

Rethinking Intentionality, Person and the Essence

Aquinas, Scotus, Stein

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Intentionality as Vital Striving? Edith Stein and Thomas Aquinas

Therese Scarpelli Cory

1 Introduction

Since Brentano, the search for paths backward from phenomenology to medieval Scholasticism, via the key concept of “intentionality,” has been irresistible. Brentano famously wrote:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing); or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.¹

Brentano here connects his notion of intentionality with “the Scholastic” notion of “intentional inexistence,” or *esse intentionale*. But those of us who specialize in 13th- and 14th-century European thought know that there is no such thing as “what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages thought” (*en masse*) about anything—any more than there is such a thing as “what phenomenologists think” (*en masse*) about anything. To investigate how Scholastic thought might have informed developments within phenomenology, one can only ask whether there are alignments between *a* Scholastic concept of intentionality and *a* 20th-century phenomenological account.

1 Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Linda L. McAlister. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 88.

Much important work has already been done to trace the medieval history of intentionality,² as well as to place medieval Latin and Islamic approaches to intentionality into conversation with phenomenological approaches.³ The present chapter operates in the latter vein of scholarship, juxtaposing two historically distant notions which (I hope to show) can usefully illuminate each other: namely, the phenomenologist Edith Stein's notion of the "living I" in her *Finite and Eternal Being* (composed in the late 1930s), and the Scholastic thinker Thomas Aquinas's notion of intellect as a kind of life. Placed in conversation with each other, these two suggest an intriguingly distinctive, non-standard approach to intentionality in terms of *vital striving*—*what I will call a "vital" notion of intentionality, as opposed to a more widespread "semantic" notion.*⁴

This manner of juxtaposing two thinkers may seem slightly unorthodox as an offering from a historian of medieval philosophy. Of course, Edith Stein's engagement with Neo-Scholastic philosophy and with the thought of Thomas Aquinas has been well documented.⁵ In particular, her masterpiece *Finite and*

2 To mention only a few notable collections: Dominik Perler (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*. Leiden: Brill, 2001; the special issue edited by Fabrizio Amerini, *Quaestio 10* (2010), dedicated to "Later Medieval Theories of Intentionality"; Gyula Klima (ed.), *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015; and monographs such as Dominik Perler, *Theorien der Intentionalität im Mittelalter*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004; Martin Klein, *Philosophie des Geistes im Spätmittelalter: Intellekt, Materie und Intentionalität bei Johannes Buridan*. Leiden: Brill, 2019; Georg Barthimäus Koridze, *Die thomistische Theorie der Intentionalität*. Neunkirchen-Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019; Sümeyye Parıldar, *Intentionality in Mulla Sadra*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2020.

3 As in Arno Anzenbacher, *Die Intentionalität bei Thomas von Aquin und Edmund Husserl*. Wien: Oldenbourg, 1972; and more recently, the special issue of *Phänomenologische Forschungen* 2 (2018), edited by Jörn Müller and Michela Summa, dedicated to "Modes of Intentionality: Phenomenological and Medieval Perspectives."

4 In other words, on this account, the intentionality of thoughts and perceptions ends up looking quite a bit like practical intentionality in Aquinas, on which see Jörn Müller, "A Medieval View of Practical Intentionality: Intentio in Aquinas's Psychology of Action," *Phänomenologische Forschungen* 2 (2018), pp. 155–175.

5 The timing and manner of Stein's access to Aquinas's writings and those of various Neo-Scholastics, as well as her views on Neo-Scholasticism in relation to phenomenology, are discussed extensively in the introduction ("Einleitung") by Speer and Tommasi, to Edith Stein, *Übersetzung: Des hl. Thomas von Aquino Untersuchungen über die Wahrheit, "Quaestiones disputatae de veritate,"* eds. Andreas Speer and Francesco Valerio Tommasi. Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2008, pp. XI–LXXVI. See also Peter Volek (ed.), *Husserl und Thomas von Aquin bei Edith Stein*. Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2016. Stein herself famously writes a imagined dialog between Aquinas and Husserl, which was then modified into a comparative study, in Edith Stein, "Husserls Phänomenologie und die Philosophie des hl. Thomas

Eternal Being, dating to the late 1930s, develops a project begun in her “habilitation” thesis, *Potency and Act*, of examining “the founding principles of the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas from a phenomenological perspective.”⁶ Nevertheless, I do not claim to undertake any kind of historical sourcework in this study, i.e., showing that Stein got this or that idea from Aquinas directly or through some intermediary. Rather, I am interested solely in bringing to light a striking big-picture conceptual alignment in Stein’s and Aquinas’s thought: namely a notion of *mental life as a vital striving*. This notion, I hope to show, usefully opens up the possibility for recasting intentionality in teleological terms, as a striving for some good—but it also has implications for the history of intentionality, by opening up new interpretive possibilities.

In what follows, I will first identify what I call a “semantic approach” to intentionality, which was circulating in late 19th and early 20th century Neo-Scholasticism. (The Neo-Scholastic movement is significant as the reference point for Brentano’s remarks about the “Scholastic” notion of intentional inexistence, and as a major influence within Stein’s own intellectual milieu.)⁷ This “semantic approach” is thoroughly intertwined with a major Neo-Scholastic concern: namely, the mind’s ability to access the “thing as it is in itself.”

Second, I point out that although this Neo-Scholastic approach finds some echoes in Edith Stein’s *Finite and Eternal Being*, her work also exemplifies another strain of thought, expressed in some intriguing formulations about the living I and the striving of thought—suggesting what I call a “vital approach” to intentionality. Third, I highlight similar language of mental vitality and striving also in Thomas Aquinas’s discussions of intentionality.

In the last section, I argue that reading Stein and Aquinas in light of each other opens up a *new way of thinking about intentionality* in terms of vitality, which can either complement, or even substitute for, a “semantic” notion of intentionality. I will conclude with some schematic remarks about the history of these two notions of intentionality, noting that Stein is perhaps closer to an authentic recovery of Aquinas’s own perspective on the mental (and thus closer to classical Neoplatonic thinking), than to the accounts of “intentional inexistence” of the Neo-Scholastics of her own age, and of earlier ages.

von Aquino. Versuch einer Gegenüberstellung,” in Festschrift. Edmund Husserl zum 70. Geburtstag Gewidmet, special issue of *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* (1929), pp. 315–338.

6 See the “Foreword to the ICS Edition,” in Edith Stein, *Finite and Eternal Being* (hereafter: FEB), trans. Kurt F. Reinhardt, Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002, pp. xiv–xv.

7 See Speer and Tommasi, “Einleitung,” pp. XIX–XXIII.

2 Neo-Scholasticism and Intentionality

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, Neo-Scholastic discourse on the “mental” has tended to be pervaded by amazement at the mind’s ability to trespass upon its own metaphysical boundaries. The thought goes like this: A tree is just a tree. It does not encompass anything other than itself. In contrast, I am myself, *and also* I can encompass what is other than myself, through my mind. Although I am not a tree, I can see, touch, and think about trees. The tree is not just physically present to me, nearby, or in contact with my body, but also *mentally present*—in some way, my mind encompasses it.

