The Doctrine of Signs
in John Poinsot

The Context, Content, and Perennial Importance of
Joannes a Sancto Thoma's *Doctrina Signorum*

Brian Kemple

Lyceum Institute
New York (USA)

Studia Poinsotiana
https://www.uc.pt/fluc/ief/publica/poinsotiana
IEF — Institute for Philosophical Studies
Faculty of Arts and Humanities University of Coimbra

Contra Errores
Publishing House

Medieval
Publishing House

INSTITUTIONAL CIRCLES
https://www.uc.pt/fluc/ief/publica/poinsotiana/editorial/directories/circles/

Angelicum – Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas
https://www.angelicum.it/

Hugh of Saint Victor Cultural Institute
https://www.hugodesaovitor.org.br/

International Society for Biosemiotic Studies
https://www.biosemiotics.org/

Lyceum Institute
https://lyceum.institute/

Portuguese Province of the Order of Saint Dominic
https://www.dominicanos.pt

This text should have been written by John Deely (1942–2017). But we all pass from this coil with our life's work left unfinished—leaving thereby to others the choice of whether or not that work is continued. During our last conversation, knowing that his time in this life was limited, John expressed to me a wonder and a trepidation whether the human soul really is immortal. I repeated to him, in paraphrase, words he had once said in class: "It is an experiment we all make, but only once." He chuckled and said that's true.

Reflecting at the distance of nearly seven years and having since oft-read C.S. Peirce's brief essay, "Immortality in the Light of Synechism", it occurs to me that the immortality of the individual soul is the wrong question, if we understand it strictly as materially individuated*: for we are all of us sustained more by relationality than substantiality, by our common and shared intentionality, and though we may not know with certitude his final resting place, we do here—I hope—sustain something of the soul that belonged to John Deely.*

I hope this doesn't "go off the rails".

1. Introduction

How well do we understand ourselves? What is the self, to be such an object of understanding? What, today, is the object elicited in thought by the word "understanding"? The Modern Age has turned the eyes of all Western culture inward in search of answers to that question. This inward turn more often than not renders the word "understanding"—especially in our immediately contemporary world, i.e., that since roughly 2005—into a sign of inarticulate and innate experiential "knowledge": such that "understanding" signifies a *sic et non* lived experience of inexpressible and incommunicable truth. One has

understanding or one does not; one may get understanding, but not from without, only from within. Thereby the achievements signifed by the word "understanding" become not the answers to questions about what the world is, but rather the resolution of the world outside oneself into the framework of oneself: what, we might well term a *centripetal anthropocentrism* that places the self at the center and attempts to draw toward an internal Procrustean conformity all else.[1]

The emergence of genuine postmodern philosophy, propagated by the semiotic point-of-view, rightly understood and pursued, repudiates this inward-collapse. Simultaneously, this repudiation does not claim fruitless the subjective turn—but they are fruits grown up, as it were, almost *in spite* rather than *because* of the soil in which they took root. While the fields of Scholastic thought had, perhaps, been taxed of their crops too frequently, and in need of a fallowing, it was foolish to depart them entirely for the rocky soil of solipsistic individualism—especially when some of those fruits were just reaching a most-fecund point of beautiful maturity.

But the fields, long left fallow though they were, yet possess remarkably rich soil, and the fruits of recent centuries' past may seed new developments today. Though doubtless many others have aided the rediscovery of the broaded Scholastic grounds, especially in the Thomistic tradition (retrieved from 1889's *Aeterni Patris* onwards), and though still much rediscovery has yet to happen, as is now unfolding in the thought of Duns Scotus (c.1265/66–1308), it is the recovery and retrieval of John Poinsot (1589–1644) that will prove—I have the greatest confidence—to nourish best minds born into and reared within the Age of Relation.

It is not that John Poinsot was ever *lost* to history; his works were not, to the best of my knowledge, ever discarded from records and catalogs and archives, but known to exist and

---

1 Cf. Deely 1994: *New Beginnings*, 179: "Postmodern philosophy will have to learn how to be anthropocentric inasmuch as it is grounded throughout in experience without being anthropomorphic and falling into the ancient sophism of making itself the measure of all things."

able to be found by dedicated scholars. But, outside of the narrow channels in which such scholars (mostly Catholics, priests, and mostly the Dominicans of his own order), he was largely forgotten. Like many other Scholastics, his work was not only preserved but given a certain new life in the 19th century through the printing press of "Ludovicus Vives", in Paris, which produced editions of both the *Cursus Philosophicus* and *Cursus Theologicus*. The Vives printing of his works in the 1880s seemed, evidently, to catch the attention of some within the ambit of Thomism and Scholastic thought generally, leading most fortuitously to the 1930s edition of the *Cursus Philosophicus* edited by Beatus Reiser, O.S.B.—an edition far superior in critical apparatus and textual precision to its Parisian predecessor. Simultaneously, a critical edition of his *Cursus Theologicus* was begun—and is yet incomplete, having attained only the first five of nine planned volumes—by the Benedictine monks of the Abbaye Saint-Pierre Solesmes. Beyond the provision of his *texts* for a modern audience, however, the recovery of Poinsot's *thought* has been affected by a handful of interested philosophers: most especially, Jacques Maritain (1882–1973) and John Deely (1942–2017).[2] Maritain—somewhat famously, particularly as it highlighted the contrast of his approach to that of the other most influential Thomist of the 20th century in North America, Étienne Gilson (1884–1978)—considered Poinsot second only to St. Thomas Aquinas himself as guiding the development of Maritain's thought. Indeed, Poinsot himself too, of course, considered his own thought to be wholly faithful to that of Thomas Aquinas and thus the adoption of his religious name, Joannes a Sancto Thoma,[3] upon entering the Dominican Order in 1613.

---

2 Quite a few others noted Poinsot's importance after the 1930 publication of the *Cursus Philosophicus*, such as Marcotte, Du Lac, Glanville, Wolicka, and, of course, Yves R. Simon. But few delved into Poinsot's thought in the same way as Maritain and Deely. Simon, I suspect, would have moved deeper in this direction if not for his all-too-early passing.
3 As Deely notes (1985: *TDS*, "Editorial Afterword", 423n33), there are as many as 18 different variations one can find for Poinsot's names, across Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Italian, and English—and thus, not only due to two close contemporaries who *also* went by the

Thus, to understand Poinsot's thinking, one must himself be thoroughly versed in the thought also of his intellectual progenitor, as well. Complicating this matter, one finds frequent reference to works spuriously attributed to St. Thomas by Poinsot's time—works such as the *Summa de Totius Logicae Aristotelis*, now attributed as likely the work of one Gratiadeus de Asculo,[4] but also to the work of Annibald de Annibaldis (c.1230–1271), a friend and like-minded thinker of St. Thomas,[5] as well as to the *De natura verbi intellectus*, likely by Thomas of Sutton, as well as several others of as yet unknown authorship.[6] Despite these interventions of other thinkers, it remains true to say that the principles espoused by Poinsot, as evidenced by his work, remain faithful to those taught by Aquinas. If one wishes, then, to understand Poinsot's semiotic, one needs to understand also the natural philosophy, the psychology, and the metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas.

While Aquinas himself provided little direct or immediate innovation in the doctrine of signs—indeed, his contemporary Roger Bacon (c.1219/20–c.1292) applied much more focused thought to the question—the elucidation of human nature and human knowledge, grounded upon the Aristotelian metaphysics which Aquinas so successfully incorporated into his own inquiries, proves essential to grasping the semiotic discovered in Poinsot's *Cursus Philosophicus*.[7]

It should then prove no surprise that both Maritain and Deely

---

name "John of St. Thomas", it is fruitful to use his given surname.

4 Cf. James J. Cannon 1961: "The Development of Logic in the Dominican School" (PhD dissertation); Frederick Roensch 1964: *Early Thomistic School*; Angel D'Ors 2001: "Peter Hispanus O.P. Auctor Summularum (II): Further Documents and Problems" in *Vivarium* 39.1-2, p.238; Minerd 2017: "The Logic of Intentionality in Hervaeus Natalis" (PhD dissertation), 129.

5 Notably, the *Catena Aurea in Marcum* is dedicated to Annibaldo: "Reverendo in Christo patri domino Hannibaldo, basilicae duodecim apostolorum venerabili presbytero cardinali, frater Thomas de Aquina ordinis fratrum praedicatorum se totum." See also Martin Grabmann 1923: *The Interior Life of Saint Thomas Aquinas* 39

6 Cf. Torrell 1993: *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume I: The Person and His Work*, 360-61 for a list of spuriously-attributed works.

7 One can, if carefully attending to the texts, discover certain partial foundations for semiotic thinking in St. Thomas—but it is excusable to any not versed in Poinsot to miss the markers, for they are as subtle as Scotus and, moreover, wrapped in the reverence so often paid to St. Augustine.

were themselves close students of St. Thomas as well, which study opened their eyes to the true brilliance of Poinsot's work. So illumined, the paths of insight they began to trammel, following the directions Poinsot prescribed, provide for us, as well, a way forward—a way not only into the answer of *what* and *who* we are, a way not only to *understanding of the self*, but precisely to understanding the self as a "semiotic animal", in the felicitous phrase of John Deely. It is this forward direction which will bring us into the new age of philosophical understanding: the Age of Relation.

2. Ages of Understanding

While many may be familiar with this phrase—age or ages of understanding—it will prove fruitful nonetheless, for this introduction to Poinsot's semiotic, to provide a summary of its significance: for the full weight of Poinsot's contribution to philosophy can be appreciated only in its historical context.

The work by which John Deely is perhaps best known is also his longest, namely, the thousand-page *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Published in 2001, this mammoth work divides the history of philosophical thinking (as, in some way, embracing of *all* thought) into four ages: the Ancient Age, originating with Thales of Miletus (c.625–c.545BC) and concluding with Simplicius of Cilicia (AD490–560); the Latin Age (rather than "Medieval"), beginning with St. Jerome (c.AD347–419/20) and St. Augustine of Hippo (AD354–430), lasting until the death of Poinsot (1589–1644); the Modern Age, begun with Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and René Descartes (1596–1650), lasting up into today and still being carried on in some of its main ideas; and finally, the Postmodern Age, or what might be called the Age of Relation, begin-

ning with Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914).[8] The ages are distinguished from one another not by any arbitrary date nor by extrinsic political, social, cultural or technological causes—such as the advent of the printing press or the spread of Christianity (though certainly these had an integral influence)—but by the characteristic thoughts espoused, taught, and published by these central historical figures. Each thinker and age thereby is related to a central thought: namely, none other than the understanding of signs. While certainly, the *signum* alone (or rather, thoughts about it) did not turn the gears of historical thinking, one can nevertheless accurately correlate different characteristic beliefs in accordance with an understanding of how things are made known to us, in which making-known the sign proves in fact to play the most-central role.

A history of philosophy, that is, cannot be understood as a matter of linear progression through a universal and abstract dimension of time, but rather only as the movement of persons through the influence of ideas. A belief, to paraphrase Charles Peirce, is the conviction in the truth of a proposition so as to act upon it when the occasion should arise.[9] Tracing the history of beliefs—that influence of ideas—proves an inexhaustible task. But it is a task that richly rewards us with understanding nonetheless.

Particularly difficult to trace, for reasons into which we cannot delve here but must merely mention in passing, are the beliefs of the Latin Age—which have been so badly misrepresented that they appear almost impossible for many today to follow, even in the wake of extensive study of their authors' writings. Most common among the reasons for this difficulty today, I would suggest, is the tendency to reduce thought of the Latin Age to tropes easy to dismiss: that it was theocratic or fideistic, that it forced square pegs of reason into round holes of revelation, that religious tyranny overrode the

---

8 Cf. Deely 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding*, 1015-19.

9 Cf. 1878: "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" in *W*.3: 263-64; 1895: "Of Reasoning in General" in *EP*.2: 12; 1902: "Parts of Carnegie Application", *NEM* 4: 39-40; 1902: "Minute Logic", *CP*.2.148, etc.

natural autonomy of human individuals, that it was an Age of Darkness—and so on. Giving support to these otherwise insipid views that Scholasticism can be readily dismissed is the obscurity of much Scholastic thought: thinkers such as Duns Scotus are rightly renowned for subtlety; Francisco Suárez's oeuvre comes to some 21 million words (nearly thrice that of St. Thomas Aquinas); and authors such as John Poinsot are so thoroughly immersed in the academic environment of their time that their texts are full of confliting opinions and oppositions, an apparent sea of chaos to any reader not familiar with the dialectical manner of proceeding or the underlying intellectual ethos of these centuries.

But the history of the Latin Age proves difficult to understand also because of what today remains a largely-unrecognized growing importance of *the sign* throughout that Age's roughly 12-century development (and, as I would add myself, the placement and question of the sign in the context of specifically-Scholastic metaphysical thinking). As Deely makes plain in both his *Four Ages* and the enlarged treatment of the second age—published posthumously under the title *Medieval Philosophy Redefined as the Latin Age*—the switch from Greek to Latin as the common linguistic currency of intellectual culture was accompanied by the revolutionary definition of sign offered by Augustine of Hippo. This definition, however, was not only deeply problematic—germinating the far-more well-known controversy over universals, or that contention between "realists" and "nominalists"—but, apparently in the eyes of Augustine himself, relatively banal. As Deely writes in his most-thorough study of Augustine's contribution:[10]

> The sign... was only a means to an end within Augustine's concerns, a subject treated over a relatively brief compass of time and in a small number of writings.

And:[11]

---

10 Deely 2009: *Augustine & Poinsot: The Protosemiotic Development*, 9.
11 Ibid, 10.

> So with Augustine, even though we find in his *De doctrina Christiana* the first general proposal that the being proper to signs transcends the φυσις/νομος (nature/culture) divide of Greek thought, we do not find this proposal developed into an actual theory. We do not even find an attempted justification of how such a transcending in being is possible. By failing to provide or follow up on his initial proposals with such a theoretical justification, Augustine lays himself open to the charge of having put forward with this general notion of sign an empty nominalism — a weakness that will be exploited by William of Ockham in the 14th century and more particularly by Pedro de Fonseca in the 16th century whence, through Fonseca's influence in the Jesuit tradition, Descartes' schooling at La Flèche (where Fonseca was read) between 1606 and 1614 will help determine the eclipse of the doctrine of signs throughout the epoch of modern philosophy, the epoch from Descartes in the 17th century to the lifetime of Peirce in the 19th-20th century that has been aptly characterized as the "*cryptosemiotic age*".

The deficiency of Augustine's definition, however—the weakness exploited by nominalists, leading directly to the modern turn, the abandonment of Aristotle, and, indeed, the weakening of the philosophical culture throughout all Europe—should not wholly overshadow the profound influence of its encompass of both nature and culture equally. As Deely adds in the same text, "after Augustine wrote, sign everywhere came to be conceived as *anything whatever*, natural *or* cultural, that carried the mind to some object other than itself." As we will discuss in the final part of this entry, clarifying this ground for unified semiosis proves one of the greatest contributions of Poinsot—which would not have been possible without Augustine—even as it yet remains an area greatly to be explored by future philosophical minds. Indeed, Poinsot, not only through his resolution of the semiosic ground but in his writing as a whole, represents in many ways the *conclusion* of the Scholastic method of philosophical inquiry. The characteristic method of disputation—in which all the serious opinions upon a given controversy or difficulty are weighed and measured before being distinguished, rejected, or accepted—has a way of growing unwieldy. John

Poinsot's first major work, the *Cursus Philosophicus*, spans three volumes in its modern editions, comprising nearly 2,400 pages: all of it intricately interwoven, cross-referencing, and building up an ornate edifice of concepts through a painstaking dialectical sifting of true from false, striving all the while to present opposed positions in as succinct and direct a manner as possible.[12] His *Cursus Theologicus* does the same through commentary upon St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*—drawing upon concepts elucidated in the *Cursus Philosophicus* as well—to the length of roughly 8,000 pages in the Vives edition of the 1880s. By contrast, Poinsot's contemporary, the as-yet better-known René Descartes, penned his most famous treatise, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophiae*, to a length short enough to be carried in one's pocket—perhaps even a few copies.

Much easier to share and distribute such a brief and straightforward piece of literature, it turns out, than to lug around a wheelbarrow's worth of dialectical disputation—and far less intimidating for a readership to tackle, besides. This contrast in their works' length and complexity, I do not doubt, contributed greatly to Cartesian fame in contrast to the relative obscurity of Poinsot.

But, although Poinsot's name has not attained anything like the household familiarity of Descartes', it may yet prove to be the more influential and important in shaping the beliefs of humankind. For Poinsot, though his time witnessed the sun setting upon the Scholastic manner of inquiry, "seems destined to emerge from the shadows of modernity to play the role of a central figure of the postmodern development".[13] Though there remains much to derive from the as-yet untranslated Latin works of Poinsot—insights beyond number littering the pages of his two great *Cursus*—the first light which Poinsot's

---

12 And, notably, the entirety of the *Secunda Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, written on the topic of *De ente mobile incorruptibili*, was suppressed from publication by the author himself, presumably to avoid controversy in the wake of the Galileo affair.

13 Deely 1994: "A Morning and Evening Star: Editor's Introduction" in *ACPQ* 68.3: 275.

thought has to shine upon the Age of Relation is found in the *Tractatus de Signis* edition prepared and rendered into English by Deely: namely, the *doctrina signorum*.

3. The Doctrina Signorum[14]

The revolutionary truth of Poinsot's unique synthesis concerning the *doctrina signorum* may tempt us into a narrowed focus: attending *only* to this teaching and ignoring the full breadth of his genius. This tunnel-vision, however, would be unjust not only to the other topics upon which he writes so admirably, but, indeed, to that very doctrine of signs as well: for, once we grasp this doctrine, we see it applied consistently—albeit not always explicitly—throughout Poinsot's philosophy and theology alike (just as one might see the syllogistic of Aristotle employed subtly throughout all his works). Though there doubtless were consequences of his doctrine that Poinsot did not see, or at the very least which he did not explain, even a cursory glance through either of his *Cursus* will discover the import of signs on page after page. As more scholarship becomes dedicated to its study, there is little doubt that the *Cursus Theologicus* will be found to clarify and advance St. Thomas' teaching from the *Summa Theologiae* precisely through the semiotic heft of Poinsot's nascent realizations.

