ELABORATING AQUINAS' EPISTEMOLOGY: FROM BEING TO KNOWLEDGE

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ABSTRACT

Amidst the broad divergence in opinion of philosophers and scientists at understanding reality that have lent character to the historical epochs of the Philosophical enterprise, the crucial realization has always been, of the necessity of Epistemology in our entire program of making inquiry into 'What Is'.[1] This realization seems born out of the erstwhile problem of knowing. Epistemology, which investigates the nature, sources, limitations and validating of knowledge,[2] offers a striking challenge here. Since we have no direct access to our world around us, outside of the subjective experience offered us by our senses, we are handicapped at making comparisons of our beliefs with a concrete world, out there, or with elements of the world. Our statements about the world seem to stand alone, buffeted against the intimidating tide of possible contradicting circumstances. Our putative claims to knowledge, therefore, face the exigency of justification. Ayer, expressing the urgency of resolving this persisting lacuna, provides an alternative criterion of knowing, as 'having the right to be sure'.[3] Thus, it is this deep-seated concern that has evolved, over time, to become the primary thrust of the project of Epistemology, raising the controversy over which, of Epistemology or Metaphysics, is to be accorded the prime status of first philosophy.

However, Aquinas is wise to build his epistemological premise on a firm metaphysical support, clarifying the needed development from being to knowledge. For, being has to first exist to constitute the object of perception, belief and knowledge. Accordingly, our exposition of Aquinas' epistemology will first take a cursory look at the theoretical and historical background to Aquinas' Philosophy, before offering a general characterization of his theory of knowledge. Then, the paper will discuss his concept of sense perception as a basis for all knowing, followed closely by an analysis of Cognition and *Scientia*.

Keywords: Aquinas, knowledge, epistemology, empiricism, cognition, justification.

Aquinas is largely apathetic to the modern epistemological controversy of which of epistemology or metaphysics is to be honoured as first philosophy.[4] Yet though, Aquinas may be averse to tackling this concern, "he does not build his philosophical system around a

[1] O'Hear, Anthony. 1985. *What Philosophy Is*. New York: Penguin Book Publishers, p. 11.
[2] Velasquez, Manuel. 2005. *Philosophy*. Belmont: Thomson-Wadsworth Publishers Ltd., p. 11.
[3] Ayer, A. J. 1956. *The Problem of Knowledge*. Victoria: Penguin Books Ltd., pp. 31-35.
[4] Kreeft, Peter. 2009. *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*. Boston: Recorded Books LLC, p. 63.

theory of knowledge", rather, he founds it on the "basis provided by the other parts of his system, in particular, his metaphysics and psychology".[5] Consequently, building significantly on his concepts of psychology and metaphysics, Aquinas exposes the concept of knowledge through the thematic headings of Sense perception, Cognition, *Scientia*, and the Foundationalist agenda of justification.

Born around the year 1225, based strongly upon evidence of his death on the morning of the 7th of March, 1274, after a vibrant life and career of about forty-nine years, Saint Thomas Aquinas was one of the most influential figures of his time. He was descended from a rich historic Lombard family, born at the castle of Roccasecca, near the small town of Aquino, which lies between Naples and Rome. His father, who was the count of Aquino, nourished the selfish desire of someday, seeing his son enjoying an exalted ecclesiastical position. Hence, Saint Thomas had his early education under the scrupulous direction of the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassano, and later, in 1239, went to further his education at the University of Naples, previously founded by Emperor Frederick II in 1224.[6] While at Naples, however, Saint Thomas fell in love with the Dominican life, which later culminated in his embracing the Dominican garb, despite the disapproval of his family. His later assignment to study under Saint Albert the Great, the erudite Dominican theologian, in the North, was particular in the shaping of his great love for the scriptures and for dogmatic theology. 'The Dumb Ox', as he was fondly called particularly due to his taciturnity, was greatly impregnated with Albert's thought within the four years of his stay.[7] As Albert testifies with lively conviction, "We call him a dumb ox, but he will make resound in his doctrine such a bellowing, that it will echo throughout the entire world". Two of Aquinas' major contributions to Scholasticism were his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and his *Summa Theologica*. Neither of these works may be considered as a philosophical treatise. This is based on its deviation from the post-modern ideas about the nature and scope of philosophy, and furthermore, upon Aquinas' own delimitation of the frontiers of philosophy and dogmatic theology as he discusses in the opening chapters of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*.[8]