In short, the mind is itself—but remarkably, it can be so much more than itself, without ever ceasing to be what it is. The mental “superpower,” so it seems, is the ability to “reach out” beyond itself, to embrace what is other than itself.⁸ Thus in 1919, Léon Noël writes:

Knowledge of an external thing is a taking hold of the other insofar as it is other; it consists essentially in escaping the spatial borders of our being, in living—if not entirely, at least in one aspect of our life—beyond these borders. In Aristotelian metaphysical terms, it consists in receiving, in the subject that we are, on the side of the perfection which is ours, the formal perfection of a distinct and different being.⁹

Again, in 1937, we find Jacques Maritain in *The Degrees of Knowledge* expressing the same idea as follows:

Another kind of existence must, then, be admitted; an existence according to which the known will be in the knower and the knower will be the

⁸ Two sorts of formulations in Aquinas seem to tend in this direction, particularly when taken in conjunction: (1) the claim that “the intellect in act is the thing understood in act” (intellectus in actu est intellectum in actu SCG 2.74 n. 2; ST I, q. 85 a. 2 ad 1; cf. also SCG 1.51 n. 6; ST I, q. 14 a. 2 co, where intellectum is replaced by intelligibile); (2) the language of a special “intentional” or “spiritual” mode of existence, that things cognized have in the cognizer (cf. Sent., lib. 1 d. 30 q. 1 a. 3 ad 3; In De an., lib. 2 l. 24 n. 3; ST I, q. 56 a. 2, ad 3).

⁹ My translation. The French is: “La connaissance d’une chose extérieure, c’est la saisie de l’autre en tant que autre; elle consiste essentiellement à échapper aux frontières spatiales de notre être, à vivre, sinon entièrement, du moins par un côté de notre vie, hors de ces frontières. En termes de métaphysique aristotélicienne, elle consiste à recevoir, dans le sujet que nous sommes, à côté de la perfection qui est la nôtre, la perfection formelle d’un être distinct et différent”; Léon Noël, “Le thomisme et le point de vue critique,” *Revue de philosophie* 16 (1919), pp. 34–51, here p. 49. For a recent take on Noël, see Gaven Kerr, “The Immediate Realism of Léon Noël,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (2018), pp. 175–89.

known, an entirely tendential and immaterial existence, whose office is not to posit a thing outside nothingness for itself and as a subject, but, on the contrary, for another thing and as a relation... In virtue of that existence, the thing exists in the soul with an existence other than its own existence, and the soul is or becomes the thing with an existence other than its own existence.¹⁰

Similarly, Bernard Lonergan writes that intentional being (*esse intentionale*) has, as its peculiar superpower, that it enables intellect to “be the others as others.”¹¹

The basic Neo-Scholastic idea is that the mind has the special ability to trespass its own ontological boundaries to encompass what it is not. I would suggest that this is one of the Neo-Scholastic ways of expressing the view that intentionality is the mark of the mental. Compare Brentano's reference, in the passage cited at the beginning, to “intentional in-existence,” such that “every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself.” Just as Noël asserted that knowing “consists essentially” in the mind's living beyond its own boundaries, Brentano holds that “including objects” is definitive of mental phenomena as such, not just something the mind happens to do sometimes. Thus Brentano insists that every “mental phenomenon” is a presentation or appearing, and that presentations are always *of something*.¹² There is no appearing, unless something appears. From here, of course, it is a short step to the view that *what appears* is always by definition *what is other than the subject* (the mind is uniquely able to encompass *what it is not*). (That notion, incidentally, raises all sorts of accompanying hurdles to the possibility of *self-awareness*. Hence the sometimes-repeated insistence among Thomistic authors that what appears as directly “objectified” to the human mind must always be some *material other*.¹³ That claim, related to phenomenological concerns about

10 Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995, p. 114.

11 Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea*. London, Darton: Longman & Todd, 1967, p. 162.

12 See Brentano, *Psychology*, 80–85.

13 See Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, “The ‘I’ and Aquinas,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 51 (1977), pp. 47–54, notably p. 50: “To be conscious is to be conscious of another. Consciousness, in Thomistic terms, is always relation and the term of the relation is the other”; and François Xavier Putallaz, *Le sens de la réflexion*. Paris: Vrin, 1991, p. 111: “En réalité, dans tout acte de connaissance, il n’y a pas d’objet autre que la chose extra-mentale; le ‘soi’ n’est pas objet, il n’est pas conçu comme autrui ...”. See also pp. 166–167.

objectifying the self, often gave rise, especially earlier in the 20th century, to a further claim that the human mind cognizes itself only ever indirectly, by reasoning from effect to cause.)¹⁴

So if the special talent of mental activity is to encompass the other, how exactly does this “encompassing” happen? The Neo-Scholastic answer is to introduce the notion of a mental sign. Signs, after all, seem to encompass what they are not. For instance, “T-R-E-E” is not a *mere* arrangement of marks on a page, but an arrangement that carries a reality beyond the marks themselves, something other than they are—a tree.

Similarly, the mind encompasses what it is not *by means of mental items that are signs*: whether we call them cognitions or concepts or species or mental representations or mental phenomena. These items are something in and of itself, i.e., a mental form, a quality, an action. But they are not *mere* forms, qualities, or actions—they have content or meaning. Or in other words, what makes them *mental* forms, qualities, or actions, is that they encompass something other, as their content.

This approach is exemplified in Gredt, the author of a Neo-Scholastic manual from the 1930s called *Elementa philosophicae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*, which Stein cites quite often throughout her *Finite and Eternal Being*. Concerning concepts, Gredt writes:

A sign is that which represents something other than itself to a cognitive power, as though being the thing's deputy (*vices gerens*). From which the following is clear: (a) The sign is always distinct from the signified thing; (b) The sign is measured by the signified thing and depends on it as the less principal depends on the more principal. For that reason, the sign taken formally (or its signification) consists in a relation *secundum esse* to the signified thing.¹⁵

Operative here is a straightforwardly semantic notion of intentionality. The relationship of the mind and what it cognizes is construed in semantic terms: The mind is informed by some item that, like a word or sign, harbors something else as its “content”—for instance, a tree or a star. The sign-like entity in the mind therefore serves as a “vehicle” whereby trees and stars appear to me, enabling the mind to embrace what is otherwise outside its reach.

14 See the polemic between Roland-Gosselin and Romeyer together with Gardeil, discussed in my “Is Anything in the Intellect that was not First in Sense? Empiricism and Knowledge of the Incorporeal in Aquinas,” *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy* 5 (2018), pp. 116–17.

15 Joseph Gredt, *Elementa philosophicae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*, vol. 1, *Logica, Philosophia naturalis*. Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 1937, p. 11, no. 9, my translation.

Now in Gredt's manual, the importance of the Neo-Scholastic theory of concepts is seen from the fact that this discussion appears in the opening pages of the manual, indeed as the first topic under consideration. Why are concepts so important?

