organic body’ because a living one.⁶ The soul, therefore, was residing in the body, not, as Descartes would have said, somewhat like a horseman sitting on his steed, or like a pilot in the ship that he guides, but as a constitutive principle forming by its combination with the body a single new being, to wit, the individual man, that was different from both, as water is from hydrogen or oxygen; for the man is neither the soul nor the body but a compound of the two.⁷

This doctrine must appear very materialistic, and hardly reconcilable with the spiritualistic creed which is the necessary ‘presuppositum’ of Christian belief, if the human soul is to be considered as entering into combination with a purely material nature like the body, and if it is

to be regarded as exerting upon it that sort of quasi-chemical, or, one might say, fermentative action that generates in it the vital activity, just as the soul of a brute or the vital principle of a plant.⁸

Still that substantial form of a material body was considered by St. Thomas, at the same time, as immaterial and therefore simple. It was immaterial, because being able, as all will admit, to form some conceptions of immaterial objects, such as the Good, Virtue, God, etc., such conceptions could be the product only of proportionate and similar, that is to say, immaterial, operations; for even if necessarily accompanied, as has been abundantly proven by physiology, with material concomitants in the brain, those operations could not have reached an immaterial object if they had been essentially and exclusively material themselves. Again, the idea of an immaterial operation cannot be understood without the idea of an immaterial faculty that produces it, and which in its turn points necessarily to an immaterial nature, from which alone it can spring.⁹

Being immaterial, the human soul is consequently immortal, not by privilege, but by its nature, so that it cannot be otherwise conceived,¹⁰ and therefore it cannot come into existence, except by creation, nor possibly be destroyed, except by annihilation, just like the primary quantitative elements of the simple bodies themselves.¹¹

How, then, does Aquinas reconcile the seeming contradiction that exists between the concept of a spiritual soul and that of the same as ‘substantial form’ of an organic body? The solution of the apparent antinomy is to be found in the grand view in which, following Dionysius Areopagita, his mind embraced the whole world.¹² The divine wisdom that made the universe disposed the scale of beings in such an order of rising and gradual perfection, that every superior form virtually contains in its own perfection all the attributes that can be found in the inferior beings, together with its own superior characteristic properties, so that it may be laid down as a general principle in nature, that “*Summum infimi attingit infimum supremi*,” the superior grades of perfection of any given being are to be found again as inferior perfections in some higher species, so that there is no gap in nature, which rather rises steadily through multiple intermedia, from the lowest to the highest organisms.¹³ In plants, we find minerality, but associated and subordinated to the functions that are characteristic of the living beings, nutrition, growth, and generation, under the vegetable form ; in the animal kingdom, we discover vegetative life, but associated with it that higher degree of activity which is peculiar to sensitive beings and manifests itself principally in locomotive power; in man, we find at the same time minerality combined with vegetative and sensitive life, but subservient to moral and intellectual activity. That is why the ancients used to call man a microcosmns, for he was like a resume of the various perfections scattered through the universe. But since the human being possesses one superior order of faculties, those that fit him for a distinctly spiritual activity, it must be admitted also that that organic body of which the soul is the substantial act or form, was raised by it to the participation of its own immaterial being, of its own intellectual and moral pursuits. It shared in them, as the subject required to support the exercise of those intellectual and moral operations, and as the instrument through which the soul comes in contact with the external material world. As man partakes of all the attributes of material beings, which are, so to speak, epitomized in him, while at the same time he partakes of the higher functions of intellectual and moral life along with the angels, he appears to us like a horizon¹⁴ in which heaven and earth unite, as the intermediary being through which material life blossoms, as it were, into spiritual and immaterial activity.

Such, in brief, then, is the meaning of our definition of the human soul as “the substantial form (first act or entelechy) of a physical organic body endowed with rational life.”

II.