Of the many events that contributed to shaping Aquinas' thought, the historical event of the Renaissance was remarkably crucial to his landmark contributions in Philosophy and theology. Coppleston argues on the pressing importance of not overlooking the unbroken continuity of theory that exists between the Medieval, the Renaissance and the Post-Renaissance Philosophies, and expresses this as the key to understanding the history of Philosophy. Aquinas' arrival in Paris around the middle of the Thirteenth Century witnessed the general ambience of apathy towards literature of antiquity. Evidently, though, Ovid's works, as well as a few other works of antiquity, met with a yet dwindling popularity among

[5] Macdonald, Scott. "Theory of Knowledge" in Kretzmann, Norman and Stump, Eleonore. 1993. *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 161.
[6] Torrell, Jean-Pierre. 1992. *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. I.* Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, pp. 1-3.
[7] Torrell, Jean-Pierre. 1992. *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 26-27.
[8] Copleston, Frederick. 1955. *Aquinas*. New York: Penguin Book Publishers, pp. 12-13.

the people of the time.[9] The general character of indifference for these works however, was soon to change, as there was a gradual reappraisal of philosophic reason from the bosom of antiquity. This is also particularly vital to understanding the development of Aquinas' thought, because, in purely theoretical terms, Aquinas' amazing status in the prevalent school of Thirteenth Century Scholasticism, finds its origin centred at the heart of an "authentic rebirth". This rebirth furnishes a discovery of the Ancient culture of philosophy. Put in more lucid terms, it witnesses the discovery of the prime place of Aristotle in understanding theology, and summarily, the assimilation of Greek reason in Christian theology. As Aquinas points out, "The study of Philosophy is not done in order to know what men have thought, but rather to know how the truth herself stands". Hence, it is in this respect that Aquinas becomes a most fervent disciple of Aristotelian thought. It was the inauguration of this rebirth that saw the rise of Aristotelianism, a sensational event in the rediscovery of antiquity that also was to consequently be the determining factor in the development of the work of Saint Thomas.[10]

I

Generally described as the 'Christian Aristotle', Aquinas models a good deal of his philosophy on the philosophic system of this luminary giant. Aquinas wields a convincing realist support for human knowledge, as reason is open to reality, and reality to reason.[11] He stresses the experimental foundation of human knowledge, in conceding that the objects of sense experience furnish us with viable knowledge. Aquinas makes mincemeat of the theory of innate knowledge, as put forward by Plato. Man is not endowed with innate ideas at the time of his birth. The human mind, from birth, is basically in potentiality to knowledge, though, gifted with the capability of abstracting and forming ideas.[12] At birth, the human mind is a *tabula rasa*, that is, "a clear tablet in which nothing is written".[13] He, in consequence, criticizes the position of Augustine, who maintains that our "intellectual knowledge cannot be conveyed by the senses". Aquinas, nevertheless, does not align fully on the plane of Greek empiricism, found in the writings of Democritus, often described under the terms of Hard or Radical Empiricism. These hold that *all* our knowledge was derived from the mere impression brought about by sensible things, impressions which they allege to be caused by a discharge of images.[14] Aquinas, on the other hand, goes off a tangent, as his mentor, Aristotle, gravitating between the two extremes of Empiricism and Rationalism. This is so because though he acknowledges sense experience as the *starting point* of all human knowing, he does not *limit* human knowledge simply to sense experience. Hence, Aquinas states pointedly,

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[9] Chenu, M. D. 1978. *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, p. 31.
[10] Chenu, M. D. 1978. *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, pp. 31-32.
[11] Kreeft, Peter. 2009. *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 63.
[12] Copleston, Frederick. 1993. *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. I. New York: Doubleday Publishing Group Inc., p. 392.
[13] Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica* (abbreviated henceforth as ST), Ia, q. 84, a. 6, in Aquinas, Thomas (St.). 1948. *Summa Theologica* [ST] (transl. By Dominican Fathers). New York: Christian Classics, p. 451.
[14] Kreeft, Peter. 2009. *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 63-64.