One reason is that the Neo-Scholastic project conceives its primary opponent to be Kant and his critical philosophy. The worry was schematized (and continues to be schematized today) as a choice between "epistemological realism vs. representationalism." Representationalism, also equated with "idealism" and "subjectivism," is characterized as the view that the mind grasps only its internal impressions, while the thing in itself—the Kantian *noumenon*—remains permanently inaccessible. In defiance of this view, Aquinas is supposed to have held that (much more recently in the words of Sanguineti) the mind "arrives at real being *as it is in itself*."¹⁶

The problem comes to a head, then, in the theory of concepts. Are concepts the objects of our thought, or are they vehicles whereby we encounter the world directly? A semantic notion of intentionality, properly constructed, promises a resolution that favors realism. Concepts are signs, and signs, properly construed, encompass the things they signified, allowing the mind to surpass its own ontological boundaries to reach out into the world. Thus when I look out into my garden, what appears to me is not an appearance of the garden, but *the garden as it is in itself*. In this respect, one must especially note the sophisticated theory of the concept as "formal sign," as it came to be called, which was developed by the 17th-century commentator John of St. Thomas, carried forward in Peifer's influential study, *The Concept in Thomism*, and more recently promoted by John Deely and William Norris Clarke.¹⁷

3 Edith Stein: "The I is alive, and its life is its being"

3.1 *Vitality of the I*

The relationship between "knowledge and its object" is also a prominent theme in Edith Stein's project of drawing together Thomistic and phenomenological

16 Cf. Juan José Sanguineti, "La especie cognitiva," *Tópicos: Revista de Filosofía* 40 (2011), pp. 63–104, see p. 67: "llegar al ser real tal cual es."

17 See, e.g., John F. Peifer, *The Concept in Thomism*. New York: Bookman Associates, 1952; John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001; William Norris Clarke, "Integration of Thomistic Intentionality and Contemporary Semiotics," *Semiotica* 178 (2010), pp. 11–23.

insights.¹⁸ To understand how she considers this relationship, I want to take an unexpected (but I hope fruitful) way into the problem, via her remarks about the living I, in *Finite and Eternal Being* (hereafter, *FEB*).

Consider the following remarkable description, from *Finite and Eternal Being*, ch. 2, of what Stein, following Husserl, calls the “pure I” (*reine Ich*), “that self which is immediately given in conscious experience.”

This means, then, that it is the I that lives in every ‘I perceive,’ ‘I think,’ ‘I draw conclusions,’ ‘I experience joy,’ ‘I desire,’ etc. and, furthermore, that it is the I in one way or another that is oriented toward what is perceived, thought, desired, etc.... Right now the important thing is to make it clear that [the I] is alive in every experience and cannot be eliminated from it. It is inseparable from the experiential content but nonetheless not actually a *part* of this content. Rather the converse is true: Every experience is part of the I; the I is alive in every experience; *its life* is that very flux in which ever new structures of experiential units (*Erlebniseinheiten*) arise. This last statement, however, means not only that all experiential contents (*Erlebnisinhalte*) are part of it. The I is *alive*, and its life is its being.

A little further on she adds:

We are merely trying to show that it [the I] does not come into being and die away like the experiential units but that it is *something living* whose life is filled with changing contents. And this latter assertion again does not mean that its life is comparable to a ready-made vessel that is gradually being filled with varying contents: It is rather a life that wells up anew at every moment; *in every moment its being is actually present*.¹⁹

18 Note especially her extensive work translating Aquinas’s Disputed Questions on Truth. In her introduction to the translation, Stein indicates that in order to tackle central questions of critical philosophy (“etwa die phänomenologische ‘Was ist Erkenntnis ihrem Wesen nach?’ oder die Kantianische ‘Wie ist Erkenntnis möglich?’), the place to look in the writings of Thomas Aquinas is in the consideration of the question of truth (Stein Gesamtausgabe bd. 23, p. 3). In *FEB*, truth is one of the transcendentals considered in Chapter 5. On Stein’s criticism of Husserl’s transcendental idealism, see Daniele De Santis, “Edith Stein on a Different Motive that Led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism,” in *The Idealism-Realism Debate Among Edmund Husserl’s Early Followers and Critics*, ed. Rodney K. B. Parker. Cham: Springer, 2021, pp. 239–259.

19 Stein, *FEB*, ch. 2, sect. 6, pp. 48–49 (with modifications). The German is: “Das heißt, es sei das Ich, das in jedem ‘ich nehme wahr,’ ‘ich denke,’ ‘ich ziehe Schlüsse,’ ‘ich freue mich,’ ‘ich wünsche’ usw. lebt und in dieser oder jener besondern Weise auf das Wahrgenommene, Gedachte, Gewünschte usw. gerichtet ist. Es kann hier dahingestellt bleiben, ob die

Let me highlight two striking features of this passage.

First, the vitality of the I: namely, the insistence that the I is *alive*, and that “its life is its being.”

Second, the rejection of the standard “static” / “inert” construal of content-bearer and content. Stein denies that the I is a “ready-made vessel filled with varying contents,” and insists instead that “it is a life that wells up anew at every moment,” such that every content is *part* of the living I. In what sense a *part*? Later, in *FEB*, ch. 3, she explains that the contents constitute the very shape or “organic articulate structure” of the living I.

Unless essences were realized in the life of the I, this latter would be a chaotic maze in which no formal structure whatever could be distinguished. It is the essences which impart to the life of the I unity and multiplicity, organic articulate structure and order, meaning and intelligibility.²⁰

Now when one reads a passage like this, the first thing that comes to mind is the Neoplatonic tradition of late antiquity, with its triad of Being-Life-Intellect. Within that triad, being includes life, and life includes intellect. This Neoplatonic notion of life is not restricted to the biological-organic (the organism that is the subject of Aristotle’s *De anima*). Rather, it encompasses *all* vitality—and the most perfect form of vitality is the purely immaterial life of intellect.²¹

»Reinheit« des reinen Ich wirklich so zu verstehen sei, daß es in sich—inhaltlich—kein so oder so geartetes und daß es darum von anderen nur zahlenmäßig unterschieden wäre. Es kommt zunächst nur darauf an, zu sehen, daß es in jedem Erlebnis lebt und daraus nicht zu streichen ist. Es ist vom Erlebnisgehalt unabtrennbar, aber es ist nicht eigentlich als »Teil« dieses Gehalts anzusehen. Vielmehr gehört jedes Erlebnis ihm zu, das Ich ist das, das in einem jeden lebt; der Fluß, in dem sich immer neue Erlebniseinheiten aufbauen, ist sein Leben. Das besagt aber noch etwas mehr als daß ihm alle Erlebnisgehalte zugehören. Das Ich lebt, und das Leben ist sein Sein [...] Es soll nur aufgezeigt werden, daß es nicht entsteht und vergeht wie die Erlebniseinheiten, sondern ein lebendiges ist, dessen Leben sich mit wechselnden Gehalten erfüllt. Dies wiederum heißt nicht, daß sein Leben ein fertiges Gefäß wäre, das sich allmählich mit Gehalten füllte,—es ist selbst ein in jedem Augenblick neu aufquellendes. Es heißt aber, daß sein Sein in jedem Augenblick gegenwärtig-wirklich, aktuell ist” (Edith Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein. Versuch eines Aufstieges zum Sinn des Seins*. Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1962, p. 47).

20 Stein, *FEB*, ch. 3, sect. 2, p. 65. The German is: “Das Ichleben wäre ein unentwirrbares Chaos, in dem nichts unterschieden werden könnte, wenn in ihm nicht Wesenheiten »verwirklicht« würden; durch sie kommt Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit, Gliederung und Ordnung, Sinn und Verstehbarkeit hinein” (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 64).

21 On vitality in Stein, see *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 47, where Stein contrasts the Lebendigkeit of the finite Ich and that of Ewiges Sein, and p. 130, where she says that a plant has more Lebendigkeit than non-living things.

