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*Articles*

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THE ABSOLUTE PRIMACY OF THE INTELLECT IN  
AQUINAS: A REACTION TO FABRO'S POSITION

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*Emmitsburg, MD*



## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

**P** RIMACY OF THE INTELLECT or of the will? Sometimes I think that the desire itself to answer this question is yet another proof of the primacy of intelligence. The desire for knowing is in our nature. After all, what's wrong with the pursuit of wisdom? Is not philosophy the "love of wisdom"? Is not philosophy the perfect combination of both potencies? What is worth loving, except wisdom? What should be loved more than wisdom? And who will find wisdom except the virtuous? Intellect and will are not enemies but co-workers. The task is to understand their respective roles.

St. Thomas Aquinas has always considered intelligence a potency higher than the will, absolutely speaking.<sup>2</sup> That be-

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Nancy Marrocco RP, MRE, Br. Jacob Fluech IVE and especially Fr. Richard Yevchak, IVE, Ph.L., for their English corrections and very valuable suggestions. I thank Fr. Gianluca Trombini, IVE, Ph.D. for his pointing out to me the relevant texts of Fabro at the beginning of my research and I am looking forward to finish reading Gianluca Tombini, *Sinteticita Metafisico-Esistenziale della Liberta nel "Tomismo Essenziale" di Cornelio Fabro* (Segni, Italy: EDIVI, 2021), a work which fell into my hands when this article was completed. I gather from my reading so far that Fr. Trombini has a different position regarding the primacy of intelligence in Aquinas but I look forward to his reaction to this paper. I am sure that my present reflections would have greatly benefitted from his massive and profound work, to which I hope to pay due attention in the future.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (Ottawa: Commissio Piana, 1953), I, q. 82, a. 3 (in the following, this work will be referenced simply as *Summa* or *ST*): this text will be the object of our study in Section I of this research. I have examined also all of the parallel texts quoted in the aforementioned critical edition of the *Summa* and one more suggested by the text itself, from St. Thomas' *Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics*. Thus, the parallel texts examined are the following: ST I-II, q. 3, a. 4 ad 4 ("Whether, if happiness is in the intellectual part, it is an operation of the intellect or of the will"); ST II-II, q. 23, a. 6 ad 1 ("Whether charity is the most excellent of the virtues"); In II Sent, d. 25, [q. 1,] a. 2, ad 4 ("Whether free will can be compelled"); In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4 ("Whether knowledge is higher than love"); *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 11 ("Is the will a higher power than the intellect, or is the opposite true?"); SCG III, c. 26 ("Whether felicity consists in a will act"); *Quaestiones Disputatae: De Caritate*, a. 3, ad 12 et 13 ("Whether charity is the form of the virtues"); *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, lib. X, lectio 10, n. 2080. I have tried to

ing said, and in my view, the existential primacy of the will in the act of freedom (particularly in choosing the existential end) is also indisputably Thomistic, as Cornelio Fabro has shown.<sup>3</sup> Is it possible to affirm coherently these two primacies, that is, the intellect's absolute primacy and the will's existential primacy? It is possible, in my view, and in order to show this possibility I offer the following considerations, in three sections. Firstly, I will explain the reasoning St. Thomas Aquinas uses in the *Summa* to justify the absolute primacy of the intellect over the will. Secondly, I will explore some parallel texts, in order to shed light on my interpretation of the *Summa* and expand our view regarding this and related doctrinal points. Thirdly, I will offer a brief study of Fabro's position, one in which his concerns regarding the intellect's absolute primacy are taken into account and carefully considered, to the best of my abilities.<sup>4</sup>

### **I. THE ABSOLUTE PRIMACY IN THE *SUMMA*: A "RATHER STRANGE CRITERION"**

St. Thomas' position regarding the absolute primacy of intelligence over the will never changed during his career, as appears from a reading of the parallel texts.<sup>5</sup> In the *Summa*, however, St. Thomas uses a "rather strange" principle to justify this

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use the best critical editions according to the list provided by Enrique Alarcón and available online at <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/reoptedi.html>. Sometimes, however, the edition I used was not the latest in print. Cf. Bibliography for complete references.

3 Cf. Cornelio Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 2nd ed., ed. C. Ferraro (Segni, Italy: EDIVI, 2004). From now, this work will be referenced as *Riflessioni*.

4 There are several seemingly conclusive arguments against the intellect's primacy, arguments that have not been treated all at once, but which are scattered throughout this paper. They have been treated as the matter at hand has required and sometimes more than once, according to differing aspects of the same argument. I think that a stronger case is made in this way, that is, by presenting the arguments for the intellect's absolute primacy in a positive way, with St. Thomas, and resolving the objections as they become more apparent or more pressing.

5 Cf. footnote 1 for the parallel texts, which will be discussed briefly in Section II of this research.

primacy, in the words of Fr. Fabro.<sup>6</sup> St. Thomas says, “The more simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself.” What did St. Thomas mean? Does it make sense? Let us approach Aquinas’ text in ST I, q. 82, a. 3.

Is the will a higher potency than the intellect? St. Thomas’ response begins in the following way: “The superiority of one thing over another can be considered in two ways: ‘absolutely’ [*simpliciter*] and ‘relatively’ [*secundum quid*]. Now a thing is considered to be such absolutely which is considered such in itself: but relatively as it is such with regard to something else.”<sup>7</sup> It is in this second consideration (relatively, with regard to something else) that the will sometimes has the primacy over the intellect, as St. Thomas will say later.

St. Thomas continues: “If therefore the intellect and will be considered with regard to themselves, then the intellect is the higher power. And this is clear if we compare their respective objects to one another.”<sup>8</sup> It is perfectly reasonable to resolve the question in this way, since Aquinas demonstrates the distinction of the potencies by distinguishing their formal objects. As St. Thomas states a few lines later: “The proper nature of a power is in its order to its object.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, in a way, St. Thomas is employing the best possible argument, in that his argument is the most radical. And here comes the crucial moment or, as Fabro says, the “strange” argument:

For the object of the intellect is more simple and

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<sup>6</sup> Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 59.

<sup>7</sup> ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.: “Respondeo dicendum quod eminentia alicuius ad alterum potest attendi dupliciter, uno modo, simpliciter; alio modo, secundum quid. Consideratur autem aliquid tale simpliciter, prout est secundum seipsum tale, secundum quid autem, prout dicitur tale secundum respectum ad alterum.”

<sup>8</sup> ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.: “Si ergo intellectus et voluntas considerentur secundum se, sic intellectus eminentior invenitur. Et hoc apparet ex comparatione obiectorum ad invicem.”

<sup>9</sup> ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.: “... propria ratio potentiae sit secundum ordinem ad obiectum.”

more absolute than the object of the will; since the object of the intellect is the very idea of the appetible good [*ipsa ratio boni appetibilis*]; and the appetible good, the idea of which is in the intellect, is the object of the will. Now the more simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself; and therefore the object of the intellect is higher than the object of the will.<sup>10</sup>

Let me offer a few considerations in order to help in our understanding of St. Thomas' text.

### **I.1. Terminological Considerations: *Ipsa Ratio Boni Appetibilis* and the Terms of the Comparison**

What is meant by "*ipsa ratio boni appetibilis*"? The translation could be something like "the objective or notional content of that which is good" and, in that sense, "the idea" of that which is good. In other words, "*ipsa ratio boni appetibilis*" means the known perfection of that which is good, with an emphasis on the perfection itself rather than on the fact that this perfection is known.<sup>11</sup> Also, St. Thomas is saying "*ratio boni*" not in the sense of "goodness" (which is the object of the will) but rather

<sup>10</sup> ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.: "Obiectum enim intellectus est simplicius et magis absolutum quam obiectum voluntatis, nam obiectum intellectus est ipsa ratio boni appetibilis; bonum autem appetibile, cuius ratio est in intellectu, est obiectum voluntatis. Quanto autem aliquid est simplicius et abstractius, tanto secundum se est nobilius et altius. Et ideo obiectum intellectus est altius quam obiectum voluntatis."

<sup>11</sup> St. Thomas is referring to the perfection of something and not to an idea as subjective modification, as can be understood also from the following parallel texts. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, ed. A. Dondaine, vol. 22.3.1, Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1973), q. 22, a. 11: "Now it is more perfect, simply and absolutely speaking, to have within oneself *the nobility of another thing* than to be related to a noble thing outside oneself [...]. The intellect can accordingly be compared to the will in three ways. Firstly, absolutely and in general, *without any reference to this or that particular thing*. In this way the intellect is more excellent than the will, just as it is more perfect to *possess what there is of dignity in a thing* than merely *to be related to its nobility*." [Perfectius autem est, sim-

in the sense of “the idea of this appetible good,” as will be clarified in the following.

In Thomistic gnoseology,<sup>12</sup> an idea (also called *ratio*, *species intelligibilis*, *universal*, etc.; this applies also to the concept) has two aspects and the term “idea” itself (and the others) can be used with two different meanings. An idea has two aspects: one subjective (the fact that it is a representation, an image with a particular mode of being in the knowing subject) and one objective (the content represented, that which is represented). Thus, the term “idea” can mean *what* we know, as when I say, “He and

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pliciter et absolute loquendo, habere in se *nobilitatem* alterius rei, quam ad rem nobilem comparari extra se existentem. (...) Sic igitur tripliciter potest comparari intellectus ad voluntatem. Uno modo absolute et in generali, non respectu huius vel illius rei; et sic intellectus est eminentior voluntate; sicut habere *id quod est dignitatis in re aliqua* est perfectius quam comparari ad nobilitatem eius]; Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de caritate*, 8th ed., ed. P. Bazzi and E. Odetto, vol. 2 (Taurini: Marietti, 1949), a. 3, ad 13: “The act of the will is considered according to the one who wills in relation to things as they are in themselves. But the act of the intellect is considered according to things known as they are in the one who understands. Whence, when things are below the one who understands, then the intellect is higher than the will, because *things exist in a higher manner in the intellect than in themselves, since everything which is in another is in it according to the manner of that in which it is*. But when the things are above the one who understands, then the will rises higher than the intellect is able to attain. Thus it is that in moral matters, which concern things below man, the cognitive virtue informs the appetitive virtues, just as prudence informs the other moral virtues. But in the theological virtues which concern God, the virtue of the will, viz., charity, informs the virtue of the intellect, viz., faith.” [Actus voluntatis est secundum ordinem volentis ad res ipsas prout in se sunt. Actus autem intellectus est secundum quod res intellectae sunt in intelligente: unde quando res sunt infra intelligentem, intellectus illarum est dignior voluntate: quia tunc *altiori modo sunt in intellectu res quam in seipsis, cum omne quod est in altero, sit in eo per modum eius in quo est*; sed quando res sunt altiores intelligente, tunc voluntas altius ascendit quam possit pertingere intellectus. Et inde est quod in moralibus quae sunt infra hominem, virtus cognoscitiva informat virtutes appetitivas, sicut prudentia alias virtutes morales; in virtutibus autem theologicis, quae sunt circa Deum, virtus voluntatis, scilicet caritas, informat virtutem intellectus scilicet fidem]. Moreover, in the text of the *Summa*, St. Thomas uses *ratio* to refer to the nature of the potency, as will be seen later.

12 Cf. especially ST I, q. 85, aa. 2-3.

I have the same idea about ‘human being’: we both think that ‘human being’ is a rational animal”; but “idea” can also mean the representation by which we know, as when I say, “I have my own idea of human being, not because I think differently about human being, but because I do not think with the ideas in someone else’s intellect; I think with the ideas in my own intellect.” In one sense, many people have the same idea about man but, in another sense, each of them has his or her own idea of man.

When St. Thomas says here, “the idea of the appetible good,” he refers to what we know: what we know, in this case, is the (intelligible) perfection of that which is good, that is, its actuality or being. St. Thomas is not saying here that the intellect’s formal object is the notion of good, but that the object of the intellect is the idea, the intelligible perfection of that which (for the will) is good.

In this first part of the article, St. Thomas is considering each potency with regard to its own formal object, abstracting from any particular object. However, in order for the comparison to be perfect, St. Thomas is comparing each potency to the “same” abstract object, and that is why he says that the intellect knows the idea (*ipsa ratio*) of that which is desired by the will (that is, the appetible good) and that the will desires this good itself. St. Thomas is neither comparing each potency with regard to the same particular object (this he will do in the second part of the article), nor is he comparing each potency with its own abstract formal object (St. Thomas is not comparing the notions of *Verum* and *Bonum* between themselves). Here, St. Thomas is comparing each potency’s attitude towards the same abstract object or, better said, what it is that each potency reaches when both of them deal with a certain (any) being. In summary, what St. Thomas is saying is that, when intellect and will regard the same object, the intellect understands the idea (as known perfection) of the thing, whereas the will desires the thing itself.

## I.2. A Strange Principle: The More Abstract a Thing is, the Nobler and Higher

St. Thomas says that “the object of the intellect is more simple and more absolute than the object of the will” and then that “the more simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself.”<sup>13</sup> What does this mean?

The term “simple” means “without composition”; the terms “absolute” and “abstract” are similar and in this text can be taken to mean “separated from matter.” The three terms have one thing in common, which is that they imply a certain lack of potentiality: in fact, composition requires potentiality in order to be realized, whereas separation from matter is separation from a principle of potentiality.

Now, let us examine the principle, “the more simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself.” As per the above terminological clarification, the direct meaning of St. Thomas’ principle is the following: the less something is mingled with potentiality, the nobler and higher it is, simply because having less potentiality (as limitation) implies possessing more actuality (as pure perfection). This principle is indisputable. The most perfect beings in creation are those that are simpler and more separated from matter. The more composite a being is, the lesser its perfection, whereas the more a being emerges from matter, the more perfect it is.

That being said, in what sense does Aquinas say that “the object of the intellect is more simple and more absolute than the object of the will”? There are several possible explanations but, in my view, the best is the following. In general, the idea of a thing is simpler and more abstract than the thing itself because the idea of a thing contains only this thing’s formality and must on principle be immaterial, whereas the thing itself *may* contain, besides its formalities, other individual principles and must not necessarily be immaterial. In other words, whatever the object, what the intellect understands is necessarily imma-

<sup>13</sup> ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.

terial and simple, whereas the object of the will is not necessarily so. The object of the intellect contains on principle only the formal perfections of something (its “whatness”), whereas the object of the will is not on principle so abstract. Of course, there may be a situation where the object of the will is more abstract, but this would be a situation depending on a particular object and not a principle regarding the formal object of each potency. St. Thomas speaks about this situation in the second part of the article. At this point, instead, he is comparing the potencies in themselves regarding their formal objects.

Another possible explanation is that St. Thomas refers to human intellect’s adequate object, that is, to the essence of corporeal things, whose ideas are always more simple and more abstract than the things themselves. This explanation fails, however, because it would imply that the will cannot desire things other than material and would be referring the intellect not to its formal object but to a particular object, which is what St. Thomas does, not here, but in the second part of the article.

Still another explanation may be the following: the object of the will is more complex because, being later in the process, this object possesses, *in addition* to the formality of a thing considered in itself, another formality which is its appetibility or its relationship to the appetite. This explanation, however, seems too abstract and would not justify in what sense the object of intelligence would be higher and nobler.

### **I.3. How Can an Idea Be More Perfect than the Corresponding Thing Itself?**

Now, in what sense can we say that the object of the intellect, being more abstract and simple, is more perfect than the object of the will? Is the idea of a thing more perfect than the thing itself?

The short answer is: if by idea we mean the intelligible perfection of something without limitations and by the thing itself we mean this same something not necessarily lacking those limitations, then the idea of a thing is better than the thing it-

self. This scandalous statement needs to be clarified, step by step.

First of all, let us remember that the object of the intellect is not “concepts” but “things.” We know things, not concepts. We know things *through* concepts. Whatever is in our minds, in a concept, is really present in the things themselves. If this were not so, our knowledge would not be about reality, but about ideas, which is Platonic, Kantian and wrong to say.<sup>14</sup> This is the clear doctrine of St. Thomas, although obscured in many instances of modern Thomism. This means that the perfection of a thing is both in the thing itself and in the mind, but with a different mode of being: the perfection of something is present in the thing itself with an individual mode of being and in the mind with an intelligible mode of being. Therefore, the idea of a thing and the thing itself have the same perfection but two different modes of being: Which one is better? Which one is more perfect?

There is no question that, for St. Thomas and *in principle*, the perfection of a thing in its intelligible mode of being (without material limitations) is better than that same perfection in itself (where it may or may not possess material limitations).<sup>15</sup> But, when you have a birthday, is it not better to get a real gift than the idea of a gift? Let us proceed with order.