The edition produced by Deely has been critiqued for elevating the thought of Poinsot unfairly above his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors, as well as constituting an interpretation which does some violence to Poinsot's own deliberate arrangement, specifically by extracting what Poinsot offered as a description and rendering it into a title.[15] Cer-

tainly, the content of the *Tractatus de Signis* "leaps" from one text to the next in its preambulatory material, before coalescing around the three consecutive questions that constitute the primary text.

Make no mistake, the arrangement of the *Tractatus de Signis*—extracted from the *Ars Logica* of Poinsot's *Cursus Philosophicus*—is, unequivocally, an interpretation.[16] As such, it may and has invited and will likely continue to invite some objection and controversy: one may be tempted to believe that the arrangement represents less the thinking of John Poinsot himself and more the beliefs of John Deely. Yet the core of the text, presented as Books I-III in the arranged edition, indisputably presents three consecutive *quaestiones* from Poinsot's own ordering (namely, q.21, "De signo secundum se," q.22, "De divisionibus signi" and q.23, "De notitiis et conceptibus") in the *Secunda Pars Artis Logicae*. The other included material—two preludes, the first three chapters from the *summulae* in the *Prima Pars Artis Logicae*, a comment on the *Perihermenias*, and two preambles (q.2, "De ente rationis logic" and q.17, "De praedicamento relationis"), as well as one appended article ("Utrum voces significent per prius conceptus an res") from the first disputed question in the *Prima Pars Artis Logicae*—may be more legitimately questioned, but only if one looks at the whole work from its table of contents and

---

Poinsot" in *Versus* 46: 109-29 and Ashworth 1988: "The historical origins of John Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs*", *Semiotica* 69.1/2: 129-47. Response to both Ashworth and Marmo is given below in n.164.

16 Indeed, it says so explicitly on the title page of both first and second editions—Deely himself was quite aware of this, considering it an interpretation not only in its organization but even more pressingly in its translation. I think here of Martin Heidegger's words in his lecture 1939: "On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις", 315/187, where he writes: "Since this 'translation' is already the *interpretation* proper, only an explanation of the 'translation' is called for. This is certainly not a 'trans-lation' in the sense of a 'carrying over' of the Greek words into the *proper force and weight of our language*. It is not intended to *replace* the Greek but only to place us *into* the Greek and in so doing to disappear in it. This is why it lacks all the character and fullness that come from the depths of our own language, and why it is neither pleasing nor 'polished.'" Arguably, John Deely's translation of Poinsot is both more pleasing and certainly more polished than Heidegger's renderings of Aristotle's Greek, and, yet, his English words do deliberately rebel against constrictive traditions which would result in the misrepresentation of Poinsot's genius.

correspondences and not at the content of the work itself. In reading through the text as so-presented, that is, the intimate relation of the primary text upon these adjoined questions and articles becomes quickly evident. Naught in the three "books" of the *Tractatus* would be intelligible absent an understanding provided by those preludes, prologues, and preambles.

For the doctrine of signs, as explicated by Poinsot, not only helps make clear an understanding of both *entia rationis*, or mind-dependent beings, and relations, but depends upon both to itself be understood. (This is not a vicious circle but the semiotic spiral[17] in action.) We will fold our consideration of relations into the schematic exposition given below. Here, allow us to say a few words first about the nature and importance of *ens rationis*—as well as the difficulty of translating this and its correlate term, *ens reale*.

As a first statement on terminology and translation, it is worth noting that the phrase "*ens reale*" is not authentically of St. Thomas Aquinas himself, despite its prevalence in the tradition: nowhere in the 8 million words believed truly to have come from his mind will the phrase be found. It *is* found frequently, however, in spurious works, including the *Summa de Totius Logicae Aristotelis*, which, as aforementioned, is frequently cited by Poinsot and once, in the *Secunda Pars Artis Logicae*, q.17, a.4 (an article not contained in the *Tractatus de Signis*) even vehemently defended as assuredly a work of St. Thomas: "Nor should we deny that this work belongs to St. Thomas, to whose authority we often petition."[18] While it does not ultimately undermine Poinsot's treatment, this terminological inconsistency in the tradition makes one have to work harder at understanding a bevy of terms and, indeed, makes one have to work harder in translation, too.

For how are we to understand the contrast of the *ens rationis* with the *ens reale*? Modernity, as Deely has often demonstrated,

---

17 Cf. Deely 2010: *Semiotic Animal*, 91-98.
18 1632: R.I.591b16–19: "Nec debemus negare hoc opusculum esse D. Thomae, a quo toties auctoritatem eius petimus."

conceives these two as opposed along dualistic lines: the former being a mental phenomenon, the latter what is extramental. The temptation, therefore, is to render these phrases by their apparent transliterations: "being of reason", "real being". But this translation misinterprets[19] the significance of these two technical terms: for it suggests a differentiation along *causal* rather than *intentional* bearing, upon which latter basis the two are, in fact, distinguished. Put in other words, the misinterpretation posits the distinction on the side of the existence of things themselves rather than on how we relate to them as objects. On this point, let us listen to Poinsot himself:[20]

> If we attend to the signification of the name taken in its fullest extent, "mind-dependent being" [that is, Deely's translation of "*ens*

---

19 Cf. Deely 1985: "Editorial Afterword" to the *Tractatus de Signis*, 465 n106: "the line between translation and interpretation is hard and fast only in cases where there clearly exist in two languages semantic units so governed by established conventions and rules of usage that no understanding beyond straightforward linguistic competence in the two tongues is required to see their comparative synonym. Where this is not the case, then translation without interpretation degenerates to transliteration or to a greater or lesser degree of sheer guesswork. Where interpretation becomes necessary, then, to guide the work of translation through a problem passage, the question is not whether interpretation is involved, but whether it is correct or not; and no simple appeal to the distinction between translation and interpretation can resolve the problem-situation, though it remains the case that translation and interpretation should indeed be kept as separate as the established conventions governing the respective languages allow. Second, in the case of philosophical writers generally, and all the more so in the case of one as original and little known as Poinsot, new ground is always being broken that is simply not covered by patterns of usage prejacent to the writer's thought, as has been made abundantly clear in the matter of Poinsot's writing... so that interpretation is normally necessary in philosophical translation to a greater extent than in most literary genres. He who does not understand an author cannot be a reliable guide to the establishment of that author's text in a second language. Third, as has been said above concerning the first principle for the generation of our English text of this edition, to which principle I would again refer the reader here, the control factor over interpretation and translation alike, in their imperfect but real separability and interweave, can only be *the original text*".

20 1632: *TDS*, 48/1-22: "Ens rationis in omni sua latitutdine, si nominis significationem attendamus, dicit id, quod dependet aliquo modo a ratione. Potest autem dependere vel ut effectus a causa vel ut obiectum a cognoscente.

"Primo modo invenitur aliquid dupliciter dependere a ratione, vel quia est ab ipsa ut ab efficiente, sicut opera artis, quae per rationem excogitantur et fiunt, vel quia est in ipsa ut in subiecto et causa materiali, sicut actus et habitus sunt in intellectu. Sed uterque iste modus pertient ad ens reale, quia ens sic dictum habet veram et realem existentiam, dependentem tamen ab intellectu.

"Quod autem secundo modo ab intellectu dependet, scilicet ut obiectum, dicitur proprie ens rationis, ut pertinet ad praesens, quia nullum esse habe extra rationem, sed solum obiective dicitur essein ipsa, et sic opponitur enti reali."

rationis"] expresses that which depends on the mind in any way. But something can so depend either as an effect depends on a cause, or as an object depends on the one knowing.

In the first way, something can be found to depend on the mind as an effect upon a cause in two senses: either because it is from the mind as from an efficient cause, the way that works of art are devised and come to be by virtue of the mind; or because it is in the mind as in a subject and material cause, the way that acts and habits are in the understanding. But each of these senses pertains to the order of mind-independent being, because a being referred to in either of these two senses has a true and physical existence [i.e., an existence which does not wholly consist in being known], though one dependent upon understanding.

That which depends on the understanding in the second way, however, namely as an object, is properly called a mind-dependent or mental being, so far as is pertinent to present concerns, because it has *no* existence outside of the [relation provenating from the] mind, but is said to exist only objectively within apprehension, and so is opposed to mind-independent or physical being.

Put otherwise, these *entia rationis* properly so-called, which exist only by the rationale of the mind's intending them as objects, are something quite different than the improperly mind-dependent entities which come about as *things* following the mind's activity: either in productive constitution (as artifacts dependent somehow on the mind of the artificer) or in the mind's own accidental modification (as the forms residing in the mind itself). *Entia rationis*, properly speaking, rather, are those termini of cognitive relations which do not, of themselves, possess an existence apart from that very intentional termination, whereas mind-independent entities (*entia realis*) are those that do. As will be shown below (3.3 and 4.3), mind-dependent beings play an integral role in the experience of culture and human development. More immediately, however, we must note that, although dependent upon the intentionality of a cognitive action, *entia rationis* are nevertheless *truly* beings. No dualism

can be found here. As Poinsot continues:[21]

> That there is being in this sense, to be sure, has been denied by some, yet it is affirmed by the general consensus of theologians and philosophers, since they all distinguish mind-independent being from constructed, fictive, or mind-dependent being, by the fact that the former exists in the world of nature, while the latter does not have an existence in nature but is only known and constructed. Quite apart from any expert opinion, experience itself sufficiently proves that there is such a thing as being[s] whose entire existence depends on the mind, since we witness ourselves imagining and knowing many things which are entirely impossible, and such are the constructed or fictive beings. They are beings, certainly, **because they are known in the way being is known**; but they are constructs or fictions, because no true being on the side of physical nature corresponds to them.

Behind this assertion—that *entia rationis* are "known in the way being is known" (or "known in the mode of knowing being")—lies what Poinsot will defend and clarify in the first question of his *Prima Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, article three, namely, that *ens ut primum cognitum* ("being as first known") is not the *ens inquantum ens* of metaphysics, but something wholly and in all ways indeterminate: a conception of "being" which comprises equally *ens reale* and *ens rationis*.[22]

It is a point on which we will dwell at length below (3.1.2), but important to note here is that this full extent of being—both the mind-dependent and mind-independent—can only be comprised by a perspective which considers the two equally. As Deely made central to his life's work, this perspective is that which semiotics provides: that is, by recognition that all thought is in and through signs, we are able to see the full

---

21 Ibid, 48/23-49/7: "Quod quidem licet aliqui negaverint, communi tamen theologurm et philosophorum consensu dari constat, cum omnes distinguant ens reale ab ente fictio seu rationis, quia illud existti in rerum natura, hoc non habet existentiam in re, sed solum cognoscitur et fingitur. Imo ipsa experientia sufficienter id probat, cum videamus multa nos imaginri et cognoscere, quae omnino impossibilia sunt, et talia sunt entia ficta. Entia quidem, quia cognoscuntur ad modum entis, ficta vero, quia non correspondet illis aliquod esse verum a parte rei." **Bold** emphasis in the English my own.
22 Cf. Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition* especially c.2 but *in passim*.

extent of being not only in the existential dimension which traditionally resolves towards God as the first cause, but also the intelligible dimension of our own experience, which resolves towards the *primum cognitum*. But to attain this semiotic perspective and the equality of its objects, there must be some kind of being which is indifferent to the dependence upon the mind. This being is relation.

That is: while *entia rationis* stand essential to understanding the range and importance of the *doctrina signorum*—both as to how signs are constituted and what they may signify—our understanding of that doctrine itself hinges upon first properly grasping the nature of **relation**. For, according to Poinsot, signification consists always in a relation between not only the signifying element and that which is signified, but also at least virtually a relation to a cognitive power. As Nathan Lyons writes in his highly recommended *Signs in the Dust*:[23]

> Poinsot's diverse typology of signs is grounded in a single metaphysics of signification. Considered metaphysically, a sign is a species of *relation*. The sign[-vehicle] establishes a relation between a signified object and a knower, and through this relation the knower comes to know the signified object. Poinsot's metaphysics of signs thus rests on his metaphysics of relations, and he supplies a careful account of this theme.

It is worth noting that Poinsot—as seemingly everyone before and after him until Charles Peirce—ambiguously references the *sign* as both the *something through which* the mediation is accomplished **and** as the *relation itself*. However, Poinsot, unlike those many both before and after, nevertheless clearly demonstrates an *awareness of* and an effort (without yet having introduced a terminological correction) to distinguish these two references of the term *signum*. Nevertheless, for the principal signification of the term, he does maintain it to refer to *that*

---

23 Lyons 2019: *Signs in the Dust*, 18.

which accomplishes the relation of representation rather than the relation itself.[24]

3.1. The Being of Relations

The controversy over relations in Scholastic thought is, in a word, complex. We will not dive into that historical complexity here—nothing we could provide would do aught but understate the matter.[25] The controversies begin before Scholasticism itself, being rooted in ambiguities of Aristotle and in passing comments of Boethius—not to mention the very difficult-to-discern reality independent of any theoretical insight or commentary. Suffice it only to say that an *incorrect* grasp of relation results in **disaster** for the **entirety** of one's philosophical endeavor. We therefore want to stress the *correct* grasp and subsequent presentation offered by Poinsot.

To begin, we have to note that the notion of relation is introduced explicitly into Western philosophical discourse by Aristotle through his *Categories*. There, as Deely has shown time and again, Aristotle's discussion in c.7—the second longest in the work—proceeds dialectically towards the conclusion, namely, that "the fact that a thing is explained with reference

---

24 1632: *TDS* 25/11-13: "**Signum** ergo **definitur** in communi: « Id, quod potentiae cognoscitivae aliquid aliud a se reprasentat »."

25 Krempel's works (1952: *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas: exposé historique et systématique* and 1959: "S. Thomas et la notion de relation transcendentale" in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques Et Théologiques* 43:87-94) provide value historical information on St. Thomas himself but little else. For more detailed discussions of relation generally, see Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 277-334, Deely 2010: *Semiotic Animal* 53-80; 2009: *Purely Objective Reality* 17-53 and 69-83; 2008: *Descartes & Poinsot*, 29-46; 2007: *Intentionality and Semiotics*, 115-36, 143-46, 156-63, and 171-84, and many other works. For historical overviews, see Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 284-96 as a summary (and surrounds for context) and Henninger 1989: *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* for a more extensive presentation. This does, however, leave aside the various controversies which ran throughout later Scholasticism between Scotus and Poinsot. To the best of my knowledge, no sufficient study has as yet been presented on these centuries. One can find summaries of their positions (with questionable accuracy) in manualist figures such as Juan Jose Urraburu—but these are indications at best, without explanation and devoid of attention to nuance. Given the extensive quantity of figures who wrote and commented, and the potential slight but significant deviations which may occur therein, it is to be wondered whether an adequate summary could be provided, or whether the study could be undertaken by a single scholar—it seems that a dedicated team might be necessary. Such dedication, though laudable, may not be expedient.

to something else does not make it essentially relative" and "these [substantial things, such as heads and hands] are not relatives, and, this being the case, it would be true to say that no substance is relative in character." As he ends, "It is perhaps a difficult matter... to make a positive statement without more exhaustive examination".[26] In all the Stagirite's extant works, no such "more exhaustive examination" is to be found.[27] But even if Aristotle had provided such explanation, it is doubtful that the Scholastics would not have entered into dispute over its interpretation regardless: for one's theory of relation determines not only one's understanding of the natural cosmos but also of human culture. It is the thread which holds together the web of all being and has, among all the categories, arguably an equal importance with substance for our understanding of the cosmos. The slightest deviation from the correct understanding of relation, therefore, may result in a massive shift to one's grasp of the arts, sciences, society, culture, nature, metaphysics, and, indeed, the entire universe. The consequences demand of us great care.

3.1.1. Mind-Independent Relations

What emerges out of Aristotle—and especially out of Boethius' commentary upon the *Categories*—is the distinction of speaking about relation into the division of *secundum esse* and the *secundum dici*. As noted, there exist no smooth translations of these highly-compressed terms into English. Deely has rendered the former as "relation according to the way it has being" and the latter as "being according to the way it must be expressed in discourse". The key controversy concerns the former, the *secundum esse*:[28] chiefly that is,

---

26 Aristotle, c.360ʙᴄ: *Κατηγορίαι*, 8a32–34 and 8b15–23.

27 Which is not to say important contributions to our understanding of relation cannot be found elsewhere, such as in c.348/47b: *Μετά τα Φυσικά*, 5.15, 1020b26–31 or c.348/47a: *Φυσικὴ ἀκρόασις* 5.2 at 225b11–14. These, however, are passages only in passing, and though they contain important hints, do not lay out any positive doctrine.

28 Most of the controversies concerning the *secundum dici* seem, in fact, to be related either to the translation of the term or to a conflation of the *secundum esse/dici* pairing with the *relationis realis/rationis* pair-

the question over relation concerns whether they have a being properly their own, or whether that being is constituted solely by an act of the mind. In other words, are there *relationes realis*, or only *relationes rationis*—and, further, if they are mind-independent, where and how is this mind-independence to be found?

Poinsot begins his answer to these questions by stating the chief opposed opinions[29]—namely those of the nominalists (such as Ockham and Sáurez, who deny mind-independent relations altogether) and those who posit relations to be real but only as *inherent* accidents *within* substances (which is to reduce them to the *relativa secundum dici*), whom we might call "relational immanentists"—and contrasting his own position against these by invoking the authority, first, of Aristotle,[30] and second, of St. Thomas.[31] From these two authorities, he gathers that "relation is something mind-independent and an inhering accident."[32] Put in other words, relation can be *both* something mind-independent *and* an accident which inheres in substances.