Plotinus, for instance, insists that the intelligibles are not “without thought or without life” in the manner of “premises or axioms or sayables.”²² Indeed, he insists, “the intelligible is a certain kind of actuality; it is neither a potency nor something without thought, nor is it separated from life, nor are life and thinking added to it by something that is other than it in the way that they might be added to a stone or to something inanimate.”²³

Much later, Thomas Aquinas similarly presents intellectuality as a form of vitality, when he explains why ‘Life’ is a proper name of God. We’ll see the text in a moment, but this is the tradition into which Stein’s remarks about the “living I” naturally fit.

3.2 *Vitality and Intentionality*

Now in Edith Stein, this notion of the I as *living* opens up a unique perspective on intentionality, because the emphasis on the *vitality* of mental life makes it possible to take seriously a notion of *mental striving*. “Striving (*Streben*)” is a theme which occupies Stein’s attention quite extensively in ch. 5 of *Finite and Eternal Being*, on the transcendentals. There, she explains how ‘good’ “denotes the *congruity of the existent with the conative striving*.”²⁴ This is her own way of repeating Aquinas’s view that the transcendental ‘good’ is nothing other than being insofar as it is appetible (i.e., attractive of desire).

Stein’s language of “striving” (*Streben*) is particularly worth noting here. The medieval language of “desire” or “appetite” too easily strikes our ears as distinctively “mental,” and perhaps even static—desire as a “mental state.” Consequently, when medieval Scholastics speak of a stone’s natural desire to be “down,” or a plant’s desire to preserve its own existence, modern readers encountering such formulations for the first time cannot help chuckling at what appears to be a rather childish anthropomorphizing of the cosmos.

Stein’s language of “striving,” however, perhaps more effectively captures the underlying idea. It underscores the *dynamism* of the relationship of individuals to their goods, using language that is easily recognizable as applying to both the mental and the non-mental. She writes:

For striving, as tending toward the perfection of the being of the striving existent, pertains to all created reality (as a becoming actuality). Aside

22 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.1. trans. Lloyd P. Gerson et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 584.

23 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.5, p. 584.

24 Stein, *FEB*, ch. 5, sect. 15, p. 309. The German is: “Als Unterschied war genannt, daß »gut« die Übereinstimmung des Seienden mit dem Streben bezeichne” (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 288).

from the conscious (intellectual) striving of rational creatures (a striving which is founded on knowledge), there is the striving of sentient (but irrational) creatures, and the natural striving of animate (but not sentient) and inanimate beings. The turning of plants toward light, or the entering of soluble material elements into a crystalline form, may be named as examples of purely natural striving.²⁵

The picture is familiar to any connoisseur of premodern metaphysics. In the world of becoming, things are not just simply inert lumps moved around by external forces. The forces that shape the world of becoming are *internal* to things themselves. And these internal teleological forces are not simply static blueprints for what a thing ought to be. Rather, they are dynamic inner drives, straining toward that goal: Each thing leans toward, strains toward, drives itself toward its perfected state. Each nature is like a toy motorized car whose wheels are ceaselessly spinning, so that when placed on a road, it immediately begins to move forward.

Now how does this all apply to the human mind? If the mind, too, is “on the road,” toward what is it straining? Stein touches upon this point briefly:

In intellectual striving (*Erkenntnisstreben*), too, an existent strives for a greater perfection (*Vollkommenheit*): [a perfection] for understanding

25 Stein, FEB, ch. 5, sect. 17, p. 315. The German is: “Denn das Streben als Gerichtetsein auf die Vollkommenheit des eigenen Seins ist allem geschaffenen Wirklichen als einem Werdenden eigen: neben dem bewußten und in Erkenntnis begründeten (= geistigen) Streben der vernunftbegabten Geschöpfe stehen das sinnliche der sinnenbegabten, aber vernunftlosen Lebewesen und das naturhafte Streben der nur belebten (aber nicht empfindenden) und der unbelebten Geschöpfe. (Die Hinwendung der Pflanze zum Licht, das Einschließen gelöster Stoffe in ihre Kristallform können als Beispiele naturhafter Strebenstätigkeit dienen)” (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 293).

See also p. 316 (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, pp. 293–294): “Striving as such is linked with a definite genus of existents. Only something that is in the process of becoming can strive (i.e., something that is as yet unfinished or imperfect and thus not fully actual, but simultaneously actual and potential). The actual end of the striving is the perfection of that which is as yet imperfect, and the transition from potency to act is the fulfillment of the striving. Thus we see that the entire order of goods and values is an order of the actual or real world. The immediate object of the striving of every existent is this existent’s own goodness: The perfection of its quid and the highest stage of its being (i.e., its supreme actuality). All other existents which can contribute to this existent’s perfection are mediately good for it. Since existents are to actuate [wirken], they must be actual [wirklich]. Actuation or efficacious activity pertains to actual being as such [...] The entire world of becoming is permeated by that order which permits every created being (ens) to strive for its own perfection and to aid other created beings on their way to perfection.”

(*Verstand*), and therefore for the knowing human being. And this striving also finds its fulfillment (*Erfüllung*), in an actual event (*wirklichen Vorgang*), i.e., in the perfection of knowledge.²⁶

This is an interesting and obscure remark, worth closer consideration. The obvious point is that the intellect, too, is not exempt from striving. It, too, has an internal driving toward its own perfection—a claim that flows nicely out of Stein's earlier insistence on the vitality of the "I". Once again, we see Stein's approach diverging from a picture of mind as an inert display space or container for "mental content," favoring instead a "vital" account of the mind as living stuff with an interior dynamism.

But *toward what* does the mind strive? Obviously, "the perfection of knowledge." It is in unpacking this thought that the intriguing character of Stein's contribution comes to light. She continues:

But the contents (*Gehalt*) of knowledge, which are among the conditions of its actualization, do not enter into a causal relationship or into one unity of being with knowledge, but rather into that unique relationship which we call 'intentional'; and which has its foundation in transcendental truth. (i.e., in the unique being-ordained of the existent to the knowing spirit)²⁷

It is easy to brush past the idea that humans want to know things, as though it simply referred to a behavioral tendency to *collect knowledge*, as a bird collects straw to build its nest. That road leads back to the view of the mind as a 'ready-made vessel' filling up with contents—as the inner pocket where we store items that we pick up in our stroll along the beach of the world.

26 Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 292; FEB, p. 314.

27 Stein, FEB, ch. 5, sect. 16, my translation, based on the English at p. 314. The German is: "Wie ist mit diesen Klarstellungen die frühere Behauptung verträglich, daß das Wahre als solches (oder das Seiende als Wahres) auch gut sei? Auch beim Erkenntnisstreben wird für ein Seiendes eine größere Vollkommenheit erstrebt: für den Verstand und damit für den erkennenden Menschen. Und auch dieses Streben findet in einem wirklichen Vorgang—im Vollzug der Erkenntnis—Erfüllung. Der Gehalt der Erkenntnis aber, der zu den Bedingungen ihrer Verwirklichung gehört, tritt nicht mit ihr in einen ursächlichen Zusammenhang und in eine Einheit des Seins, sondern in jene eigentümliche Beziehung, die wir die »intentionale« nennen und die in der transzendentalen Wahrheit (als der eigentümlichen Zuordnung des Seienden zum erkennenden Geist) ihre Grundlage hat" (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 293).

Instead, Stein is giving us quite a different picture of the human dynamism toward knowledge. The intellectual striving is a *striving for relationship with some being*. Perhaps it would not be going too far to say that the striving for knowledge is a striving for *beings*—an ecstatic striving. The existent (the tree that I am aiming to understand), is the object of my striving. This is what it means to say that truth is the good of the intellect.