A set of questions can help in clarifying this matter: How are all created things in God? How are things in the mind of God? They are in God with an intelligible mode of being. Would it be better for God to possess those things in himself as they are in reality? All creation belongs to God, but creation in itself does not perfect God. Are things more in themselves than in the mind of God? What is more perfect: the divine idea of

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<sup>14</sup> In the *Summa*, the clearest text is ST I, q. 85, a. 2; cf. a. 3, ad 1 and ad 4.

<sup>15</sup> Here should be considered that 1) an idea does not abstract from the *actus essendi*, because the abstract idea is a synthetic content (as *ens*) including not only the *id quod* but also the *est*; and 2) the perfection of the thing as known participates of the intellect’s own act of being. Cf. footnote 18 of this paper.

a thing or the thing itself? Where are the perfections of things better, in God or in themselves? Certainly in God. God's exemplar ideas possess the perfections of all things better than those things have those perfections in themselves.

When we possess the idea of something, we resemble the way God possesses the perfection of something.<sup>16</sup> The real perfection of a thing is present in our mind with an intelligible mode of being, which abstracts from the limitations of matter. This is, on principle, better than the thing in itself, which is what the will loves.

However, is not God in Himself more perfect than the idea of God? Our idea of God is not more perfect than God Himself. But, properly speaking, the true idea of God can only be God Himself. Therefore, God's idea of God is identical with God Himself, not more or less simple, not more or less abstract, not more or less perfect. This is why, in heaven, we will not see God in an idea, but in Himself.

Still, is the idea of an angel more perfect than the angel in itself? Again, the true idea of an angel is its own essence and, therefore, the idea of an angel is neither more nor less abstract than the angel in itself: they are the same thing. Both the angel and God are intelligible in their own mode of being and this is why they are their own idea. My point is that, on principle, the intelligible perfection of a thing is more simple and more abstract than the thing itself; however, when the thing itself is more perfect than a human idea, the thing itself is actually its own idea, and therefore is not more perfect than its own idea.

Better said: the idea of something is in principle more immaterial than that something itself. In the particular case of things superior to us, the idea of the thing is less immaterial in us, not in God. In this way, the reason for the idea of the thing being less immaterial has nothing to do with the fact that this thing is the object of intelligence or will, but with the fact that this thing in itself is more or less perfect than *our* intelligence

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, c.

and *our* will. An object of intelligence must be immaterial as such, otherwise it will not be intelligible; the object of the will does not need to be immaterial in order to be appetible. The intelligible is always God-like, the appetible is not necessarily so.

We have spoken about the idea of God and the idea of angels. Now, is the idea of something material more perfect than the material thing itself? In principle, yes, and this is why knowing material things is better than loving them. Our idea resembles (though imperfectly) God's exemplar idea and contains only perfection, whereas the thing itself is mingled with matter, which is potential. We cannot claim that the thing is real and our idea is not, unless we want to say that we know ideas and not things. We certainly may claim that we don't understand all the real aspects of a thing (as for instance the thing's individuation); however, what we know, the thing's "whatness", even if we know it only to a certain extent, is that thing's most intimate place, because it is its essential or specific perfection.

A human idea resembles more the material thing's perfection *in God* than the material thing itself does. The perfection of the thing is there, in the idea, *in a better way* than in the thing itself. "But, how can you say that something is more perfect in the mind than in itself?" Well, this is what happens in God. The perfections of things are better in God than they are in the things themselves. Our ideas are an imperfect resemblance of God's exemplar ideas.

#### **I.4. The Will Does Not Possess**

Let's go back to the million-dollar question: is it not better to get a real gift than to just think about it?<sup>17</sup> The question is

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<sup>17</sup> In the second part of this article (ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.), St. Thomas says: "The will is inclined to the thing itself as existing in itself" [*voluntas inclinatur ad ipsam rem prout in se est*]. St. Thomas knows that the will reaches out to the thing itself. He knew this when he established previously (in the first part of this same article) the absolute primacy of the intellect. Even so, St. Thomas thought that the intellect was better. What is important, at least in order to

misleading, because it presupposes that the will possesses the thing itself, whereas the intellect just thinks about it. Actually, the will desires the thing itself, works hard at getting it and rejoices in its possession, but the will itself does not possess. The thing itself is possessed either cognitively or physically and, when that happens, the will rejoices and rests in what is possessed. The act of the intellect ends in what is present intentionally in the intellect itself, and the will can only rest in what is present to another faculty. The perfection is not present in the will: the will does not possess.

Let us examine some instances of gifts: a chocolate box is possessed by taste, or physically by eating it; a music CD is stored somewhere in the house and its music is possessed by hearing it; a picture frame is possessed by vision; clothing is a certain habitus, an accident in human beings which is materially possessed over the body; money is complicated... in any case, none of those things perfect the will or, better said, none of those things is possessed by the will. Those things are *the end* of the will but their perfections are *the form* of the intellect (and/or of some other faculty).<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, is it better to possess the idea of a thing than to possess a thing? It depends on what thing we are talking about. There are things which it is better not to have, but we need to know them. Other things make us happy when we actually have them, not when we just think about them. However, the

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understand St. Thomas, is to find out why he thought coherent to affirm both things at the same time.

<sup>18</sup> The example of money is used by St. Thomas also and explained in the following text. ST I-II, q. 3, a. 4, c.: "For if the acquisition of money were through an act of the will, the covetous man would have it from the very moment that he wished for it. But at the moment it is far from him; and he attains it, *by grasping it in his hand, or in some like manner*; and then he delights in the money got" [Si enim consequi pecuniam esset per actum voluntatis, statim a principio cupidus consecutus esset pecuniam, quando vult eam habere. Sed a principio quidem est absens ei; consequitur autem ipsam *per hoc quod manu ipsam apprehendit, vel aliquo huiusmodi*; et tunc iam delectatur in pecunia habita.]

question here is not whether possessing an idea is better than possessing a thing in itself. The question St. Thomas is dealing with here is, whether the idea of a thing is better than the thing itself? Aquinas' answer is that, in principle, the idea is better: this is the way God possesses the perfections of all things. The idea, in fact, is necessarily immaterial and possesses only the intelligible perfection of that thing.<sup>19</sup>

Let us read again St. Thomas' text, trying to keep in mind the main concepts of this present research so far.

The superiority of one thing over another can be considered in two ways: "absolutely" [*simpliciter*] and "relatively" [*secundum quid*]. Now a thing is considered to be such absolutely which is considered such in itself: but relatively as it is such with regard to something else. If therefore the intellect and will be considered with regard to themselves, then the intellect is the higher power. And this is clear if we compare their respective objects to one another. For the object of the intellect is more simple and more absolute than the object of the will; since the object of the intellect is the very idea of the appetible good [*ipsa ratio boni appetibilis*]; and the appetible good, the idea of which is in the intellect, is the object of the will. Now the more

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<sup>19</sup> An idea does not abstract from real being, as if the idea were simply an abstraction of the essence. In my view, the idea in the mind is a synthetic content, that is, an *id quod* with its own *est*, and this from the very moment of simple apprehension. I am not suggesting that we can distinguish the *actus essendi* from the essence in simple apprehension, but simply that what we know in simple apprehension is something as *ens* and, therefore, not simply a dead formality. Moreover, the idea, by being intelligible and subjectively present in the human soul, participates the human soul's act of being. Thus, being something human, the idea is better than anything material. This is connected with the fact that the principal end of all human activity is (or should be) human being itself and not simply material progress. Progress must perfect human being, that is, make human being wiser or better, otherwise is not progress.

simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself; and therefore the object of the intellect is higher than the object of the will. Therefore, since the proper nature [*ratio*] of a power is in its order to its object, it follows that the intellect in itself and absolutely is higher and nobler than the will.<sup>20</sup>

St. Thomas is not wondering which potency has the primacy with regards to the act of freedom but what is the greatest potency in a human being. His question, here, is not what makes a human being good in this life, but what his or her greatest natural perfection is. However, Aquinas' response is certainly related to a human being's highest good and highest end, which is for Aquinas an act of intelligence (subjectively speaking<sup>21</sup>). Now, how are the intellect and the will related to the attainment of human happiness?

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20 ST I, q. 82, a. 3, c.: "Respondeo dicendum quod eminentia alicuius ad alterum potest attendi dupliciter, uno modo, simpliciter; alio modo, secundum quid. Consideratur autem aliquid tale simpliciter, prout est secundum se ipsum tale, secundum quid autem, prout dicitur tale secundum respectum ad alterum. Si ergo intellectus et voluntas considerentur secundum se, sic intellectus eminentior invenitur. Et hoc apparet ex comparatione obiectorum ad invicem. Obiectum enim intellectus est simplicius et magis absolutum quam obiectum voluntatis, nam obiectum intellectus est ipsa ratio boni appetibilis; bonum autem appetibile, cuius ratio est in intellectu, est obiectum voluntatis. Quanto autem aliquid est simplicius et abstractius, tanto secundum se est nobilior et altius. Et ideo obiectum intellectus est altius quam obiectum voluntatis. Cum ergo propria ratio potentiae sit secundum ordinem ad obiectum, sequitur quod secundum se et simpliciter intellectus sit altior et nobilior voluntate."

21 Objectively speaking, human being's highest good and end is God Himself. Subjectively, in the sense employed here, human being's highest good is the subjective operation by which we attain the objective highest good, that is, the operation by which we attain God.

### **1.5. Happiness, Intellect and Will: Initial Synthetic Presentation**

The will loves and desires that which is not yet possessed, the will loves and rejoices in that which is already possessed, but the will does not possess. Regarding the true final end of human beings (or happiness), the only potency which is able to possess the perfection of that which is loved is intelligence. For pagans, this final end is the truth about the First Cause; for us, the truth which is the First Cause.

Now, only the will can take us to happiness. Only the will can determine a human being to attain happiness. Only the will can choose that particular happiness which is the true human happiness and move us effectively towards that end, but the will does not attain it. The will wants the vision of God, the will wants the good of the intellect in the vision of God and the will moves all potencies (including the intellect) towards the achievement of that vision. But it is the intellect which attains God by vision. The will does not see, the intellect does.

The will prepares the intellect for that vision. The will purifies the intellect. The will is part of beatitude in a very particular way: the will does not stop when the end is achieved, the will rests *in* the end. The will rejoices in the possession.

Therefore, that which makes us formally happy in Heaven, that which makes us God-like is to see God face to face. In my view, this is why St. John says, “we will be like him”—why?—“because we will see him as he is” (1 Jn 3:2). Certainly, the will also is part of God’s image in us, and love of God also makes us God-like, since God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). This is related to the fact that, in this life, that which makes us more God-like is love. However, according to St. Thomas, the greatest potency absolutely speaking is the intellect and human beatitude is substantially an act of the intellect. That being said, and in my view, it is indisputable that, for Aquinas, the primacy in the real determination of the act of freedom belongs to the will, particularly regarding the existential end; but this does not contradict the

absolute primacy of intelligence, as we will discuss later.

The two primacies are well summarized by St. Augustine: “The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire. You do not yet see what you long for, but the very act of desiring prepares you, so that when he comes you may see and be utterly satisfied.”<sup>22</sup>

Nobody is good unless he or she has a good will. How come perfect happiness is an act of the intellect? I will discuss this issue later but an initial clarification may be helpful here. Good and evil have to do with the attainment of the end. In this life, that human being is good who is directed towards the right end, and this depends on having a good will. But perfectly good (“blessed”) is that human being who has already attained its final end, which is the heavenly vision of God, an act of the intellect. Clearly, nobody will be happy with this intellectual good unless he or she had a good will, and a good will remains in heaven rejoicing in the good possessed. Therefore, the fact that nobody is good unless he or she has a good will, does not take away from the fact that perfect happiness is substantially an act of the intellect.

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<sup>22</sup> Augustine, “Tractates on the First Letter of John (PL 35, 2008-2009),” in *Liturgy of the Hours*, vol. 2, Office of Readings for Friday VI in Ordinary Time. The text continues: “So, my brethren, let us continue to desire, for we shall be filled. Take note of Saint Paul stretching as it were his ability to receive what is to come: Not that I have already obtained this, he said, or am made perfect. Brethren, I do not consider that I have already obtained it. We might ask him, ‘If you have not yet obtained it, what are you doing in this life?’ This one thing I do, answers Paul, forgetting what lies behind, and stretching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the prize to which I am called in the life above. Not only did Paul say he stretched forward, but he also declared that he pressed on toward a chosen goal. He realized in fact that he was still short of receiving what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.”

## **I.6. Helpful Distinctions: Paving the Way to an Understanding of St. Thomas' Coherence**

In my view, at least in order to understand St. Thomas' position, we need both a rediscovery of intentional presence as the presence of a real perfection and the extension of the notion of real to the perfections that are known. When we use the terminology "intentional," "idea," "concept" and the like, we need to clarify what we are talking about. In fact, these notions always imply two aspects which must not be confused: cognitive content and mode of being of this content.

"Abstract," in this article of the *Summa*, does not mean "dis-incarnated" but "divine." Abstract does not mean the non-real but the essential. The divine does not cease to be real by the fact of not having matter, nor does the essential cease to be real by the fact of not including in itself the individual determinations. Thus, the abstract is more perfect than the material because the abstract more resembles the divine.

The greatness of the intellect is in its openness to possess the perfections of all things and, by grace, to possess God himself.<sup>23</sup> However, the will is essential for the human intellect to actually possess that final perfection. Here is, in my view, the existential primacy of the will and its necessity for intelligence to attain the human end: intelligence is open, but not yet there.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, c.: "Hence, it is said in *The Soul* that the soul is, 'in some manner, all things,' since its nature is such that it can know all things. In this way it is possible for the perfection of the entire universe to exist in one thing. The ultimate perfection which the soul can attain, therefore, is, according to the philosophers, to have delineated in it the entire order and causes of the universe. This they held to be the ultimate end of man; which, for us, happens in the vision of God; for, as Gregory says: 'What is there that they do not see who see Him who sees all things?' [Et ideo in III De Anima dicitur, anima esse quodammodo omnia, quia nata est omnia cognoscere. Et secundum hunc modum possibile est ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat. Unde haec est ultima perfectio ad quam anima potest pervenire, secundum philosophos, ut in ea describatur totus ordo universi, et causarum eius; in quo etiam finem ultimum hominis posuerunt, quod secundum nos, erit in visione Dei, quia secundum Gregorium, quid est quod non videant qui videntem omnia vident?]

It is only the will which can take intelligence to human being's final end.

## II. PARALLEL TEXTS FROM AQUINAS ON THE ABSOLUTE PRIMACY AND RELATED TOPICS

The following exploration of parallel texts considers other arguments employed by Aquinas in treating the intellect's absolute primacy, and also Aquinas' doctrine regarding subjective happiness as an act of the intellect and the primacy of charity among theological virtues. I bring here also a few texts from Cajetan's Commentary to the *Summa* (this commentary is adjacent to Aquinas' *Summa* in the Leonine edition) in order to add Cajetan's insightful remarks to our discussion of Aquinas' text. One might disagree with certain crucial points of Cajetan's metaphysics, but Cajetan's claims on the matter at hand are valuable and Cajetan's text speaks for itself: "it does not matter who says it, but what is said."<sup>24</sup>

It was not my intention to completely explain each of the parallel texts, as that would have made this research more cumbersome, even for the most patient of readers. Instead, I have taken from each of them only that which seemed helpful in expanding, completing or confirming what had already been shown. Finally, I have ordered Aquinas' texts according to the estimated composition dates of his works rather than according to their relative importance.

### II.1. The Meaning of *Ratione Ordinis*: In II Sent, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 4<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Ignotus Auctor, "De Modo Studendi," accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/xas.html>: "Do not consider who the person is you are listening to, but whatever good he says commit to memory" [Non respicias a quo audias, sed quidquid boni dicatur, memoriae recommenda]. English translation from Pseudo-Aquinas, "How to Study," accessed December 17, 2023, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/DearJohn.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, ed. P. Mandonnet, vol. 2 (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929). From now, this work will be referenced as In II Sent.

Let me make a brief note about the meaning of *ratione ordinis* here. Aquinas says,

Even though the intellect is a higher power than the will by reason of order [*ratione ordinis*], since it is prior to the will and presupposed by it, the will is also higher in a certain way, insofar as it has command over all the soul's powers on account of the fact that its object is the end. Hence it is most fitting that we find the height of freedom in the will, for that is called "free" which is the cause of itself, as it says in *Metaphysics* 1.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that *ratione ordinis* should be understood as a reference to the intellect's *absolute* primacy, since the primacy of the will is considered to be a primacy only "in a certain way" and the objection had referred to the intellect's absolute primacy. It would not seem accurate to take *ratione ordinis* in the sense of a temporary order or another kind of order. In fact, "*secundum ordinem*" in the text of In III Sent., d. 27, q. 1, a. 4 (studied below) refers to the natural primacy of the intellect.