> Aristotle chose[s] the middle wise. For with Plato, he agreed that intellect and sense are different, But he held that the sense has not its proper operation without the cooperation of the body; so that to feel is not an act of the soul alone, but of the composite...Aristotle agreed with Democritus...that the operations of the sensible part are caused by the impressions of the sensible on the sense, not by a discharge...[15]

To this extent, his position is often described under the philosophical distinction, Moderate or Soft Empiricism. Aquinas is wary of confusing man with the animals as the hard empiricist does, in reducing all knowledge to passive sensation, and also, he cautiously avoids mistaking man for the angelic order, as the rationalist, in believing we possess some divine power of "mental telepathy" with the divine mind in their ambitious claim to innate knowledge. Instead, there is the proper classification of man in Aquinas' typical Aristotelian "golden mean" between the two extremes.

Hence, knowing as an activity of man is characteristically immanent, as the known forms are present in the knowing mind not as material objects but in their abstract forms. However, one needs to be careful of making the supposition that Aquinas endorses phenomenalism or is hand-in-glove with the Copernican revolution of Kant, both of which subtly deny the relevance of a concrete extra-mental existence. Thomas expresses confidently the material and extra-mental existence of the objects of experience and posits that these are only present in the cognizing faculty of the mind only by the formal identity between both.[16] His emphasis is therefore, on the indispensable factor of sense experience in the attainment of knowledge.

II

Copleston argues against the common misconception of according the Classic British Empiricists the luxury of discovering the fundamental role of sense-perception in human cognition.[17] Still, the role of sense perception in the acquisition of knowledge has always been pictured with a delimiting factor of doubt. Scepticism harshly criticizes the reliability of our senses in affording us sure knowledge about the world. As Descartes exposes in his epistemological program of systematic doubt,

> How often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed...But in thinking over this I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indication by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep

[15] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 89, a. 1, p. 428.
[16] Kretzmann, Norman and Stump, Eleonore. "Aquinas, Thomas" in Craig, Edward. (ed.) 1998. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge Publishers Ltd., p. 336.
[17] Copleston, Frederick. *Aquinas*, p. 27.

> that I am lost in astonishment. And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I now dream.[18]

Further to this tendentious inconsistency, our senses yet present us with another dilemma. Most times, there exist a subtle dichotomy between our experience of objects and the objects of experience themselves. What we perceive as sweet, may appear bitter to someone else. In such cases, we would not be able to sufficiently characterize the object of experience. To this effect, we hear such clichés as "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", attributed to Margaret Wolfe Hungerford. At other times, closely similar to Descartes' scenario, our senses offer us the confusing muddle of illusions, delusions and distortions of the 'real'.

Against this tide of epistemological pessimism, Aquinas counters with the Aristotelian argument that the human mind can no doubt attain certain knowledge, but that this may not be realized outside of sensible experience, hence, the senses alone can furnish man with objects of knowledge. Hence, Aquinas does not nurse the sceptic's distrust of the senses. The strength of his position is reflected in his proposition that even the soul's knowledge of itself is predicated in its acts, and not in its essence, that is to say that the soul abstracts intelligible species from its acts. Unlike the rationalists, such as Descartes, the *cogito* does not come first, but last. We don't begin with "I think therefore, I am", rather we assert "I see something, therefore, I am not just an object seen but a seer".[19] Put bluntly, Aquinas simply, posits that we cannot know anything without the presence of a phantasm or sense impression: *nihil in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu.*[20] His position is hinged on the consideration of man as composite (compositum) of an intellectual soul and a corporeal body. The intellectual soul, he held, was the "primary principle of nourishment, sensation, and local movement, and likewise, of understanding".[21] Therefore, the intellectual soul was the form of the body. Both were properly united, irrespective of their distinctive characters of incorruptibility and corruptibility respectively. As he states matter-of-factly,

> Nature never fails in necessary things: therefore, the intellectual soul had to be endowed not only with the power of understanding, but also with the power of feeling. Now the action of the senses is not performed without a corporeal instrument. Therefore, it behoved the intellectual soul to be united to a body fitted to be a convenient organ of sense.[22]

Aquinas believes that the senses in their natural state (that is in a healthy sense organ) are capable of mirroring objects as they really are. He, therefore, maintains that the natural mind is able to grasp the permanent and stable in objects of sense. At this juncture, it is important to establish that, quite, unlike the phenomenologist, Aquinas supports the independent existence