In knowing, the intellect attains to the perfection of its being. The existent, which aids the intellect in attaining this end, imparts to it perfection and is thus—insofar as it is true—also good, albeit not in an absolute sense, but only in this particular respect.²⁸

When we put this notion together with the earlier discussion of the living “I,” an interesting picture emerges. Just as each thing is internally “motorized toward” its own good, so too the intellect is “motorized toward” beings. Through its internal dynamism, it drives itself toward beings. And its attaining them consists in its achieving an *intentional relationship* with them (which, as we just saw her stressing, is neither a “causal relationship” nor a “unity of being”).

But then what exactly is this intentional relationship? What I want to suggest—as the core of Stein’s approach to intentionality—is that *even that intentional relationship itself* is not conceptualized as wholly static. In the passages cited above from *FEB* ch. 5, recall that she describes the *goal itself* toward which intellect strives, in dynamic terms, as an event or process (*Vorgang*): “This striving also finds its fulfillment (*Erfüllung*), in an actual event (*wirklichen Vorgang*), i.e., in the perfection of knowledge.”

In my view, this claim must be interpreted in light of the discussion of the “living I” from *FEB* chs. 2–3. In the passages that we saw above, (a) Stein energetically denies that the I is merely a vessel for mental “contents,” thus effectively rejecting a model of intentionality as mere static containment.

It is *something living* whose life is filled with changing contents. And this latter assertion again does not mean that its life is comparable to a ready-made vessel that is gradually being filled with varying contents: It is rather a life that wells up anew at every moment.

28 Stein, *FEB*, ch. 5, sect. 16, p. 312. The German is: “Im Erkennen gelangt der Verstand zu seiner Seinsvollendung: das Seiende, das ihm dazu verhilft, gibt ihm Vollkommenheit, ist also, sofern es wahr ist, auch gut—allerdings nicht schlechthin, sondern in dieser ganz bestimmten Hinsicht” (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, p. 290).

And as we saw, (b) she insists that essences structure and organize *the very life* of the living I. Recall Stein's formulations:

Every experience is part of the I; the I is alive in every experience; *its life* is that very flux in which ever new structures of experiential units (*Erlebniseinheiten*) arise. This last statement, however, means not only that all experiential contents (*Erlebnisgehalte*) are part of it. The I is *alive*, and its life is its being. (Ch. 2)

It is the essences which impart to the life of the I unity and multiplicity, organic articulate structure and order, meaning and intelligibility. (Ch. 3)

From this, I want to suggest that Stein is offering us a picture of intentionality centered on *vitality*. What does it mean for me to be thinking *about trees* (or in Stein's example, judging that the tree is green)? The "about" of intentionality does not capture a merely static containing, but a dynamic striving. To think about trees is to *strive toward incorporating trees* into my intellectual life. I am intellectually hungry for trees, and trees aid me to satisfy that hunger by entering into the structure of my living experience. Perhaps we could say that the intentional relationship as an "event" or "process" (*Vorgang*) is a kind of *vital performance*: a collaboration of both the living intellect and the beings toward which it strives.

I would like to call this a "vital" approach to intentionality, according to which intentionality is construed dynamically, as a *living striving*, with the intentional object construed as the *goal of that striving*. In other words: trees are the objects of my thought insofar as they are the goal of my intellectual striving.

More precisely, we can observe that in Stein's account there are actually two aspects in this intentional striving:

1. To the extent to which my intellect is only incompletely unified with the tree, its intentionality is a *striving for the tree as an unattained perfection*.
2. To the extent to which this process is already consummated, intentionality is an *active collaboration* with the tree, in which the intellect takes up the tree into the structure of its own life.

To put it differently: my thought is "about the tree" in the sense of an object of striving. And it can be such an object in two ways (often at the same time): as a not-yet-fully-attained object of striving, and in the second sense as a collaborative partner in a vital activity. One might say something similar about a sunflower: A sunflower is "about" the sun both as an object of striving and as a collaborative partner in the sunflower's ongoing perfection.

Of course, there is an important difference between the sunflower and the I. The sun does not become part of the sunflower. But Stein insists, as we saw above, that the tree has to become *part of the living I*. Yet, she also insists, the I and the tree remain “ontically different” beings. This is a difficulty that both she and Aquinas face. And at the end of this chapter, I will give some indications about how they resolve it—not in the usual Neo-Scholastic way by invoking the role of signs, but in their own way.

4 Thomas Aquinas on Intellect as a Form of Life

Now let us dial back the clock a few centuries to the “Scholastics of the Middle Ages,” and specifically to the thirteenth century thinker, Thomas Aquinas. Two important strains of thought that we have just seen in Stein align nicely with remarks in Aquinas’s theory of intellect: namely, (1) In holding that intellect is a form of life, and (2) in construing intentionality in terms of vital striving.

First, Aquinas holds that intellectuality is the highest form of life, which is why the name ‘Life’ can be properly predicated of God:

That whose very nature is intelligizing itself, and to whom it belongs not to be determined by anything else, is that which attains to the highest degree of life. And such is God. So in God, there is life to the highest degree. Whence the Philosopher, in *Metaphysics* XII, having shown that God is intelligent, concludes that he has perfect and sempiternal life, because his intellect is most perfect and always actual.²⁹

The reason that intellect is the “supreme and perfect grade of life,” as he explains elsewhere, is that “it reflects on itself and can understand itself.”³⁰ In other words, the vitality of intellect in Aquinas, interestingly, seems to be expressed most of all in its supreme self-possession and self-motion.

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 18, a. 3 [Opera Omnia 4, p. 228]: “Illud igitur cuius sua natura est ipsum eius intelligere, et cui id quod naturaliter habet, non determinatur ab alio, hoc est quod obtinet summum gradum vitae. Tale autem est Deus. Unde in Deo maxime est vita. Unde philosophus, in XII Metaphys., ostenso quod Deus sit intelligens, concludit quod habeat vitam perfectissimam et sempiternam, quia intellectus eius est perfectissimus, et semper in actu.”

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 4, c. 11 [Opera omnia 15, p. 32]: “Est igitur supremus et perfectus gradus vitae qui est secundum intellectum: nam intellectus in seipsum reflectitur, et seipsum intelligere potest.”

Second, though, is there a reason to see intellectual vitality as relevant to Aquinas's approach to intentionality?

From the standard interpretations of Aquinas, one might at first think not. Scholars typically locate Aquinas's theory of intentionality in one or more of the following groups of remarks:

- a. *Remarks about mental likeness:* Aquinas holds that all cognition requires a mental likeness, or what he calls a "species." So, to understand what trees are, my intellect has to acquire a likeness of treeness.
- b. *Remarks about a special mode of "intentional" or spiritual being:* Aquinas states that the thing cognized inheres in the cognizer in "intentional being," often construed as a "spooky" kind of non-real, purely mental being.