As he goes on to explain:[33]

> THE FOUNDATION OF THIS VIEW is the fact that relations according to the way being must be expressed in discourse have an absolute being and are not totally toward another; mind-dependent relations do not exist except in an apprehension of the understanding, from which they have an objective act of being; but apart from any consideration of the mind, some things are encountered in reality

---

ing—most often, that is, an unintentional dualist reading of profoundly anti-dualist thinking.

29 1632: *TDS* 80/12-81/10.

30 Ibid, 81/11-44.

31 Ibid, 81/45-82/6.

32 Ibid, 82/4-6: "relationem esse aliquid reale et accidens inhaerens."

33 Ibid, 82/7-27: "FUNDAMENTUM EST, quia relationes secundum dici habent esse absolutum et non totum sunt ad aliud; relationes rationis non sunt nisi in intellectu apprehendente, a quo habent esse obiectivum; sed in re nullo intellectu considerante inveniuntur aliqua non habentia aliud esse quam ad aliud. Ergo inveniuntur relationes reales, quae non sunt secundum dici et sic praedicamentum seorsum a rebus absolutis possunt constituere.

"*Antecedens* proabtur, quia nullo intellectu considerante inveniuntur in re aliqua, quibus nullum esse absolutum assignari potest. Invenitur enim ordo, ut exercitus ordinatus, universum ordinatum; invenitur similitudo, dependentia, paternitas et alia similia, quae nullo esse absoluto explicari possunt, et totum esse in eis se habet ad alterum."

which have no being other than a being toward another. Therefore physical relations [*relationes reales*] are encountered, which are not according to the way being must be expressed in discourse, and so can constitute a category apart from [the categories of] "absolute" mind-independent beings.

The antecedent is proved because, apart from the mind's consideration, there are encountered in reality some things to which can be assigned no relatively independent or absolute being [*esse absolutum*]. For order is encountered—for instance, an army on parade, the ordered physical universe; similitude, dependence, parenthood, and other like things are encountered, which cannot be explained by any absolute being, and the whole content or being in these things possesses itself relative to another.

Succinctly put otherwise, we find ourselves confronted with mind-independent relations *constantly*. Our world is rife with these "physical relations" (as Deely translates *relationes reales*).[34] Of particular importance here among those examples which Poinsot gives, note the inclusion of *similitude* (and, we may infer, its opposed corollary, *dissimilitude*). To grasp the mind-independent reality of this relation may cause a struggle for many: for the sheer number of mind-independent or physical relations this implies appears, at first consideration, staggering. For instance: it is estimated that our galaxy, the Milky Way, contains approximately 100,000,000,000 stars: each, as alike to the other in being-a-star, is really related to every other in that similitude. Consider, further, that there are estimated to be some 200,000,000,000 to 2,000,000,000,000 *galaxies* in the universe, some of which may contain many more

---

34 Cf. Deely 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding*, 382: "[The] prospective infinite reach of human understanding is what lay behind the medieval fondness for the formula that 'the intellectual soul is capable of becoming all things' ('*anima est quodammodo omnia*', to quote exactly). The infinite reach of understanding is also behind the use, little understood today, by some of the best Latin authors of the term 'physical' to apply to whatever exists in the order of being as it exhibits an existence independent of the finite mind. In modern usage, 'physical' tends to be a synonym for 'material', in contrast to 'spiritual'. But in Latin philosophy, 'physical' extends equally to material and spiritual substances and to the *esse divinum* itself, even to the discussion of grace among the theologians. Modern ignorance on this point means that the student should note that '*physica*' among the Latins can be extended also to spiritual being insofar as such being is cognition-independent. An angel would be no less 'physical' than a rock."

stars than our own. Some estimates hold there to be 1E+24 (i.e., one *septillion*) stars in the universe. To take a much easier example—one much easier to envisage (with far smaller numbers)—we may consider the average mature white maple tree (*acer saccharinum*) which, in the full bloom of summer, will have approximately 100,000 leaves. Each leaf bears an intrinsic similarity to each other. Each year, as the leaves turn and fall, some cease to be leaves (properly speaking) before others. One leaf, always, is the first to fall; it may remain a leaf in a sense, but only equivocally so-called. The similitude to those leaves yet upon the tree remains in the quality of shape, but not for long, though no longer in substantial being. Yet the dissolution of one leaf, and correspondingly its similitude to those yet living, destroys neither the living leaves nor their similitudes to one another.

It is important to note, however, that, while still very numerous, the number of these relations is far fewer than it might seem at first, for "the numerically same relation can be referred to numerically diverse terms".[35] Thus, the *similitudes* as essentially suprasubjective rather than intersubjective are commonly participated between each and not severally multiplied by each (i.e., each leaf has one relation of similitude to every other). The single fundament establishes one and the same relation to a potentially-infinite number of terms.

Thus, as Poinsot continues in demonstrating the mind-independence of such relations:[36]

---

35 : *TDS*, 85/45-47: "unam relationem numero posse ad diversos terminos numero referri" – "the numerically same relation can be referred to numerically diverse terms". Poinsot takes for his authority here the text of St. Thomas in 1271-72: *ST* IIIa, q.35, a.5. One might consider also the nature of any *point*, which may be singular in itself and yet diverse in relations. Aquinas makes use of this analogy to explain the relation of the *sensus communis* to the action of the exterior senses. Cf. 1268: *Sentencia De anima*, lib.2/lib.3, lec.27/lec.3, n.609-631/n.11-15; 1268: *Sentencia De sensu et sensato*, tr.1, c.18/1.7, n.286-289, especially the lattermost. Cf. also 1265/66: *SCG* lib.2, c.100, n.3; 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.1, a.3, ad.2; i.1256-59: *Quodlibet VII*, q.1, a.2, ad.1.

36 1632: *TDS*, 82/27-34: "Cuius signum est, quia non existente termino deficit similitudo aut paternitas. Si autem esse illorum esset quid absolutum, non deficeret ex solo defectu termini. Negare vero, quod ista in re dentur nullo untellectu formante et fingente illa, est negare id, quod vel rusticissimi homines in re dari cognoscunt."

> The sign of this [mind-independence of the relation] is the fact that when the terminus becomes nonexistent, the similitude or parenthood disappears. But if the being of those things were something absolute, it would not disappear solely in consequence of the disappearance of the term. But to deny that these things are given in the order of mind-independent being when no finite intelligence is forming and constructing them, is to deny that which even the most unlearned of men recognize in nature.

We see here an appeal to a certain truth as *notissimum quoad nos*: one needs no sophistication (and may indeed often be better off without it!) in recognizing that two-alike things have between them a relation of likeness, which relation is destroyed immediately along with either one of the two things—though it may be preserved in our minds as a *mind-dependent* relation—while the other entity *along with the fundament from which the relation of similitude provenated* remain unchanged. For the categorical and mind-independent relation consists always in three elements: the subject, the fundament, and the terminus. Respecting these three elements, Poinsot lists five conditions requisite in order that the mind-independent and categorical relation can be established in being:[37]

> On the side of the subject, the two conditions are that [first] that the subject of the relation be a mind-independent being and that [second] it be a fundament, that is to say, that the subject of the relation have the rationale of the founding independently of that rationale's being known. On the side of the terminus, the conditions are that [first, or third overall] the terminus of the relation be something mind-independent and mind-independently existing, and second [or fourth overall], that it be mind-independently distinct from the other extreme [i.e., the subject of the relation]. But on the part of the relatives [and thus fifth overall], i.e., of the subjective things related, the condition is that they be of the same order...

---

37 Ibid, 91/8-15: "Ex parte *subiecti*, quod subiectum sit ens reale et fundamentum seu rationem fundandi realem habeat. Ex parte *termini*, quod terminus sit res aliqua realis et realiter existens, et secundumo, quod sit distincta realiter ab alio extreme. Ex parte vero *relativorum* quod sint eiusdem ordinis..."

To exposit these five conditions more thoroughly, so as to show how they render a difference in the being of mind-independent and mind-dependent relations, let us proceed through each in sequence.

First, on the part of the subject, that it be itself a mind-independent being: this means that a mind-independent relation cannot be founded on a mind-dependent being. Something which itself is mind-dependent may certainly have a real effect, that is, but it cannot give rise to a *real relation*, except indirectly *through* that effect. Rather, any relation arising from the mind-dependent being as such would be a kind of *mixed* relation. If I believe a murderer to be lurking in my basement, when no such murderer exists, this belief will have a real effect upon me, and be "real" to me; but the relation does not obtain in reality in fact and therefore does not constitute a categorical relation.

Second, that the subject of the relation has a mind-independent rationale of founding the relation: this is to say that the mind-independent relation is one which exists *whether or not we know of it.* John Deely, in both written works and in conversation, would often use the example of the man who does not know he is a father: there is a mind-independent relation to his progeny even if the man has no clue whatsoever. By the act of intercourse with a woman, that relation was founded, and persists in actual existence, so long as both father and child exist, even if they never know one another, and even if the father never knows the son exists at all.

Third, on the part of the terminus, that it be something mind-independent not only as a possibility but as actually existing: this condition demands not only that the terminus be something possible—else every man would be engaged in the mind-independent relation of paternity and every woman in maternity whether or not they have ever even engaged in intercourse let alone the actuality of procreation—but a being in actual existence. That is, in order that man and woman respectively *be* father and mother, the child must be actually

existing as well. The being of the predicamental relation, in other words, requires a mind-independent existence of *both* terms.

Fourth, that the terminus must be *really distinct*, that is, mind-independent, of the subject founding the relation: else, there would be an infinite proliferation of mind-independent relations, inasmuch as we might modally or "logically" differentiate terms *ad infinitum*. If there were a real difference, that is, between Peter and Peter-himself, then there would also be a real difference between Peter-himself and Peter-himself's-self, and so on and on.

Fifth and finally, the two terms related—fundament and terminus—must belong to the same order of being: otherwise we have an impossibility of co-terminative coordination, in that, if the mode of being of one of the terms is entirely different than the other in the regard they are related, then the relation in some way will depend upon being rendered objectively through cognition. An angel and a human being, for instance, may be engaged in a predicamental relation inasmuch as the angel, really immaterial in itself, may influence the thoughts of the human being, which thoughts have in them a really immaterial element. But the human being, as a bodily creature, cannot be engaged in a predicamental relation with the angel as really affecting the angel through humanly material operations. I believe this fifth condition has a certain importance for the *reality* of *mind-dependent* relations as well, but this would here be a bridge too far.

In summation, we may recognize with Poinsot that mind-independent relations have a mind-independent fundament with a coexistent mind-independent terminus, while every mind-dependent relation lacks such a fundament. The mind-independent *reality* of the relation, taking "reality" in the sense not only of existence but more primarily of its intelligibility, consists in both the fundament and the terminus each becoming something other than it would be without that relation, even if the change is not one which entitatively alters the being of the terms them-

selves. This change is affected by virtue of the positive and entitative being of the reality of the relation itself. For example, the subject of the man in no way entitatively changes by his becoming a father—and yet there *is* a real change inasmuch as that relation of paternity exists, somehow, in some way, *in* that man; inasmuch, that is, as he as the subject *becomes* the fundament of that relation. The converse is true for his child. Even though this relation possesses no existence independent of those terms, it is clear nevertheless that "paternity" has 1) a mind-independent subject; 2) a mind-independent rationale founding the relation—namely, commission of the act of intercourse; 3) that the child actually exists and is therefore a mind-independent terminus; 4) that the terminus is really distinct from the subject and its fundament, which is patently clear since the child survives not only the ceased act of procreation but also the death of the father; and 5) that father and child belong to the same order of being.

But, though such mind-independent relations are in fact ubiquitous within and essential to our experience, they constitute only a small—and in the modern age, decreasing—quantity of the relations through which our experience itself is constituted.

3.1.2. The Full Extent of Relation

The truth that one and the same relation under differing circumstances can be either mind-dependent or mind-independent has great importance for the doctrine of signs. To see this, consider that **relations are defined by Poinsot** (taking this to be the intent of Aristotle in his *Categories*) as "those the entire being of which consists in bearing toward another" – "*quod sunt illa, quorum totum suum esse se habet ad aliud*".[38] As Deely well explains in his *Intentionality*

---

38 Ibid, 81/20-21. Translation my own: note the key difference from Deely's: "they are those things whose entire being consists in bearing toward another." The word "things", here, I believe, suggests something misleading.

and Semiotics, this definition shows a *singularity* to what relation is: namely, that, although it is listed among the categories, not all relations are or need be categorical.[39] And indeed, that one and the same relation, without changing its own positive being, can be either mind-dependent or independent exhibits the *singularity* of relation, for, thus, one and the same relation might sometimes belong to the categories and sometimes *not*. The *ad aliud*, in other words, remains *essentially* the same in its own proper being even while it may *contextually* be altered from a state of mind-independence to one of mind-dependence. This interpretation of relation's indifference arises from a text of St. Thomas:[40]

> ...It must be considered that only in those things which are said to be "to something" [*ad aliquid*], is there to be found something which is according to reason alone [*secundum rationem tantum*] and not according to thinghood [*non secundum rem*—that is, respectively, according to mind-dependence and not according to mind-independence]. Such is not to be found in other genera, because the other genera, such as quantity and quality, signify something inhering in some other according to their proper intelligible rationales. But those things which are said to be "to something" [*ad aliquid*], signify only the respect to another in their proper intelligible rationales.

As Poinsot notes, Aquinas must here be speaking of relation comprising both mind-dependent and independent elements either specifically as it is a category or of relation in a broader sense, that is, insofar "as [relation] abstracts from the division into mind-independent and mind-dependent".[41] This slight am-

---

39 Deely 2007: *Intentionality and Semiotics*, 120.

40 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.28, a.1, c.: "considerandum est quod solum in his quae dicuntur ad aliquid, inveniuntur aliqua secundum rationem tantum, et non secundum rem. Quod non est in aliis generibus, quia alia genera, ut quantitas et qualitas, secundum propriam rationem significant aliquid alicui inhaerens. Ea vero quae dicuntur ad aliquid, significant secundum propriam rationem solum respectum ad aliud." It is worth noting that the phrase rendered here in English as "those things which are said to be towards something", somewhat misrepresents the Latin: "*his quae dicuntur ad aliquid*". That is, nothing in the Latin corresponds to our English "things". Cf. Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 290 for a more detailed discussion of this problem.

41 1632: *TDS*, 93/24-26: "Nam vel loquitur D. Thomas de relatione praedicamentali vel de relatione, prout abstrahit a reali et rationis."

biguity in Thomas' literal words led to three distinct and common interpretations by Poinsot's own time, the first two of which interpret Aquinas to be speaking of relation as a category. The first of these categorical interpretations holds that, although the mind-independent element of the relation is some accident upon which any relation is founded, the respect itself (i.e., the *ad aliud*) is mind-dependent. Thus, it holds "relation" to name something "*in things*" only in an equivocal manner. The second interpretation (and this the opinion of Suárez) holds that we can pattern mind-dependent relations after mind-independent relations, as a kind of "mental representing", but that these mind-dependent relations do not truly constitute the rationale of *ad aliquid*.[42]

By contrast, the third interpretation holds Aquinas not to be speaking here of relation as confined to categorical being but rather as abstracting therefrom—which opinion Poinsot will defend and explain. For, as he shows, against the first interpretation, if the category of relation concerned only the accident *within* the substance, this would, in fact, *exclude* relation properly speaking from the categories. Such a position renders the *respect* to have no mind-independence whatsoever, but instead would make the "respect" something other than the "relation" of the categories: namely, whatever other accident serves to found the relation. For instance, if "heavier than", as said of iron with respect to cotton, were merely the name of a mind-dependent object, and what were mind-independent were only the respective quantitative weights of the substances, then the category of relation would not name anything having existence of itself.

---

42 1597: *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, disp.47, sect.3, n.5, p.796a: "Et inde etiam fit ut facilius possint entia rationis secundum illum modum habitudinis concipi, non quod in tali relatione sit vera habitudo, seu verum esse ad, tale quale est in relatione reali, sed quia ad instars seu proportionem ejus concipitur. Unde idem D. Thomas postquam dixit relationem secundum propriam rationem solum significare respectum ad aliud, subdit hunc respectum aliquando esse in ipsa natura rerum , aliquando vero esse solum in apprehensione rationis conferentis unum alteri. Ad rationem autem illius sententiae facile respondetur, negando propriam rationem relationis vere reperiri in relatione rationis, quia in tali relatione nec est vera habitudo, nec verum esse ad aliquid, sed solum apprehenditur ac si esset ad aliquid."

Against the second interpretation—namely, that all mind-dependent relations are merely patternings after mind-independent relations—Poinsot acutely and succinctly observes that this would be nothing unique to relation (and therefore it would not deserve to be a unique category). We can form mind-dependent patterns of every category of being on the basis of the mind-independent instantiations thereof. What reason then, would there be for Aquinas to ascribe something of *ens rationis* to relation as unique among the categories? Thus, as Poinsot writes in defense of the third interpretation (bold emphasis added):[43]

> For [St. Thomas] did not say that in the category of being-toward-something are found some things conformed to the order of mind-dependent being, but he said unqualifiedly, "in the case of these things, which are a being toward something," in order to indicate that he is not speaking of relation as it is a category determinately of mind-independent being, but according to itself absolutely—to which point some who read St. Thomas less carefully ought to pay attention. St. Thomas, therefore, in the passage in question, is speaking of relation under the most formal concept of a being-toward [that is, in its own proper intelligible rationale, considered precissively {BK}], and he asserts that from that content by which the relation is considered toward a terminus, **both exists positively**, and *is not determinately a mind-independent form*, but is indifferent to the exercise of a mind-independent or a mind-dependent act of existence, even though a categorial exercise of being-toward would also be mind-independently founded. And thus St. Thomas did not wish to point out which relation would be mind-independent or which mind-dependent, but [rather] the rationale or content owing to which relation is [*peculiarly*] able to be mind-independent or mind-dependent, namely, the rationale

or content whereby it is toward a terminus; for even though it can have a mind-independent existence there [namely, in *being-towards* {BK}], yet it does not have a mind-independent existence *from* there [that is to say, that *being-towards* does not make a relation to be mind-independent {BK}].