A theory of knowledge based on such psychological foundations must logically follow the same plan in its systematic elaboration, as will become apparent from the remainder of this article. Like the soul from which it emanates, the cognitive power in man will be at the same time material and immaterial, or, to express it more accurately, will, although essentially immaterial, exercise some of its operations with the necessary concurrence of the body; there will be in it something material and something immaterial. The faculties of the soul spring forth from its essence as the boughs from the stem of a tree, distinct from it but as a natural and necessary production of it.¹⁵ The human intellect, therefore, is an efflux of the soul; it is the eye through which it explores the material and even peers into the spiritual world, being, as the Scholastics would have said, ‘a spiritual accident of a spiritual substance.’ Nevertheless, all knowledge must develop from the data of sensuous perception,¹⁶ and it is only through inferences and indirectly that it can rise to any immaterial notion concerning the immaterial world. A careful analysis of the process of intellection will help us to realize that fact, which the Scholastics expressed in the trite axiom, *non est intellectus sine phantasmate* — there can be no intellection without some picture in the imagination — not only as the starting point, but also as the necessary and indispensable subject of any operations of the intellect, even the most abstract and seemingly immaterial one.¹⁷ Such a conception obviously must imply that there are for St. Thomas no innate ideas, since all knowledge must begin from sensuous perception. And, indeed, if by innate ideas we understand such concepts as we might have inherited ready-made, there are not for him, in the proper sense of the term, any innate ideas.¹⁸ This is for him a simple statement of fact: it does not require any demonstration. Did not Aristotle, the philosopher — he whom we might term the prophet of the Scholastics — tell us that the individual human mind at the outset is like a *tabula rasa* on which nothing has as yet been written? Such is undoubtedly the condition of the mental faculty of a child before the awakening of his intellectual activity. As a fact, therefore, man is not born with ready-made ideas, and in that sense there are not any ‘innate ideas’ so-called.

But if no ideas are innate in the human mind, there is nevertheless in it an inborn tendency to frame some very definite ones which universally appear in it as soon as the first awakening of the intellectual faculty takes place ; for that awakening itself implies and involves the acknowledgment of the first principles¹⁹ which form themselves spontaneously in the intellect as soon as it comes in contact with ‘intelligible’ objects; exactly as the first contact of food causes the gastric juice to spring from the walls of the stomach.

The simile is a very material one, but it may be pardonable to employ it in default of a better one; and it may help us to realize the meaning of the Scholastics. The difference, however, is that the gastric juice is produced by the stomach alone, being secreted by its walls at the presence of a digestible object, but the latter contributes nothing to the substantial constitution of the said gastric juice: whereas the first principles are generated in the intellect by the intelligible object itself, and in fact they are nothing but mental conceptions based on, and representing, its most abstract and general feature, to wit: being, *ratio essendi*.

When a photographic plate of slow action is exposed to light in a camera, if developed after a very short exposure, it reveals nothing but a vague and indistinct outline of the object, of which it was intended to reproduce the likeness. It is only after a sufficient exposure that the image of the object will have imprinted itself with all its details in perfect clearness of reproduction. So with the human intellect, the earliest idea that it receives at first sight from any object whatever is that very vague and indistinct notion that ‘there is’ something before itself, that a being appeals to its cognitive power; but it is only after a careful examination and

a progressive investigation, that it may hope to acquire a full knowledge of the said being in all its details.

The idea of Being is therefore the very first intellectual impression that the human mind gathers, although confusedly, from the outward object.²⁰ That idea of Being, expressed in a negative formula, is the very first of all first principles, the principle of contradiction, viz., ‘Being is not not-being.’ All other so-called first principles of theoretical knowledge are nothing but various applications of that one and unique first principle. The principle of causality, for instance: ‘Nothing takes place without there being some sufficient cause to account for the change,’ simply means that no new being can come into existence, springing from Naught, since the contrary would imply that Being and Naught are practically identical. A similar explanation might be given of all other first principles, bringing them all down to the principle of contradiction, if we could afford such a digression for the present.

Those first principles, therefore, are the only ideas that might perhaps in a derived and secondary sense be called ‘innate ideas,’ inasmuch as they form themselves naturally and uniformly in every human mind ; still, since they are generated from the potentiality of the intellect by the object, they come from without, and are of objective origin, although subjective as to their formation.²¹

All other ideas, those representing things or facts, are acquired by some mysterious intuition by which the human intellect reads into the nature of some given material object, and that process we are now going to try to investigate by means of psychological analysis.²²

The process of intellection is naturally divided into two successive stages, one which we have in common with the animals, the preliminary stage, the stage of sensuous and imaginative preception; the other, which is peculiar to man, is the stage of abstraction, of properly universal or intellectual knowledge. Sense perception, considered in its general conditions, is easy to describe and presents no special difficulties. Any sensible object that appears before our senses is a complex of various qualities, visible, audible, odorous, tactile, or gustatory. The sensorial apparatus of man will by its five organs, sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, separate each group of qualities from the others; each one of them will find its own entrance, organized and adapted for it, into the sentient subject. All those qualities that first enter in separate groups will, in the next instant, be reunited into a sensible imaginative picture that will be the exact representation of that very individual object that stands before us, let us say a dog, for instance, or a tree.