These formulations are commonly taken to provide Aquinas's explanations of intentionality. In other words, so the standard readings go, what makes a thought be *about anything* (and in this case about treeness) is that it has a likeness to treeness, or that it has treeness in intentional being.³¹

I have raised concerns about standard readings of Aquinas's references to "intelligible species" and "intentional being" elsewhere.³² However, I do not claim here that these notions have *nothing* to do with intentionality in Aquinas. Rather, for now, I only want to point out that what is missing from such

31 Scholars differ widely on how they think the appeal to a species, or to intentional being (or both), is supposed to explain the fact that my thoughts are "about" something other than itself. It would be impossible to survey all the theories. For the view that intentionality is a primitive feature of mental species, see Fabrizio Amerini, Tommaso d'Aquino e l'intenzionalità. Pisa: ETS, 2013, p. 98; Jeffrey Brower, Susan Brower-Toland, "Aquinas on Mental Representation," *The Philosophical Review* 117 (2008), pp. 193–243, notably pp. 225–240. For a view of species as signs or entities with encoded content, see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas*. London: Routledge, 2003, p. 275; Gyula Klima, "Aquinas on the Materiality of the Human Soul and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect," *Philosophical Investigations* 32 (2009), pp. 163–182, esp. 174–176; George Peter Klubertanz, *The Philosophy of Human Nature*. rev. ed. Saint Louis: Modern Schoolman, 1951, pp. 69–70, etc. For the view that either the species, or intentional being, is purely relational or significative, having no metaphysical texture in its own right and therefore making the object directly present, see Joseph Owens, "Form and Cognition in Aristotle," *Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1980), pp. 23–24; Jean-Luc Solère, "La notion d'intentionnalité chez Thomas d'Aquin," *Philosophie* 24 (1989), pp. 13–36, etc.

32 On the problems with standard interpretations of the intelligible species or likeness, see Therese Cory, "Aquinas's Intelligible Species as Formal Constituents," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione medievale* 31 (2020), pp. 261–309. On the problems with standard interpretations of "intentional being," see Therese Cory, "Mental Being in the Thirteenth Century: Metaphysical or Merely Relational? Albert, Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent," in *Mental Being and Intentionality*, eds. Fedor Benevich and Hamid Taieb (volume in preparation).

accounts of intentionality is any sense of *dynamism* or *vital intellectual striving*. They appeal, instead, to static facts about intellect: its possession of “intentional being” or representations, or its standing in certain relations to extramental things. One might immediately respond that “of course all sense of dynamism is missing, because for Aquinas cognition is just passive reception.” But the widespread identification of thinking with passive form-reception in Aquinas is also a myth. Aquinas clearly states that once the intellect is passively formed, it performs an *action* of understanding (*intelligere*).³³ In fact it has several actions available to it: contemplating, composing and dividing propositions, or reasoning.

So, on my view, we should not presume that Aquinas’s cognitive theory excludes any notion of intellectual dynamism. And in fact, if we allow ourselves to look for it in the text, we can see that Aquinas *does* describe intellect as dynamically striving for some good—and moreover, that the good toward which it strives is precisely the cognitive object.

Let me briefly explain.³⁴ For Aquinas, any action is related to its object as an end. “The action primarily and principally tends toward its object.”³⁵ For most actions, that end is a *product* (fire strives toward more fire). In the case of cognitive actions, however, the end is a *standard against which the cognition is measured*—an exemplar relative to what is exemplified. This claim is related to the broader (again Neoplatonic) idea that every image tends toward its exemplar as its end. Likeness gives rise to striving—and specifically, striving for a greater likeness to the exemplar.

33 I make the case in detail elsewhere, but one of the most important pieces of textual evidence is Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6 [Opera omnia 22, p. 238]: “Unde intelligens non se habet ut agens vel ut patiens, nisi per accidens; in quantum scilicet ad hoc quod intelligibile uniatur intellectui, requiritur aliqua actio vel passio: actio quidem, secundum quod intellectus agens facit species esse intelligibiles actu; passio autem, secundum quod intellectus possibilis recipit species intelligibiles, et sensus species sensibiles. Sed hoc quod est intelligere, consequitur ad hanc passionem vel actionem, sicut effectus ad causam. Sicut ergo corpus lucidum lucet quando est lux actu in ipso, ita intellectus intelligit omne illud quod est actu intelligibile in ipso. ...Sicut igitur materia prima non potest agere aliquam actionem nisi perficiatur per formam; et tunc actio illa est quaedam emanatio ipsius formae magis quam materiae; res autem existentes actu possunt agere actiones, secundum quod sunt actu; ita intellectus possibilis noster nihil potest intelligere antequam perficiatur forma intelligibili in actu.”

34 What follows is a brief summary of a reading of Aquinas that I develop in much more detail elsewhere, in work in progress.

35 Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 9 [Opera omnia 22, p. 328]: “Cuiuslibet potentiae animae virtus est determinata ad obiectum suum; unde et eius actio primo et principaliter in obiectum tendit.”

This is the same sense in which God is the end (or object) of creaturely striving: The Divine Idea of treeness is the *standard against which trees are measured*. So a tree's striving for God is the same as the tree's striving toward its own second perfection. To attain an end in *this* sense is not to produce the end, but rather to live up to the end. Thus Aquinas writes in *SCG* 3.19: "The agent is said to be the end of the effect, insofar as the effect tends toward the likeness of the agent; and for that reason, the form of the generator is the end of generation. But God is the end of things in just that way, because he is their first agent."³⁶ (Stein puts what I think is the same point in different terms, such that each creature, in achieving its own good, achieves conformity to the divine will.)³⁷

Now from this broader perspective, we can immediately unfold the whole picture of intellectual striving in Aquinas. The extramental treeness is the cause of the intellect's tree-likeness. Indeed, treeness is the exemplar or standard against which tree-thought is measured. Aquinas writes: "When a thing (*res*) is the measure and rule of the intellect (*mensura et regula intellectus*), truth consists in the intellect's being adequated to the thing," or in other words, measuring up to the thing. In other words, truth is nothing other than the success of my tree-thought in living-up to extramental treeness.³⁸

From here, therefore, it should come as no surprise that Aquinas describes extramental natures as *the ends for which the intellect strives*: "The known thing (*res intellecta*) is sometimes outside the intellect [...] indeed the conception of

36 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 3, c. 19 [Opera omnia 14, p. 43]: "Agens dicitur esse finis effectus in quantum effectus tendit in similitudinem agentis: unde forma generantis est finis generationis. Sed Deus ita est finis rerum quod est etiam primum agens earum." This sense applies to all creatures.

37 Stein, *FEB*, ch. 5, sect. 15, p. 310: "Inasmuch as the divine will has determined every creature's measure of being, the attained fulfillment of the creature's being simultaneously signifies its congruity with the divine will and that measure of goodness that can be attained by this creature." The German is: "Sofern einem jeden Geschöpf das Maß seines Seins durch den göttlichen Willen bestimmt ist, bedeutet die erreichte Vollendung seines Seins zugleich die vollkommene Übereinstimmung mit dem göttlichen Willen und damit das ihm erreichbare Maß an Güte" (Stein, *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, pp. 289–290).