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[18] Descartes, Rene. *Meditation I* as in Haldane, E. S. and Ross, G. R. T. (transl.) 1969. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 145-146.
[19] Kreeft, Peter. 2009. *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 67.
[20] Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, p. 392.
[21] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 76, a. 1, p. 371.
[22] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 76, a. 5, p. 378.

of corporeal objects. Yet, despite the constant flux associated with these changing objects of sense, we can abstract from matter, its essence, from the particular, the universal.[23]

Aquinas, espousing Avicenna's categories, distinguishes between the exterior senses and the interior senses. 'Sense', he states, 'is a passive power, and is naturally immuted by the exterior sensible'. This implies that there is an exterior cause of the immutation which is perceived by the sense, and it is the diversity of these exterior causes that give rise to the distinctive sensitive powers and their consequent sensory organs. Natural immutation is clearly distinguished from spiritual immutation in that, the former communicates its form that is received physically, while the latter communicates its form spiritually or metaphysically. The external sensory powers are then, the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, the sense of smelling and the sense of touch and taste. All these communicate both forms of immutation with the exception of the sense of sight that communicates only a spiritual immutation.[24] Coupled with experience offered by these exterior senses, there are the interior senses which represent the sensitive power that preserves the sensations received in the former. They are listed as common sense, phantasy, imagination and the estimative and memorative powers. While in the exterior sense, physical sensations are perceived, in the interior senses, intentions are perceived. The sensory species that were received in the exterior senses were transmitted to the interior senses, organs which Aquinas located in the brain. While the forms received through the senses were taken in by the proper sense and the common sense, the phantasy or imagination was responsible for their retention and preservation. The function of apprehension of intentions, not gotten through the senses, rested with the estimative power, as well as, its retention dependent on the memorative power. These interior senses were responsible for the further required step in actual human cognizing. Aquinas, also, makes a needed distinction between man and the animals, in that while the latter intuits intentions, through natural instinct or the natural estimative, the former does so by the cogitative. As a consequence, the senses simply were relevant in furnishing us with raw material for the entire process of knowing.

III

In the entire process of intellectual cognition, Aquinas lays strong emphasis on the crucial part played by the sensory. Indeed, He does not, in any way, underestimate the necessary intervention of the human intellect in the perfection and completion of the knowing process. The important raw material furnished by the interior senses, especially the phantasy or imagination are termed phantasms, that is, the impression gotten from the corporeal object, e.g. sound, taste, colour, etc.[25] These phantasms are the sensory species that are worked on by the human intellect. Aquinas however, distinguishes the intellect in two modes based on their functions in cognition: the first expresses the intellect "in potentiality with regards to things

[23] Stumpf, Samuel. E. 1989. *Philosophy, History and Problems*. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., p. 195.
[24] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 78, pp. 392-395.
[25] Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, pp. 389-390.

intelligible", termed the passive or possible intellect, in Aristotelian jargon.[26] It is, on the other hand, the function of the active or agent intellect to work on the phantasms, abstracting the universal element in the particulars of sense impressions of sound, taste, colour, etc. and producing in the passive intellect, the *species impressa*.[27] Abstraction, as an Aristotelian concept implies the isolation of universal elements from particulars. Hence, for different particular phantasms of red objects, the active intellect isolates "redness" as a concept. This concept, then, is received by the possible or passive intellect, where it finds its place in the full sense as the *verbum mentis*.

These universals are properly understood as forms. So, the human mind in the process of cognition receives a form. "Every act of cognition is in accordance with some form, which is the source of cognition in the one cognizing".[28] Cognition, therefore, entails some formal identity between the object of cognition and the cognizing subject.[29] Cognition is a process of change, where the cognizing subject undergoes something that requires his coming to be in a state which they previously were not. This cognitive change, in hylomorphic terms, expresses "a process by which some matter or subject (hyle) comes to possess some form or property (morphe) that it previously lacked".[30] This is often termed as the Aristotelian-Thomistic doctrine of the "identity" of the knower in the known. For Aquinas explains that 'knowledge is regulated according as the thing known is in the knower [and] the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower'.[31] This assimilation is quite different from the natural mode, whereby there is an ordinary change:

> One kind of assimilation occurs because of an agreement in nature…but this kind is not required for knowledge. Another kind of assimilation occurs through information, which kind is required for cognition – just as sight is assimilated to colour, when the pupil is informed by its species.[32]

The forms received are, however, in intentional or representational states, that is, they are in a form whereby when received by the cognizing subject are used to make other things. Aquinas, relevantly, adopts the term *species*, a synonym for representation to classify these forms. To this effect, Aquinas distinguishes between sensory and intellective species. The former, we have previously seen, are the received phantasms worked on by the intellect, while the latter

[26] Kretzmann, Norman and Stump, Eleonore. "Aquinas, Thomas" in Craig, Edward. (ed.) 1998. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, p. 336.
[27] Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, p. 390.
[28] Aquinas, Thomas. *Sentences* 1.36.2.3, as quoted in Brower, E. Jeffrey and Brower-Toland, Susan. "Aquinas on Mental Representation: Concepts and Intentionality" (philreview.dukejournals.org/content/117/2/193.full.pdf), p. 6.
[29] Kretzmann, Norman and Stump, Eleonore. "Aquinas, Thomas" in Craig, Edward. (ed.) 1998. *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, p. 336.
[30] Brower, E. Jeffrey and Brower-Toland, Susan. "Aquinas on Mental Representation: Concepts and Intentionality", pp. 4-6.
[31] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 12, a. 4, p. 51.
[32] Aquinas, Thomas. *Sentences* 1.34.3.1 ad 4.

are the product of the intellect's consideration. They are only universals, e.g. round, metallic, etc. As Aquinas states,

> Wherefore the intellect naturally knows natures which exist only in individual matter; not as they are in such individual matter, but according as they are abstracted therefrom by the considering act of the intellect, hence it follows that through the intellect, we can understand these objects as *universal*; and this is beyond the power of sense.[33]

Despite all these, cognition is yet clearly not itself knowledge, for we can also possess false cognition.[34] In short, cognition, for Aquinas, is broader than knowledge. To this inadequacy, Aquinas presents *Scientia* as his notion of knowledge. Yet *Scientia* seems inadequate to fully explicate the concept of knowledge. Accordingly, Aquinas links up his notion of *Scientia* with the support of inferential justification.

IV

It is doubtful that Aquinas has any corresponding concept to tally with the English word: "knowledge". His notion of *scientia*, which is his closest equivalent, is built firmly on his preceding notion of cognition. Here, *scientia* is a species of cognition, but further, cognition of the truth of what is cognized. The self-reflexive capacity of the human intellect discussed earlier, offers the cognitive mind not only the acceptance of epistemic propositions but the grounds or reasons for accepting them. *Scientia* is the paradigm for knowledge; it is complete and certain cognition of the truth of something. Its propositions serve as the starting point of all philosophizing. However, it is to be noted that the project of Aquinas is far from complete, given that our propositions often hit wide of the mark. The paradigmatic *scientia* is often unattainable, as the words of later Popper attest, when he contends that we can only arrive at a mere "approximation of the truth" (verisimilitude). Aquinas' summation can be revised to admit of both the strict *scientia* as well as a secondary *scientia*. The former will entail propositions within the precinct of logic and geometry, while the latter will cover many other sorts of propositions.[35]

Aquinas puts forward the Aristotelian theory of demonstration as representative of *Scientia*. The demonstrative syllogism whereby a given belief, P, is held on the basis of some epistemic grounds, which lend credible support to its conclusion, gives the logical structure of *Scientia*. For example, a certain Mr. A holds a belief that P, and when questioned supports his belief with some other propositions, which can then be regarded as the premises to his belief, and these lend credible support to his belief that P. In the context of demonstration, Aquinas distinguishes between the two aforementioned types of *scientia*. As effects, which are the metaphysically posterior facts, are more epistemically accessible to us than the causes,

[33] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 12, a. 5: 1c, p. 52.
[34] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 17, a. 3.
[35] Macdonald, Scott. "Theory of Knowledge" in Kretzmann, Norman and Stump, Eleonore. 1993. *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, p. 174.