In the animals, knowledge stops at that stage; there is no further progress; the animal can imagine, remember, even form some instinctive judgments, but it cannot have universal ideas — it cannot think. In man there is something more: that raw material, that sensible and single picture of that individual dog, that individual tree may, by the mysterious process of intuition that we call abstraction, be converted, manufactured, into the intellectual universal representation of the tree in itself, or the dog in itself, into the ‘intelligible’ idea of the dog, the tree. In what manner, then, does that abstraction take place? Every picture that is in the imagination appeals to the intellect, but the intellect may or may not, according to its present condition or circumstances, advert to it; however, there stands the ‘phantasm’²³ before the intellectual faculty, apt to arouse its activity, ready for use. It is also admitted by all that a single individual phantasm is not sufficient to cause the intellect to act: it is only by the recurrence of similar appearances, that it is aroused into activity, and then spontaneously abstracts the universal from the singular.

Let us now suppose that several individuals or instances have already appeared in the imagination, that they have left an enduring impress upon it, without however having succeeded, up to the present, in bringing the intellect to the act of manufacturing a universal idea. The

intellect has remained inactive, it is in the condition of a looking-glass before which stands an object, but in which no reflection appears, because the object is, as yet, in the dark.

But now the succession of similar experiences is sufficiently complete. A new ‘phantasm,’ clothed with all its sensible qualities, is offered again to the intellect, together with the remembrances of past similar experiences; then, as if by the turning of some electrical switch, a flood of intellectual light, if we may use the metaphor, flashes upon it; the complex of sensible qualities, that is, the phantasm, assumes an ‘intelligible,’ immaterial condition, and that immaterial mirror, the intellect, receives in itself the immaterial picture thus revealed, the universal abstract idea.²⁴

Following the data of Aristotle, the scholastics therefore divided the intellectual faculty, in itself one and indivisible, into two powers — the active intellect, *intellectus agens*?²⁵ and the passive intellect, *intellectus possibilis*.²⁶ The first, the *intellectus agens*, is that power, that aptitude, inherent in the human mind, to discover and bring into prominence the universal, to illuminate the phantasm with intellectual light, we might say, so as to immaterialize it. The *intellectus possibilis*, on the other hand, is the faculty of perceiving and assimilating the universal idea that has been evolved from the individual by the activity of the *intellectus agens*. It is the mirror in which the immaterial likeness of the object, the universal idea, reflects itself, when it has once been brought forward by the illuminating power of the *intellectus agens*. It is called passive, *possibilis*, from its aptitude to take up any idea; but it is essentially active, as soon as it has acquired the idea. This it is that thinks, judges, reasons, organizes science, and so on; it is the thinking mind itself, of which the *intellectus agens* is only the servant and the tributary.²⁷ There are, indeed, besides the first one that we have just described and that was called by the Scholastics simple apprehension, two other operations which are proper to the *intellectus possibilis* alone, viz., judgment and reasoning. When once in possession of several ideas through abstraction, the human mind may also mentally associate or dissociate them by judgments that are expressed in propositions; again, it can evolve by reasoning some new judgment from others in which it is implicitly contained. These are the three fundamental operations of the human intellect: perceiving, judging, reasoning; all others are more or less forms or complexes of these three.

III.

After having perused the preceding exposition of St. Thomas’s doctrine on the human soul and the human intellect, one more question will naturally occur to a modern mind familiar with post-Kantian philosophy. What were the views of Aquinas concerning the value of human knowledge? What was his standpoint in regard to the epistemological problem?

The answer to this inquiry allows of two different researches, viz., first, stating and defining that standpoint, and secondly, solving from a Thomistic point of view the difficulties that might be urged against it from a Kantian point of view. But as the second part of such a study would imply a critical examination of the Kantian system as a whole, we shall for the present refrain from such an attempt, and content ourselves with stating St. Thomas’s position and defining his doctrines concerning the reliability of our knowledge and the grounds on which it rests.