To recapitulate briefly what Poinsot here is saying, the being proper to relation includes but does not reduce to the category of relation. Indeed, the being proper to relation is *indifferent* as to whether it is mind-dependent or independent, and only as mind-independent could it properly be categorical. The question we must ask in light of these clarifications, however: how are we to understand the meaning of the "positive existence" of the relation, such that even a *relatio rationis* which is *not* a mind-independent form can be identified as *relativum secundum esse*? A key advance in answering this question, Poinsot goes on to contrast the *positive* with the *entitative*: "in the other categories their proper and most formal rationale cannot be understood positively unless it is also understood entitatively, because their positive rationale is toward themselves only and subjective".[44] By contrast, the relative can be understood positively without being entitatively, because its rationale—we may infer—consists in being *supra*subjective.

This distinction proves essential to understanding the nature of relation as such. For every entitative signification references what *has being* or *has existence*—this being the direction of resolution towards which we ordinarily move in thinking of a being insofar as it is a being, that is, the metaphysical order of resolution that terminates in a First Cause. But it seems clear that the *positive*, though contrasted with the *entitative* and with this existential order of resolution, is not *nothing*. Nor is the positive being of mind-dependent relation to be relegated to the contemporary conventional sense of what is *mere fiction*, for the contrast between the positive and the

---

44 Ibid, 95/19-25: "in aliis generibus ratio propria et formalissima eorum non potest positive intelligatur, quia positiva eorum ratio est ad se tantum et absoluta, et ideo non intelligitur positive nisi etiam entitative".

entitative is not of *contradictories*, or of those things which are mutually opposed to one another, but rather the positive is something which *could be entitative* as well as not. Let us carefully attend to Poinsot's exposition:[45]

> Only relation has [both] to be being and toward being [*habet esse ens et ad ens*], and from that content by which it is toward being, it exists positively, yet it does not have thence the rationale of being mind-independent. But a mind-independent existence comes to relation from one source, namely, from a [mind-independent] fundament, the positive rationale of "toward" from elsewhere, namely, from the terminus, from which the relation does not have "to be" being, but "toward" being, although that "toward" is truly mind-independent when it is founded. That therefore something can be considered positively, even if it does not exist entitatively independently of mind, is proper to relation.

The point may be subtle, but it is patently here nonetheless: a relation has a mind-independent *entitative* existence from the fundament making the relation really to affect something other (which effect, *nota bene*, need not be according to the order of efficient cause);[46] while the *positive* being comes from the relation having a terminus and therefore necessarily a "respect towards" the terminus, as the that-towards-which the relation is provenated. This coheres with the rest of what St. Thomas says in the disputed text.[47] This "respect towards"—which we may call

---

45 Ibid, 95/26-36: "Sola relatio habet esse ens et ad ens, et pro ea parte, qua se habet ad ens, positive se habet, nec tamen inde habet entitatem realem. Sed aliunde relationi provenit realitas, scilicet a fundamento, aliunde positiva ratio *ad*, scilicet ex termino, ex quo non habet esse ens, sed ad ens, licet illud *ad* vere reale sit, quando fundatum est. Quod ergo aliquid possit considerari positive, etiamsi non entitative realiter, proprium relationis est." Quotation marks in the English my addition.

46 This point—absolutely essential in properly understanding the nature of relation—would take us too far afield from the intent of this article.

47 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.28, a.1, c.: "Qui quidem respectus aliquando est in ipsa natura rerum; utpote quando aliquae res secundum suam naturam ad invicem ordinatae sunt, et invicem inclinationem habent. Et huiusmodi relationes oportet esse reales. Sicut in corpore gravi est inclinatio et ordo ad locum medium, unde respectus quidam est in ipso gravi respectu loci medii. Et similiter est de aliis huiusmodi. Aliquando vero respectus significatus per ea quae dicuntur ad aliquid, est tantum in ipsa apprehensione rationis conferentis unum alteri, et tunc est relatio rationis tantum; sicut cum comparat ratio hominem animali, ut speciem ad genus. Cum autem aliquid procedit a principio eiusdem naturae, necesse est quod ambo, scilicet procedens et id a quo procedit, in eodem ordine conveniant,

the *ad aliquid*, the *esse ad*, or the *relativum secundum esse*—consists in a kind of non-entitative existence regardless of whether the conditions for a categorical relation are satisfied or not.[48] Seen from the perspective of the ontological resolution towards the ultimate cause of all mind-independent being, God, this non-entitative *esse ad* is *ens minimum*. Seen, however, from the perspective of radically-relationally-reliant reality of all finite beings, nothing could be more important to understanding not only *our own understanding*, but also *how* all finite beings *are*. For, as we here mention only in passing, every categorical relation exists as *modally distinct* from the terms which it relates. This invites discussion of the meaning of "modes" and the types of distinction beyond this contribution. Suffice it only to say that such relations—as mind-independent non-entitative positive *beings-toward*—are, while dependent upon their terms for existence, nevertheless not reducible to those terms.[49] But to enter into this consideration before inquiring into the being of signs would not only place the cart before the horse, but only *imagine* the horse as terminus of an unreal relation.

---

et sic oportet quod habeant reales respectus ad invicem." – "Now sometimes this respect in itself belongs to the nature of things; such as when some things according to their own natures are ordered to one another and have a mutual inclination. And relations of these kinds are necessarily cognition-independent existences. For instance, in the heavy body there is an inclination to the middle place, and thus there exists in the heavy body a certain respect towards the middle place. And similarly of other like things. But sometimes this respect, which is signified through those things which are said to be 'toward another' [i.e., *ad aliquid*], consists solely in the apprehension of reasoning comparing one thing to another, and then it is cognition-dependent only; as when the reason compares 'human' to 'animal', as the species to the genus. However, when something proceeds from a principle of the same nature, then it is necessary that both, namely that which is proceeding and that from which it proceeds, agree in the same order, and thus it is necessary that they have a cognition-independent respect to one another."

48 This is precisely the point which Deely makes ubiquitously (often invoking the statement of Ratzinger 1970: *Introduction to Christianity*, 132: "the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality") that the primordial division of *esse* is not into substance and accident but into the modalities of *esse in* and *esse ad*. Cf. 2007: *Intentionality and Semiotics*, 145 for a diagram that makes this distinction and its derivations clear.

49 Cf. Poinsot 1632: *Secunda Pars Artis Logicae*, q.17, a.4 (R.I.590-95); Cf. Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum* 296-306.

3.1.3. Unstated Importance of Relation

Thus, to conclude our discussion of relation: that which is signified by the expression "*relativum secundum esse*", understood according to its own proper nature, is the positive being of the *ad aliquid*, irrespective of whether it be a *relatio realis* or *rationis*. Conversely, the significate of "*relativum secundum dici*" is some accident inhering in a substance (or perhaps even a substance itself) which is intelligible to us through its relation to something other: as "father" signifies a being dependent upon the being of paternity, and "daughter" upon that of filiation. Thus, while the *things* upon which relations are founded (and in a lesser degree, that at which they terminate—both of which can be predicated as *relativa secundum dici*) determine the *nature* of the relation, the positive constitution of the relation itself (*secundum esse*) is both irreducible to those terms *and* necessary in order that the *secundum dici* predicates are rightly said.[50]

We will touch upon this twofold relational constitution below (4.3) specifically as it pertains to the constitution of cultural phenomena. The importance of such relations for our social interactions is at once both blatant and neglected; for, together with *ens rationis*, relations provide the whole fabric of our cultural experience—which experience, today, permeates nigh-on the entirety of our human lives. Misunderstanding the nature of relation, most especially the nominalistic presupposition unrecognized but implicitly held throughout the world today, results in a misunderstanding of culture, and, thus, the most prevalent constituent element of our experience. If we are to penetrate therefore to insights concerning the world we inhabit in actuality—and thus establish the intellectual Age of Relation—we sorely need a continually-deepening understanding of relation, upon which path Poinsot has placed us. With these as-yet provisional clarifications concerning relation—expounded upon at length and still leaving much to be

---

50 Cf. Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 282-84.

said (are we, indeed, bearing adequate witness to the Age of Relation's dawn? are we at least turning our eye sin the right direction?)—we are now equipped to consider the *doctrina signorum* itself.

3.2. The Being of Signs

It is evident Poinsot holds it true that we, his readers, must ourselves be in possession of a clear understanding of relation before progressing to the being of signs; which is manifest from the first article of question 21, "concerning the sign itself": namely, "whether the sign belongs to the order of relation".[51] One can answer this question neither affirmatively or negatively, after all, if one does not know what constitutes the order of relation.

The article appearing under this question presents myriad challenging concepts: challenging both because of their nature and because of the brevity with which they are given. That is, although the question *De signo secundum se* runs nearly fifty pages in the Reiser edition of the *Cursus Philosophicus* (646-693), one finds the density contained therein to beg for hundreds if not thousands of pages of commentary and exposition, especially as unfolded against the historical background of Iberian Scholasticism and as extending forward into the contemporary semiotic age of relation. We will not try the reader's patience with any such elaboration here (though, perhaps, the *Studia Poinsotiana* will provide this depth with time), but attempt instead to emphasize the key points of the *doctrina signorum* as presented by Poinsot in its most essential elements. Primarily, we will concern ourselves with exposition of the formal rationale of the sign, understanding the fundament of the sign's structure, and the sign's proper causality.

---

51 I.e., *de signo secundum se* and *utrum signum sit in genere relationis*. It may mislead to translate "genere" as "genus", even if one might expect the cognate: for the *genus* of relation suggests, to many minds, the *category* of relation—which is not what Poinsot here is attempting to convey, as evident by the above analysis which makes clear that relation's positive being does not reduce to the category. Thus we have followed Deely's rendering as "order of relation". Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 116.

The first key point which must be examined is one which Poinsot himself raises at the outset of the article: namely, that the rationale of *signum* consists in a certain irreducible complexity, for the *ratio formalis signi*, the formal rationale by which the essence of the sign is identified, is constituted *both* by the rationale of the representative *and* by a *twofold* relational order. As he writes:[52]

> In our definition [given in the *summulae* text], therefore, two things concur to constitute the general rationale of a sign. The first is the rationale of something manifestative or representative. The second is an order to another, specifically, on the one hand, to the thing which is represented (which must be other than the sign, for nothing is a sign of itself nor signifies itself) and, on the other hand, to the cognitive power to which the sign manifests and represents the thing distinct from itself.

Poinsot will go on to distinguish more clearly between what belongs to manifestation or representation and to signification properly speaking. We will turn to this clarification below (in both 3.2.2., concerning the fundament of sign-relations and in 3.2.3, concerning the causality of signs). Before moving on to such considerations, however, we not only want but need to distinguish precisely what it is that belongs to the nature of the sign as such. To that end, we must note that the definition given in both the *summulae* and here in q.21 is undeniably and irreducibly **triadic**: the relating accomplished by the sign-vehicle is both *of* (or *for*, that is, *on behalf of*) the object represented and *to* the cognitive power. It is in this triadic structure that we discover the formal rationale of the sign.

3.2.1. Formal Rationale of the Sign

That is: Poinsot, in the text just quoted, does not (unlike so many others) reduce the *signum* to the representative ele-

---

52 1632: *TDS*, 116/14-22: "In nostra ergo definitione ad rationem signi in communi duo concurrunt: Primum est ratio manifestativi seu repraesentativi. Secundum ordo ad alterum, scilicet ad rem, quae repraesentatur, quae debet esse diversa a signo, nihil enim est signum sui nec significat se, et ad potentiam, cui manifestat et repraesentat rem a se distinctam."

ment alone, nor even situate it within that element primarily, but rather asserts that the general rationale of the sign (*ratio signi in communi*—and thus, *every possible instance of a sign*) requires the concurrence of this representative element with the twofold *ordo ad alterum*: which is not only to the thing represented but also a potency to which manifestation of that represented thing is made. It is worth noting well that Poinsot does not here claim *two* relations, but rather a *twofold* order of *one* relation. The unity of the significative relation adheres to the principle of parsimony that rejects multiplication of causes beyond necessity, and, moreover, bespeaks the unitive function of these relations as such.[53] Subsequently, in explicitly formulating the question which structures the body of the article, Poinsot writes:[54]

> **We ask therefore whether this formal rationale of a sign** [*formalis ista ratio signi*] **consists, primarily and essentially, in a relation according to the way it has being** [*relatione secundum esse*] (*an ontological relation*) **or in a relation according to the way being must be expressed in discourse** [*relatione secundum dici*] (*a transcendental relation*) **that is to say, in something** *subjective* [*in aliquo absoluto*] **which founds an ontological relation.**

Poinsot subsequently draws attention to the distinction between the *relativum secundum esse* and the *categorical* relation. That is, we are concerned with the positive being of the *esse ad* regardless of whether it is mind-dependent or mind-independent, for, as he says, "we are discussing the sign in general, as it includes equally the natural and the social sign, in which general discussion even the signs which are mental artifacts—namely, stipulated signs as such—are

---

53 Without such a unitive consequence being affected by the singular relation, there would be a kind of infinite causal regress in significative action, as we will examine below. Suffice it here to say that the notion of semiosis as driving evolution would be eradicated were there a necessary multiplicity of distinct relations between object, sign-vehicle, and interpretant.

54 1632: *TDS*, 117/20-24: "Quaerimus ergo, an formalis ista ratio signi consistat in relatione secundum esse primo et per se, an in relatione secundum dici seu in aliquo absoluto, quod fundet talem relationem." All emphases Deely's.

involved."[55]   Subsequently, he gives the position of "some authors", by whom he undoubtedly means the Conimbricenses, as holding the sign to consist in "a respect according to the way being must be expressed in discourse, that is to say, in something absolute founding that ontological relation."[56]   That this which he identifies here is the opinion of the Conimbricenses is clear; for as they themselves write: "the formal rationale of the sign, whether it is [considered] in the ordination to the thing or to the power, consists not in the relations but in their foundations."[57] And, as they confirm just a few lines farther on:[58]

> …a sign is understood to be constituted in its formal character by the fact that there is in it a reason to move a potency to knowledge of the thing it signifies. But this **it does by means of a fundamental proportion, and not by an intervening relation**. Therefore, it is by that proportion constituted in its formal character of sign.

The Conimbricenses argue that given the fact that the fundament of a relation intrinsically possesses some essential proportionality—that is, inasmuch as a substance and its properties constitutes a transcendental relative or the *relativum secundum dici*—there exists some *transcendental respect* to the terminus; and thus the relation itself, the *relativum secundum esse*, exists as an extrinsic consequence thereof. The order to a terminus is therefore required to explain the respect within the entity.[59] Nevertheless, the formal rationale of what

---

55 Ibid, 117/28-118/7: "Et loquimur hic de relatione secundum esse, non de relatione praedicamentli, qui loquimur de signo in communi, prout includit tam signum naturale quam ad placitum, in quo involvitur etiam signum, quod est aliquid rationis, scilicet signum ad placitum."
56 Ibid, 118/22-24:" in respectu secundum dici seu in aliquo absoluto fundante illam relationem." All translations from the Conimbricenses belong to the author, with consultation of the translation by John P. Doyle.
57 1606/7: *De signis*, q.1, a.1: "opinantur [scilicet Alexander of Hales et Martin de Ledesma] tamen non in iis [relationes], sed in earum fundamentis consistere formalem rationem signi, sive in ordine ad rem, sive ad potentiam."
58 1606/7: *De signis*, q.1, a.1: "signum per id itenlligitur constitutum in sua ratione formali, quod est ei ratio promovendi potentiam in notitiam rei significatae: at hoc praestat media proportione fundamentali; non vero interventu relationis; ergo per id constituitur in formali ratione signi." Emphasis in English translation belongs to the author.
59 Cf. ibid, "Ad rationem".

it is to be a sign, they hold, belongs to the entity (the as *relativum secundum dici*) rather than to the respect or relation itself (the *relativum secundum esse*). But this turns the relation itself into a kind of superfluity, for relegating signification to consist in an intrinsic attribute of an entity suggests, indeed, that to understand the *sign*, we do not really need to understand the *relation at all*—such that the in-itself intelligibility of the relation is not integral to understanding the sign, that is—but that we need only grasp the *thing* which founds the relation, subsequent to which we will understand the relation.[60]

For example, under this approach, in attaining an understanding of the man who is a father, we would understand also fatherhood itself.

It is at this point that Poinsot brings his greatest innovation to the *doctrina signorum*. For, despite his own language continually conflating *signum ut sic* with the *fundament* of a sign-relation (that which has long been called the "sign", i.e., the vehicle of other-representation), Poinsot identifies the *formal rationale of the sign* with the *relativum secundum esse*. As he writes:[61]

> My own answer to the question before us is this: **the rationale of a sign formally speaking does not consist in a relation according to the way being must be expressed in discourse [a relation** secundum dici], **but in a relation according to the way relation has being [a relation** secundum esse].

Poinsot exclusively uses the term "formal" to signify what delineates a being in its own proper actuality: the formal being

---

60 Perhaps the reality of the *relativum secundum esse* which comes consequent to the fundament is preserved by the Conimbricenses because of certain texts in the tradition or because one would lapse explicitly into nominalism thereby. But, regardless, they evidently do not believe the relation to be an essential element of the sign's constitution as such; perhaps somehow integral or as a necessary concomitance or consequence, but not *essential* to the constitution of the *signum*. One would have to ask whether the *ordo ad aliquid* exists as something *other than* that which is transcendentally relative within the being at all, then.