which stand as metaphysically prior and explanatory, Aquinas extends two arms of demonstration. In some cases, accordingly, we may infer the cause from the effect (on the basis of necessary causal principles), rather than the effect from the cause as is usual. This case is what Aquinas terms as 'factual demonstration' (*demonstrationes quia*), as they do not offer explanation for a fact. However, the other scenario presents us with 'explanatory demonstrations' (*demonstrationes propter quid*), which offer explanation or give the cause of an effect. In distinguishing both senses of scientia, thus, Aquinas aligns explanatory demonstrations as requirement for paradigmatic scientia, while placing factual demonstrations alongside secondary scientia. Unlike the level of intellectual cognition, which lends simply 'understanding', *Scientia* expresses the making of judgments. It is judgment that, hence, leads to *scientia.* He says thus, that, "Judgment goes with the certitude of scientia. And it is because we cannot have certain judgment about effects except by analysis leading to first principles that this part of human reason is called 'analytics'".[36] We understand things by 'composition and division'.[37] These judgments are arrived at by syllogistic inference. Thus, Aquinas expresses,

> [Aristotle] says that because we believe a thing has been concluded and have *scientia* with respect to it by virtue of the fact that we possess a demonstrative syllogism, and we possess this insofar as we have *scientia* with respect to the demonstrative syllogism, it is necessary not only that we antecedently cognize the first principles of the conclusion but also that we cognize them more than the conclusion[38]

As the above makes clear, there exist some first principles, thus, upon which *Scientia* ought to be grounded. Some propositions derive their justification based on an inference (*per demonsrationem*), however, there exist others that have their positive epistemic status non-inferentially, by virtue of themselves (*per se*). These propositions (*per se nota*) are Aquinas' first principles, the foundations of *Scientia*. They are also understood as self-evident principles (*principia per se nota*), as they are not simply necessary, but also give information about reality.[39] Support for his distinction between the strict *scientia* and the secondary *scientia*, also comes up here, as can be gleaned from the priority of sensory cognition over intellective cognition. As a result, the particular is both prior to and better known than the universal. Consequently, such immediate propositions can function *for us* as epistemic first principles, grounding what is *for us*, *scientia*.[40]

To buttress his argument, Aquinas argues for the self-justifying presence of these first principles by attacking rival principles of justification. Firstly, he strikes off the Aristotelian

[36] Aquinas, Thomas. *Sententia super Posteriora Analytica*.
[37] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, Ia, q. 85, a. 5, p. 437.
[38] Aquinas, Thomas. *Posterior Analytics*, I, q. 6, a. 2.
[39] Copleston, Frederick. *Aquinas*, p. 30.
[40] Macdonald, Scott. "Theory of Knowledge" in Kretzmann, Norman and Stump, Eleonore. 1993. *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, p. 175.

regress argument by stressing the need for a non-inferential justification to put an end to a backward regress *ad infinitum* of inferential justifications. Secondly, he argues against the vacuousness of circular reasoning as a source of justification, pointing to the bulwark of self-evident foundational principles as a way out of such vacuity.

Aquinas' notion of *Scientia* further implicates the relevant concept of truth. As a realist, one would expect Aquinas to further the correspondence theory of truth; however, he makes a slight deviation from the norm. For Aquinas, our concepts about the world are true not as much as they are a picture or copy of the real form in the world. On the other hand, it should represent the form of matter outside the mind as it is in the cognitive mind. So he says, "The soul of man is in a way all things".[41] This is rather an identity theory of truth. The correspondence theory of truth regards ideas in the mind as objects, things, e.g. copies, representations, etc. Aquinas, moreover, treats ideas not as material signs, but as formal signs. Aquinas' understanding of truth takes us a leap further into the divine. This is incumbent on the fact that Aquinas believes that the truth resides in the divine intellect. Hence, Aquinas finds it intriguing to consider the aspect of knowledge of immaterial substances, as well as the possibility of knowledge in separated substances.

V

Aquinas first argues on the possibility of knowledge of immaterial substances by the human intellect. Already, his preceding notion of sense perception as the basis for all knowledge precludes such a possibility. Consequently, it can be put forward, as Copleston presents, that the human mind cannot in this life attain a direct knowledge of immaterial substances, which are not and cannot be the object of the senses. The question as to the capability of the mind to rise above the senses to attain knowledge of God, who is not an object of sense, therefore, surfaces.