38 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 1, c. 62 [Opera omnia 13, p. 176]: *Veritas enim nostri intellectus mensuratur a re quae est extra animam, ex hoc enim intellectus noster verus dicitur quod consonat rei*"; *Summa Theologiae* 1a, q. 21, a. 2 [Opera omnia 4, pp. 259–260]: "Intellectus autem qui est causa rei, comparatur ad ipsam sicut regula et mensura, e converso autem est de intellectu qui accipit scientiam a rebus. Quando igitur res sunt mensura et regula intellectus, veritas consistit in hoc, quod intellectus adaequatur rei, ut in nobis accidit, ex eo enim quod res est vel non est, opinio nostra et oratio vera vel falsa est."

the mind is ordered to the known thing as to an end.”³⁹ This ordering is not just a static relationship, but actually a striving, or in Aquinas’s terms, a “tending (*tendere*).” Thus Aquinas writes: “For the sense tends toward apprehending the particular, but the intellect tends toward apprehending the universal.”⁴⁰ And again he describes “the consideration of something true” as “directly tending toward the object.”⁴¹ More broadly, “just as things lacking cognition are moved toward their end without rationality, so too the human intellect by a natural inclination tends toward truth even while it does not grasping the reason for that truth.”⁴²

Aquinas appeals to the same notion of intellectual striving to explain “rational inquiry” as the intellect’s ongoing dissatisfaction with what it already knows. Even if conformity has been achieved, the intellectual striving may not be fully satisfied until it achieves certitude. Thus like Stein, he holds that the achievement of certain resting points is still consistent with a further, ongoing striving toward certainty. “From the fact that the intellect is not yet terminated [i.e., remains not yet fully determined or determinate], the intellectual motion goes on, because it naturally tends toward its determinacy.”⁴³

39 Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, q. 8, a. 1 [Marietti, p. 215]: “Quae quidem conceptio a tribus praedictis differt. A re quidem intellecta, quia res intellecta est interdum extra intellectum, conceptio autem intellectus non est nisi in intellectu; et iterum conceptio intellectus ordinatur ad rem intellectam sicut ad finem: propter hoc enim intellectus conceptionem rei in se format ut rem intellectam cognoscat.”

40 Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 4, ad 4 [Opera omnia 22, p. 621]: “Quia sensus et intellectus differunt per rationes apprehensibilis in quantum est apprehensibile, propter hoc quod ad diversa genera pertinent potentiarum. Sensus enim tendit in apprehendendum particulare, sed intellectus in apprehendendum universale.”

41 Thomas Aquinas, *De virtutibus in communi*, q. un., a. 7 [Marietti, p. 724]: “Dicitur enim aliquis intelligens vel sciens secundum quod eius intellectus perfectus est ad cognoscendum verum; quod quidem est bonum intellectus. Et licet istud verum possit esse volitum, prout homo vult intelligere verum; non tamen quantum ad hoc perficiuntur habitus praedicti. Non enim ex hoc quod homo habet scientiam, efficitur volens considerare verum, sed solummodo potens; unde et ipsa veri consideratio non est scientia in quantum est volita, sed secundum quod directe tendit in obiectum.”

42 Thomas Aquinas, *In Physic.* 1, c. 10, n. 5 [Opera omnia 2, p. 34]: “Quod quidem licet vere ponerent, non tamen quasi ab aliqua ratione moti hoc ponebant, sed sicut ab ipsa veritate coacti. Verum enim est bonum intellectus, ad quod naturaliter ordinatur: unde sicut res cognitione carentes moventur ad suos fines absque ratione, ita interdum intellectus hominis quadam naturali inclinatione tendit in veritatem, licet rationem veritatis non percipiat.”

43 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Sent.* 3, d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 1, ad 2 [Mandonnet/Moos, vol. 3, p. 726]: “Ad secundum dicendum, quod per hoc quod dicit Damascenus, quod fides est non inquisitus consensus, excluditur inquisitio rationis intellectum terminantis, non

From this, I want to suggest that Aquinas's notion of intentionality has to be understood as including a vitality model of intentionality. For a thought to be "about" x is for the thinking, living intellect to be *striving for* x , which consists in *striving to emulate* x . This notion is not unrelated to the standard intuition that intentionality in Aquinas is somehow connected to likeness, however. After all, the intellect strives for x because it has been formed by x , and is therefore "like" x . Only a tree-formed intellect strives toward trees.

5 Word vs. Life? A Retrospective on Intentionality in Scholasticism, Neo-Scholasticism, and Edith Stein

Now one may have noticed that there has been an ambiguity in my descriptions of what exactly Aquinas's intellect, or Stein's I, is striving for. That ambiguity deliberately mirrors an ambiguity in these authors themselves.

For instance, Stein at first states that her intellect is striving for the actual event of *knowledge*—that is, an internal intellectual perfection. But later, she seems to allow that the end for which intellect strives is something *external*: "the existent."

Similarly, Aquinas says that the intellect tends toward truth or conformity—that is, an internal intellectual perfection. But he also says that the intellect tends toward the "known thing" (*res intellecta*), or just "the thing" (*res*), a term that he typically uses in such contexts to refer to the thing known as it extramentally exists.

How this ambiguity gets resolved, I think, is important to sorting out the relationship between the vitality model and the semantic model in both authors. What I want to suggest, in outline, is the following.

For Aquinas, truth and the known object are ends of intellectual striving *in different ways*. To strive for truth is to strive for a perfection that I can *possess*—something that can be a perfecting accident *of me*. But I cannot strive for extramentality as something to possess intellectually. I cannot intellectually possess *extramental* treeness, because it is other than me. The extramental nature of that tree, *qua* extramentally existing in all its material particularity, cannot be an accident of me. So "striving for extramental treeness" has a different sense, i.e., as an exemplar that I aim to live up to, or emulate.⁴⁴

inquisitio voluntatem inclinans. Et ex hoc ipso quod intellectus terminatus non est, remanet motus intellectus, in quantum naturaliter tendit in sui determinationem."

44 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 59, a. 2 [Opera omnia 5, p. 93]: "Nam cognitio fit per hoc quod cognitum est in cognoscente, unde ea ratione se extendit eius intellectus in

Thus for Aquinas, intellectual striving for extramental treeness should be more precisely described as a striving to possess an internal perfection, which emulates extramental treeness. (Just as a dog's striving for God should be more precisely described as a striving for its own subjective dog-perfection, which emulates the Divine Idea of 'dog'.)

Tentatively, it seems to me that Stein offers a roughly parallel solution. Immediately after discussing intellectual striving, she clarifies:

Content [*Inhalt*] and reality [*Bestehen*] together are the 'ingredient components' [*Gehalt*] of my knowledge. And in the consummation of this knowledge the intellect passes from *potential* to *actual* being and attains to a certain perfection of being [*Seinsvollendung*]. But the known *Sachverhalt* is not contained in the whole. The *Sachverhalt* has not really entered into the actual being in this manner. The reality of the *Sachverhalt* and my own being remain ontically separated, notwithstanding the fact that I owe to the reality of the *Sachverhalt* that increment of being [*Seinssteigerung*] which the consummation of knowledge entails.⁴⁵

I do not find Stein signing onto the view that knowledge just *is* the object in some spooky "merely intentional" mode of being, in the way that some Neo-Scholastic authors suggested. Instead, she writes that spirit and being are simply different genera of existents which are essentially ordered toward each other, but that they are both being, and that even mental contents are being, because they live with the being of the I, as part of the I.⁴⁶

id quod est extra se, secundum quod illud quod extra ipsum est per essentiam, natum est aliquo modo in eo esse. Voluntas vero se extendit in id quod extra se est, secundum quod quadam inclinatione quodammodo tendit in rem exteriorem."