61 1632: *TDS*, 119/13-16: "Sit ergo unica conclusio: Ratio signi formaliter loquendo non consist in relatione secundum dici, sed secundum esse."

of something is its proper act, the way in which it has the existence properly signified in its intelligibility. Thus, the formal act of the human being is the soul which structures the body for the sake of intellectual activity, as the formal rationale of a legal contract consists in the mutual agreement of some *quid pro quo* exchange. In this way, the body might have a *fundamental* role to play in human cognition: it might be materially necessary and foundational, that is, for the human acts which are intellectual, perhaps in some ways as a remote foundation, in others as proximate—but in no way does it formally constitute the human being itself. A different body could be equally human. Similarly, the goods exchanged in a legal contract may be foundational but do not themselves constitute that rationale. Different goods could be exchanged. As we will see momentarily, there obtains the same kind of distinction between signs understood as relations and the fundaments upon which they depend—namely, that the fundament is presuppositively necessary to the actuality of the sign, but the sign's own formal rationale consists in something irreducible to the fundament. Poinsot continues:[62]

> I have said "formally speaking," because materially and presuppositively the sign bespeaks the rationale of something manifestative or representative of another, which doubtless does not imply only a relation according to the way relation has being, as we will show shortly.

In other words, to break this text here for a brief comment, every sign-relation presupposes as necessary that there be

---

62 1632: *TDS*, 119/17-41: "Dixi 'formaliter loquendo', quia materialiter et praesuppositive dicit rationem manifestativi seu repraesentativi alterius quod sine dubio non important solam relationem secundum esse, ut statim ostendimus. Formaliter autem ratio signi non dicit solam rationem repraesentativi alterius, cum constet multa repraesentare aliud seu manifestare, et non per modum signi, sicut Deus repraesentat creaturas, et omnis causa effectus, et principia manifestant conclusiones, et lux colores; nec tamen habent rationem signi. Igitur repraesentare aliud requiritur quidem ad signum, sed non in hoc solo consistit; addit autem supra repraesentare, et formaliter dicit representare aliud deficienter vel dependenter ab ipsa re significata, et quasi vice illius substituendo. Et ita respicit significatum non ut pure manifestatum et illuminatum a se, sed ut principale cognoscibile et mensuram sui, cuius loco subrogatur et cuius vices gerit in deducendo ad potentiam."

some absolute being, as a subject, within which there exists something with manifestative properties, that will serve as the fundament. The existence of this fundament (or what is material and presuppositive to that formal existence of the sign) implies by the very fact of its existence *more* than just the positive being of the *relativum secundum esse*. Said otherwise, the *relativum secundum esse* alone does not suffice for the constitution of a significative relation. To continue the text of Poinsot:

> Formally, however, the rationale of a sign does not bespeak the mere rationale of something representative of another, since it is well known that many things represent or manifest another, and not in the mode of a sign, as for example, God represents creatures, and every cause an effect, and principles manifest conclusions, and light manifests colors: yet these do not have the rationale of a sign. Therefore, to represent another is indeed required for a sign, but a sign does not consist in this alone; for *a sign adds something beyond representing, and formally bespeaks representing another deficiently or dependently upon the very thing signified, and by substituting in the capacity of that thing.*

Conversely, that is, while the formal rationale's dependence upon the fundament indicates that the sign is not *merely* the positive being of the relation but has some grounding in the order of substance, neither can the sign be reduced to this fundament which grounds that relation. That is, it belongs to the fundament to represent or manifest, but representation or manifestation alone does not constitute signification.

We do—to elaborate upon our previous example—fundamentally rely upon the good functioning of our brains for acts of intellection; but our brains are not themselves nor do they formally constitute the acts of intellectual thinking. Indeed, our brains and *what occurs within them* are not even formally the acts of *perceptual* and *commonly animal* cognition; for all thinking is in signs, as we will see by the end of this article, and signs are always relations irreducible to their material fundaments. But to employ also a more tangible example: if I have sufficient money and you possess a book I wish to pur-

chase—say, the *Quaestiones minoris dialecticae* of Miguel Comas del Brugar—these possessions are necessary for our exchange but do not constitute a contract apart from some actual agreement to trade them. So too, there might be a neurological pattern and a thing both somehow actual, but the cognition consists precisely in the relation between them (such that the thing is turned thereby into an object for cognition). Concluding this passage of Poinsot, we see him write (with interpolated additions and bold emphasis of my own):

> ...thus a sign[-vehicle] respects a significate not as something purely self-manifested and self-illumined [for thus the sign-vehicle would be superfluous], but as the principal knowable and **measure** of the sign[-vehicle], something in whose place the sign[-vehicle] is surrogated and whose vicegerent the sign[-vehicle] is in bringing that knowable thing to a cognitive power.

In this passage we encounter the notion of the **vicegerent**—literally signifying that which bears a duty or a burden on behalf of another (*vice* from *vicus*, "place, stead, office", and *gerens* from *gerere*, "to carry")—which plays a central role in Poinsot's conception of the representative element of the sign-relation. To carry for another, to bear for another: the sign does not *create* the meaning that it bears, but rather carries it on behalf of the object; it has its office or duty imposed upon it by that which it carries (and this is the *realism* embedded within *semiotics*). Indeed, this is why what we so often name the "sign"—as Poinsot himself does, unfortunately—is only a sign-*vehicle*; it is that which carries the meaning but inasmuch as it does not create that meaning, and inasmuch as it must be carrying that meaning *to* some other, it is indeed only a vehicle, a means, a medium.

The quality of the vicegerent—that is, the specific quality possessed by the subject-as-fundament which allows it to assume the duty, as it were, of exercising that vicegerency—has its measure according to the object on whose behalf it bears such significance. Thus, we can identify the sign-relation affected by the vicegerent as belonging within those kinds of

relation which are of measure and measured.[63] This entails, if we prescind from the whole significative relation as actually accomplished, that there exists a **mind-independent relation** between the sign-vehicle and the significate. (Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, allow it to be said that this relation between vehicle and object has tremendous importance for understanding the evaluation, adoption, and development of stipulated and customary signs, to which we will return below.) When we draw a poor diagram for the purpose of trying to help another person understand, as an example, we have produced a poor vicegerent: for such is a sign-vehicle that poorly conveys the object by which it is measured. In all likelihood, you can recall having seen such poor diagrams that, rather than illuminating the objects they are intended to signify, make them instead further obscure (or, at least, not any clearer). Likewise if we use a poor word—not only an incorrect word, but one insufficiently descriptive or vague—we thereby produce a poor vicegerent, a poor carrier of meaning. Were I to describe Poinsot as merely "smart", for instance: this word inadequately conveys his *brilliance* in most contexts (unless, perhaps, aiming at ironical understatement). Though they are conventional signs, the words we use are yet measured by the objects they are intended to signify.

3.2.2. The Fundament of the Sign-Relation

To understand fully this vicegerency, however, we need to grasp more deeply the manifestative or representative element of a sign-relation; that is, we must examine more carefully the nature and function of the fundament. Note that being-the-fundament of a sign-relation does not belong to the object but rather to that which represents or manifests on behalf of the object—*the sign-vehicle*. In other words, objective specifying causality (the principal topic of our following section, 3.2.3) occurs in our experience for the most part, even if derivatively

---

63 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 102/1-17; 117/14-19.

and dependently *in itself* (as the vicegerent of the object), through the sign-vehicle. Poinsot writes:[64]

> That which is manifestative principally respects a power as the terminus, towards which it tends or which it stimulates, and similarly, to represent something to a power is accomplished only by rendering the something in question present to the power as knowable.

To briefly interject, here, this respect towards a power as its terminus indicates that the manifestative and representative are acts rendered upon passive faculties: for they move or stimulate that upon which they act. To respect a power as a terminus is to respect it as that-at-which an action ceases, and an action ceases only at a passive power. Implicit therefore in any manifestation or representation is the possibility of a relatively-undetermined *to which*. Put otherwise, there is a *relativity towards some dative receptive to manifestation* in every such act of manifesting or representing. Vehicles and interpretants presupposes a mutual metaphysical fittingness. But as we continue through the same passage in Poinsot, we see him give three reasons why the *actuality* of this manifestation (as something proper to the sign-vehicle) is not necessarily resultant in an actual relation:

> This [accomplishment of rendering], according to St. Thomas, in q.7 of the *Disputed Questions on Truth*, art. 5, reply to obj. 2, is but [for the power] to contain a similitude of the [represented] other. This containing of a similitude, however [*nota bene!*–BK],

---

64 1632: *TDS*, 122/19-49: "quod *manifestativum* principaliter respicit potentiam ut terminum, ad quem tendit vel quem movet, et similiter repraesentare aliquid potentiae solum perficitur per hoc, quod reddat aliquid praesens potentiae cognoscibiliter, quod secundum D. Thomam, q. 7. de Veritate art. 5. ad. 2., non est aliqud quam similitudinem alterius continere. Ista autem continentia similitudinis sine aliqua relatione dari potest, quae sit relatio secundum esse: *Tum* quia talis continentia potest esse perfectio simplicter et sine ulla dependentia a re repraesentata, sicut Deus repraesentat creaturas in ideis. *Tum* quia conservatur ista continentia et exercetur etiam non existente termino, et consequenter etiam sine relatione praedicamentali, ut constat in repraesentatione rei futurae vel praeteritae. *Tum* denique quia repraesentatio ista pertinet ad rationem movedni potentiam, cui redditur praesens obiectum per repraesentationem. Unde ipso obiecto per se et directe convenit repraesentari; obiectum atuem non consistit in relatione secundum esse ad potentiam, imo per se loquendo non respicit potentiam aut ab ea dependet, sed potentia ab ipso; ab eo nenim specificationem sumit. Non ergo representare et manifestare in relatione secundum esse consistunt."

can occur without there being any relation which is a relation according to the way relation has being [*secundum esse*]: in the first place [1], because such a containing can be a perfection simply and without any dependence on the thing represented, as God represents creatures in [the divine] ideas; in the second place [2], because this containing [i.e., this being similar] is conserved and exercised even when the [represented] term does not exist, and consequently even without a categorial relation, as is clear in a representation of a future or a past thing; in the third place [3], finally, because this representation pertains to the rationale of something stimulating or arousing the power to which an object is rendered present by means of the representation. Whence it pertains essentially and directly to the object itself to be represented; but the object does not consist in an ontological relation to the power—on the contrary, an object, essentially speaking, does not respect a power or depend on it, but power on object; for a power takes [its] specification from an object. Therefore to represent and to manifest do not consist in an ontological relation [i.e., neither a representation nor a manifestation is a relation according to the way it has being, *secundum esse*].

The thoughtful reader will here have many questions raised (some of which ought to direct him or her to concerted study of Poinsot's work) that this article cannot answer. If we focus instead, however, on the germane issue: the three explanations for why the manifestative or representative entails no necessary relation (or at least, no necessary mind-independent relation) and does not itself consist in a *relativum secundum esse*, all hold that, although a relation may ensue, nothing about the manifestative or representative power *necessitates* such a relation. In the first place [1], something may represent something other but without a dependence upon it, as God in His ideas or the emperor represents the statue made of him. In the second [2], the object may not exist at all, and so, absent knowledge of that object from some other source, the vehicle will not affect in any power a relation to the object. The portrait of an unknown individual signifies the human, broadly, but it does not signify the person painted. In the third [3], the vehicle's possession of the representative quality depends ontologically and mind-independently upon the ob-

ject signified but has no dependence upon the power to which it may represent and thus may stand independently of it.

Or to put this yet otherwise: every manifestative and representative act necessarily respects a power by a relation *secundum dici*, and therefore has the potential for being related to some dative of manifestation by virtue of its very being; however, it neither *need* respect the power *actually* in order for it to be representative in what it is in and of itself nor necessarily have an *object really distinct from itself* which it makes present to that dative.

Indeed, the key difference between "representation" and "signification" consists in the former term designating what belongs to some subject that may be *relativum secundum dici*, by which quality of in-itself relativity it may comprise *either* other- *or* self-representation, or even both at once, while "signification" pertains *only* to the *relativum secundum esse* accomplished by the subject serving as a fundament of other-representation. For instance, we might see a portrait of someone deceased—such as Qin Shi Huang. If we know nothing of Qin Shi Huang, the portrait may signify to us elements we recognize as Chinese—clothing, facial hair styling, etc.—but it does not signify the Emperor. But the portrait also represents itself, *as* a portrait, as *this* portrait, as paint on canvas, etc.[65] As Poinsot continues in elucidating this contrast:[66]

But to signify or to be significative is understood directly through

---

[65] This self-representative aspect is particularly important for understanding sensation. Cf. Deely 2008: *Descartes & Poinsot: The Crossroad of Signs and Ideas*, c.7 *in passim* but especially 72-73.

[66] Ibid, 123/1-24: "At vero *significare* seu *significaivum esse* direct sumitur per ordinem ad signatum, pro quo substituit et cuius vices gerit tamquam medium, quo signatum ducitur ad potentiam. In hoc enim ministrat et deservit signum ipsi signato, quod defert illud et praesentat potentiae tamquam suum principale representabile; sicut etiam in ministro et substituto alterius duo consideramus, scilicet subiectionem ad alterum, cuius gerit vices, ut ad principale, et effectum, pro quo ministrat et vices eius gerit. Sic ergo signum, licet in repraesentando respiciat potentiam, ut ei manifestet signatum, quia ad hunc effectum destinatur et assumitur, et in hac praecisa consideratione ad potentiam non petat consistere in relatione secundum esse, tamen in subordinatione ad signatum, quatenus respicit ipsum ut principale et ut mensuram sui, necessario debet in relatione ad ipsum consistere, sicut servus dicit relationem ad dominum et minister seu instrumentum ad suum principale."

an order to a significate for which it substitutes and in whose capacity it functions as the means by which the significate is brought to a power. For a sign ministers to and subserves the significate itself in this, that the sign brings and presents that significate to the power as the sign's principal content capable of being presented. In just the same way too we consider two aspects in a minister and substitute for another, namely, subjection to that other whose place is taken as to the principal, and the effect which he is commissioned by his principal to achieve. In this way, therefore, a sign, even though in representing it respects a power in order to manifest thereto what is signified (because a sign is destined and used for this effect), and in this precise consideration relative to a power need not consist in a relation according to the way relation has being, yet in the subordination to what is signified, inasmuch as it respects that signified as what is principal and as the measure of itself, a sign must necessarily consist in [an ontological] relation thereto, just as a servant bespeaks a relation to a master and [as] a minister or instrument [bespeaks a relation] to its principal.

Notably—and importantly made clear here—what manifests or represents may *also* signify.[67] Indeed, nothing signifies

---

67 It is worth noting the threefold distinction which Poinsot adds in the *consectarium appendix ex tota questione*, namely, between manifestation, representation, and signification: 1632: *TDS*, 217/17-27: "Nam 'repraesentativum' est genus, siquidem est commune ad id, quod repraesentat se, ut obiectum movens ad sui cognitionem, et id, quod repraesentat aliud a se, ut signum, et est inferius ad esse manifestativum, quia plura manifestant et non repraesentant, ut lux, quae manifestat illustrando, non repraesentando, et habitus, qui etiam dicitur lumen, ac cetera, quae effective manifestant, sed non repraesentative et obiective." Superficially read, this passage conflicts with an earlier (132/16-46) in which it is stated that representation is not the genus of signification; but, if this earlier passage is read carefully, we can see that Poinsot there is speaking of the *sign-relation*, while in this latter he is reading it as the *sign-vehicle*. Thus, in this latter passage, so long as we interpret *reprasentativum* as "that which represents" (Deely's translation renders it as "something representative"—which sense appears obvious from the repetition of "id quod" statements), we observe there to be no conflict. Though too complex to be discussed here, I believe the possibilities of conflating representation with signification and sign-vehicle with sign-relation—particularly when filtered through the necessary lenses of analogy—may be responsible for the apparent conflict between Poinsot and Aquinas on the nature of signification as pertains to the Divine Word, as discussed by Lyons 2019: *Signs in the Dust*, 45-62. Briefly stated, I believe that Lyons mistakenly sides with the under-distinguished language of Aquinas, where Poinsot's usage is more precise and accurate. Moreover, Lyons (particularly at p.56-57) seems to misunderstand the meaning of "representation" in Poinsot, as though to represent prohibits being the same as that which is represented, i.e., that there is no self-representation. That the Verbum is identical with the Divine Essence is unreservedly and unquestionably the teaching which Poinsot maintains (cf. 1632: *TDS*, 233/12-26; i.1637-44: *Cursus theologicus*, q.27, d.12, a.4 [Vives t.4, 89b]; ibid, a.5 [120ff]), and indeed, many other places. To the contrary, given how Poinsot uses the terms *representare* and *significare*, were he to hold the Verbum to *signify*

without representing. In truth, apart from exemplars or ideals (and even these in some way), most if not all of the things we encounter in our lives *as* manifestative or representative are, indeed, also significative: for in their capacity as making known what they contain actually and implicitly in themselves, they also make known objects which are beyond or outside of themselves. The statue of the emperor, for instance, may contain actually in itself many a great many things of which it is representative: a firm-countenanced or handsome representation, for instance, but it also represents the person as *other* than the statue, and therefore signified by it, and thus, as such a *vicegerentive signifier* its quality is determined by how well it signifies that person. The statue is a measured with respect to that signified measure. Even were the statue not meant to signify a particular individual, inasmuch as by its very in-itself subjective quality it intends to present some representation of the human being and thus the form which manifests through the body, it still has a measure against which it is measured and still signifies something other than itself.[68]

Let us now explicitly answer the question, first, of precisely what is meant by founding a relation and, second and more specifically, how something founds a sign-relation. In every categorial relation, there must be some degree of mind-independent distinction between the subject and the fundament of a relation. This distinction, however, may be any but the most properly logical distinction.[69] The fundament, quite often, is

---

the Father, this would be to posit an inferiority of the Son with respect to the Father. But this is an issue deserving of more substantial treatment than can be offered here.

68 An important but abstruse point worthy of its own article concerns the nature of instrumental signification of the non-existent entity, and Poinsot's argument that what signifies virtually suffices to signify in act. This is complexified by the "collapse" of instrumental sign-vehicles into mind-dependent objective relations, such that the provision of a mind-dependent object can be virtually signified by an instrumental sign. Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 126/1-131/17 and 273/41-275/41.