## **II.2. Perfect in Itself vs. Perfect with Regard to Other: In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4 (Whether Cognition is Higher than Love)<sup>27</sup>**

I think it could be helpful to begin with a division of this text's "*responsio*," in order to understand better Aquinas' doctrine here.

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<sup>26</sup> In II Sent, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 4: "Quamvis intellectus sit superior virtus quam voluntas ratione ordinis, quia prior est et a voluntate praesupponitur; tamen voluntas etiam quodammodo superior est, secundum quod imperium habet super omnes animae vires, propter hoc quod ejus objectum est finis; unde convenientissime in ipsa summum libertatis invenitur; liber enim dicitur qui causa sui est, ut in I Metaph., c. II, dicitur."

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, ed. M. Moos, vol. 3 (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1933). From now, this work will be referenced as In III Sent.

Firstly, St. Thomas explains that things are perfect in two senses, in themselves and with regard to other things. Applying this distinction to creatures capable of knowing regarding their cognition and love, Aquinas claims that cognition regards the perfection of something in itself, whereas love and will (“*Similiter etiam*”)<sup>28</sup> regard the perfection of something with respect to other things. That being said, Aquinas compares *the potencies* in three ways (“*Potest ergo comparari*”). 1) “*Primo*”: According to a metaphysical order, and in this way the primacy belongs to intelligence. 2) “*Secundo*”: According to their capacity, and in this way the potencies are equal. 3) “*Tertio*”: According to their eminence and dignity, and here he says that things result differently according to the way we consider each potency. This consideration is divided in *two* parts, with a further elucidation of the second of these two parts. 1- If the potencies are considered as accidental properties of the subject (“*ut quaedam proprietates et accidentia*”), then intelligence is first. This is a consideration of the potencies in themselves, which would explain the lack of further explanation: it is already clear that, considered in themselves, priority regards cognitive faculties (this Aquinas has determined at the *Responsio*’s very beginning and in “*Primo*” above). 2- If the potencies are considered with regard to other things (this is what he means, here, by considered “as potencies”, “*ut potentiae*”, since a potency refers to an act, and operative potencies refer to acts and objects as ends or goals), then the will is first, perhaps because of the general principle already established at the *Responsio*’s very beginning (that the will refers to the perfection of something regarding things different from itself) or, more specifically, because the will is first motor of all potencies and, therefore, the first potency moving towards something different from the subject.

Now, having just mentioned acts and objects (in “2-” above,

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<sup>28</sup> In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4. All the following texts in both Latin and quotation marks are from this article and are intended to indicate the precise location in the text.

“*ut potentiae*”), St. Thomas goes *at this point* to the solution of the question at hand, that is, which act is superior, whether cognition or love. If I am correct, “*harum*”<sup>29</sup> (feminine, referring to the potencies) should be corrected to “*horum*”<sup>30</sup> (masculine, referring to the acts) as some editions read.<sup>31</sup> The response is clear in Aquinas’ text: in order to know which act is superior (“*dignius*”) one must first determine what object this act is about.

The reason I say that, at this point, St. Thomas is comparing directly the acts and not their respective potencies, is that he has already compared the potencies regarding “eminence” (cf. “*Tertio*”) in point “1-” above (“*ut quaedam proprietates et accidentia*”), and probably also in “*Primo*” above. At the most, if one wants to save the “*harum*,” what could be said is that he is determining the primacy of one potency over the other one with regard to its act.

If my reading is correct, then the absolute primacy of intelligence is mentioned in “*Primo*” and in “1-”, but a reason for this primacy is given only in “*Primo*” and presupposed in “1-”. This reason (“The perfection of something in itself has priority over the perfection of something insofar as it relates to other things”<sup>32</sup>) may seem too short, but it is a clear reason and, besides, the absolute primacy is not the main point of the article.

### II.2.A. Beatific Vision

“Ad octavum et nonum:”<sup>33</sup> Aquinas admits that love is superior to knowledge when God is the object, as has been said in the corpus. The objections, however, regard science and faith which are knowledges of this life: our knowledge of God, in this

29 In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4.

30 In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4.

31 These variant readings are according to Moos’ critical edition, which I am following.

32 In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4: “*prius est perfectio rei in seipsa quam secundum ordinem ad aliam.*”

33 In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4, ad 8 [“*Et quia oportet... ad octavum et nonum*”].

life, is imperfect. Thus, love of God is more perfect than knowledge *when knowledge is imperfect*.

In objection seven,<sup>34</sup> beatific vision is mentioned as a reason for the primacy of cognition. In his response,<sup>35</sup> Aquinas claims that recompense belongs *more* to cognition because cognition is receptive and therefore perfective of the self, but he does not exclude love from beatific vision.

It must be remembered that, in this article, Aquinas is comparing the acts (cognition and love) absolutely, not in particular (that is, regarding this or that particular object). Aquinas' point is that, in general, the love of that which is superior is better than its knowledge. In heaven, however, "we will be *like* Him *because* we will see Him as He is" (1 Jn 3:2). Even if, in heaven, we will not be equal to God by nature, we will be deified by grace in order to know God in himself and not by a similitude. This is a (very!) particular case that does not affect this general principle as such: that is, the principle that the love of that which is superior is better than its knowledge.

### **II.2.B. Absolute Primacy of the Intellect: Primacy of Cognition?**

In objection 1, the fact that Aristotle says that "the intellect is the highest potency we have" (*intellectus est altissima potentia in nobis*) seems to indicate that understanding is the highest act and, therefore, higher than love. Aquinas' response is that the Aristotelian claim refers to the potencies as properties of the subject in which they are. This is the intellect's primacy which Aquinas had stated in the *Responsio*'s point "1-" (see above "Tertio"), where he considers the potencies in themselves, as qualities of the subject. Aquinas is thus saying (again) that intelligence is the best quality or property of the soul. Still, Aquinas does not accept that, because of this, cognition is *in general* better than love because this depends on the object, as he has de-

34 Cf. In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4, ob. 7.

35 Cf. In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4, ad 7.

terminated in his *Responsio*. Aquinas would say that cognition, insofar as it is possession, is better than love, as tendency towards the other: this is the reason why intelligence is superior to the will. However, and still with Aquinas, because tending towards certain things is better than knowing them, not every cognition is better than its corresponding love.

An objection could be now presented. In general, love is better than cognition regarding that which is higher than the human soul (God and angels). However, in general, human happiness is an act of intelligence, that is, an act of understanding the highest objects, which are precisely beings higher than the human soul. How is it, then, that the best human act is an act of intelligence regarding an object higher than the soul? Should it not be an act of the will, at least from a natural point of view?

I would respond as follows. From a natural point of view, happiness is the contemplation of the truth about the universe and its first principles and causes, which is the truth proportionate to the human intellect. This truth is human understanding's highest possible object, and its contemplation is better than its love: to possess wisdom is better than loving wisdom without possessing it, and the one who rejoices in the wisdom possessed rejoices precisely in the knowledge of it. God, instead, is not the proportionate object of human understanding from a natural point of view and, therefore, loving Him in Himself is better than knowing that which we can naturally know about Him.

One could even argue that, from a natural point of view, this love of God would make us closer to Him but this love would certainly not make us happy: this love would search for an impossible union and desiring the impossible causes despair rather than joy. From a theological or supernatural point of view, in this life the love of God is better and in the other life the knowledge of God is subjectively speaking the best act: the vision of God is the highest good which the will can desire and

in which the will can rejoice.<sup>36</sup>

### II.2.C. Concluding Reflections: The Soul's Perfection in Itself and towards Another One

In his response to objections 11 and 12,<sup>37</sup> Aquinas refers the primacy of the will regarding the end as end to the primacy of the will regarding the subject's perfection *ad alia*. Aquinas does the same with the primacy of the will as first motor not moved by any other potency: that is, according to him, this primacy also refers to the soul's perfection *ad alia*. St. Thomas clarifies that, still, the will is moved by natural inclination as by another, in this way clarifying that the will is not absolute first motor, as God is.

What seems most relevant about this article is Aquinas' emphasis on the metaphysical primacy of that which regards the "in itself" as opposed to that which regards the "towards another".<sup>38</sup> This is because the first meaning of being regards what something is in itself, whereas "being towards another" cannot be but a derived notion of being. True, finite being requires necessarily "being towards another one" in order to find fulfillment or perfection: this, however, is based on the metaphysical primacy of the "in itself" (insofar as the tendency itself requires being in itself as its subject) and comes back to the primacy of the "in itself" (insofar as the other is wanted for the "in itself", as perfection of the same). This, I think, is related to the "ego-logical" aspect of freedom, in the sense that everything we choose, we choose for ourselves, as our own good.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> More reflections on this topic can be found in Section II.8 of this paper.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. In III Sent, d. 27, q. 1, a. 4, "*Ad undecim et duodecim.*"

<sup>38</sup> Cajetan also says that "good [lit. *ratio boni*] has more a connotation of [something] towards another, whereas the true [lit. *ratio veri*] is said more absolutely" (*Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani in Thomas Aquinas, Pars Prima Summae Theologiae: Cum Commentariis Thomae De Vio Caietani OP*, vol. 5 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1889), page 302, par. XXI: "ratio boni magis dicitur ad alterum, ratio vero veri dicitur magis absolute").

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Alberto Barattero, "The Ego-Logical Structure of Freedom," *The In-*

### II.3. The Absolute Primacy in *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 11

This text<sup>40</sup> is the only other place, besides the *Summa*, in which St. Thomas dedicates an article explicitly to establish which potency has the absolute primacy. This article may help understanding the *Summa* for two reasons. Firstly, even if Aquinas does not use the same argument, he makes the same kind of comparison: Aquinas compares each potency to the same object in abstract. Secondly, this text makes clear that what is taken as object of both potencies is the perfection itself of something, not that perfection's state of abstraction nor the concept as subjective modification. St. Thomas states,

Now it is more perfect, simply and absolutely speaking, to have within oneself *the nobility of another thing* than to be related to a noble thing outside oneself. Hence, if the will and the intellect are considered absolutely, *and not with reference to this or that particular thing*, they have this order, that the intellect is simply more excellent than the will.<sup>41</sup>

Regarding my first point (the kind of comparison at play in this article), we see that both potencies are compared with the nobility of one and the same thing, but “thing” is taken in general, not with reference to this or that particular thing. The reason for the intellect's absolute primacy in this article is that, in general, it is better to have the perfection of something in one-

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*carnate Word* 10, no. 1 (May 2023): 87–112.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 22, a. 11. In the following, this work will be referenced as *De Veritate*.

<sup>41</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 11, c.: “Perfectius autem est, simpliciter et absolute loquendo, habere in se *nobilitatem alterius rei*, quam ad rem nobilem comparari extra se existentem. Unde voluntas et intellectus, si absolute considerentur, *non comparando ad hanc vel illam rem*, hunc ordinem habent, quod intellectus simpliciter eminentior est voluntate.”

self than to tend towards that perfection.<sup>42</sup> Regarding my second point (the object is the real perfection of something in both cases), the text speaks clearly of “nobility,” “dignity,” etc. This is related to the *Summa*’s “*ratio boni*,” what Aquinas meant by this terminology is the perfection as known and thus possessed by the intellect. Similar remarks could be made regarding the following text, a few lines below the previous one:

The intellect can accordingly be compared to the will in three ways: First, absolutely and in general, *without any reference to this or that particular thing*. In this way the intellect is more excellent than the will, just as it is more perfect *to possess what there is of dignity in a thing* than merely *to be related to its nobility*.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the object in abstract, in *De Veritate* Aquinas focuses on the kind of relationship which each potency has with this object (possession in the intellect, relationship towards the other in the will), whereas in the *Summa* he focuses on the object itself, that is, on the object’s conditions regarding each potency (abstract in the intellect, not necessarily abstract in the will). The main argument in *De Veritate* is thus closer to the argument of the *Commentary to the Sentences*,<sup>44</sup> where the intellect is considered as regarding the perfection of something in itself and the will as regarding the perfection of something towards another.

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<sup>42</sup> As usual, things are different when particular objects are considered and, thus, Aquinas’ doctrine that, in general, to love God is better than to know Him remains explicit and unchanged.

<sup>43</sup> *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 11, c.: “Sic igitur tripliciter potest comparari intellectus ad voluntatem. Uno modo absolute et in universali, *non respectu huius vel illius rei*; et sic intellectus est eminentior voluntate; sicut *habere id quod est dignitatis in re aliqua* est perfectius quam *comparari ad nobilitatem eius*.”

<sup>44</sup> Cf. above, Section II.2, and In III Sent., d. 27, q. 1, a. 4.

## II.4. Human Happiness Not an Act of the Will: SCG III, c. 26

The question here<sup>45</sup> is in what operation does felicity substantially consist, that is, what act makes us substantially happy or, in other words, what act is the felicity itself. The question is not what object makes us happy but by what operation we reach subjectively this object, that is, what operation makes us happy. St. Thomas' answer is that felicity is not an act of the will but an act of intelligence.

One would expect Aquinas to argue that this is so because intelligence is the highest potency, and the highest act must be the act of the highest potency. He does not,<sup>46</sup> but he does reject that the will is the highest potency and proves that the intellect is higher *simpliciter*.

The fifth objection claims that felicity should consist in an act of the will because the will is higher than the intellect, and so St. Thomas needs to respond by showing the opposite, that is, that the intellect is actually higher. The objection said that the will moves the intellect to understand and, therefore, because the mover is higher than the mobile, the will is higher. St. Thomas responds that the intellect is superior to the will even as mover.

Firstly, because the will as will, that is, as the potency of the good, is moved by the good understood by the intellect. That is, unless the intellect understands the good, the will cannot be moved by its object. Thus, insofar as the will is moved *by the good* understood by the intellect ("*voluntas... movetur a suo obiecto*"),<sup>47</sup> St. Thomas says that the will is moved by the intellect ("*intellectus movet voluntatem*").<sup>48</sup> Also, insofar as the will is moved in this way for being precisely will, St. Thomas says

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Rome: Typis Riccardi Garroni, 1926), III, c. 26. From now, this work will be referenced as *Contra Gentiles* or SCG.

<sup>46</sup> He does in *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, as will be shown in the next Section.

<sup>47</sup> SCG III, c. 26.

<sup>48</sup> SCG III, c. 26.

that the intellect moves the will “*primo et per se*”. On the other hand, the will cannot be said to move the intellect except *per accidens*:<sup>49</sup> the will does not move the intellect as intellect, but moves the intellect because its act is perceived (by the intellect!) as good.

What does it mean that the intellect perceives something “as good”? Is not the intellect’s object the true? Is not the good as such the object of the will? The response to this question is not difficult: that something is good can be true, and as such can be perceived by the intellect. In this sense, the good is contained in the true. In another sense, of course, a certain truth can be good for the subject, and that is why the reverse could be said also, that is, that the true is contained in the good. The good is the object of the will not as true, but as such, that is, as good and appetible.

Secondly, the intellect is superior to the will regarding moving insofar as the final cause moves first. The final cause moves first insofar as the agent cause moves for the sake of the end. “The good understood is the end of the will”,<sup>50</sup> and thus the will moves for the sake of the good understood. This must be understood properly. Aquinas is not saying that the intellect has the primacy as efficient mover but as final cause, which is *a certain* mover but not an agent mover. For Aquinas, the primacy as efficient mover corresponds absolutely to the will, insofar as the will *moves itself* towards the good understood and no particular good understood can move necessarily the will to choose. The will owns its movement towards the good understood. This fact accounts for the primacy of the will in moving as efficient cause, but not for the absolute primacy of the will. Metaphysically speaking, the end is the first cause and moving as final cause belongs to the intellect and, in any case, for Aquinas, absolute primacy is not a primacy in moving but a primacy in being.

<sup>49</sup> One could say also that the will moves the intellect, not as intellect, but insofar as the will is the efficient mover of all potencies, and this is also a way of moving *per accidens*.

<sup>50</sup> SCG III, 26: “bonum intellectum est finis voluntatis.”