45 Stein, FEB, ch. 5, section 16, p. 313. The German is: "Wenn ich erkenne, daß dieser Baum grün ist, so umfasse ich mit dem Verstand sowohl das, was den Inhalt dieses Sachverhalts ausmacht, als sein Bestehen. Beides zusammen bildet den 'Gehalt' meiner Erkenntnis. Im Vollzug dieser Erkenntnis geht der Verstand vom 'möglichen' zum 'wirklichen/Sein über, erfährt also eine gewisse Seinsvollendung. Aber in diesem Sein ist der erkannte Sachverhalt und sein Bestehen nicht als ein Teil enthalten, er ist nicht (in diesem Sinn) wirklich darin aufgenommen. Das Bestehen des Sachverhaltes und mein Sein bleiben in der Erkenntnis seinsmäßig getrennt, obgleich ich dem Bestehen des Sachverhalts die Seinssteigerung verdanke, die der Vollzug der Erkenntnis bedeutet" (Stein, Endliches und ewiges Sein, p. 291).

46 Stein, FEB ch. 5, section 11, p. 298: "Spirit is that genus of existents which in a definitely determined manner is ordained to all that which is. And truth is a definitely determined form of the being-ordained of all that which is to that genus of existents which in a corresponding form (not in the same form) is ordained to all that which is. [...] "To be manifest' (or revealed), 'to be ordained'—these verbal forms imply being, and not a special

Nevertheless, Stein does use the language of “content” (*Gehalt*) repeatedly throughout the work (as when the “experiential contents” or *Erlebnisgehalte* are said to constitute the structure of the living I).⁴⁷ So the language of the semantic model is certainly there. It remains to be seen, however, how much real theoretical work such language is actually doing in her theory. For the moment, it seems to me closer to the spirit of her theory of knowing to say that structures derived from objects enter into the life of the I, and put it into a *relationship* with extramental things—a relationship that the I continually strives to strengthen. And *in that respect*, I think her view is perfectly aligned with that of Aquinas, at least as I read him.

Some concluding proposals: Both Aquinas and Stein represent something of a departure from other views that are widespread among various Scholastics of the “Middle” and “Newer” Ages, and which rely on the notion that there is a distinctively *mental* way for things to be in minds. The late-13th-century Theology Master, Henry of Ghent, for instance, develops an absolutely crucial distinction between two ways of “being in” something: as a form or accident is in a subject, and as an object is in a cognizer.⁴⁸ It seems to me that it is to Henry

mode of being, but being as such. In short being means (though perhaps without thereby exhausting its full meaning) a being manifest for or a being revealed to the spirit.” And Stein, FEB ch. 2, section 6, p. 49: “The fact that the experiential contents attain to real being, although they touch it only punctually [punktuell] at any given moment, may now appear a little less enigmatic. The real being they touch is in fact not their being, since in and by themselves they are incapable of real being. The experiential contents receive a share in real being only by virtue of the ego into whose life they enter. With respect to what owes its being to the ego and rises to the level of being only by virtue of and within the ego, the latter thus exists in a preeminent sense. The ego is not, to be sure existentially superior in the sense that it could be said to embody the height of being (as compared with rudimentary degrees of being) but rather in a sense that indicates a relationship existing between a carrier and the thing carried.”

47 See, e.g., Stein, FEB, ch. 2, section 6.

48 Henry of Ghent, Quod. IV, q. 7, ed. Gordon Anthony Wilson and Girard J. Etzkorn. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011, vol. VIII, p. 41: “Simili modo ponimus hoc idem de omni quod per suam essentiam praesens est in intellectu quocumque modo. Et ponimus omnia necessaria ad cognitionem et intellectum impleri per solam rei essentiam, propter quae videbatur illis ponenda species per ipsam enim essentiam rei praesentem intellectui determinabitur ad ipsam intelligendam melius quam per speciem inhaerentem, ut dictum est. Dum tamen intellectus sit in tali dispositione quod absque sensu res per essentiam videre poterit, tunc nihil aliud ex parte videntis requiritur nisi quod ad visibile se convertat quadam spirituali et incorporea conversione, ut dicit Augustinus de cognitione mentis a se ipsa, XI^{vo} De Trinitate cap. 6. Tale enim quod est praesens per suam essentiam intellectui, similiter magis est coniunctum ei, ut forma eius existens in ipso, non ut in subiecto, tamquam forma inhaerens impressiva et informans ad actum essendi, sed ut obiectum in cognitivo tamquam forma exemplaris expressiva sive representativa,

that one ought to trace ultimately Brentano's notion of "immanent objectivity," as well as the Neo-Scholastic notion that there is a special mode of intentional existence, a sheer mental relationality, that pertains only to the cognized.

For Henry, an object's presence in a cognizer—its "having cognized being, *esse cognitum*, or *esse obiectivum*"—simply describes the intellect's having an intentional relation to that object.⁴⁹ But for the early 14th-century thinker, Peter Auriol, this notion becomes the notion of a purely mental being which is no real being, but just appearance itself, *esse apparens*. And it is that development, I suspect, that makes neuralgic an increasingly familiar question: what is the relationship between "appearing trees" and extramental trees? This is, of course, the question that recurs in Neo-Scholasticism in an attempt to respond to Kant's critical turn.

And it is that question about the relationship of the appearances and the things that appear—essentially, a skeptical worry—that makes semantic notions of intentionality so attractive. If the goal is to penetrate a veil of appearance in order to gain access extramental things as they are in themselves, a notion of intentionality as vital striving seems less than helpful. Mere *emulation* of the extramental object in attaining the internal perfection of knowledge will not pierce any veil. To meet *that* bar, *the extramental tree itself must be the internal perfection of my intellect*. Knowledge must be the object of knowledge. The appearance of a tree must be the tree itself—or at least the tree has to be *included in* the appearance of treeness.

In other words: If piercing the veil of appearance is the desideratum, then how better to reach that goal than by a semantic model, which allows one thing to "contain" another as its meaning? This semantic solution is perfected in the 17th century commentator John of St. Thomas, whose account of the concept as pure sign came to define Neo-Scholastic approaches to intentionality.⁵⁰ If the concept is a pure sign, it is nothing in itself, and entirely transparent to the

praesens et movens ad actum intelligendi. Et hoc est essenziale ad hoc quod aliquid sit sibi ratio intelligendi, et est perfectionis et in cognoscente et in cognito, et est modus intelligendi quo Deus intelligit se ipsum se ipso et per consequens se ipso omnia alia a se, ut alias habet determinari."

49 See Michael E. Rombeiro, "Intelligible Species in the Mature Thought of Henry of Ghent," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 49 (2011), pp. 181–220; Richard Cross, "Henry of Ghent on the Reality of Non-Existing Possibles," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92 (2010), pp. 115–132, esp. p. 129; Martin Pickavé, "Causality and Cognition: An Interpretation of Henry of Ghent's Quodlibet V, q. 14," in *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Gyula Klima, New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 46–80, esp. p. 79; Cory, "Mental Being in the Thirteenth Century."

50 See note 17 above.

extramental thing. It is all meaning, making it an even more perfect vehicle of the tree's real being than a spoken or written word 'tree', which is something in itself (sound waves or marks on a page), and thus risks getting in between my mind and the tree.

Since Kant's transcendental idealism was one of the main enemies against which Neo-Scholastic philosophy of mind defined itself, then, it is not surprising that those writers might have embraced this semantic approach to intentionality. What is perhaps surprising, though, is that Edith Stein, separated from Aquinas by these historical developments, nonetheless recovers something closer to Aquinas's own authentic view—a view less concerned with items of a special intentional status, and more concerned with the vital texture of living experience, with its energetic striving for conformity with all that is.

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