69 This point proves enormously complex but stems from what Poinsot writes in the last three articles of q.17 concerning relation in the *Secunda Pars Artis Logicae* (R.I.590b41–606a31). In short: the distinction between the *remote* fundament (which is the subject) and the *proximate* fundament can be mind-dependent ("logical"; *ratio ratiocinantis*) or mind-independent ("real"; *res et res*) **or** it can be distinguished *ex natura rei* either by reason (*ratio ratiocinantiae*)

in or belongs to the subject as a differentiable aspect or action of that subject which gives rise to the relation. The man *qua* man is not a father, but he is a father *qua* his action of having had intercourse with a woman and thereby having caused that real effect to come into being. It is the weight *in* the door, as a quality of it, that makes it heavier or lighter than another. It is the whiteness in the dove that makes it visibly similar to other white doves and visibly dissimilar to the raven. A being existing simply as a substance does not thereby enter into relations with others, but rather by the particular ways in which its substantiality is realized.[70] Thus, even the barest attribute of "having-been-created" allows a substance to be in relation to its creator.

What then founds the *sign-relation*? As Poinsot has made explicit in his definition of the sign, and in his description of it as a vicegerent, there must be a certain real distinction between the sign-vehicle and the object signified. But while therefore a priority belongs to the object—the priority of that which measures to that which is measured—it is the specific quality representative of something other than the sign-vehicle nevertheless *within* the sign-vehicle that founds the relation: for it is the sign-vehicle by means of which the *specifically significative* relation comes into existence at all, such that the object is signified to the interpretant. That a deer walks upon soft earth is the cause of the hoofprint, to be sure: but it is upon discovery of that hoofprint, whereby the deer is represented, that another animal has signified to it the passage

---

or modally. But from things not in any way cognizable as distinct in themselves (but only from an imposition of the mind) there cannot arise any basis upon which that subject enters into a real relation with some other being, but only a mind-dependent relation. As is most clear from a.4, a mind-independent relation is necessarily really distinct from the subject as the remote fundament but may be either really or modally distinct from the proximate fundament, depending upon whether the fundament is itself really or modally distinct from the subject. But there exists no possibility in which the proximate fundament can be only logically distinct from the subject and provenate in a mind-independent relation.

70 This coheres with what Aquinas says in *ST* Ia, q.45, a.7, wherein it is stated that all beings, as containing at least some vestige of the Trinity from creation, have not only mode (as substance) and species (as intelligible specification), but also order (that is, a being-towards others).

of the deer itself. Of course, the constitution of such a relation becomes more complex with signs by convention: for the posit of the representative quality is not *in* the sign-vehicle, in such cases, by a mind-independent subjective possession, but, rather, by a mind-dependent denomination. Understanding how both natural and conventional sign-vehicles cause their relations will require considerable elaboration.

Thus, prior to such an inquiry, we ought to ask: what precisely constitutes this causality? As can be inferred from the fact that the representative element alone does not constitute something as being significative, the cause cannot be strictly the quality—whether naturally or conventionally possessed—as such; something more must be at work.

3.2.3. The Causality Proper to Signs

There are two principal points which we must address in this section: first, the *ratio formalis significandi* (as distinct from the *ratio formalis signi*) and second, the necessary conditions belonging to every realized act of signification.

To clarify, we are here seeking the formal rationale of "signification", that is, of the *act of signifying* as distinct from the *being of the sign*. The difference here is subtle and shows the difficulty in distinguishing between the sign-vehicle and the sign-relation. To seek and discover the formal rationale of signification or signifying is to attain an understanding of what it means for *anything* to signify (and, correlatively, to *be* signified). In short, the rationale of signification pertains to the relation as comprising all the elements, whereas the rationale of the sign pertains to the sign-vehicle as necessarily engaged in that relation. Signification belongs to the order of **objective causality**: an extrinsic specifying formality which is neither productive nor efficient but determinative of something else's being somehow nonetheless. It is helpful, for understanding such causality, to grasp the meaning of *obiectum*. Poinsot gives a helpful universal definition for

object in the *Tractatus de Signis*:[71]

> Object in general, as it abstracts from stimulus and terminus, consists in this, that it be something extrinsic, from which derives and upon which depends the intrinsic rationale and specific character of any power or act; and this is reduced to the category of an extrinsic formal cause not causing existence, but specification.

The role of such extrinsically-caused specification deserves extensive study.[72] Of particular note for a robust theory of sign-relations in John Poinsot, however, is the point here that the *obiectum*, whether it is "stimulative" (i.e., an *obiectum movens*) or "terminative" (*obiectum terminans*) consists essentially in causing this specification. To be an object is to be specificative. Unless it is specifying something other than itself, something is not to be regarded as an object. Thus, to be specificative is to be extrinsically but intimately related to that which receives the specification. The act of signifying, as something which occurs in this order of objective causality, consists therefore in a certain specifying.

To understand the kind of specification rendered through signification requires us to make distinctions with respect to the objective relation: namely, that just-mentioned distinction between the stimulative and the terminative. As mentioned

---

71 1632: *TDS*, 166/4-11: "Obiectum in communi, ut abstrahit a motivo et terminatov, consistit in hoc, quod sit aliquid extrinsecum, a quo sumitur et dependet intrinseca ratio et species alicuius potentiae vel actus; et hoc reducitur ad genus causae formalis extrinsecae non causantis existentiam, sed specificationem."

72 Most especially—but not only—for the understanding of cognitive activity and especially within cultural relations. Here it is the "but not only" that ought to grasp our attention, however; as Poinsot writes in his *Prima Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, considering the unity and contrariety of motion, for instance (and specifically in the context of asking the terminus of motion) that (q.19, a.1; R.II.394a5–8): "id, quod specificat, debet attingi per se, quia nihil tam per se pertinet ad aliquam rem quam id, quod specificat" – "that which specifies ought to be attained through itself, because nothing pertains more intimately to any given thing than that which specifies [it]". The principal signification of which Poinsot there speaks concerns the intrinsic specification of an entity; but an extrinsic specification, too, can be a *movens*. The role of specification in determining motions of all kinds—not only those belonging to cognitive life but anything which may be altered through a cause of specification—therefore can be considered to have a profound importance for understanding the whole cosmos. We will touch on this importance as it pertains specifically to intellectual life in section 4 below, primarily with heuristic intentions.

previously (see n.65 above), this distinction of "object" can be found in Thomas Aquinas (and may antecede him as well, though a cursory reading has found it explicitly in no prior authors). These two kinds of objects are differentiated by their respective ordering to human powers: for the stimulative concerns a *passive* power, and the terminative is the concern of an *active* power. Powers need these objects inasmuch as they have an innate indeterminacy and therefore require something other than themselves in order that their determinate, secondary acts be elicited.[73] Thus some relation to the appropriate object is required for both active and passive powers. For instance, no eye can see in the absence of some determinate wavelength of light, nor can ears hear without vibrations of some audible frequency, just as neither can the will make a choice in the absence of some object-towards-which it orders the acts of intention,[74] command,[75] and use,[76] nor can the intellect assent to the means without their first being somehow apprehended and, second, somehow terminating the intellect's discursive consideration.[77] Where intrinsic formal causes are specificative in the physical being of things as they are in themselves (in the order of *esse in*), the extrinsic formal causality of objects specifies beings in the order of *relations* (i.e., in the order of *esse ad*).

In either case—whether terminative or stimulative, as related

---

73 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 166/11-167/3.

74 Cf. Aquinas 1269-70: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.12, a.4, ad.2; see also Poinsot i.1637-44: *Cursus Theologicus*, q.10, disp.5, a.1 (t.5, 460ff) for a general discussion of the will's relation to its objects.

75 Ibid, q.17. Though "command" belongs properly to the intellect, it exists also as the point of terminal intersection between intellect and will in the commission of some properly human act.

76 Ibid, q.16.

77 Ibid, q.17, a.6, c.: "Alio modo, quantum ad obiectum, respectu cuius, duo actus rationis attenduntur. Primo quidem, ut veritatem circa aliquid apprehendat. Et hoc non est in potestate nostra, hoc enim contingit per virtutem alicuius luminis, vel naturalis vel supernaturalis. Et ideo quantum ad hoc, actus rationis non est in potestate nostra, nec imperari potest. Alius autem actus rationis est, dum his quae apprehendit assentit. Si igitur fuerint talia apprehensa, quibus naturaliter intellectus assentiat, sicut prima principia, assensus talium vel dissensus non est in potestate nostra, sed in ordine naturae, et ideo, proprie loquendo, nec imperio subiacet. Sunt autem quaedam apprehensa, quae non adeo convincunt intellectum, quin possit assentire vel dissentire, vel saltem assensum vel dissensum suspendere, propter aliquam causam, et in talibus assensus ipse vel dissensus in potestate nostra est, et sub imperio cadit."

to an active or to a passive power—we must acknowledge that the object plays the role of a *principle*. The stimulative object is the principle which brings the facultative act into being;[78] the terminative object, that which consummates and finalizes it.[79] The object, we might say, is both alpha and omega for the determination of these "intermediate" beings (not only powers, but secondary acts and habits as well) reliant upon extrinsic relations for their proper and fulfilled actuality. It demands recognition, however, that, specifically as it pertains to the constitution of sign-relations, between the stimulation and termination of these relations there exist both the sign-vehicle and the powers (or interpretants) through which the relation is interpreted. Though the object is the principle as related to powers, whether active or passive, the precise nature of any sign-relation depends upon *all three* elements: not only the object's specificative causality (to be discussed here), but also the vehicle's representative quality through which it exercises this causality as vicegerent (discussed above), as well as the power's own proper action (a topic well-discussed in Thomistic philosophical literature).

First demanded of us, therefore, in pursuit of clarifying this triadic dependence, is the precise relational nature of the sign-vehicle's casuality. (Here, both for brevity and to keep our focus on Poinsot, we will limit our consideration to cognitive powers.) Following the distinction of objective causality into its twofold manner of specifying—as stimulative and terminative—we might think to ask whether the sign-vehicle performs its vicegerentive function in the line of that which stimulates or that which terminates. But quickly we realize there are several reasons why it can *only* be substitutive for an object as stimulative that it exercises this causality: for one, and most directly, because the sign-vehicle signifies *to* something. To signify *to* something is to specify a power indeterminately

---

78 1632: *TDS*, 169/23.
79 1632: *TDS*, 187/15.

open to receiving such a specification and thereby determines the kind of act it will have (without yet efficiently causing it to be in act). The object as terminative, by contrast, specifies the otherwise indeterminate *ordination* of a power's action. The terminative object is necessary for the active power but not in order that the power be reduced to act.[80] For instance, given the healthy condition of the body, an animal needs to receive no specification in order that it move (as evidenced by involuntary movements); that it move itself, however, it needs a something-towards-which or for-the-sake-of-which that motion be actually committed.

By contrast, a passive power requires an extrinsic specificative determination in order that it be reduced to act at all: as aforementioned, eye neither sees nor ear hears in the absence of those objects by which they are stimulated. Likewise, for another reason, we can see that active powers need no *formal* intermediary (even though they may require *instruments*) for their actions to be performed. It belongs precisely to an active power that it act upon its object. Were it impossible for an active power to operate upon its object, there would never be any transitive actuality at all. Conversely, the very act of signifying is to be itself a formal intermediary; for even an instrumental sign-vehicle, as we will show below (in this section), requires the presence of some formal sign-relation in order that it signify actually.

Second, we must clarify the actual exercise of this causality by the sign-vehicle. As Poinsot writes:[81]

---

80 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 158/45-159/17, esp. 159/13-17: "fundamentum esse ipsam rationem medii, quam habet ad significatum ut manifestabile potentiae, substituendo pro ipso in ratione movendi et repraesentandi." See also 173/29-37, wherein it is stated that a terminative object cannot be secondary; for, although it is by looking at the image or the hoofprint that the mind is led to the prototype or the ox, all four objects are that at which the mind terminates: that is, if the mind terminates at the sign-vehicles, it terminates at them precisely inasmuch as they *themselves* fulfill the function of *sign-vehicles*, i.e., as fundaments in possession of a *relativa secundum dici* ordering towards their signified objects, but, as terminatively considered, only precisely as they are *objects* in themselves, and not as sign-vehicles.

81 1632: *TDS*, 195/17-27: "quod signum succedit et substituitur loco obiecti in hac ipsa linea et ordine obiectivae causae, non autem in ratione applicantis effective nec deducentis potentiam ad signatum modo effectivo, sed obiectov, non principali, sed substitutivo, ratione cuius

a sign falls under the notion of and is substituted in the place of an object in this very line and order of an objective cause, but not in the rationale of something productively applying nor of something leading a power to a thing signified in the mode of an effective cause. Rather a sign is an objective cause, not the principal objective cause, but a substitutive one, by reason of which a sign is said to be instrumental, not indeed as if it were an instrument of an agent producing a physical effect, but as it is a substitute for an object, not informing as [an intrinsic] specifying form, but representing from the outside.

The word "substitutive" here may be misleading: for it may suggest that we frequently encounter objects which are directly and immediately specificative of our cognitive faculties, without any intervention of signs—that is, non-substitutive encounters. And in truth, we do; though if ever we are aware of them, it is only insofar as they are themselves sign-vehicles or being communicated to us through other sign-relations. Even though we may sense things directly, immediately, of themselves, our awareness of them nevertheless comes through semiosic relations. All thought is in signs. The in-themselves indeterminate external sense faculties through which you encounter the corporeal world may be determined in fact at the moment by a great number of sensible objects to which, at the moment, you are not cognitively attuned, but any which attunement-to depends upon and involves an unfolding of signification. For example, I have a direct awareness of the keys of my keyboard under my fingers: I touch the objects themselves; but that I have this "touching" in cognition, in awareness of any kind, stems only from the receptivity of the signs of friction and pressure conveyed by aspects of the keys which are neither the whole of the key nor the keyboard itself. These aspectual presentations are signs of the wholes to which they belong, bringing into objective awareness those wholes.[82] Thus,

---

signum dicitur instrumentale, non quidem quasi instrumentum efficientis, sed quasi substitutum obiecti, non informans sicut species, sed ab extrinseco repraesentans."

82 Without delving into the inevitable distraction it would become, it is important to note that this precisely is what Peirce recognizes through his distinction of immediate and dynamic objects. At no point can I have immediately present to me every aspect and every

we ought to understand the term "substitutive" here, not as strictly or necessarily something present while the object is absent, but rather in the sense of an "intermediary": that the object, in other words, always is communicated through some one or another or complex collection of signs, which acts as its vicegerent or means, regardless of whether the object itself is present directly or only through that substitutive medium—that is, in those cases where the object is in fact absent (as when attending to an old hoofprint or a dinosaur bone).[83]

As an aside, we ought to note that the *instrumentality* of the sign-vehicle consists in an *objective* and not an *efficient* instrumentality, and therefore, as Poinsot notes,[84] it is not properly named an "instrument", but only metaphorically, or by a kind of mind-dependent extrinsic denomination—or as he also says, a "logical instrument".

But what does Poinsot mean here, in identifying the sign as a certain "intermediate" or "substitute" in the line of objective causality? Let us look at the fundamental constituents of objective presence to a power which Poinsot outlines:[85]

> In the act itself of signifying or representing, we can distinguish three things which seem to pertain to making an object present in a power; for to represent is nothing other than to make an object present or united to a power.

dimension of intelligibility belonging to even a single key of my keyboard, and, yet, I have an awareness of this object as beyond what immediately is present to me. Note a similar albeit difficult and confusing passage in Heidegger's 1927: *Sein und Zeit*, §7.A, "Der Begriff des Phänomens" (28/51-31/55).

83 Cf. n.68 above concerning the "virtually significative".

84 1632: *TDS*, 203/14-32.

85 1632: *TDS*, 193/16-194/16: "Possumus autem in ipso significare seu repraesentare distinguere tria, quae videntur pertinere ad faciendam praesentiam obiecti in potentia; repraesentare enim non est aliud quam facere obiectum praesens seu unitum potentiae.

"Primum est emissio seu productio specierum, quae ab obiecto et signo extrinseco fit in potentiam.

"Secundum est excitatio potentiae, ut attendat, quae distinguitur ab ipsa impressione specierum; nam etiam post receptas species indiget aliquis excitatione ad attendum.

"Tertium est concursus cum potentia ad eliciendam notitiam rei significatae, ad quem actum eliciendum concurrit signum extrinsecum mediante specie intrinsece recepta, per quam non solum concurrit, ut formetur notitia sui, sed etiam signati, ad quod deducit. Ceterum iste concursus cum potentia non est significare, quia concursus iste pertinet ad elicientiam cognitionis. Elicientia autm cognitionis non est significare, sed si sit cognitio signati, est terminus et finis significandi; ad hoc enim movet signum, ut accipiatur notitia signati."

The first is an emission or production of specifiers which comes about in a power by the agency of an object and external sign.

The second is the excitation of a power to direct attention, which is distinguished from the impression itself of specifying forms; for even after the specifiers have been received, someone needs to be aroused to attention.

The third is the concurrence [of a sign] with a power to elicit an awareness of a thing signified. To elicit this act, an external sign concurs by means of the intrinsically received specifying form, through which it not only concurs in the formation of an awareness of itself, but also of the significate to which it leads. But this concurrence with a power is not the act of signifying, because this concurrence pertains to the eliciting of knowledge. To elicit knowledge, however, is not to signify, but if the knowledge is of a signified, it is the terminus and end of signifying; for a sign works to this end, that an awareness may be had of the thing signified.

These three constituents of objective presence in a power— namely, first, what we may call the **production of specifiers in a power** (or **production**); second, the **excitation of a power to direct its attention to the object in accordance with the specifier** (or **excitation**); and, third, the **concurrence which elicits awareness of the object** (or **elicitation**)—together are that through which the act of signification effects its causality.