As regards his general conclusions, he decided the question by vindicating the absolute objective value of human knowledge, although not, of course, the infallibility of the individual mind. When the intelligible universal idea has been evolved through the agency of the *intellectus agens* from the sensible phantasm, the question will arise, Where does that intelligible idea come from? It cannot have come out of Naught, for this would be an utter impossibility; the intelligence of man cannot, any more than any other finite being, create anything, not even an

idea.²⁸

It might be supposed that the idea is produced by the intellect itself from its own substance when it comes in contact with the object, just as a spark will spring from the pole of an electric apparatus when touched by the finger of the operator. Neither St. Thomas nor any of his contemporaries seem even to have considered such a hypothesis, to which, however, Kant's doctrine of the *a priori* forms would come very near. St. Thomas would very likely have answered that, according to all appearances, whereas the electric spark, whatever may be the nature of the object that comes in contact with the pole of the electric machine, is always the same, different sorts of objects give rise in the mind to different ideas of objects with perfect and infallible mutual correspondence, so that the variety of ideas cannot be satisfactorily accounted for, except by the diversity of the objects that generate them in the human mind.

If it be further urged, and this is more distinctively the Kantian position, that there are positive and *de facto* motives to distrust the testimony of our intellectual faculty concerning the external realities, the answer, as already stated, would involve a critical examination of the various motives brought forward to batter down the authority of reason; we are consequently obliged to decline to attempt that in the present article. One thing, however, we shall not hesitate to state in advance, viz., that neither the *a priori* forms of the sensibility, nor the *a priori* categories of the understanding, nor the *antinomies* of reason would have disturbed the serene confidence of St. Thomas in the objective value of our knowledge; for all those objections he would have discarded, maintaining that they did not apply to *his* view of Space and Time, to *his* Categories, to *his* arguments concerning God, the World, and the human soul.

For Aquinas, therefore, if mind discovers the idea in the phantasm of the sensible individual, it is because the idea is contained in that sensible individual as a letter in its envelope or a diamond within its gangue; indeed, it is nothing but the substantial form of the thing in itself ideally reproduced in the *intellectus possibilis*, as the likeness of a person in a looking-glass or on some photographic plate.²⁹

Now if the substantial form is capable of being so ideally reproduced, it is because it is itself an idea, a concept of the divine mind embodied in matter, the archetype of which exists in God, and which has been enclosed in it by Him.³⁰ Hence it follows that the cognitive process is nothing other than a communion with the divine mind through the intermediary of things,³¹ a deciphering of the book that He has written in Nature for our instruction ; for the whole universe is the handiwork of God and the heavens declare His glory (Ps. 19). Another objection may be raised, viz., since the idea is universal whereas the individual is singular, how can the one be a faithful picture of the other? In that form, apparently the only one in which the epistemological problem appealed to the minds of mediaeval philosophers, it gave rise to the celebrated quarrel about the Universal.

Without reciting here the various opinions that were set forth at the time, we shall simply reproduce Aquinas's solution of that question. But there is first of all a preliminary observation that will force itself upon our attention: those features, those modes, universality or singularity, are in themselves accidental or external to the essential constituents of the 'form' in itself.³²

Just as, in the case of a photographic picture, the likeness of a man must not be supposed to be unlike to him *in repraesentando* because it is apt to be reproduced in an indefinite number of paper prints, so an 'intelligible' likeness, though it be universal, remains the same in the essential features, and universality is a

merely extrinsic condition that makes no difference to its representative value.³³

But, moreover, universality is *not* a creation of the intellect; it is derived from the objective world, it has its objective counterpart. It is because the mind has discovered the same feature in several individuals that it is naturally induced, from the very objective condition of things, to

conceive that feature as one element, possessed in common by several singulars, as a universal. Universality, therefore, as it is in the mind, has for its objective foundation that plurality by means of which it is participated in by several individuals in the external world.

It is not an arbitrary or spontaneous creation of the mind; it represents something, to wit: the fact that one and the same reality or portion of reality is to be or can be found in several distinct individuals, and we may therefore conclude that ‘nothing’ is to be discovered in the idea which is not somehow in the object, according to the trite scholastic axiom: *Nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit in sensu* (“Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses”).