#### II.4.A. Felicity is an Act of Intelligence

Felicity must be an act of intelligence because it is the attainment of the good, and therefore that operation by which we firstly attain the ultimate good is felicity. This is the act of intelligence, because we cannot love what we do not understand. As Aquinas says:

If one thing has another thing as its external end, then the operation whereby the first thing primarily attains the second will be called the ultimate end of the first thing. Thus, for those to whom money is an end, we say that to possess the money is their end, but not the loving of it, not the craving of it. Now, the ultimate end of an intellectual substance is God. So, that operation of man is substantially his happiness, or his felicity, whereby he primarily attains to God. This is the act of understanding, for we cannot will what we do not understand. Therefore, the ultimate felicity of man lies substantially in knowing God through his intellect, and not in an act of the will.<sup>51</sup>

#### II.4.B. No Act of the Will Can Be Considered Felicity Substantially

Felicity consists in the possession of the ultimate good. Now, on the one hand, the desire for the ultimate good implies that this good is not yet possessed. On the other hand, both the

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<sup>51</sup> SCG III, 26: "Si alicuius rei sit aliqua res exterior finis, illa eius operatio dicetur etiam finis ultimus per quam primo consequitur rem illam: sicut his quibus pecunia est finis, dicitur etiam possidere pecuniam finis, non autem amare, neque concupiscere. Finis autem ultimus substantiae intellectualis est Deus. Illa igitur operatio hominis est substantialiter eius beatitudo vel felicitas, per quam primo attingit ad Deum. Hoc autem est intelligere: nam velle non possumus quod non intelligimus. Est igitur ultima felicitas hominis in cognoscendo Deum per intellectum substantialiter, non in actu voluntatis." A similar text is Aquinas, *Quodl. VIII*, q. 9 a. 19, quoted in Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 27.

love and the delectation following the possession of the good *are caused* by the possession of the good and *are not themselves* the possession of the good. Therefore, no act of the will can be considered felicity itself. In the words of Aquinas:

If any act of the will were this felicity, this act would be either one of desire, of love, or of delight. Now, it is impossible for the act of desiring to be the ultimate end. For it is by desire that the will tends toward what it does not yet possess, but this is contrary to the essential character of the ultimate end.—So, too, the act of loving cannot be the ultimate end. For a good is loved not only when possessed but also when not possessed. Indeed, it is as a result of love that what is not possessed is sought with desire, and if the love of something already possessed is more perfect, this results from the fact that the good which was loved is possessed. So, it is a different thing to possess a good which is the end, and to love it; for love, before possession, is imperfect, but after possession, perfect.—Similarly, delight is not the ultimate end. For the very possession of the good is the cause of delight: we either experience it while the good is presently possessed, or we remember it when it was formerly possessed, or we hope for it when it is to be possessed in the future. So, delight is not the ultimate end. Therefore, none of the acts of will can be this felicity substantially.<sup>52</sup>

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52 SCG III, 26: “Si aliquis actus voluntatis esset ipsa felicitas, hic actus esset aut desiderare, aut amare, aut delectari. Impossibile est autem quod desiderare sit ultimus finis. Est enim desiderium secundum quod voluntas tendit in id quod nondum habet: hoc autem contrariatur rationi ultimi finis. Amare etiam non potest esse ultimus finis. Amat enim bonum non solum quando habetur, sed etiam quando non habetur, ex amore enim est quod non habitum desiderio quaeratur: et si amor iam habiti perfectior sit, hoc causatur ex

### II.4.C. Should Not Felicity, as the Highest Good, Be the Object of the Will?

One of the most common objections against felicity as an act of the intellect is the following: “Felicity is the highest good. Now, the good as such is the object of the will. Should not felicity, therefore, be found in an act of the will?” Aquinas would respond:

For, if felicity is an object of the will because it has the rational character of a highest good, that does not make it substantially an act of the will, as the first argument implied. On the contrary, from the fact that it is a first object, the conclusion is that felicity is not its act, as is apparent in what we have said.<sup>53</sup>

What Aquinas had said is the following:

For all the powers capable of reflection on their own acts, the act of such a power must first be brought to bear on some other object, and then directed to its own act. If the intellect is to understand itself in the act of understanding, it must first be taken that it understands something, and then, as a result, that it understands that it is understanding. For, this act of understanding which

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hoc quod bonum amatum habetur. Aliud igitur est habere bonum quod est finis, quam amare, quod ante habere est imperfectum, post habere vero perfectum. Similiter autem nec delectatio est ultimus finis. Ipsum enim habere bonum causa est delectationis: vel dum bonum nunc habitum sentimus; vel dum prius habitum memoramur; vel dum in futuro habendum speramus. Non est igitur delectatio ultimus finis. Nullus ergo actus voluntatis potest esse substantialiter ipsa felicitas.”

53 SCG III, 26: “Non enim, si felicitas per hoc quod habet rationem summi boni, est obiectum voluntatis, propter hoc necesse est quod sit substantialiter ipse actus voluntatis: ut prima ratio procedebat. Immo ex hoc ipso quod est primum obiectum, sequitur quod non sit actus eius, ut ex dictis apparet.”

the intellect understands pertains to some object. Hence, it is necessary either to proceed through an endless series, or, if we are to come to a first object of understanding, it will not be the act of understanding but rather some intelligible thing. Likewise, the first willed object must not be the will's act but some other good thing.<sup>54</sup>

If I am correct, what Aquinas is saying is that felicity, as the highest good, is the first object of the will. In fact, the reason we do everything we do is felicity and, in that sense, the love of felicity underlies as first cause all other acts of the will. Now, the first thing we have ever loved could not have been an act of the will, but some other object. In the same way, the first thing we love in every decision we make cannot be an act of the will and, therefore, felicity cannot consist substantially in an act of the will.

Regarding this objection, in general, we must not lose sight of the following: the will is the potency of the good and felicity is the highest good. This means that the will desires felicity and rejoices in felicity as the highest good, but does not mean that felicity is an act of the will. Aquinas' doctrine is that this highest good is the vision of God, towards which the will tends and in which the will rejoices.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> SCG III, 26: "In omnibus potentiis quae possunt converti in suos actus, prius oportet quod actus illius potentiae feratur in obiectum aliud, et postmodum feratur in suum actum. Si enim intellectus intelligit se intelligere, prius oportet poni quod intelligat rem aliquam, et consequenter quod intelligat se intelligere: nam ipsum intelligere quod intellectus intelligit, alicuius obiecti est; unde oportet quod vel procedatur in infinitum, vel, si est devenire ad primum intellectum, hoc non erit ipsum intelligere, sed aliqua res intelligibilis. Similiter oportet quod primum volitum non sit ipsum velle, sed aliquid aliud bonum."

<sup>55</sup> Cf. section II.5 of this paper, immediately following.

## II.5. Felicity and Absolute Primacy: The Highest Act Belongs to the Highest Potency (*Sententia Libri Ethicorum*)

In *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*,<sup>56</sup> Aquinas maintains his position that felicity consists in an act of intelligence<sup>57</sup> and proves it by the fact that intelligence is the highest potency:

Happiness is the highest activity, as was pointed out before. But the highest of human activities is contemplation of truth; and this is evident from the two reasons by which we judge the excellence of activity. First, on the part of the faculty that is the principle of the activity. Thus this activity is obviously the highest, as the intellect is also the best element in us, as previously explained. Second, on the part of the object [...].<sup>58</sup>

Thus, for Aquinas, felicity must belong to the intellect because the highest activity must belong to the highest potency. Similarly, the highest end must belong to the highest potency, as we read in the *Summa*: Aquinas maintains that the *Verum* (as the intellect's end) is the highest end because the intellect is the highest potency. He clarifies this point precisely when affirming that the *Verum* is a particular *Bonum*:

Truth signifies something more absolute, and extends to the idea of good itself: wherefore even

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, Leonine, vol. 2 (Rome: ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1969). From now, this work will be referenced as *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, b. X, lect. 10, page 583, lines 72-78.

<sup>58</sup> *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, b. X, lect. 10 (page 583, lines 81-88): "Dictum est prius quod felicitas est optima operatio. Optima autem inter operationes humanas est speculatio veritatis, et hoc patet ex duobus ex quibus pensatur dignitas operationis: uno modo ex parte potentiae, quae est operationis principium, et sic patet hanc operationem esse optimam sicut et intellectus est optimum eorum quae in nobis sunt, ut prius ostensum est; alio modo ex parte obiecti..."

good is something true. But, again, truth is something good: forasmuch as the intellect is a thing, and truth its end. And among other ends this is the most excellent: as also is the intellect among the other powers.<sup>59</sup>

This is related to felicity being an act of the intellect. Once again, the fact that happiness is the highest good does not mean that the operation by which happiness is actually obtained is an act of the will. The will desires the highest good: this is why the will desires the operation by which we obtain the highest good: “When will I enter and see the face of God?” (*Psalms* 42:2).

## II.6. Cajetan’s Commentary to the *Summa*

At this point, following a historical timeline of Aquinas’ works, I should refer to the first part of the *Summa*, but this has been treated in the first section of this paper. Instead, I insert here my reflections on Cajetan’s *Commentary to Aquinas’ Summa*,<sup>60</sup> when the Cardinal explains ST I, q. 82, a. 3.

What does it mean, in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*, that the object of the intellect is “more abstract”? Cajetan offers an interesting interpretation: Aquinas means that the object of intelligence does not include the object’s act of existence, in the sense of the fact of existence. The object of the will includes it, and is therefore less simple. In Cajetan’s words: “Any thing insofar as it has a quiddity is more abstract than itself as having the act of existence: in the first way this thing is the object

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<sup>59</sup> ST I, q. 82, a. 3 ad 1: “Verum dicitur magis absolute, et ipsius boni rationem significat. Unde et bonum quoddam verum est. Sed rursus et ipsum verum est quoddam bonum; secundum quod intellectus res quaedam est, et verum finis ipsius. Et inter alios fines iste finis est excellentior; sicut intellectus inter alias potentias.”

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Pars Prima Summae Theologiae: Cum Commentariis Thomae De Vio Caietani OP*. In the following, Cajetan’s commentary will be referenced *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, plus the indication of page and paragraph.

of the intellect, in the second way it is the object of the will.”<sup>61</sup> And a little further: “The object of the intellect is the thing as *that which something is*, whereas the object of the will is the thing as having existence. It is evident that *that which something is* is more abstract than that which has being.”<sup>62</sup> Regardless of what Cajetan thought about the real distinction *essentia-esse* (a doctrinal point in which I prefer to agree with Fabro rather than with Cajetan), what the Cardinal says here seems plain: considering something without the fact that it exist is certainly more abstract than considering it together with the fact that it exists. Abstracting means considering something separately from something else.

Now, how could something be more perfect when it is considered separately from the most important act, which is the act of being? I would say that, even if the greatest perfection of something is its own act of being, the greatest perfection we can possess of something is its quiddity by means of intelligence. In fact, possessing something together with its act of being is either an act of a lower potency (like possessing money), or not possible at all (like possessing an angel) or possible only by grace, which happens precisely in beatific vision.

That being said, Cajetan’s position on this point is not exactly the same as my position. For me, that which is abstract is more perfect not because it lacks the act of being, but because it is more simple and less potential, as I have explained previously. Moreover, the quiddity does not abstract from *esse* absolutely: we understand the quiddity as *ens* and, therefore, as a synthesis of formal content and act, *id quod* and *est*. This synthesis is not yet an understanding of the real composition of

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<sup>61</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XIV: “Quia quaelibet res ut habet rationem *quod quid est*, est abstractior seipsa ut habet actum existentiae: illo modo est objectum intellectus, hoc voluntatis” (For Cajetan’s *Commentary*, always my translation).

<sup>62</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XIV: “Objectum intellectus est res ut *quod quid est*, voluntatis autem ut habens esse. Constat enim quod *quod quid est* abstractius est habente esse.”

essence and act of being, but it is perhaps the condition of the possibility of that understanding. Other elements of my position have been explained already.

### II.6.A. How can the *ratio boni* be the object of the intellect?

Cajetan's interpretation of *ratio boni* is very similar to the one I have offered. In fact, for him, the terminology "idea of the good" ("*ratio boni*") refers to the idea as the intelligible content of that which is good ("*ut ratio est*"), rather than to this same object as good.<sup>63</sup> He also says that, even if this way of speaking about *ratio* fits not only the idea of the good but also the idea of the true and of anything, Aquinas uses "idea of the good" because the discussion was precisely about the good.<sup>64</sup> Finally, he claims that this understanding of "the idea of the good" is connected with the object of the intellect being more abstract than the object of the will:

This is the direct and explicit intention of the letter; as if Aquinas were saying that the good is offered in a more abstract way to the intellect, because it is offered as idea and whatness, than to the will, because to the will is offered as the good itself of this

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<sup>63</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XVI: "When the objector argues that it is false saying that the object of the intellect is the idea of good [*ratio boni*], I respond that the idea of good, as idea, is an objective condition and thereby constitutes the object of the intellect in its being as object, as is evident from what has been said." [Cum arguitur falsum esse quod ratio boni sit obiectum intellectus, dicitur quod ratio boni, ut ratio est, est conditio obiectiva, ac per hoc constituit obiectum intellectus in esse obiecti, ut patet et dictis.]

<sup>64</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XVI: "This does not apply more to the idea of the good than to the idea of the true or of anything, because it applies to the idea as such: but Aquinas refers to the idea of the good rather than the idea of other things, because he was making a comparison with the good" [Nec hoc magis convenit rationi boni quam veri, et cuiuscumque alterius, quoniam hoc convenit rationi ut ratio est: sed adducta est boni ratio magis quam aliorum, quia ad ipsum fiebat comparatio].

particular being [*ipsius entis boni*]; thus, and considered as explained, the object of the intellect is more abstract than the object of the will.<sup>65</sup>

Similar remarks a little further: “Even in the will’s object itself, that which is the intellect’s object as such is more abstract than that which is offered to the will as object. Because, to the will, the good itself is offered as object whereas that which is offered to the intellect is the idea of that good.”<sup>66</sup>

Now, it appears difficult to elucidate whether Cajetan is interpreting “the idea of the good” as the idea of *the being* which is good or as the idea of *the goodness* of this particular thing. In both cases the idea of the good is more abstract than the good in itself, but what I have suggested is that St. Thomas refers to the idea of the being which is good rather than referring to the idea of its goodness. In any case, Cajetan does state at some point: “Being and good are interchangeable and are the same, and there is no idea of being which is not also idea of good.”<sup>67</sup>

### II.6.B. Is the Being of Things in the Soul More Perfect than in Themselves?

According to Cajetan, Scotus proposes the following argument against the superiority of the intellect over the will.

The act uniting to an object according to a nobler being is simply the nobler act. Now, the act of

65 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XVI: “Et haec est directe et explicite intentio litterae; ac si dixisset, quod bonum abstractiori modo offertur intellectui, quia per modum rationis et *quod quid est*, quam voluntati, quia per modum ipsius entis boni; et ideo obiectum intellectus ut sic, abstractius est quam obiectum voluntatis ut sic.”

66 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XVII: “Etiam in ipso voluntatis obiecto id quod intellectus obiectum est, ut sic, abstractius est eo quod voluntati obicitur; quoniam voluntati obicitur ipsum bonum, intellectui autem illius ratio.”

67 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XVII: “Ens et bonum convertuntur et sunt idem, et nulla est entis ratio quae non sit boni ratio.”

the will regarding the beatifying object unites to this object according to a nobler being, because [it unites to the object] as it is in itself; whereas the act of the intellect unites to the object as it is in the knowing subject.<sup>68</sup>

Cajetan responds in a twofold manner. First, as if Scotus' argument were a kind of general principle regarding objects absolutely speaking, that is, as if the argument regarded objects in general, abstracting from being this or that particular object. Cajetan says that the principle "being in itself is more perfect than being in the soul" does not hold, "because this is not true universally, and consequently not true absolutely speaking: as is appears regarding [objects which are] inferior [than the soul]",<sup>69</sup> that is, as it appears regarding material things.

He clarifies also that the object of the intellect is not constituted by its being in the soul but, rather, being in the soul is one of the object's conditions. This means that "the act of the intellect unites to the object absolutely insofar as the quiddity is in itself" whereas the will "unites to the object as exercising being."<sup>70</sup> In other words, because the quiddity is considered in itself, one cannot say that the intellect is uniting to something *insofar* as it is in the soul: rather, the intellect is considering

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68 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 300, par. IX: "Secundo, sic. Actus coniungens objecto secundum nobilius esse, est nobilior simpliciter. Sed actus voluntatis respectu objecti beatifici, coniungit objecto secundum nobilius esse, quia ut in se est; actus vero intellectus, ut es in cognoscente. Ergo."

69 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XIX: "Ad probationem, *quia esse in re est perfectius quam esse in anima*, respondetur primo, quod hoc non est verum universaliter, et consequenter nec absolute; ut patet de inferioribus."

70 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XIX: "[Scotus' argument] falsum supponitur, scilicet quod obiectum intellectus ut sic, constituitur per esse in anima; quamvis esse in anima sit una conditio illius. Actus enim intellectus coniungit obiecto absolute ut *quod quid est* in se est: et per hoc differt primo ab actu voluntatis coniungenti objecto ut exercet esse."

something which happens to be in the soul but considering the quiddity as it is in itself, that is, in its own cognitive content.

Cajetan's doctrine here is similar to mine, but I would clarify that, in my view, the intellect considering the quiddity is uniting to a real perfection, that is, to something which is in reality. True enough, the quiddity is in reality with a different mode of being but, still, it is the same quiddity and, therefore, what the intellect knows is something real. In other words, the intellect does not know something "abstract", but something real in an abstracted mode of being.