Though, a *prima facie* representation of Aquinas' epistemic program may discredit the attempt at ascribing man the capability of knowledge of immaterial substances, a more scrupulous consideration of his epistemology will reveal a glaring fact. For Aquinas, the senses were necessarily determined to a particular kind of object, unlike the intellect, which being immaterial, was the faculty of apprehending being. As such, the intellect was directed towards all being. Copleston explains Aquinas' position, saying that "the object of the intellect is the intelligible: nothing is intelligible except in so far as it is in act, partakes of being, and all that is in act is intelligible in so far as it is in act, i.e. partakes of being".[42] As the movement of the intellect is directed towards all being, therefore, the human intellect is not simply restricted to sensible being. The human intellect can therefore, proceed beyond sense to consider immaterial beings, in so far as they are manifested in and through the sensible world. However, Aquinas notes that the human intellect cannot by its own power, comprehend God directly, but requires the instrumentality of nature to reach the divine.

[41] Kreeft, Peter. 2009. *The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 63-64.
[42] Copleston, Frederick. *A History of Philosophy*, p. 393.

These effects of God as are intelligible in nature, manifest God to the extent that the intellect can come to understand the nature of God. Summarily, Aquinas posits that we can know God *ut causam, et per excessum, et per remotionem*. Consequently, it would be proper to assume that the intellect cannot attain a natural knowledge of immaterial substances. However, the active intellect only does so, by reading off a relation to the immaterial being from the sensible representations it perceives. As strong support to his thesis, Aquinas put forward his argument for the existence of God, as is made intelligible in nature. His famous *Quinque viae* consists in a five-fold argument based on motion, causation, contingency of beings, degree of perfection, and from design.[43] Aquinas argues further that though these proofs testify to us about the existence of God, they do not describe what God is. Hence, he terms these proofs, the *via negativa* – the negative way, as they do not give us a positive conception of God, but lead us to remove certain ideas from our conception of God.[44]

Concerning knowledge in separated substances, Aquinas says that the soul even when separated from the body by death still possesses its own proper act of understanding, as the power is not a sensory power. Aquinas' understanding of separated substances, however, extends beyond merely the disembodied soul of man, covering also the angels. The term, 'separated' designates the absence of sensible matter in those souls that do not or no longer share our material existence. Knowledge in such substances, given that they do not possess the sensory organs, is attained without recourse to sense perception or phantasms. However, Aquinas does not submit that these attain spiritual knowledge through innate ideas rather that they understand by means of participation arising for the influence of the Divine light.[45]

VI

It is indubitable that Aquinas' contribution in epistemology is most crucial in the development of Empiricism. However, like all empiricists, Aquinas seems to narrow down the possibility of human knowledge to simply the sensible. He disregards without any evidential support the position of innate ideas, as put forward by Plato. Aquinas is so confident that our human senses can offer us certain knowledge of the world. However, Hume, though an empiricist like Aquinas, offers a critique of this summation in his position of scepticism. He argues against our claim to certain knowledge through the senses, as they may simply be deceiving us. His distrust of the senses is not without reason, as recent studies in psychology expose the problem of perception, as is presented in illusions and delusions. Our senses are not altogether reliable. Descartes' account of dreaming, as an example of a hallucination, suffices to point out the limitation that can be presented us in perceptual experience. If, then, the source of knowledge according to Aquinas is dubitable, it is, consequently, difficult to ground his claim to knowledge as certain. Furthermore, Aquinas in lending support to his thesis on the primacy of the senses in furnishing all knowledge presented his five ways to discerning God, *via negativa*. However, he makes an ontological

[43] Copleston, Frederick. *Aquinas*, pp. 121-130.
[44] Velasquez, M. 2005. *Philosophy*. Belmont: Thomson-Wadsworth Publishers Ltd., p. 332.
[45] Aquinas, Thomas. *ST*, q. 89, a. 1: 1.

leap in virtually all the categories, as he cannot fully align his previous thesis of sensible primacy with knowledge of the divine.

Despite the loopholes that may seem evident in Aquinas' Epistemology, his program of making inquiry into 'What Is', which is the ultimate resolve of Epistemology, is worth the effort. His philosophical system serves as the basis for the growth of Christian theology, as well as the development of a viable basis for the later British Empiricists.

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