That is why St. Thomas held that in the first operation of the intellect, the one that we have described above as ‘simple apprehension,’ there is, on the part of the human mind, not even a possibility of error — and that error can occur only in the second operation (judgment) or in the third (reasoning). With the examination of these last propositions we shall conclude the present study.

First of all, no error can occur in the process of the first operation of the mind, the ‘simple apprehension,’ except inasmuch as judgment mixes with it to some extent.³⁴ That assertion is already manifest from the analysis of the process of abstraction that we have given above. In the presence of the object, the intellect may or may not advert to it. If it does not, no intellectual action will take place, and therefore there will be no error because no act of intelligence; if, on the contrary, the intellect does advert to the object as presented by the imagination, and an act of intelligence does indeed take place, it will understand the object fully or at least partially. If some person comes toward me in the dark, I may recognize that this is a human being, without, however, being able to discern what person it is. In that case, I shall gather only partial information, but a partial truth implies no error of itself except in so far as my mind may mistake that partial truth for a complete one.

If in the presence of some dubious animal, let us say a coral, for instance, I notice in it some vegetative properties, without, however, discovering the animal characteristics that are to be found in it at the same time, and if, therefore, I gather from that incomplete observation the idea that there is something vegetative in the coral, there is as yet no error in that partial truth, unless I judge that a coral is only and exclusively a plant; but forming such an erroneous opinion is going beyond the limits of simple apprehension, is launching into a judgment, into the second operation of the mind, in which, as well as in the third, viz., reasoning, no natural privilege of immunity from error can be guaranteed to us. The causes of the errors that may befall the individual mind in its search for truth are subtle and manifold; all of us are more or less doomed to fall into mistakes now and then, but this is no proof that the human mind itself is not made for truth, or is incapable of reaching it. There is no reason why we should at all doubt of its inherent capacity to grasp truth. Judgment, therefore, and reasoning are also operations by which we are capable of attaining to the truth. This will be our concluding proposition.

Judging is mentally associating or dissociating two concepts, two essences, on the basis of some characteristics that they have in common.³⁵ Having, for instance, perceived the idea of animal and that of biped, I may form the judgment : ‘An animal may be a biped.’ Now the two ideas that are thus associated in the foregoing judgment are, as we have shown, objective in their origin and objective in their representative value. Supposing, therefore, that a judgment is not founded on ignorance, or an imperfect knowledge of the two elements involved as subject and predicate, the mutual agreement on which my judgment is based is inherent in those two ideas themselves ; but then it must exist also in the things that are represented by those ideas, and of which they are merely the mental substitutes, the intellectual likenesses. We have, therefore, consistently to admit that our judgments have a real objective value in and through the ideas on which they are

based.

Reasoning, as St. Thomas remarks,³⁶ is a property of the human intellect founded on its relative weakness and inferiority, that makes it unable to embrace the whole domain of truth at one glance, and to discover at once all that is contained in one idea. This makes it necessary for it to grope its way, to run successively (*discurrere*) from one judgment to another, so as to proceed from known propositions to unknown truths. It may, therefore, be defined as the process by which, be it inductive or deductive, on the basis of two given mental judgments, we are enabled by bringing them together to perceive the truth of a third, which, without the help thus afforded by the two first, would either never have occurred to us, or would have remained forever dubious in our minds, exactly as the meeting of two electric currents, the positive and the negative, will cause an electric spark to flash in the darkness.

Here, again, while having more than sufficient motives for distrusting the capability of the individual mind, there is no cause why we should doubt the objective value of the reasoning process in itself, provided all the necessary precautions against a possible error be taken. For if the two premises are objectively true and fully understood, and if no flaw finds its way into the process of comparison, the third judgment that springs from it must also be considered as objectively true and reliable, since it is but the inherent and natural content of objectively valid judgments. We are therefore entitled legitimately to extend the conclusion of our reasonings to the objective world without.

To sum up in one sentence the whole epistemological system of Aquinas, we should say: Man's mind is, in itself, a faithful mirror of the external universe, that mirrors itself in it ideally and immaterially. Such would be, on the principles of St. Thomas, the outcome of the foregoing study.