Cajetan is aware that uniting to the object as it is outside the soul is uniting to it according to a more perfect being *as thing*: a thing is perfect in itself only when having its own act of being. However, uniting to the object absolutely (as the intellect does) is uniting to it according to a more perfect being *as object*, because of the object's greater abstraction. "And since the dignity of the potencies is considered according to the nobility of the objects, not as things, but as objects; therefore, absolutely speaking, the intellect is nobler than the will."<sup>71</sup>

Second, Cajetan responds as if Scotus' argument regarded specifically the beatific object, that is, as if Scotus were saying that God's being is more perfect in itself than in our intelligence and, therefore, the act of the will uniting us to God in Himself is more perfect than the act of the intellect. Cajetan's solution is the following:

[Scotus'] argument serves to conclude that the love of this particular object is higher than its cognition in this life, but not in heaven: because God's

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<sup>71</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301, par. XIX: "Modo dicitur quod, licet actus coniungens obiecto secundum esse extra, coniungat obiecto secundum perfectius esse ut res est, quam actus coniungens obiecto absolute: tamen e contra iste coniungit obiecto secundum perfectius esse ut obiectum est, quam ille, quia secundum abstractiorem modum. Et quia nobilitas potentiarum attenditur penes nobilitatem obiectorum, non ut res, sed ut obiecta sunt; ideo simpliciter intellectus nobilior est voluntate."

being in itself and in the soul of the blessed is equally noble, even the same, since it is understood immediately in its [God's] essence. Consequently, the act of the intellect remains nobler, with its proper nobility [*nobilitate sui generis*], and not exceeded in nobility only in a certain sense [*secundum quid*], as in this life was exceeded.<sup>72</sup>

Cajetan's solution here is the same I have proposed. In beatific vision, God is united to the intellect in Himself, as *species impressa*<sup>73</sup> and therefore without mediation. Thus, in beatific vision, the intellect possesses God as it is in Himself, in His own being.

### II.6.C. The true is the highest good

Cajetan argues also that *verum* and *bonum* are both good and can be compared in their nobility as goods. Thus, it is clear that “*Verum* is a good nobler than any other good, because *verum* is the end of a potency nobler than any other potency.”<sup>74</sup> Further, he claims that “The *ratio* of the first species of good is nobler than the very *ratio* of good, as the first species [is nobler]

<sup>72</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 301-302, par. XIX: “Ratio concludit amorem talis obiecti in via esse nobiliorem conitione, non autem in patria: quia aequae nobile, immo idem est esse Dei in se, et in anima beatorum, quia secundum essentiam immediate intelligitur. Et consequenter remanet actus intellectus nobilior nobilitate sui generis; et non excessus nobilitate secundum quid, ut in via excedebatur.”

<sup>73</sup> On the notions of *species impressa* and *species expressa*, cf. Andres Ayala, *The Radical Difference between Aquinas and Kant: Human Understanding and the Agent Intellect in Aquinas* (Chillum, MD: IVE Press, 2021), 191 ff and 341 ff, available online at <https://philpapers.org/rec/AYATRD> (Accessed February 17, 2023); Andres Ayala, “The Thomistic Distinction between the Act of Understanding and the Formation of a Mental Word: Intelligere and Dicere in Aquinas,” *The Incarnate Word* 9, no. 1 (May 2023): 33–48, available online at <https://philpapers.org/rec/AYATTD>.

<sup>74</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 302, par. XXI: “Tertia est secundum nobilitatem utriusque in ratione boni: et sic dicitur quod verum est nobilior bonum quocumque alio bono, quia est finis nobilioris potentiae quacumque alia potentia.”

than the *ratio* of its own genus. Of this kind is the *ratio* of good in *verum*,<sup>75</sup> that is, *verum* is the first species of good, the noblest good and, therefore, nobler than the *ratio* of good, as considered generically.

Now, if the will's object is the good in itself, and God actually is the Good in Itself, could we not say that the highest object is the object of the will, absolutely speaking? For Cajetan, "One cannot say that the good in itself [lit. *per essentiam*] is the will's proper object and end. In fact, one thing is saying "good in general" [lit. *in universali*] and a different thing saying good in itself."<sup>76</sup>

## II.7. Whether Happiness is an Operation of the Intellect or of the Will? ST I-II, q. 3, a. 4

### II.7.A. Joy as Consummation of Happiness: On Aquinas Analogous Use of Terminology

The following text allows us to touch upon one aspect of the relationship between joy and happiness. "So, therefore, the essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect: but *the delight that results from happiness pertains to the will*. In this sense Augustine says (Confess. x, 23) that happiness is 'joy in truth,' because, to wit, *joy itself is the consummation of happiness*."<sup>77</sup>

It would seem that, if joy is a certain consummation and perfection of happiness, then rejoicing is the ultimate perfec-

<sup>75</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 302, par. XXIV: "Ratio primae speciei boni est nobilior ipsa boni ratione, sicut prima species ratione sui generis. Talis autem est ratio boni in vero."

<sup>76</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I, page 302, par. XXIV: "Negatur quod bonum per essentiam sit proprium obiectum et finis voluntatis. Aliud enim est dicere *bonum in universali*, et aliud *bonum per essentiam*."

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Prima Secundae Summae Theologiae: Cum Commentariis Thomae De Vio Caietani OP*, vol. 6 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1891), q. 3, a. 4, c. (my italicized): "Sic igitur essentia beatitudinis in actu intellectus consistit, sed ad voluntatem pertinet *delectatio beatitudinem consequens*; secundum quod Augustinus dicit, X Confess., quod beatitudo est gaudium de veritate; quia scilicet ipsum *gaudium est consummatio beatitudinis*." In the following, this work will be referenced as ST I-II.

tion and therefore happiness itself. However, it is obvious that St. Thomas is saying the opposite, for the many reasons he has mentioned here and in other places: Aquinas denies that rejoicing itself is the essence of happiness. However, I think a terminological clarification may help the understanding of St. Thomas in this and similar passages.<sup>78</sup>

The substance is perfected and completed in the accidents, insofar as accidents are acts and perfections of the substance. This does not mean that the accidents are more perfect than the substance. Again, the accidents are acts, forms and perfections, and the substance can be considered “matter” and “potency” of the accidents. Still, the substance is more perfect than the accidents, simply because being in itself is more perfect than being in another. Thus, the fact that joy is the perfection of happiness does not require joy to be more perfect than that which is perfected by joy. We will rejoice *in* the vision: joy is an accident of the vision, which is the substance of happiness.

Something similar occurs when St. Thomas says that the act of freedom belongs substantially (or even “materially”)<sup>79</sup> to the will and formally to the intellect. It should be clear that, in this case, formal does not mean essential but somehow “complete”: the act of freedom, for St. Thomas, belongs principally, substantially and essentially to the will, insofar as the decision belongs to the will and not to the intellect. How can St. Thomas say “materially” then, at least sometimes? Because “matter” is taken in its analogous meaning of “substance”, which is the principal being, and formal is taken in its analogous meaning of secondary perfection (as when Aquinas says that “formal” abstraction is the abstraction of quantity, which is an accident).<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> I will come back to this terminological clarification in Section III.2.E of this paper, when discussing Fabro’s interpretation of Aquinas’ “substantially” and “materially.”

<sup>79</sup> Cf. ST I-II, q. 13, a. 1, c.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, “Super Boethium De Trinitate,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas’s Works in English*, ed. Armand Mauer (Toronto, 1953), q. 5, a. 3, c. “... all accidents are related to the underlying substance as form to matter

Two further clarifications are in order. First, the primacy of the will in the act of freedom, as I have already suggested and explained, does not take away the absolute primacy of the intellect. This primacy of the will is a primacy in moving and moving, as a perfection towards another, refers to the will. Second, the formal role of the intellect in the act of freedom is not properly speaking accidental but, rather, analogously “formal” and certainly not principal. The intellect “determines”, *so to speak*, the act of freedom because the intellect provides the object and the object is like the “form” of the act of freedom, insofar as the object is “what the decision is about”. But the will alone determines itself to this object: the will is not determined by the intellect in its decision. This is what it means to say that the substance (or matter) of the act of freedom belongs to the will and the formal determination belongs to the intellect. It is not an intellectualistic affirmation but exactly the opposite.<sup>81</sup>

I suggest that, in order to understand Aquinas, it is crucial to be cautious about the interpretation of terms. Aquinas employs terms analogically, not technically, and this does not take away anything from his precision and clarity. In my view, it does the opposite. In the context, his statements are always clear, but that context is sometimes too foreign to the modern reader. I think that a greater awareness of Aquinas’ analogical way of speaking and a study of parallel texts would result in better interpretations, at least in general.

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[...] So there are two abstractions of the intellect. One corresponds to the union of form and matter or accident and subject. This is the abstraction of form from sensible matter” [...cum omnia accidentia comparentur ad substantiam subiectam sicut forma ad materiam (...)] 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]. Available online at <https://isidore.co/aquinas/BoethiusDeTr.htm#53> (Accessed February 17, 2023).

<sup>81</sup> A more expanded explanation will be offered in Section III.2.E of this paper, that will show more clearly Aquinas’ doctrine by contrasting it with Fabro’s interpretation.

### II.7.B. Happiness and Cognition: Cognition First in Attaining

If attaining to the beatifying object is happiness, then the first potency in attaining is the first one in obtaining happiness. This is for St. Thomas the intellect, since the beatifying object could not be loved or enjoyed if it were not possessed by the intellect first. Thus, cognition is first in attaining: “Love ranks above knowledge in moving, but knowledge precedes love in attaining: for ‘naught is loved save what is known,’ as Augustine says (De Trin. x, 1). Consequently we first attain an intelligible end by an act of the intellect; just as we first attain a sensible end by an act of sense.”<sup>82</sup> See how, again, the primacy of the will regards moving, that is, being towards another, and the primacy of the intellect regards being in itself. Attaining is possessing in oneself, achieving.

In his commentary to this article, Cajetan responds to one of Scotus’ arguments against Aquinas’ doctrine. Cajetan’s text may add light to our discussion. Because St. Thomas has said that “Blessedness is the attainment<sup>83</sup> of the end” [*Beatitudo est consecutio finis*], Scotus tries to argue that love obtains, achieves the end in order to demonstrate that happiness is an act of the will. Cajetan states:

Scotus could not do away with Aquinas’ statement that “blessedness is the attainment of the end” and, therefore, in order to pursue his own opin-

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<sup>82</sup> ST I-II, q. 3, a. 4, ad 4: “Dilectio praeeminet cognitioni in movendo, sed cognitio praevia est dilectioni in attingendo, non enim diligitur nisi cognitum, ut dicit Augustinus in X de Trin. Et ideo intelligibilem finem primo attingimus per actionem intellectus; sicut et finem sensibilem primo attingimus per actionem sensus.”

<sup>83</sup> I have translated the Latin term “*consecutio*” as “attainment”, by suggestion of Fr. Richard Yevchak, IVE, Ph.L. In my view, “attainment” should be understood as its synonym “achievement” and not simply as “arriving at”, although “attainment” seems preferable because of its more obvious relationship to the term “end”. In any case, “*consecutio*” means “attaining” in the sense of “achieving”, with the implication that the end attained is possessed.

ion, he equivocated the term “attainment”. However, one can prove that love is not attainment by the fact that love regards both that which one possesses and that which one does not possess. It is obvious that love of that which is not possessed is not attainment, from the very fact that it regards that which is not possessed. Whereas love of that which is possessed is not attainment because it presupposes attainment, since this love regards that which is [already] possessed.<sup>84</sup>

The terminology “attainment”, therefore, refers to possession and thus to a certain being in itself. Cajetan’s clarification helps to pay attention to the sense in which we employ the terms. One could say that love “achieves” insofar as by acts of love we manage to reach the end but, properly speaking, love does neither possess nor achieves.

## II.8. Charity Vs. Natural Love of God: Cajetan on ST II-II, q. 23, a. 6, ad 1

In this article,<sup>85</sup> St. Thomas is addressing the question whether charity is the most excellent virtue. The reason why charity is superior to all other virtues including intellectual virtues is that charity’s object is God himself and, therefore, this is one of the instances in which, regarding a particular object,

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84 *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I-II, page 30, par. IV (cf. par. II): “Unde [Scotus] arguens, quia illam propositionem, *Beatitudo est consecutio finis*, evitare non potuit, equivocavit *consecutionis* vocabulum, ut suam prosequeretur opinionem. Quod autem amor non habeat rationem consecutionis, ex eo probabitur, quia amor est rei habitae et rei non habitae. Et amor quidem rei non habitae patet quod non est consecutio, ex hoc ipso quod est rei non habitae: amor autem rei habitae ex hoc ipso non est consecutio, quod consecutionem supponit, quia est rei habitae.”

85 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Secunda Secundae Summae Theologiae: Cum Commentariis Thomae De Vio Caietani OP*, vol. 8 (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1895), q. 23, a. 6. In the following, this work will be referenced as *Summa*, II-II or ST II-II.

the will is superior (cf. *Ad primum*<sup>86</sup>). In fact, regarding things superior to the soul, loving them is better than simply knowing them, “particularly referring to the love of God.”<sup>87</sup> Regarding this last clarification, Cajetan makes an interesting reflection:

St. Thomas understood that the love of God and separate substances which we can have by our natural capacities alone is not simply superior to the intellectual virtue of wisdom: this is because that love is not a virtue. But the love of God about which we are talking, which is out of charity, [is superior to wisdom] because charity is a virtue.<sup>88</sup>

Cajetan’s point is that St. Thomas is not simply saying that love of the separate substances is simply superior to cognition of them: he is saying that the *virtue* by which we love God (i.e., charity) is superior to *any other virtue* by which we know God (be it wisdom or faith), which is the article’s point.<sup>89</sup>

Cajetan claims also that Aquinas’ aforementioned statements about the comparison between cognition and love should be understood of this life only: “And understand these things as said about the cognition and intellection of this life, where love attains God in himself, cognition instead attains God in ourselves by means of a [cognitional] species. In heaven, however, is different, where both vision and love attain God in himself.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> ST II-II, q. 23, a. 6, ad 1.

<sup>87</sup> ST II-II, q. 23, a. 6, ad 1: “et praecipue dilectio Dei”

<sup>88</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST II-II, page 170, par. II: “Videbat siquidem quod dilectio Dei et substantiarum immaterialium qualis potest per naturalia sola haberi non praefertur simpliciter virtutis intellectuali quae est sapiential, et hoc quia non est virtus: sed dilectio Dei de qua est sermo, quae scilicet est ex caritate, quia caritas est virtus.”

<sup>89</sup> On this topic, I have offered other important remarks in Section II.2.B of this paper.

<sup>90</sup> *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in St II-II, page 171, par. II: “Et intellige haec de cognitione et intellectione viae, ubi dilectio ad Deum in seipso, cog-

## II.9. In What Sense is the Intellect a Condition of the Act of Will? On Aquinas' *De Caritate*, a. 3

*Objection 12* of this article<sup>91</sup> argues that faith is the form of charity because the greatest virtue should be the form of the others. Now, faith is the greatest virtue, it is argued, because faith is the virtue of the most perfect potency, which is the intellect. Therefore. St. Thomas' response accepts that the intellect is the most perfect potency absolutely speaking, but not in moving, where the will is superior. Thus, because the intellect is moved by the will to believe, the form of faith is something belonging to the will, that is, charity.

Now, the argument St. Thomas uses to state the absolute primacy of the intellect over the will is interesting: "*bonum intellectum est obiectum voluntatis*".<sup>92</sup> The line is too short to elaborate a theory, but a short comment is not out of place. The intellect is superior, here, because the will is moved towards the object understood, insofar as we cannot love what we do not know, that is, we love what we know. Why would this be the reason to consider the intellect superior, absolutely speaking? Because the object moves the potency and, so, the potency that provides the moving object seems superior because it conditions the act of the other potency. Now, this condition should be understood properly. The act of intelligence is an absolute condition of each and every act of will, because we cannot love if we do not know something: the object of the will is always something we know, at least in some way. But intelligence does not condition the will's movement towards this or that object. St. Thomas says clearly that the will is superior (and therefore not conditioned by the intellect) precisely in moving.

What happens when the will decides not to move at all? Is this decision still conditioned by the intellect, *in the manner*

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nitio autem Deum in nobis per speciem attingit. In patria autem secus est, ubi tam visio quam dilectio Deum secundum se attingit."

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de caritate*, a. 3, ob. 12. From now, this work will be referenced as *De Caritate*.

<sup>92</sup> *De Caritate*, a. 3, ad 12.

*we have just explained?* Yes, because what is chosen is “not to choose” the goodness which is present in the intellect as understood.<sup>93</sup>

As in many other places, for St. Thomas, the priority of the will in moving is clearly not an argument for the absolute primacy but rather for the relative primacy of the will. This is because, as he explains in other places, something is considered absolutely when considered in itself, and relatively when considered with regard to other things. Because moving is a relationship to other things, whatever is related to something’s moving qualifies this something relatively.