As to the first, the **production** of the specifier, this occurs— it must be unequivocally maintained—always in a twofold manner: both that of the efficient producing cause and that of the objective specification.[86] The object, as an object, always remains in a certain opposition to the entitatively-existing specifier itself, even as it grants it the precise specification which it bears. Put otherwise, the specifying form received into a power and the object remain always distinct. The object is not "in" the specifying form (or *species impressa*), in an

---

86 It is worth noting that one and the same being can do both, as in the case of the external senses: the light received into the eye both efficiently causes the specifier and conveys as substitute the specifying causality of the object seen. It is thus that there stands no need for a *species expressa* in external sense.

entitative sense (as an intrinsic form thereof), and yet always has a determinative relation to that form. It is, after all, as measure to measured. This non-efficient but extrinsically-formal causality is what Poinsot indicates when he writes that:[87]

> Therefore to represent or to make present does not pertain to the object itself as it is formally an object, as to the cause effecting or producing this presentation, but as to the form and act which is presented and united to a power.

As emphasized above, powers of themselves have a kind of intermediate being, in that, though they exist *within* substances, they have their determination according to and dependently upon relations. The presentation and unification of an object to a power occurs through a relation, through which the power receives a determination—while the form of the object yet remains entitatively distinct from the entitative form specifying the power; and yet intentionally they are the same.[88] Poinsot makes this clear: "[the sign as a sign] is the very thing signified itself in another existence [*in alio esse*], just as a thing represented through a specifying form is the very object itself in intention, and not physical, being."[89]

Yet merely having received an impression and having previously formed a concept therefrom—which concept is that entitative accidental form constituting a quality in the cognitive subject, whereby the power can be specified to awareness of some object—does not mean we necessarily have that object present to us in an awareness at every moment. Each specifying form retained within our minds has within itself, as a determiner of the powers to which it belongs, a quality of being *relativa secundum dici*: it stands in potency to found a relation to the object but does not do so always or necessarily.

---

87 1632: *TDS,* 196/9-15: "Igitur repraesentare seu facere praesens non pertinet ad obiectum ipsum, ut formaliter obiectum est, tamquam ad causam efficientiam hacn praesentationem, sed ut ad formam et actum qui potentiae praesentatur et unitur."

88 This is true even in the case that the object is not an entity itself at all, but a "pure object."

89 1632: *TDS,* 209, 4-7: "esse ipsummet signatum in alio esse, sicut res reprasentata per speciem est ipsummet obiectum in esse intentionali, non reali."

Rather, the awareness of the object requires some **excitation**, as Poinsot states—which excitation belongs neither to the object nor to the sign:[90]

> ...to excite effectively does not pertain to the rationale of an object, both because this excitation comes about effectively by the agency of another cause, whether from within by God or from without by a man or some other agency proposing and applying an object to sense; and because in an excitation the object is that which is applied to a power, but it is not required that it be itself the thing effectively producing the application.

The Latin word *excitare* (*ex-*, meaning "out of" or "out from", and the root *citare* or *ciere*, meaning "to set in motion, call forth") signifies the action of a cause other than that which is excited: for anything moved is moved by another. Importantly, as Poinsot makes here explicit, the agent or efficient cause of the excitation need not be the object towards which it excites. One might be aroused to hunger, for instance, by the smell or sight or sound of bacon itself, but one might just as well find himself thinking of bacon by the words with which I describe it here, or perhaps even some more remote cause which has an associative correlation with the consumption of bacon—say, if one had a long-standing habit of eating bacon after attending Sunday church services, then attending such a service might excite the idea of bacon. Of course, the smells and sights and sounds of a cooking food are not themselves the food either; in fact, a bit of reflection seems to indicate that, in the normal course of our human experience, everything which *impresses upon us* so as to excite does so in a way which concomitantly makes use of a sign to do so. Thus easily do we confuse the excitation with the sign itself; but excitation follows upon a kind of *natural* immutation, while the sign-relation follows an *intentional* immutation. In other words, one and the same

---

90 1632: *TDS*, 196/16-24: "Ex eadem autem ratione constat, quod ad rationem obiecti non pertinet excitare effective, *tum* quia haec excitatio effective fit ab alia cuasa, vel interius a Deo vel exterius ab homine aut alio proponente et applicante obiectum sensui; *tum* quia in excitatione obiectum est id, quod applicatur potentiae, non vero requiritur, quod sit ipsum applicans effective."

source of excitation can excite two different persons to either the same sign-relation or to two relations quite different; and conversely, one and the same sign-relation can be affected by different forces of excitation, or to different degrees thereof. We may note, of course, that excitation's distinction from signification is hardly a novel point: rhetoricians have noted and commented upon this since antiquity. However, the relationship between the two needs to be considered nonetheless, for it helps us to understand the concurrence through which signification exercises its causality. Consider therefore what Poinsot writes in response to a counter-argument on the nature of excitation in the constitution of sign-relations:[91]

> For excitation occurs to this end, that we attend to the signification and be moved by that signification. And precisely as resulting from a signifying voice, this signification or representation does not work effectively, but objectively; but as the voice is used by one speaking and stimulating, it has a causally productive energy for exciting, born not of the representation, but of the one propounding and using the voice derivatively signifying, and thus the one speaking functions as applying the signifying voice, while the signifying voice functions as [passively] applied and signifying representatively.

This dense passage contains an important truth which might be missed for its obviousness: namely, it is not only what we say, but *how* we say it. A beautiful truth said in a boring fashion remains true—remains, that is, as directing toward the object—but does not *excite* the auditor to its importance. We need a certain *virtus excitativa* to arouse the attention of the listener. No doubt, we are all today victims of a cheap excitation in our media—the marketers and producers of television and its environmental conquests of new media have seen to this, even if unconsciously—but the contrary idealized

---

91 1632: *TDS*, 198/36-47: "Fit enim excitatio ad hoc, ut attendamus ad significationem et moveamur ab ipso. Et significatio seu repraesentatio ista prout a voce significante non est effective, sed obiectiva; ut autem vox movetur a loquente et excitatnte, vim habet effectivam excitandi, non a repraesentatione ortam, sed a proponente et movente vocem significnatem derivatam, atque ita loquens se habet ut applicans vocem significantem, vox significans ut applicata et significans reprasentative."

movement of producing "content" which is purported as efficacious independent of the excitation aroused by "form" has produced rather weak results, elicits only dim awareness. It seems in many ways a distortive ideal of modernity to believe that "pure reason" alone suffices or ought to suffice to affect signification—or that any mind incapable of cutting through the auspices of rhetoric to attain the reasoned truth does not deserve to grasp it. In truth, however, a cavalier attitude towards rhetoric and the means of cognitive excitation leaves unstirred minds of every quality and caliber.

Thus, let us now turn our attention the **elicitation** of this awareness (lest I digress too far). Poinsot's word for this "awareness", namely the Latin *notitia*, is a common word of the Scholastic tradition (appearing some 900+ times, for instance, in Aquinas, and quite frequently in Scotus as well). As can be seen in the third *summulae* chapter of the *Cursus Philosophicus* (and contained in the *Tractatus de Signis*), Poinsot makes of *notitia* a kind of genus, distinguished according to the different objects to which we are related by different "mental terms": "A mental term is the awareness or concept from which a simple proposition is made" and "The *mental term...* is divided according to the objects which differentiate the modes of awareness."[92]

But we might also distinguish awareness in terms of abstractive and intuitive, as Poinsot does briefly in this same chapter and at length in the third book of the *Tractatus*—insofar as the object of which one is aware is grasped as absent or present, respectively, to the cognitive power possessing that awareness—or we might discuss a *formal awareness*, as is prevalent in the second book; or a *simple* awareness, as also appears throughout.[93] Regardless of these divisions, in all

---

92 1632: *TDS* 28/2-4: "Mentalis est notitia seu concepts, ex quo simple conficitur propositio." And 7-9: "*Terminus mentalis...* dividitur penes obiecta, a quibus species notitiarum sumitur."

93 Cf. Raposa 1994: "Poinsot on the Semiotics of Awareness", *ACPQ* 68.3: 395-408. That intuitive constitutes the "paradigmatic" form of awareness—as that in which the object may most fully enters into our conscious determination—does not mean that the objective presence

cases, awareness is always of an object and always comes about in the same way:[94]

> ...for the production of an awareness an object placed within a power through a specifying form can [1] effectively concur, not in virtue of the object as it is specifying, but in virtue of the power determined and actuated through the object out of which is constituted conjointly with the power [2] one single principle in act, not that the object itself adds a productive vitality to the power. And this concurrence or production of cognition is [3] not the act of signifying or of representing; for an elicitation of cognition supposes an object represented to a power and stimulating the power to tend toward a consummate cognition and representation of the thing signified. And thus, that cognition of the signified is the terminus and end of a signification; for it moves in an order to knowing.

Let us analyze this passage closely. First, to preface this analysis, we may define the common intelligibility of every *notitia* as the intentional presence of the object. Thus, whether an object is present also in itself, as a being, or is *not* present in itself changes only the modality of the object as terminative.[95] For the production of any such awareness, an object placed within a power through a specifying form can [1] **effectively concur with the power's own action**: which is to say that the power, excited to its proper action somehow, sees *through* the specifying form *to* the object, such that [2] there is "one single principle in act". The presence of the object through the specifying form concurs in the production of the awareness, but is neither the sole nor the principal cause thereof. Rather, the operation of the cognitive power itself is the principal cause constituting the awareness of the signified. This

---

(without which intuition is impossible) of the thing itself alone suffices for our awareness; something else, that is, must be responsible for the formal constitution of awareness.

94 1632: *TDS*, 196/24-39: "*Denique* ad productionem notitae obiectum itnra potentiam positum per speciem potest effective concurrere, non in vi obiecti, ut specificans est, sed in vi potentiae determinatae et actuatae per obiectum, ex quo et poetntia unicum principium constituitur in actu, non ipsum obiectum virtutem addit potentiae effectivam. Et iste concursus seu productio cognitionis non est significare seu repraesentare; elicientia enim cognitionis supponit obiectum repraesentatum potentiae et movens, ut tendat ad consummatam cognitionem et repraesentationem signati. Et ita illa cognitio signati est significationis terminus et finis; movet enim ad cognoscendum."

95 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 287/8-14; 280/30-37; 291/46-292/4.

awareness is the "terminus and end" of a signification. In other words: the formal rationale of signification consists in the stimulative representation of an object to some interpretant, and this interpretant's unity with the object signified through some awareness of it—which is to say the intentional presence of the object as terminative for the interpretant or cognitive power—without which unity being affected through awareness the formal rationale of signification would remain incomplete. Though the act of signification itself constitutes the objective determination of some receptive faculty, unless there concur the efficient production of a specifier and the excitation of attention so as to elicit [3] a distinct cognitive action, the signification remains incomplete.[96]

As an example: I have in my possession a collection of thirteen audio recordings of class sessions from the last graduate course John Deely taught at the University of St. Thomas, in the Spring of 2013. I have listened to these classes several times; contained within them are countless sign-vehicles. At thirty-eight minutes of the fifth class in the series, Deely writes on the whiteboard the terms "mental", "mind-dependent", and "awareness-dependent" as potential translations for *ens rationis*. At one point, he taps the board and says, "this", referring to one of the three terms, and goes on to say that, like the passage in the Gospel of Matthew (26:24)—"wo to that man, by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed: It were better for that man if he had not been born"—that "*this*" translation should never have been made. For students in the class,

---

96 I am reminded here of a series of articles penned between 2008 and 2012, beginning with John Deely's 2008 review of John O'Callaghan's 2003: *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence*—provocatively titled, "How to Go Nowhere with Language", *ACPQ* 82.2: 337-59; succeeded by O'Callaghan's 2010 response, "Concepts, Mirrors, and Signification: Response to Deely", *ACPQ*, 84.1: 133-62 and Deely's final word in 2012: "Analytic Philosophy and The Doctrine of Signs: Semiotics or Semantics: What Difference Does It Make?", *The American Journal of Semiotics*, 28.3–4: 325-63. O'Callaghan argues that there exists no distinction between the concept and the act of understanding in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, nor need there be in truth. This argument is patently false in a scholarly sense—for Aquinas maintains ubiquitously that the *verbum mentis* is in a real relation with the act of understanding (cf. Kemple 2017: *Ens Primum Cognitum*, 255-56n94). See n152 below for more.

the tapping provided not only excitation but also indexical specification. For listeners of the recording, the tapping may *excite* but *something else* is necessary to elicit the completed signification: Deely never *says* which of the three should never have been made.[97]

Importantly—we might even say *essentially*—there occurs a certain necessary movement in all signification ("movement" here said in the general sense of change), but a *twofold movement* in the characteristically *human* experience of signification. To grasp this characteristically human experience of significative movement, we need to leap ahead momentarily and contemplate the difference in how the *instrumental* and the *formal* sign accomplish their respective representations:[98]

> Whence emission of specifying stimuli and excitation of a power pertains to the sign in the same way that it pertains to an object when an object represents itself, to wit, by causing it objectively, not productively, because an instrumental sign does not represent a signified otherwise than by first representing itself as an object, and then further extending the representation of itself to another virtually implicit and contained in itself. Therefore a sign does not represent objectively absolutely, but objectively instrumentally and as serving for another. But if the sign is a formal sign, it is clear that it does not represent productively, but of itself represents formally, as follows from its definition and as is clear in awareness in conception...

This distinction—that the instrumental sign has an objectivity proper to itself, whereby it must first be engaged in an objective relation so as to secondarily and concomitantly be engaged in a significative relation, while the formal sign has *no such objectivity*—sheds needed light on the *substitutive*

---

97 To terminate any suspense (though the informed reader likely knows already), the term to which he pointed was "mental".

98 1632: *TDS*, 197/4-18: "Unde emissio specierum et excitatio potentiae eo modo pertinet ad signum sicut ad obiectum quando se repraesentat, scilicet obiective id causando, non effective, quia non aliter signatum repraesentat quam prius se ut obiectum repraesentando, ulterius extendendo repraesentationem sui ad aliud in se virtualiter implicitum et contentum. Et ideo signum non repraesentat obiective absolute, sed obiective instrumentaliter et ut deserviens ad aliud. Si autem sit signum formale, constant, quod non effective, sed seipso formaliter repraesentat, ut ex eius definitione constat et patet in notita et conceptu..."

role of the sign. For it seems that *only* the instrumental sign, properly speaking, fulfills this substitution precisely as *objective*. The formal sign may, in a certain respect, substitute for the *esse* of the object, **but only** intentionally, that is, as directing towards the object; that which itself formally represents does not objectively substitute. It does not stand itself in the place of the object, as an object. Contrariwise, the instrumental sign contains in itself either *entitatively* (or by extrinsic denomination) something *of* the signified, so as to be properly speaking an objective substitute for it. This substitutive containing, of course, can be rather complex: for its containing may be not only in an intrinsic similitude—as one thing which looks like another and therefore signifies it—but may also be insofar as it is an effect of a cause or even insofar as it has been stipulated or immersed in custom and therefore is understood to have such a signification attached to it. Thus, even the audible or visible word, so long as it has been understood to have this stipulated or customary signification, retains an objectively substitutive instrumentality.

Yet it must be known, and this we may see quite clearly with the example of the word, that every instrumental sign yet requires a formal sign for the rationale of signification to be completed in the fullest sense of what signification is—as, indeed, "in the case of signs whose signification we do not know from the outset, we ourselves no less than brutes, have need of custom."[99] In other words, a complex of other signs proves always necessary to interpret instrumental signs unfamiliar to us. Not knowing what a particular word means, for instance, we require some external context—other words, an accompanying context of visual stimuli, an expectation, etc.—in order even to know that it *is* a word. Yet, that we can discern the meaning of the word *beyond* what is conveyed through customary external antecedents, demon-

---

99 1632: *TDS*, 213/8-11: "quod in signis, quorum significatoinem a principio non cognoscimus, tam nos quam bruta opus habemus consuetudine."

strates precisely what it is that makes the human being alone truly capable of grasping signs *formally*.

Regardless, we can see from the *ratio formalis significandi* that an object signified and an affected cognitive power belong to the essential rationale of the sign (*ratio formalis signi*). These both—the signified and the affected power—follow in order from the fundament. The fundament, considered in itself as something *relativum secundum dici*, must have a "transcendental relation" to the signified. This transcendental relativity is its possession of an order whereby it functions as a representation or substitute of some kind, which subsequently founds the categorial relation between significate and interpretant: the act of signification. The provenation of this relation in actuality from the fundament constitutes the *ratio formalis significandi*. Importantly, Poinsot also includes three conditions which do not belong to the essential rationale of the sign or formal rationale of signification but which are necessarily attendant upon any completed realization of it, as though proper accidents:[100]

> Besides these [elements of the essential rationale of a sign], therefore, there are required or follow the three conditions already mentioned: First, that the sign be more known than the signified, not according to nature, but as regards us. Second, that the sign be subsidiary to or more imperfect than the significate. Third, that the sign be dissimilar to that significate.

These three conditions—the *notissimum quoad nos*, the lesser-perfection of the sign-vehicle, and the entitative dissimilarity of vehicle and significate—can cause considerable confusion. Clarifying them, however, will not only render more intelligible the thinking of Poinsot, but will bring the foundations of his semiotics into sharper contrast with both that of the Conimbricenses and of Charles Sanders Peirce.

The condition that there be a greater knowability of the sign-vehicle (and each instance in this statement of conditions does

---

100 1632: *TDS*, 218/43-48: "Requiruntur ergo praeter ista seu consequuntur tres conditiones iam dictae: *Prima*, quod sit notius signato, non secundum naturam, sed quoad nos. *Secunda*, quod sit inferius seu imperfectius signato. *Tertia*, quod sit dissimile ipsi."

refer specifically to the sign-vehicle) relative to us than there is of the significate, follows not strictly by the sign-vehicle in its own entitative constitution being simpler or easier to understand than the object which it signifies, but really and truly according to the conditions of its encounter *by us*. We will misunderstand this condition if we treat it reductively—without considering, that is, the irreducible triadicity of the sign as a *relativum secundum esse*. The entitative reality of the sign-vehicle may be much more difficult to grasp in itself than the object known is, in itself. But these "in-themselves" qualities of knowability do not absolutely prevent what is less-known to us *in itself* being better-known *circumstantially*. In other words, something more knowable to us in itself can be made known by something else, less knowable to us in itself, but because the circumstances favor it, that less-knowable is more knowable to us *precisely insofar as it is capable of representing that other*.