Readers who have had the patience to read the present article thus far, will find perhaps that we have touched upon a great number of questions, while leaving an even greater number untouched. Our excuse is that this exposition could not be more than an epitome of the principal tenets of the Thomistic system, and that, if thoroughly developed and enlarged to its proper size, it might easily fill several volumes. If, however, we have succeeded in making it sufficiently suggestive to induce some reflective minds to turn to St. Thomas himself, we shall be fully satisfied with the result. Nothing can supply the want of direct contact with the text and the knowledge of an author which we obtain by communing immediately with his thoughts in his own original works. Thus only from a conscientious and careful study, can one expect to experience that 'rest of mind' (*quies animi*) in the possessed truth, in which Aquinas, in conformity with the dicta of the great Aristotle, made the natural beatitude of the soul consist — that rest being the loftiest enjoyment of our noblest faculty exercised about its highest possible object.

NOTES

¹ The doctrine of St. Thomas concerning the human soul may best be looked for in his *Summa theologica*, Part I, from question lxxv to question xc inclusive, where he treats the subject *ex professo* and in full, although in his characteristic scholastic manner; also in the *Contra gentes*, Book II, from chapter lvi to chapter xc inclusive, again in the *Quaestiones disputata* at the question *De anima* (twenty-one articles), and in his commentaries on Aristotle's three books *De anima*. St. Thomas deals with the subject of the human soul in other passages, but we content ourselves with mentioning those in which the exposition is most complete and systematic; the same remark may apply also to the quotations that we are going to make further on, this article purporting to be a faithful interpretation, not a concordance.

² *De Anima*, Book II, c. I.

³ Aquinas, *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. lxvi, 2.

⁴ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 66, a. 1 and 2, and *passim*. The concept of matter and form, as every one knows, was no creation of the Scholastics; they had simply borrowed it from the Greeks. For St. Thomas's interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine on that point, one may consult his *Commentaries on Aristotle's Physics (De physico auditu)*, Book I, and on his *Metaphysics*, Book VIII.

⁵ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. lxxvi, a. 1; *Contra gentes*, Book II, c. 68. We should like to remind the reader that the following exposition of St. Thomas's psychology is a mere statement of his views. It would be impossible within such a narrow compass as that of the present article to attempt anything like a sufficient justification of them.

⁶ *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 75, a. 1.

⁷ *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 76, a. 8. This doctrine concerning the substantial union of the soul and the human body is now a dogma of faith in the Catholic Church since the definition that was formulated by the council of Vienne (France) in 1311. It is on this basis of the mutual, natural, and necessary correlation of body and soul that some eminent commentators of the master inferred that the human soul after death, being on account of its separation from the body in an unnatural or violent condition, required a future resurrection of that body, as some sort of natural right. The Church, however, has not adopted that inference.

⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, Part I, q. lxxvi, a. I, 3, 4.

⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Part I, q. 25, a. 2.

¹⁰ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, q. 95, a. 6, and *Contra gentes*, Book. II, ch. 79.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Part I, q. 90, a. 2.

¹² *Contra gentiles*, Book II, ch. 68.

¹³ Let us remark in passing how nearly related to the evolutionary theory is the view that we mention here.

¹⁴ Cf. *Contra gentes*, Part II, 68.

¹⁵ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 77, a. I, 6.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, Part I, q. 84, a. 6.

¹⁷ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 84, a. 7.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, q. 84, a. 3.

¹⁹ *Sum. theol.*, secunda secundae, q. xlvi, a. 6.

²⁰ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, I a 2 ie , q. 94, a. 2.

²¹ Cf. Zigliara, *Summa philos.*, Log., No. 55.

²² Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 85.

²³ By the word 'phantasm' the Scholastic philosophers understood the representation of a thing as it is in the imagination.

²⁴ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 79, a. 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, a. 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, a. 10.

²⁷ Cf. *Opusc. de potent, anima*, ch. vi.

²⁸ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 45, a. 5.

²⁹ Cf. *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 85, a. 2.

³⁰ Ibid., q. 14, a. 8.

³¹ Ibid., ad 3 um .

³² Ibid., q. 85, a. I, ad 1 um ; Opusc. de ente et essentia, ch. 4.

³³ loc. cit.

³⁴ Ibid., q. 85, a. 5.

³⁵ *Sum. theol.*, Part I, q. 85, a. 5.

³⁶ Qu&st. disput. de verit., q. 15, a. I.

F. L. van Becklaere. “A Summary Exposition of Saint Thomas Aquinas’s Philosophy of Knowledge.” *The Philosophical Review* Vol. 12, No. 6 (Nov., 1903): 611-628.

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