### III. ON FABRO’S POSITION IN *RIFLESSIONI SULLA LIBERTÀ*

Fabro knows that St. Thomas has always considered the intellect superior—absolutely speaking—to the will and Fabro disagrees with St. Thomas’ conclusion.

For Fabro, the superiority of the intellect over the will is a capital point in historical Thomism and a constant doctrine in Aquinas himself:

*The superiority of the intellect over the will.* This thesis seems one of the capital points of historical Thomism, and there is no doubt that it can claim the explicit endorsement of Thomistic texts from the beginning to the end of the Angelic Doctor’s activity. The truly puzzling formula, at least at first glance, is that “simpliciter intellectus est nobilior

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<sup>93</sup> When the will decides not to choose is as if the intellect were saying, “you’d better wait!” or “wait, stop right there!” It is the intellect who shows that waiting is good and it is the will who chooses to wait. Now, the will could also choose to keep judging to see whether there is something better than waiting, as we will discuss in Section III.2.F of this paper.

quam voluntas” [absolutely speaking, the intellect is nobler than the will]...<sup>94</sup>

The discomfort and perplexity of Fabro with Aquinas’ doctrine on this point is obvious and can be seen in other places as well. The most explicit text is perhaps the following:

But isn’t God our Supreme Good? And is not then this superiority of the will on this point sufficient to bring to the level of freedom the entire dignity of the person? It is well then, or at least let it pass, that the intellect be said to be *prior*, not, however, *superior* over the will and this by virtue of the very same Thomistic principles.<sup>95</sup>

Also, Fabro sees a necessary relationship between this Thomistic doctrinal point and the one regarding the essence of felicity as an act of the intellect.<sup>96</sup> Fabro’s discomfort extends to the latter doctrinal point too.<sup>97</sup>

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94 Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 25: “La superiorità dell’intelletto sulla volontà. Questa tesi sembra uno dei punti capitali del tomismo storico e non v’è dubbio ch’essa può rivendicare l’apoggio esplicito dei testi tomistici dal principio alla fine dell’attività del Dottore Angelico. La formula davvero sconcertante, almeno a prima vista, è che ‘simpliciter intellectus est nobilior quam voluntas’...”

95 Fabro, 31: “Ma Dio non è forse il nostro Sommo Bene? E non basta allora questa superiorità della volontà su questo punto, per trascinare al livello della libertà tutta la dignità della persona? Sta bene quindi, o almeno passi, che l’intelletto sia detto *prior*, non però *superior* sulla volontà e questo in virtù degli stessi principi tomistici”; cf. also Fabro, *Riflessioni*, 26 [at footnotes] and 60.

96 Cf. Fabro, 25–26: “The direct consequence of such an approach is the other thesis, intangible in Thomism, that the essence of happiness consists in union with God through knowledge [...]” [La conseguenza diretta di siffatta impostazione è l’altra tesi, intangibile nel tomismo, che l’essenza della felicità consiste nell’unione con Dio mediante la conoscenza].

97 Cf. Fabro, 27–28: “What we cannot understand is why the beatifying union of the created spirit with God must be first of all that union which takes place in the objective sphere of the intellect and not rather the one be-

In the following, rather than exploring Fabro's doctrine on freedom, I will try to elucidate the reasons leading Fabro to disagree with St. Thomas on this particular point of the absolute primacy of the intellect. The following sections are ordered, so to speak, from the outside to the inside of the doctrinal question. The first section, on "Fabro's Concerns," may help us to take Fabro's position and place it in its own historical context. The second section goes deeper in that it offers Fabro as an interpreter of Aquinas' text. The third section intends to delve into the main doctrinal reasons for which Fabro departed from Aquinas on this particular point.

### III.1. Fabro's Concerns: The Benefits of his Position

What may have led Fabro to disagree with St. Thomas? Let us explore first Fabro's concerns. In my view, Fabro sees two benefits in giving the absolute primacy to the will. The first one is making St. Thomas more appealing to modern philosophers. The second benefit is liberating St. Thomas from a dead Scholastic intellectualism.

Regarding the first benefit, Fabro's motive is validating modern thought's profound demand: the autonomy of the subject, the principality of the "I". By this validation I do not mean that Fabro is in agreement with modern thought on this point. Fabro tries to engage modern thought by showing that he is able to appreciate the true aspects modern thought sometimes includes. One of these aspects, according to Fabro, is the keen awareness modern thought has regarding the autonomy of the subject in freedom. Fabro considers this subjective autonomy neither absolute nor complete, but he sees the point: in the act

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longing to the tendential subjective sphere in which the *desiderium* is fulfilled in the *delectatio* and then sublimated in the supreme assimilation of *amor...*" [Quel che non si riesce a capire è perché l'unione beatificante dello spirito creato con Dio debba essere anzitutto quella che si compie nella sfera oggettiva dell'intelletto e non piuttosto quella della sfera soggettiva tendenziale nella quale il *desiderium* si compie nella *delectatio* e poi si sublima nell'assimilazione suprema dell'*amor...*]

of freedom, the subject is able to override any external influence and is left to him or herself as a certain absolute principle of his or her own actions and of the meaning of his or her own life. Fabro states:

This active existential supremacy of the will is the most felt exigency of modern thought which, however, has fearfully oscillated between the absorption of the will by the intellect and the absorption of the intellect by the will, opting either by the dominion of reason or by the titanism of action.<sup>98</sup>

The conception of freedom in Saint Thomas, even when operating within the tradition of classical intellectualism, possesses a noteworthy potential to satisfy the modern exigency regarding the principality of the 'I' and, consequently, of the act of election regarding the existential concrete end.<sup>99</sup>

In my view, Fabro's concern does not necessitate correcting St. Thomas' doctrine on the intellect's absolute primacy. The existential primacy of the will in the act of freedom and in the election of the existential final end is clearly a Thomistic point, as Fabro's research shows: this is what helps in making Aquinas more appealing to modern philosophers. However, Fabro could not see how this doctrine could be coherent with the absolute primacy of the intellect: here is where I disagree with Fabro.

The second reason which may have led Fabro to emphasize the primacy of the will is related to a certain intellectualistic dis-

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98 Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 49: "Questa supremazia esistenziale attiva della volontà è la esigenza più sentita del pensiero moderno il quale però ha oscillato paurosamente fra l'assorbimento della volontà da parte dell'intelletto o dell'intelletto da parte della volontà optando o per il dominio della ragione o per il titanismo dell'azione."

99 Fabro, 79: "La concezione della libertà in S. Tommaso, pur muovendosi nella scia dell'intellettualismo classico, ha degli spiragli notevoli per soddisfare all'esigenza moderna della principialità dell'io e di conseguenza dell'atto di scelta del 'fine concreto esistenziale'..."

tortion of Aquinas' doctrine on freedom, a distortion present in some Thomists, one which Fabro wanted to correct.<sup>100</sup> An inordinate emphasis on the intellect, an emphasis giving the intellect the primacy in the act of freedom and which Fabro rightly finds at odds with Thomistic doctrine, may have been the occasion for Fabro's overemphasizing the primacy of the will.

I have preferred to name this section "Fabro's Concerns" because the aforementioned two reasons are not doctrinal reasons *per se* but rather something like a historical context which may help in understanding Fabro's position. One may disagree with Fabro's doctrine on the absolute primacy of the will but, in my view, Fabro's concerns here show how Thomistic philosophy is done: engaging in a sincere and open-minded dialogue with modern thought and correcting misinterpretations of Aquinas.

### III.2. Stumbling Blocks in Reading Aquinas

In my opinion, Fabro's perplexity regarding Aquinas' doctrine on the absolute primacy of intelligence is made possible thanks to a few "stumbling blocks" in Fabro's interpretation of Aquinas' text. By "stumbling blocks" I mean certain terms or even notions which, understood incorrectly, lead to a misunderstanding of St. Thomas' text and/or doctrine. In this section, I suggest six "stumbling blocks"; where a particular stumbling block has already been discussed in this research, the reader will be referred back to the relevant section.

#### III.2.A. *Ratio Boni*

Fabro is misguided regarding the meaning of *ratio boni* in Aquinas' *Summa*, I, q. 82, a. 3.<sup>101</sup> I hope to have clarified what Aquinas means in my previous discussion.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 49.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Fabro, 26, 27.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. above, Section I.1, Section II.3, and Section II.6.A.

### III.2.B. Intentional Presence

Fabro is misguided also regarding the meaning of intentional presence, which he calls “non real” and thus a “mere formal perfection”<sup>103</sup>. This kind of perfection, he continues, does not perfect the subject morally, that is, towards its final end, which is what really counts. Here is the relevant passage:

Nor does it convince the argument that the intellect by knowing gives us the presence of things, because here it is a matter of an intentional presence and not a real one and, therefore, of a mere formal perfection which is in itself indifferent, since – as St. Thomas himself recognizes – such a presence confers on the subject no perfection in the moral order, regarding the attainment of the ultimate end which is what above all matters. What then?<sup>104</sup>

Am I going to say that intentional presence is a real presence? Perhaps another question will help in the understanding of my position: is intentional presence the presence of something not real? Is the meaning of things not real? In other words, is what we know something concocted by the intellect and not found in reality? To be sure, I also distinguish intentional presence from real presence, but I do not deny that what is present in both cases is the same real perfection. Thus, if what is present in knowing is real, then we are not talking about a “mere” formal perfection, at least not according to St. Thomas.

Fabro’s remarks towards the end, regarding the relationship between knowledge and moral perfection, invite me to

<sup>103</sup> Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 26. Cf. 60.

<sup>104</sup> Fabro, 26: “Non convince neppure la ragione che l’intelletto conoscendo ci dà la presenza delle cose, poiché si tratta qui di una presenza intenzionale e non reale e quindi di una semplice perfezione formale la quale è in sé indifferente, poiché – come lo stesso S. Tommaso riconosce – tale presenza non conferisce al soggetto nessuna perfezione nell’ordine morale, rispetto al conseguimento dell’ultimo fine ch’è quello che soprattutto conta. E allora?”

make a clarification which is not addressed to Fabro but may not be out of place. Moral perfection is essential in order to obtain the final end, which is an act of intelligence. To think that moral and intellectual perfection are opposed is nonsensical, at least from a Thomistic point of view. Moral perfection is necessary in order to obtain the final perfection which is the vision of God. Moral perfection is impossible without knowing what must be done. True, knowing does not make us perfect in this life, but not-knowing does not make us perfect either and not-wanting-to-know makes us imperfect!

Allow me to be a little loose: if all wise people went to hell and all good people went to heaven, then heaven would be empty (because nobody is good without being wise in a very deep sense) and hell probably as well (where are the wise...?) except for those who taught that knowing is not so important in order to be good (those do deserve hell: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Since you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest" [Hosea 4:6]). Bad metaphors and imprecisions apart, what I mean is that love of wisdom is not opposed but included in moral perfection and a certain intellectual knowledge is necessary for moral perfection.

Moreover, what kind of love does not want to know more? Of course, the knowledge we want the most is the knowledge by experience, by direct contact. We do not mainly want "information" about the beloved (unless information is about where the beloved lives...), we want to meet the beloved personally. Now, is that meeting not intellectual? Who would be so stupid as to ban intelligence from this meeting, especially when the meeting is with Truth itself? Does that meeting begin only in Heaven? What is wisdom? Where are the wise in this wounded Church...?!

Let's go back to Fabro's point: the fact that the intentional possession of the perfections of things does not make us morally perfect does not mean that the potency by which we know things is less perfect than the potency by which we love

them, which is the point under discussion. Moreover, which is the greater perfection, moral perfection or happiness? Is it not one for the other? Is it not the perfection of the will precisely to desire the perfection of intelligence in the vision of God and to put the means in order to obtain it? Later, I will discuss these questions in more detail.<sup>105</sup>

### III.2.C. Abstract vs. Real

Fabro's following quote is connected with his consideration of intentional presence as a "mere" formal perfection: "Why is it that the *res materialis* in its real effectuality, to which the will is directly turned, is to be considered inferior to its abstract formal presentation in the intelligence?"<sup>106</sup> I have already discussed this issue when explaining St. Thomas' text<sup>107</sup> and in other places of this paper.

### III.2.D. *Conversio ad Phantasmata*

Fabro's objection regarding the necessity of the *conversio ad phantasmata* in order to truly know reality<sup>108</sup> is related to his considering the abstracted presence a non-real presence. Fabro states: "Now, if the intellect itself, for its objectifying function, needs to turn [...] to the singular, how can it be said to be superior to the will which directly tends to the things themselves in their immediate reality pregnant with all existential values?"<sup>109</sup> However, the fact that we know reality by turning to the phantasm does not mean that the reality we know intellectually is the phantasm, unless Fabro wants to consider the universal un-

105 Cf. especially Section III.3.C of this paper.

106 Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 30: "Perché mai la *res materialis* nella sua effettualità reale, a cui si volge direttamente la volontà, è da considerare inferiore alla sua presentazione formale astratta nell'intelligenza?"

107 Cf. especially Sections I.3 and I.4.

108 Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 30–31.

109 Fabro, 31: "Ora, se l'intelletto stesso, per la sua funzione oggettivante, ha bisogno di rivolgersi (*quasi per quamdam reflexionem*) ai singolari, come può dirsi superiore alla volontà la quale direttamente ... *inclinatur ad res ipsas* nella loro realtà immediata carica di tutti i valori esistenziali?"

real, like Plato. What we understand is the universal *in* the phantasm, *by converting* to the phantasm. For St. Thomas, the conversion to the phantasm has to do with *the way we know* the object of human understanding and does not imply that the object of human understanding is the phantasm.<sup>110</sup> The universal is as real as the phantasm: both are species representing different aspects of reality, one the concrete aspect and the other its essential aspect. What is represented in both of them is real, despite the fact that what is represented does not exist in reality with the same mode of being as in the species.

In any case, what is important to underline is that intelligence turns to the phantasm not because the universal is not real, but in order to know the universal *in the way* it exists, that is, *in* the concrete. That which is not real *in nature* is the universal mode of being of the essence, but the essence we know is real: otherwise, eggs would not be eggs... and realism would be gone.

In what way the thing understood as present in the mind is better than the thing in itself has already been discussed when explaining St. Thomas' text.<sup>111</sup>

### III.2.E. *Substantialiter* and *Formaliter*

I find confusing Fabro's remarks regarding the meaning of *substantialiter* or *materialiter* and *formaliter* in Aquinas' text.<sup>112</sup> Firstly, Fabro claims that this terminology "*substantialiter – formaliter*" is better than "*simpliciter – secundum quid*" regarding the primacy of intelligence. However, Fabro is comparing texts in which St. Thomas speaks about the primacy of the potencies with other texts in which St. Thomas speaks about the role of each potency in beatific vision. Even if these questions are related, they are different questions and Fabro's preferred terminology does not take anything from the absolute primacy of intelligence. For Aquinas, intelligence is superior to the will ab-

110 Cf. Ayala, *The Radical Difference*, 76 ff, 248 ff.

111 Cf. especially Sections I.3 and I.4 of this paper.

112 Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 26–2831.

solutely speaking, as potency, because of its higher object and because it relates to the perfection of human being considered in itself. *Secundum quid*, that is, insofar as we refer to objects superior to the human soul, the will is superior to intelligence because it is better loving *those specific objects* than knowing them. This is why St. Thomas employs the terminology *secundum quid*, that is, in a certain respect: because he is not considering the potencies in general, but with regard to a particular kind of objects, those superior to the human soul. In that case, at least in general (i.e., with the exception of beatific vision), the will is higher, because its act reaches the higher object in a more perfect way.

Now, speaking particularly of beatific vision, the terminology changes because Aquinas is discussing, not the superiority of each potency, but each potency's role in the beatific vision as the attainment of the highest end. This attainment is *substantially* an act of intelligence, because intelligence possesses God through vision and therefore it is intelligence the potency which attains. Now, because this attainment is the highest good of human being, the will rejoices in this possession, and this is complete, *quasi* accidentally perfective of beatific vision. Rejoicing comes and is fitting to vision as beauty comes and is fitting to youth. In this sense, "*formaliter*" has an meaning analogous to "accidentally", not in the sense of not important, but in the sense of not substantial. What makes us happy is not rejoicing, but possessing God. We do not possess God in order to rejoice, but rather we rejoice because we possess God: this is what makes us happy.

As is probably clear, this change of terminology keeps the primacy on the side of intelligence, since beatific vision is *per se* an act of intelligence and therefore intelligence has the primary role. Moreover, "*formaliter*" can be interpreted as accidental, as for example in the locution "formal abstraction": in fact, "formal abstraction" means the abstraction of an accidental form,

namely quantity.<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, precisely when this terminology is employed to emphasize the primacy of the will in the act of freedom, Fabro calls it “intellectualistic”!

Fabro writes: “True, Aquinas cuts short Aristotle’s uncertainty (regarding whether choice is an act of the intellect or of the will) and affirms that choice ‘is substantially not an act of reason but of will’ in the sense that ‘materially is an act of the will, and formally an act of reason.’”<sup>114</sup> And in footnote, Fabro makes the following remark: “We have already observed the intellectualistic character of this classification: *materialiter* for the will and *formaliter* for the reason.”<sup>115</sup> In my view, it is the opposite. *Materialiter* and *substantialiter* here mean the same (as substance is sometimes called “matter” by way of analogy) and *formaliter* has a meaning analogous to accidental. A choice is an act of will, *made of* will (and in this sense “materially”) which is shaped by reason, insofar as we choose something which is made available to us by reason. The concrete choice has the shape (and in that sense the “form”) of *what* we choose (it is a choice regarding *this object*, the abstract choice does not exist), but the choice belongs *per se* to the will, insofar as only the will chooses, “makes the move” towards the object.

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113 Cf. *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, c.: “... all accidents are related to the underlying substance as form to matter [...] So there are two abstractions of the intellect. One corresponds to the union of form and matter or accident and subject. This is the abstraction of form from sensible matter” [...cum omnia accidentia comparentur ad substantiam subiectam sicut forma ad materiam (...)] 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].

114 Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 41: “È vero che S. Tommaso taglia corto sull’incertezza di Aristotele se la scelta sia un atto dell’intelletto oppure della volontà ed afferma che la scelta «substantialiter non est actus rationis sed voluntatis» nel senso che «materialiter quidem est [actus] voluntatis, formaliter autem rationis».» Aquinas text, according to Fabro, is from ST I-II, q. 13, a. 1.

115 Fabro, 41: “Abbiamo già osservato il carattere intellettualistico di questa classificazione: *materialiter* per la volontà e *formaliter* per la ragione.”

Allow me to use an example which may help understanding this “*materialiter – formaliter*” terminology: the statue has the shape of Socrates (which is an accidental form) but is made of marble (which is the statue’s substance); now, even if the form makes the statue beautiful, the value of the statue depends principally on the material (insofar as a marble statue is more precious than a wooden one).<sup>116</sup> In any case, bad analogies apart, by saying that the choice belongs “formally” to the intellect, Aquinas is giving the primacy in the act of election to the will, because election belongs to the will “substantially”, it is *per se* an act of will. Moreover, if one understands “materially” as equal to “substantially” (as I suggest),<sup>117</sup> then what Aquinas is saying is not “intellectualistic”, at least not in the sense of giving any undue primacy to the intellect, but rather the opposite, insofar as freedom belongs to the will primarily and *per se*.

### III.2.F. Is Reason the Root of Freedom? In What Sense?

Fabro<sup>118</sup> is perplexed at some of St. Thomas’ affirmations regarding intelligence as the foundation of freedom: “freedom (*lit.* the whole concept of freedom) depends on the mode of

<sup>116</sup> The analogy could also be extended to the knowability of the choice. We know the statue by its shape even if its substance is marble or wood. We know a choice by its object, even if the choice itself is an act of will.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. also *In Met.* 8, lect. 1, 1687 (my italicized): “And although the composite is separable in an absolute sense, yet *some of the other things which are called substances* are separable in thought and some are not. For a form is separable in thought because it can be understood without understanding individuating sensible matter; but *matter* cannot be understood without understanding form, since it is apprehended only inasmuch as it is in potentiality to form” [Et licet compositum sit separabile simpliciter, tamen secundum rationem, *aliorum quae dicuntur substantiae*, quaedam sunt separabilia, et quaedam non. Forma enim est separabilis ratione, quia potest intelligi sine materia sensibili individuante; *materia vero* non potest intelligi sine intellectu formae, cum non apprehendatur nisi ut ens in potentia ad formam].

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 73.

cognition”<sup>119</sup> and, a little further, “from which it follows that the root of all freedom lies in reason.”<sup>120</sup> Fabro is perplexed because he thinks that these texts could be used to suggest that, for Aquinas, freedom resides substantially in the intellect, in the sense that it is the intellect who decides, and the will follows, as it were, “mechanically”. Fabro knows that this is impossible because St. Thomas in other places says the opposite. What, then, do these texts mean?

As I see it, those texts are simply saying that the will is free because human beings are rational. That is, an appetite follows every kind of cognition (sensible cognition included), but the kind of appetite which is free can follow only the kind of cognition which is rational. In this sense, to be free depends on being rational, as St. Thomas says in a parallel text from the *Summa*: “And thus, the very fact that human being is rational necessitates that he or she has free will.”<sup>121</sup>

The context of St. Thomas’ remarks in *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 2 may help us in understanding his “perplexing” texts. For Aquinas, free will cannot belong to animals because their practical judgment is determined by nature to judge in one way only at every given circumstance. Now, appetite follows cognition: the appetite of doing this or that action follows the judgment regarding this same action. Thus, regarding animals, because their judgment is completely determined, so also is their ap-

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119 *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 2, c.: “Tota ratio libertatis ex modo cognitionis dependet.”

120 *De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 2, c.: “Unde totius libertatis radix est in ratione constituta.”

121 ST I, q. 83, a. 1, c.: “Et pro tanto necesse est quod homo sit liberi arbitrii, ex hoc ipso quod rationalis est.” Cf. SCG III, 26: “But things possessed of intellectual knowledge also have an appetite proportionate to this knowledge, that is, will. So, the will is not peculiar to intellectual nature by virtue of being an appetite, but only in so far as it depends on intellect.” [Quae vero habent cognitionem intellectivam, et appetitum cognitioni proportionalem habent, scilicet voluntatem. Voluntas igitur, secundum quod est appetitus, non est proprium intellectualis naturae: sed solum secundum quod ab intellectu dependet.]

petite and, therefore, they do not have free will (which is an appetite not determined to this or that course of action).

Now, things are different with human beings. Our judgment regarding particular actions is not determined by nature and, therefore, our appetite of particular actions is not determined either but is free. Here, we must avoid confusions in order to understand St. Thomas and save Fabro's concerns. Firstly, in human beings, the judgment which is not determined by nature regards the *goodness* of this particular action. This is the judgment Aquinas is talking about because this is the judgment connected with appetite and operation, a practical judgment which could be expressed: "this action is good for me". Secondly, the reason this judgment is not determined by nature is that, because I can judge my own judgment (this is the reflective capacity of intelligence which Aquinas refers to in *De Veritate's* text), I can see that *my judgment regarding this particular action* is good for me or not. And thus, I can follow my last judgment if I deem it good or, if I don't, keep "judging" and thinking about this action until I find a judgment which I judge good for me. Why do I stop judging or keep judging? *Because I want to*, and this is the existential primacy of the will.

Thus, in *De Veritate*, reflection is brought into play not because it is an exclusive prerogative of the intellect, but because the intellect's reflection makes available the judgment (regarding this particular action) as itself an action to be judged and, therefore, as something not determined once and for all by nature nor by the intellect. This is Aquinas' point: we own our practical judgment because we can judge further the goodness of our judgment. How this practical judgment is eventually determined to this or that particular action is not Aquinas' point here but we can affirm, with Fabro and St. Thomas, that this determination belongs to the will. Now, of course, what belongs to the will is moving the intellect to keep judging or choosing a particular judgment, not judging; but the will is the *regina electionis*.

So, in *De Veritate*, reason is the root of freedom insofar as

reason's practical judgment is not determined to one thing as is the animal's judgment: reason can reflect upon its own judgment and judge it again. Reason can say not only, "this course of action is good for me" but also, "this judgment 'this course of action is good for me' is good for me" or "this judgment is not good for me" and keep thinking. St. Thomas is not saying that reason decides when to stop thinking or which judgment is last, but that reason is the condition of the possibility of freedom and, in that sense, the root of freedom. Reason, because of its reflective character, makes our own judgment available for the will to choose.

In the *Summa*, the argument is slightly different but it can help us seeing the same point, that is, that reason is not the potency of freedom but the condition of the possibility of freedom. Aquinas says that, because reason can go either way regarding contingent things, and particular actions are contingent, it follows that reason can go either way regarding particular actions. Therefore, the fact that human being's practical judgment is not determined to one thing is the reason human being is free.

Let us examine the argument a little closer. Why can reason go either way regarding contingent things? Why is reason not determined regarding contingent things? This is related to the fact that there is no science of the particular individual:<sup>122</sup> we can have science about plants in general, but not about this plant here and now. That is, we may make general and necessary judgments about this plant insofar as it is a plant but not insofar as it is *this* plant. My reason is obliged to affirm that this plant is a living being because it is a plant and this is true of all plants. But that this plant is here, for example, my reason is not obliged to affirm *absolutely* because this plant could be somewhere else or not be at all. Now, as long as the plant is here (with this condition), I must affirm (conditionally) that it is here, but this is not because it is absolutely necessary that the plant is here, but because it is necessary to affirm what it is as long as it

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122 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book XIII, chapter 10 (1086 b, 33).

is, which is a different universal principle.

In other words, contingent truths about beings are not necessarily affirmed insofar as reason does not see a necessary connection between the universal principles of being and those facts. Reason needs to check with the senses, reason needs to compare the proposition about a contingent truth with the reality perceived by the senses and thus verify or falsify this proposition. In a similar way, practical judgments about particular actions are not necessarily affirmed because reason does not see a necessary connection between the absolute good (happiness) and this particular action. In this case, reason compares this particular judgment with the subject itself as is, reason compares this judgment and/or this particular action with that which is good for this particular subject... and this is the moment of freedom. That judgment will be last which is good for *this* will, and this *coaptatio*, this conformity is what will “verify” the judgment: “this is *truly* good for me”. This is the judgment that the will “necessarily” follows: the judgment which this particular will “liked” because it was good for this will itself. The will stops intelligence from thinking and follows that practical judgment where the will *finds itself*, its own good, what it itself wants.

Why, then, is reason the root of freedom? Or, as St. Thomas puts it here in the *Summa*, why “the very fact that human being is rational necessitates that he or she has free will”?<sup>123</sup> Because reason is not determined to one thing regarding particular actions, but can go one way or the other. This is because no particular action is perceived as the absolute good, as the only good worth pursuing and, therefore, to judge this action good for the subject is not necessary. The intellect remains indetermined *and so* the subject is free to determine what is good for him or herself. This indetermination of the intellect is the condition of the possibility of the subject’s self-determination

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123 ST I, q. 83, a. 1, c.: “Et pro tanto necesse est quod homo sit liberi arbitrii, ex hoc ipso quod rationalis est.”

through the will. One can determine oneself freely (through the will) because one's own judgment is indetermined, that is, can go either way.

Again, the fact that we are not determined intellectually to affirm the goodness of any particular action allows human freedom to exist. This intellectual indetermination applies both to the goodness of a particular action and to the goodness of the judgment regarding this particular action, as the text from *De Veritate* suggests. Any judgment can be judged in its practical goodness because it is a particular action and, therefore, something contingent. Which judgment we will choose and when we will stop judging our own judgments depends on the first motor of all human potencies, the will.

My point was to show that Aquinas, in the aforementioned texts, is not taking away the primacy of the will regarding freedom. Why the will itself is indetermined regarding particular goods, the elements which may influence the will to choose one course of action over another one, the relationship between choosing a particular action and choosing the corresponding judgment about this same particular action, whether the subject itself enters as an element in the comparisons that reason performs in order to realize the practical judgment, what (specifically) are the elements of comparison which Aquinas refers to in *De Veritate*, etc. are questions worth pursuing but exceed my present scope.<sup>124</sup>

### III.3. Fabro's Main Arguments

#### III.3.A. Freedom as Participated Creativity

Fabro maintains that we are in the image of God most of all because of our freedom: freedom is a participated creativity, that is, a participation of God's perfection as *causa sui* par ex-

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<sup>124</sup> At the end of this paper, in *Appendix 2: Can We Choose the End, From a Thomistic Point of View?*, I offer a terminological clarification which may help maintaining Fabro's reading of Aquinas regarding the election of the existential end.

cellence.<sup>125</sup> A human being's will is able to put into existence something which does not need to exist: this particular action. Thus, as participated being's only explanation is the will of God, who created out of nothing and in absolute freedom, so also, in a similar way, this particular action's only explanation is the human being's freedom. Indeed, nothing necessitates this particular action in its particularity to exist: it could have been the opposite action or it could have not been at all.

Now, "creator" is said of God with regard to creatures, even if God's power to create is essential in Him. Similarly, freedom, as participated creativity, is related to a human being's perfection regarding other things and, therefore, is metaphysically and absolutely speaking posterior to a human being's perfection in him or herself, as Aquinas suggests and has been shown previously.

Clearly, there is no intellect without will and the image of God in us implies both: however, the intellect is superior to the will, absolutely speaking and in the sense explained before. Besides, why would participated creativity mean more than participated intelligence? Also, is not creation for the glory of God, as freedom for the glory of human being?

John Damascene's text, to which Fabro recurs, appears precisely in the introduction to the *Summa's* moral treatise. With this text, Aquinas is not suggesting that the image of God is mainly or only human freedom (St. John Damascene's text refers to the intellectual aspect first), but that a human being's moral aspect is the image of God in man. The intellectual aspect of God's image in human beings has already been treated in the first part of the *Summa*.

Again, this is not to take away anything from freedom regarding human dignity. However, if "the truth shall set you free" (cf. *John* 8:32), then misunderstanding human being does not foster human dignity. It is pointless to overemphasize the will against the intelligence and even dangerous, because we

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 70, 73.

risk not directing our freedom on the right path. A good life is made up of good decisions but, how will those decisions be if we are not pointed in the right direction?

The greatest dignity of a human being is that he or she can be like God, by the intellectual possession of God. Taking full possession of God's Self (in the beatific vision)<sup>126</sup> is better than taking a limited part in His creativity (by the fact that we are free). Now, the greatness of human dignity lies also in the fact that we achieve this divine end *by ourselves*, that is, not compelled by necessity but by acts of freedom. Clearly, both the beatific vision and the acts of freedom leading to this vision are supported by grace.

Could we say that, at least from a natural point of view, a human being is more Godlike by being free than by being intelligent? By being free, a human being is able to move him or herself to the final end, and by being intelligent this same person is able to possess his or her final end. By being free we can create our own contingent and particular decisions, by being intelligent we can possess the perfection of things in a universal way. The object of our creation (*i.e.*, decisions) is always human and, as such, always has a human level of perfection; the object of our understanding, even when in itself is sometimes lower than a human (for example, when we know material things), always resembles the divine, insofar as our ideas are abstract representations of those perfections. Moreover, decisions are always human but they can be bad sometimes. Ideas are not good or bad and, when they are false, they are not "true" ideas. Thus, it seems to me that even from a natural point of view human dignity resides more in the intellect than in the will.

However, when we say that human dignity resides in freedom, we emphasize that a human being is the only being in nature capable of achieving its final end by itself, that is, by mov-

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<sup>126</sup> "Taking full possession of God's self" should be understood correctly. Please see *Appendix 1: On the Intellect's Limitation regarding Beatific Vision*, at the end of this paper.

ing itself towards the final end. We defend this human dignity from those who want to impose on human beings their own will, by diminishing human being to an object of control and taking away from a human being the possibility of discovering his or her true end and moving freely and responsibly towards it. The dignity of freedom is a great dignity, but it is not opposed to the dignity coming from being intelligent. Even more, the dignity of freedom is rooted in being intelligent and is meant to help us in the achievement of wisdom. Human beings are free not in order to satisfy their lowest desires but in order to become like God. The fact that human beings can misuse their freedom is the risk and the price of God's giving human beings the possibility of becoming true heroes by the right use of their freedom.

### **III.3.B. Static vs. Dynamic, Formal vs. Real**

Fabro does not seem to be able to reconcile the superiority of the will as first motor of the human being's spiritual dynamic and the intellect's absolute superiority. For him, this is "to prefer the formal relationship [with things] to the real relationship and to prefer the static situation to the dynamic situation."<sup>127</sup> These statements are related to some misunderstandings of the Thomistic text, but these exegetical misunderstandings are simply the context of Fabro's doctrine which, here, is in disagreement with St. Thomas. True, Fabro emphasizes that his principles are Thomistic: however, Fabro's conclusion is not Thomistic (insofar as he disagrees with St. Thomas on this point) because Fabro does not see the connection between those Thomistic principles and their conclusions. I have tried to show the plausibility of St. Thomas' principles and conclusions in my previous interpretation of Aquinas' text. Let me now address more in particular Fabro's concerns.

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<sup>127</sup> Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 29: "Il ridurre pertanto la mozione della volontà ad un '...movere per modum agentis' di grado inferiore a quella dell'intelletto è un preferire il rapporto formale a quello reale, la situazione statica a quella dinamica [...]."

For Fabro, preferring a formal relationship with things to a real relationship with things is problematic.<sup>128</sup> This is related to Fabro's considering knowing a formal relationship with things, that is, a relationship to the intentional presence of something and not to the real thing in itself. Now, because Fabro considers this intentional presence inferior to the reality of things in themselves, which is the object of the will, one can understand his preferring the will to the intellect. However, I suggest that Fabro's understanding of intentional presence is misleading: intentional presence is also a relationship with the thing itself, at least in Thomistic epistemology, as I have pointed out before.

In fact, the will tends towards the real because the object of the intellect is real: this is not different from saying that the will tends towards the object of the intellect (in that sense, nothing is loved unless it is known). The will does not tend to anything real except through the intellect's grasp of it. We may even know that the thing itself is more than what we know about it, but we *know* this precisely through the intellect; and we still tend to the thing itself as we know it. We cannot desire anything which we don't know in the thing itself: or, better said, we can desire to know *fully* the thing which we already know, realizing that we still do not know something of it, or even the best of it. When we somehow desire something which we don't know in the thing itself, this is because we already know the thing itself and also know that our knowledge of it is limited. We know *that* the thing itself has more to offer, but we do not know that aspect yet: we know the existence of that aspect, but not its essence. This is why we can desire that aspect without knowing it.

For Fabro, "preferring the static situation to the dynamic one"<sup>129</sup> is also problematic. His point, I suggest, has to do with the fact that 1) the perfection of a human being is achieved by a

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128 Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 29.

129 Fabro, 29

certain dynamism towards the other, particularly God himself, and 2) knowledge, considered here as static possession of that which is to be achieved, is only the beginning of a human being's perfection (nobody is good for simply knowing what is to be done, but rather for doing it). Now, what St. Thomas is doing when he establishes the absolute primacy of intelligence over the will is analyzing *metaphysically* the two potencies *in themselves*. Of course, St. Thomas prefers here the static situation to the dynamic one, because things are considered in themselves as they are ("static" situation) and are considered with regard to others insofar as they move towards them ("dynamic" situation). "To be" as possessing perfection is absolutely more perfect than to move towards something else... unless that something else is more perfect than you! This is why, the potency as such which allows us to "be" more, by possessing in ourselves, intentionally, the perfection of other things, is absolutely more perfect than the potency by which we relate to other things. Now, things are differently, as St. Thomas has always acknowledged, when we consider the objects of each potency in particular, but this is not what St. Thomas is doing when he is establishing the absolute metaphysical priority of the intellect.

Still, if only the will can achieve God himself, should this not be sufficient cause to consider the will absolutely the greatest potency? It seems that the potency which, in itself and as potency, is able to achieve the greatest object is absolutely speaking the greatest potency.<sup>130</sup> However, several objections could be raised here. First, the will does not achieve, but either desires

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130 Cf. Fabro, 27–28: "What we cannot understand is why the beatifying union of the created spirit with God must be first of all that union which takes place in the objective sphere of the intellect and not rather the one belonging to the tendential subjective sphere in which the *desiderium* is fulfilled in the *delectatio* and then sublimated in the supreme assimilation of *amor*..." [Quel che non si riesce a capire è perché l'unione beatificante dello spirito creato con Dio debba essere anzitutto quella che si compie nella sfera oggettiva dell'intelletto e non piuttosto quella della sfera soggettiva tendenziale nella quale il *desiderium* si compie nella *delectatio* e poi si sublima nell'assimilazione suprema dell'*amor*...]

achievement or rejoices in it.<sup>131</sup> Second, intelligence is able, by grace, to obtain the greatest good. Third, the will neither desires nor attains except what intelligence has grasped first. Fourth, from a natural point of view, the will's desire for the greatest object is vain: a vain desire cannot be the reason for the will's absolute primacy.<sup>132</sup> I think that my previous reflections have addressed or will address further these doctrinal points.

Two clarifications of the Thomistic text may help to resolve Fabro's concerns in pages 28-29. Firstly, Fabro is perplexed at Aquinas' statement that the intellect moves the will as end.<sup>133</sup> However, for Aquinas, the term "moving" is analogous and does not always mean efficient movement and, also, intelligence moves as end but does not determine the end: the determination of the end (that is, the determination of the object of election) is an absolute prerogative of the will.

Secondly, Fabro considers it a metaphor to say that the intellect moves by presenting the object. Now, if by metaphor we understand analogy, then certainly for Aquinas there is such a thing as an agent object which is "agent" in an analogous sense.<sup>134</sup> For Aquinas, movement and agency do not always mean efficient agency. Aquinas does not confuse the object's agency with the efficient mover's agency and considers (with Fabro!) the will as the absolutely first efficient mover and, therefore, freedom as an act belonging substantially (which means principally and essentially) to the will. Now, if the will has this primacy in the act of freedom, then why does the will not have the absolute primacy? The reason is, I suggest, that

<sup>131</sup> Cf. SCG III, 26 (see relevant text in Section II.4.B of this paper); *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST I-II, page 30, par. IV (see relevant text in Section II.7.B of this paper).

<sup>132</sup> Cajetan points out that this natural love of God is not the act of a virtue. Cf. *Commentaria Cardinalis Caietani* in ST II-II, page 170, par. II (see relevant text on Section II.8 of this paper)

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 28–29. Fabro, *Riflessioni*, 28–29.

<sup>134</sup> On the terminology "agent object", cf. Ayala, *The Radical Difference*, 341–349, available online at <https://philpapers.org/rec/AYATRD> (accessed February 15, 2023).

for St. Thomas what is *absolute* is what belongs to something *in itself*, and this kind of perfection is the prerogative of the intellect. The will makes us perfect regarding other things and this, in general, makes us *relatively* perfect, not absolutely. Again, things are differently when the object with which we are related is more perfect than us, and this has always been acknowledged by St. Thomas.

### III.3.C. Being simply good is being morally good

One of the greatest stumbling blocks in understanding the intellect's absolute primacy is the fact that a human being is perfect when he or she is morally good, that is, because of a virtuous will and not because he or she is wiser or more learned.<sup>135</sup> Now, we have already mentioned two things: 1) that moral goodness is not opposed to intellectual perfection but rather presupposes a certain intellectual perfection and 2) that moral goodness implies the desire of knowing what makes for happiness and of contemplating God as ultimate happiness. My focus now will be different.

Moral perfection is not the same as happiness. Happiness implies moral perfection (the peaceful contemplation of the highest truth is not possible without virtue) but adds something to it. Happiness is the act of the highest potency towards the highest object: the contemplation of God. Moral perfection is the perfection of all virtues orienting us rightly towards the final end, which is this contemplation. Moral perfection is the closest we get in this life to the achievement of the final end. In the other life we achieve this final end by an act of intelligence. The achievement of the final end does not take away moral perfection but adds something to it.

Thus, happiness is more perfect than moral perfection. Moral perfection is human perfection towards the end; happiness is the achievement of the end. Moral perfection consists in

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 26 (see relevant text in Section III.2.B of this paper).

virtue, in the power of acting in the right way towards the end; whereas happiness implies virtue and consists in an act regarding this end. Therefore, is it better to be learned or to be good? It is better to be good than to be only learned. Is it better to be happy or to be morally good? There is no true happiness without moral goodness. Is it better to be in Heaven or to be walking towards Heaven? Absolutely speaking, there is no question about this, although God may want some of us still here for a while.

When we say that the intelligence is the highest potency, we refer to the fact that only the intelligence can achieve the highest good. When we say that moral perfection is the highest perfection, we refer to the fact that nobody can achieve happiness without a good will. Finally, when we say that happiness is better than moral perfection, we refer to the fact that, absolutely speaking, it is better the condition of one who has achieved the end than the condition of another who is still walking towards it. The blessed is perfect as having achieved the end, the morally good is perfect in his disposition towards the end.

The intellect is more perfect than the will because it has the potential, only by grace, to possess God, the highest good. The will, only by grace, has the potential to desire God, tend towards God and (in heaven) rejoice in its possession, but not the potential to possess God. The will, from a natural point of view, can love God (or, better said, desire to know God in himself, rejoice in the knowledge of his attributes, etc.) but this love is not a virtue. The intellect, from a natural point of view, can know God *as cause* (not in himself) by the virtue of wisdom. In general, the love of that which is greater than us is more perfect than its knowledge: knowledge diminishes the one greater than us. The reason for this diminishing in knowledge is that the species by which we know, being proportionate to our intellect, is an imperfect representation of that which is greater than us. This will be different in beatific vision, where the species by which we know will be God's essence itself and not an imperfect repre-

sentation of God. In Heaven and by grace, our intellect will be made “proportionate” to God himself, which is what St. John intended to say, that “We will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is” (1 Jn 3:2).

Thus, if we include beatific vision in our considerations, the potency which makes us more God-like is the intellect: the intellect allows us to possess God Himself in ourselves. If we consider the intellect from a purely natural point of view, it is still the intellect which allows us to resemble God by the possession of the perfection of all things in knowledge. The possession of things through understanding is always God-like, because it is through ideas; whereas the love of things makes us sometimes God-like, as when we love that which is superior to us, and other times diminishes us, as when we love disorderedly those things which are inferior to us. This is why, for Aquinas, the will is better when it comes to objects greater than ourselves but, absolutely speaking, the intellect is better, because its object is more God-like and its act makes us always God-like. And eventually, because the perfection of human beings is found in the intellectual possession of a being higher than ourselves, the most important for a human being is to have a good will, which would orient him or her towards the happy attainment of the final end. This good will either implies knowledge and the desire to know more, or it is not a good will at all.

### CONCLUSION

I am not comfortable with taking away from Thomism its proper and specific “intellectualism.” I would find such subtraction dangerous, because this intellectualism is one of Thomistic doctrine’s hallmarks and belongs to its essence. I completely agree with demolishing those intellectualisms responsible for presenting a lifeless Thomism and for portraying freedom as a matter of knowing or not knowing. However, the absolute primacy of the intellect has nothing to do with a lifeless Thomism, when that primacy is properly understood. I hope to have shown a path towards a coherent integration of

the Thomistic doctrine of freedom with the absolute primacy of the intellect.

Moreover, I worry that an inordinate emphasis on the will could bring incautious Thomists to make the same mistakes as Modern Philosophers, such as resolving “knowing into willing and knowledge into acting” or grounding “the activity of the spirit as freedom.”<sup>136</sup> This is certainly not Fabro’s problem: Fabro saw better than anyone, as far as I can tell, the radical distinction between Modern Philosophy’s foundation of being on consciousness and the Thomistic foundation of consciousness on being. In my view, however, the clear response to Modern Philosophy requires accurate notions of knowing, intentional presence and “intelligible”, notions I find missing in Fabro’s writings. I cannot boast a thorough knowledge of Fabro’s writings and doctrine, but I can comment on what I have seen so far. If I have missed something, I will be happy to read about that from better pens than the one I hold.

### **AFTERTHOUGHTS: NATURAL LOVE AND CHARITY IN LOVING SUPERIOR BEINGS**

The best way to possess inferior things is to know them.

The only way to possess superior things is to know them.

Loving superior things is better than knowing them *provided that we can love them in themselves*. This is so in this life and only by charity (not by natural love). We cannot love God in Himself from a natural point of view, because we do not even know Him in Himself: God in Himself is not accessible to our finite powers.

Loving superior things is better than knowing them *when our knowledge is limited or limiting*. This is what happens by charity in this life.

Should not this principle be understood also regarding natural love of God? That is, is not the natural love of God also superior to our limited knowledge of Him?

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<sup>136</sup> Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà*, 17.

In order to respond, a further question may be helpful here: Can someone *love* a place they have never seen or one they have never heard of? No. They may want to see the place, they may wish to hear about it, but they cannot love what they do not know. Now, given that, from a natural point of view, we do not know God directly in Himself but we know His true attributes by deducing them from His effects, we cannot, properly speaking and from a natural point of view, love God. We can certainly wish to see Him in Himself, we can certainly love contemplating the little we know about Him but, “loving” Him? What would that “love” mean?

Loving superior things, from a natural point of view, can only mean the desire to know them in themselves. Simply being happy that they exist or for their perfection... doesn't seem to be this love. The tendency towards superior substances can only be a tendency for communion and, again, the only possible communion is by knowledge.

Unless the love of superior things means the desire to contemplate them philosophically, that is, the desire to reflect about them and consider what we have discovered about them through rational discourse. In this case, what we desire is, again, an act of knowledge.

Even so, is it not better extending ourselves towards superior things than simply enclosing them in our little minds? Is it not the act of loving superior substances more perfect than the act of knowing them, even from a natural point of view?

It could be argued that St. Thomas' principle (*i.e.*, regarding superior things, love is better than knowledge) does not refer to an alleged natural love of superior substances but refers always to charity. I am thinking, for example, in ST I, q. 82, a. 3 ad 3 and In III Sent., d. 27, a. 4 ad 8, ad 9 and ad 10. In all these responses, St. Thomas' principle is used in response to the objection that charity is better than knowledge.

Or, if one wished to say that Aquinas' principle refers also to natural love, it could be argued that loving superior things is more perfect *in itself* but not with regards to the subject who

does it: that is, loving superior things is more *perfect* but not more *perfective* for the subject who loves. The reasons could be as follows. This natural love regarding superior things is more perfect in itself because the object of this act is more perfect. This love, however, is not more perfective for the subject because, with regard to the subject, this act is disproportionate and vain.

Thus, if we abstract the act from the subject, we could say that the better the object, the better the act. However, given that an act always belongs to a subject, the concrete act of loving that which is superior may not always be more perfective of the subject: this will depend on the subject's condition regarding the act.

#### **APPENDIX 1: ON THE INTELLECT'S LIMITATION REGARDING BEATIFIC VISION**

“Taking full possession of God's self” should be understood correctly: in the beatific vision, God in His infinite fullness is possessed as the perfective species of our intellect (as *species impressa*) but the act of the intellect is still limited, that is, finite. The beatific vision is a limited possession of the Unlimited Itself. This is why, according to St. Thomas, we possess the essence of God “*tota*” (“the whole”), that is, in its own fullness, but not “*totaliter*” (“totally”): in other words, the way we possess this fullness is not proportionate to the way this same fullness is possessed by God. The subjective act of possession is limited but not the object possessed. I would explain this in the following way, following St. Thomas: in the beatific vision, the essence of God is united really and metaphysically to our intellect, as in this life the abstracted species of things are united to our intellect. In this sense, God will become the subjective perfection of our own intellect, He Himself will actualize our intellect as object. However, the act of our intellect towards God will not be able to completely “envelop” God, or exhaust Him. This is why, even if we do not subjectively possess God as much as God possesses Himself, we still possess the whole God, with-

out limitations and, therefore, it cannot be said that knowledge limits the object in the beatific vision. Moreover, it cannot be said that the will has an advantage over the intellect in the beatific vision for three reasons. First, rejoicing also will be limited and by degrees, that is, each blessed will rejoice according to his or her own degree of glory and not as much as God rejoices in Himself. In other words, the will also will love God in Himself but not as God loves Himself. Second, this degree of rejoicing will depend on the degree of vision, which will in turn depend on the degree of charity at the moment of death. Third, even if we wanted to say that the will arrives at “the most”, still, the will arrives without possessing; whereas intelligence possesses in a limited way but without limiting that which is possessed. Other reasons have been treated before. Last but not least, this not possessing God as much as God possesses Himself will not take anything away from happiness: we cannot enjoy God unless we exist, and we cannot exist unless we are limited. As limited beings, we can see only with our own limited operation the unlimited God. However, God will burst our intellects open and support them by His grace in order to make us able to see Him in Himself and not be destroyed, but rather enjoy His vision. There will be no more veils between human being and God: we will be face to face with Him.

#### **APPENDIX 2: CAN WE CHOOSE THE END, FROM A THOMISTIC POINT OF VIEW?**

The following terminological clarification may help confirming Fabro’s reading of Aquinas regarding the election of the existential end and showing the coherence between this point and Aquinas’ denying that the end is a matter of election. Can we choose the end, from a Thomistic point of view? The notion of end is analogous. The end is not a matter of election in any election provided we understand the terms. Every election is made for the sake of an end. The election of the existential end is made for the sake of the common end. The election of the means is made for the sake of the existential end or some other

end we have chosen. In this way, it is true and Thomistic both that we can choose the end (as the concrete existential end) and that the end, in every particular election, is not the matter of the election (what we choose) but that for the sake of which the election is made. This is one of the reasons for which we should not translate Aquinas' "*ea quae sunt ad finem*" ("that which is for the sake of the end") as "means": Aquinas' phrase does not apply only to means but also to the existential end as "that which is for the sake of" happiness.

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