For example: a blurry picture of the icon of the Virgin Mary Theotokos in a monk's room in the tiny monastery atop the Katskhi pillar in the country of Georgia does not render the icon itself easier for us to see, in itself, than would be the very icon itself seen directly with our own eyes as physically present to us. However, since we are not ourselves in that tiny monastery, and do not have that icon before our eyes, the picture is indeed much more knowable *to us*—not many of us can travel to Georgia, and even fewer of us, I am sure, would want to tackle the only means of reaching the pillar's top (namely, a straight vertical ascent up a 131-foot-tall ladder). The *knowability to us*, in other words, occurs not strictly because the object *as object* is more knowable in itself—though this often is the case well—but also because of the circumstances in which sign and significate are related to us, such as time, and place, and so on.

But it could also be the case, I would like to suggest, that something *more knowable* in itself may serve in a roundabout manner as significative of something *less knowable* in itself,

precisely because the conditions and circumstances of knowability are better acclimated to the former than to the latter. Thus, it can be that *some particular aspect* of the greater-in-itself is *more knowable to us* than that which is found in the lesser-in-itself. That this particular aspect be taken to signify something in the latter, however, depends *entirely upon* the constitution of ourselves as knowers. Michelangelo's David is lesser-in-itself than any human being (massive and famous though it is), and, yet, if we see a curly-haired man standing contrapposto, this might **elicit** for us an image of the statue, whereby we *collapse* the human individual seen and the elicitation of the image into a singular signification. One could therefore raise an important question: namely as to whether such a making-known of the lesser by the greater according to the specific rationale whereby the greater signifies might be, in fact, a kind of manifesting that incidentally elicits and not a signifying at all; that is, whether it *only* elicits or *also* specifies—but this is a topic for further thinking (and research into the broader semiotic tradition as well).

However, if we understand that **concepts** are formal sign-vehicles, as Poinsot unequivocally maintains, it is obvious that the greater knowability of the sign-vehicle consists precisely and solely in its representative function, and not in the slightest is it to be regarded as more knowable as an object: for concepts are *never* known in themselves directly as objects. Properly objective substitution belongs only to instrumental signs.

Moving on to the second point—namely, that the sign is "subsidiary to or more imperfect than the significate"—this follows inasmuch as something more perfect may *represent* or *manifest* something lesser, but in a more eminent manner; as, for instance, Poinsot says, "God does not signify creatures, even though he represents creatures, because he does not contain them purely by representing and portraying their condition, but also as a cause and manifesting by his own light."[101] In

---

101 1632: *TDS*, 218/5-9.

other words—and here we see perhaps most clearly the contrast with the Conimbricenses[102]—the material and presuppositive possession of that which represents something other does not, by that sheer representation alone, constitute a sign-vehicle. By containing the perfections of other things in Himself, God represents and manifests them. But in the Beatific Vision, one will not see God as a *sign* of these others; for there is nothing in them that is not more perfectly in God. Similarly, the human being represented in a portrait is not in himself a sign of the portrait, for there is nothing in the portrait *precisely as it signifies the person* that is not more perfectly in the person. This is not to say that we may not *by our own formal sign-vehicles* interpret the person objectively present to us as an instrumental sign-vehicle signifying the portrait (or even another person), say, by the strength of some custom. For example, knowing well a portrait from having passed it in a hallway many times, but having never encountered the person before, my first encounter with that person is likely to elicit (if it is a good representation) the habitually-familiar sign-vehicle of that portrait, which is *better known to me* from the repeated frequency of seeing it. But this, it must be noted, is that formal sign-vehicle *in me*. I am the subject in whom the fundament accomplishing the relation between power and object is found. It is not *the person himself* that so-signifies. The representative quality in the person excites the sign-relation, but does not cause the specification.

And finally, turning our attention to the third point—that is, that the sign-vehicle be dissimilar to the significate—this follows directly from both the sign-vehicle's inferiority and its greater knowability relative to ourselves. At the very least, it is clear that the dissimilarity between the sign-vehicle and the significate must be entitative by an at-least modal differentiation. The felt surface of the keys beneath my fingers signify

---

102 To which I would add, likely the earlier work of Peirce as well, though it seems by the end of his career he had thought himself into a position much more alike to that of Poinsot.

both the keys and the keyboard, by aspects of their being not felt through the skin but discernible nonetheless: i.e., through perceptual inference from proprioceptive feedback, one can tell from the surface that there is something *beyond* the surface. This distinction of quantity from the whole is a modal distinction whereby the quantity—the extension of the surface and the quantifiable pressure of the feedback—signifies something other than the surface and pressure themselves.

However, considered precisely with respect to the question of signification, this condition of dissimilarity may cause us confusion: for it seems that much signification occurs *precisely* as a matter of similitude—as we say the painting of the emperor represents the emperor well if it bears a similar likeness, and yet the painting certainly is a sign-vehicle of the emperor; so why would not the emperor's body double, too, for instance, be a sign-vehicle of the emperor? Does he not represent in himself by a likeness to that emperor, such that in seeing him, even the emperor's wife should find her mind directed to the emperor? Poinsot says little on this matter here, except to note that one similar thing represents or manifests another "as correlative, not as representative".[103] This statement, no doubt, appears on first glance tortured: to represent but not as representative, and, rather, as correlative—what does, what *could* this mean? This remains a question in need of keen analysis to be sufficiently answered. For my own and insufficient part, I suspect that, yet again, the significative element follows from some habituation of our own cognitive apparatus rather than from any necessary categorial relation between the two extra-mental and similar things—and thus to answer how it is that such signification occurs *in fact*, we must dive into complex questions of human psychology. To merely skim the surface, however: the mind-independent relation of similitude does *not* between these two correlatives *necessitate* the sign-relation of representation but does provide a certain ground

---

103 1632: *TDS*, 219/22-23.

for such to be made by a **semiosic** act of cognitive powers—a kind of virtual fundament which may be appropriated through a process of impression and subsequent expression. The portrait and its inspiration may be similar to one another viewed in profile, but that the portrait be taken to signify the person requires both that they be entitatively distinct from one another *and* that there be produced a *formal sign-vehicle* in the mind of someone relating the portrait to the person as an *instrumental sign-vehicle*.

This brings us to one final consideration regarding the *causalitas signorum*: the range of beings upon which such causality has effects. In the work of Poinsot, we find a rather interesting contrast to his as-yet more-famous contemporary, René Descartes. As is well known, Descartes treats non-human animals as no more sophisticated in their operations of living than mere automata, programmed to operate in rigidly unthinking and unlearning ways—even to the point of being incapable of feeling pain. Contrariwise, Poinsot notes that all animals make use of signs—natural sign-vehicles, of course, such as wind and rain and sun—but noting as well that some animals, especially those domesticated and living in constant closeness to human beings, make use even of customary signs. This semiosic behavior we know simply from common observation and experience, with no needed extensive studies of their activities: one simply needs to watch how animals operate within their environments to infer this truth. Anyone who has witnessed one bird fly away from another, or a deer sniffing the air, or a groundhog peeping out of its den, may—if not committed to other presuppositions—recognize their use of natural signs as an obvious fact.

But beyond common observation and experience, a more "longitudinal observation" combined with a little reflection shows that non-human animals do indeed make use also of customary signs, insofar as they are capable of learning:[104]

---

104 1632: *TDS*, 205/23-33: "aliqua bruta sint disciplinae capacia, non statim a principio aliqua per-

> [some animals] do not immediately perceive from the outset some things which they know afterwards when a custom has arisen, as a dog, for example, does not respond the first time he is called by such or such a name, and afterward is moved when a custom has been established. Therefore, some brute animals employ signs from custom; for they are not moved as a result of the imposition as such of the name, for that imposition itself, which depends on the will of the one stipulating it, a brute animal does not come to know.

As an aside, it is interesting to note—interesting in my opinion, at least—that we often speak of animal knowledge in a way which equivocates on just what it is we mean by "knowledge"; that is, in training a dog, we will speak about the commands that the dog "knows": sit, stay, heel, roll-over, or her name. But of course, the dog does not *know* the *command*, nor even her own name—"knowledge" becomes equivocally stated in consequence of the English language's surprising poverty. More accurately stated, the dog recognizes a sign-vehicle and its significate in actual exercise (*in actu exercito*), and further recognizes that adhering to the volition of the master expressed by that sign-relation results in benefit while failure to adhere results in harm. This recognition does not require a knowledge of the sign *as a sign* (*in actu signato*), for anything recognized which is better-known-to-us in its representation of something better-known-in-itself is a signification:[105]

> Since therefore an image and a statue represent their significates to a cognitive power in the mode of a sign, if external vision attains in a statue and an image not only the statue, but also that which the image represents, it cognizes one less known thing through another thing more known, which is to use signs.

In other words, obtaining distinct awareness of the signified as an object apart from the sign—which, insofar as it is of the

---

cipiunt, quae postea consuetudine procedente cognoscunt, ut canis non statim a principio movetur, cum vocatur tali vel tali nomine, et postea movetur habit consuetudine. Ergo utuntur aliqua bruta signis ex consuetudine; nam ex impositione ipsa nominis non moventur, quia non innotescit illis impositio ipsa, quae ex voluntate imponentis dependet."

105 1632: *TDS*, 206/17-24: "Cum ergo imago et statua repraesentat potentiae sua significata per modum signi, si visus exterior in statua et imagine non solum statuam attingit, sed etiam id, quod repraesentat imago, cognoscit unum minus notum per aliud notius, quod est uti signis."

object *as* signified implicitly also is an awareness of the relation, too—is not requisite for a cognitive agent to receive and make use of a sign. That the dog hear its name and know it is called requires it to make no distinction between the voice and the owner; and likewise, seeing the particular quality of light peep through one's curtains announces that it is day without us having to reflect on the distinction of signifier and signified. Such reflective discursion comes (and indeed can only come) in consequence of having first recognized the unitive presence of the sign-relation indistinctly realized as comprising both sign-vehicle and significate all at once. We human beings make use of signs in this implicit and indistinct manner all the time: for, in our relations to the external perceptual environment we frequently utilize signs without involving any explicit conscious awareness of the distinctions between the sign-vehicle and the significate. I do not contemplate that the keys signify the possibility of producing letters on the screen in order to type. You need not think that the steam rising from coffee signifies its intense heat to know you must sip carefully. One need not even arise to the level of such perceptual evaluation—particular judgments about utility, benefit, and harm, that is—for sign-use to occur. Insofar as there exists an objectivizing relation even in sensation, that is, we find semiosis to occur without needing elaborative or recursive cognitive procession of any kind:[106]

> But this [discrimination between distinct objects of sensation] suffices for external sense to be led from one thing to another, because if it discriminates between one thing and another and knows the one as contained in another (for example, a profile as it affects or is affected by color, an image as being in a mirror, Hercules in a statue, a green as distinguished from a white thing), nothing more is required in order that it should know another through one thing and be led from the one to the other.

---

106 1632: *TDS*, 206/46-207/6: "Hoc autem sufficit, ut deducatur de uno ad aliud, quia si discernit inter unum et aliud et cognoscit unum, ut continetur in alio, sicut figuram, ut afficit vel afficitur colore, imaginem ut in speculo, Herculem in statua, viride ut discernitur ab albo, nihil amplius requiritur, ut per unum cognoscat aliud et deducatur de uno ad aliud."

Implicit, in other words, in the recognition of an object of
sensation there occurs a certain discrimination—as the *sensus communis* or "integrative sense" of Thomistic psychology
discriminates between the various external objects of sensation[107]—such that we simultaneously cognize also that the one
object of sensation is differentiated from others; and such that
there necessarily exists a sign-relation that x signifies y and
not z. An animal, for instance, may recognize that the object
seen in a mirror is *behind* itself. Though the mirror is in front,
the image signifies an object behind. Recognizing this, it may
react accordingly and thereby demonstrate to us the discrimination: say, in the case that it evaluates the object as a threat
and therefore runs away from it, or if it evaluates it as a friend
and runs towards it. It does not run away from or towards
the image in the mirror, but rather with a respect towards the
thing which is mirrored by that image. But even without such
positive or negative evaluation, we can see animals react to the
objects of their sensible environment with a discrimination (as
in navigating terrain, or the way in which a cat will idly watch
something in its owner's hands being moved).

To grasp the full importance of this *coincidentality* of the
significate within the sign-vehicle, let us examine one further
text, one which may be difficult to interpret:[108]

> Nevertheless, it should be observed that external sense cannot
> know the significate apart from the sign and in itself. For a significate is very often absent in this manner, and if it were present

107 Cf. Aquinas 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.78, a.4; 1265-66: *Quaestio disputata de anima*, a.13; Poinsot
1635: *Quarta Pars Philosophia Naturalis*, q.8, a.1 (R.III.247a38-249a34).
108 1632: *TDS*, 207/16-39: "Est tamen observandum, quod sensus exterior non potest cognoscere
signatum seorsum a signo et secundum se. Sic enim plerumque est absens, et si praesens sit et cognoscatur per signum ut ab ipso distinctum, requiret comparationem unius ad aliud, alias quomodo
ei constabit, quod hoc distincte et seorsum sumptum ab illo est signatum illius? Cognoscit ergo
signatum ut contentum in signo et ad ipsum pertinens, et, ut dicit D. Thomas, Herculem cognoscit
in statua. Nec amplius requirutur ad signum; nec enim repraesentat signum de suo signato amplius,
quam quod in illo continetur, et sic non est necesse illud cognoscere ampliori et perfectiori cognitione, conferendo et comparando signatum cum signo ut distincta inter se et ratione habitudinis
unius ad aliud. Cognoscitur tamen ipsum signatum sic in signo contentum, sicut cognoscitur, quod
haec est imago hominis et non equi, illa Petri et non Pauli; quod esse non posset, si signatum omnino
ignoraretur." *Italics* in English my addition.

and cognized through a sign as something distinct from that sign, this would require a comparison of the one to the other, otherwise how will it be established that *this* taken distinctly and separately from *that* is the significate of *that*? External sense therefore knows a significate as contained in a sign and pertaining to that sign, and, as St. Thomas says, knows Hercules in a statue. Nor is more required for a sign; for a sign represents no more concerning its significate than that it is contained in the sign, and so it is not necessary to know the sign by a fuller and more perfect cognition, by connecting and comparing the signified with the sign as mutually distinct things and by reason of the relation of the one to the other. Nevertheless the significate itself thus contained in the sign is known, just as it is known that this is an image of a man and not of a horse, that that is an image of Peter and not of Paul; which could not be the case if the significate were not known at all.

The difficulty in interpreting this passage hinges upon the notion that the significate is known—or, perhaps more accurately translated, that the significate is cognized—as *contained* in the sign. Given the ambiguity presented us by the word "sign", we are inclined to ask: does this mean the *sign-vehicle* or the *sign-relation*? This question, however, misleads us. The sign-vehicle *precisely inasmuch as it is functioning as a sign-vehicle* does not exist separately from the sign-relation. Thus, the object as contained in the sign-vehicle is the object as related thereby: not something distinct, as though it were a separate something *known*, separated out as a delineated object entitatively distinct from the vehicle, but rather as within an implicit and actual ordering of experience affected by the sign in its role as a substitutive object which thereby also represents. Discrimination of object and vehicle occurs only by a conscious and deliberate reflexive act of separation.

That we might miss this fact follows inasmuch as we human beings habitually attune thinking through our proper mode of specifically-human awareness, which consists in just this very distinction of sign and significate. Thus, nearly our entire conscious lives—at the very least, "academic" or "intellectual" lives and thus perhaps I am speaking from personal bias, though I'd say this likely extends throughout many non-academic fields and worlds of experience as well—are spent in

some measure or another trying to discern the relations between signs and their significates. In this explicit distinction of the sign and significate which dominates our own struggles in thinking we obscure the implicit ordering of the sign-vehicle, the *secundum dici* relativity of the extrinsic and instrumental sign-vehicle. Once this relativity is discovered by a mind, the sign-vehicle founds the categorial relation between the significate and the interpretant, such that object becomes impressed upon the interpretant through that specifying form whereby it is intentionally present.[109] But until we grasp the *disparity* of the two—which disparity is itself a relation, even if not recognized in its proper *secundum esse* relativity distinct from the things related—we are simply *moved* by the signs. Only after that disparity is grasped can we recognize the multiplicity of the sign-relation itself, and subsequently *move ourselves*, independently of the determinations pre-existing in our genetically-inherited habits, so as to render new possibilities of signification.[110]

Yet the explicit recognition of the relation between the sign-vehicle and the significate never consists in recognition of a dyadic relation alone; for in recognizing this relation, we cannot but recognize also the relation *to ourselves* (or, implicitly, to some other semiosic agent as well). As Deely writes in his *New Beginnings*:[111]

> A sign is anything that stands for something other than itself... But you see at once that a relation of "standing for" requires a specified context: one thing stands for another only in some respect or capacity. So the sign is not a thing as such, not a physical element merely existing in the environment, like a rock or a toad, but something as doubly related: A stands for B in context C. Yet to say "doubly related" is not to say "two relations", but to say rather that one "thing" is related to two other "things" at one and the same time by one single relation.

---

109 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 218/36-42.
110 This seems to be the antecedent necessity of intellect to will—and a blow against voluntarism.
111 Deely 1994: *New Beginnings*, 153.

This *double relating*, in other words, affects a *single relation* in every instance of a sign. Our awareness of these distinctions—that the sign-vehicle is not the significate—dull as that awareness may be in our earliest specifically-human cognitive actions, nevertheless distinguishes our way of using signs, our way of being immersed in a world of signs, from that of all other animals: for we are conscious of it, even if many of us never quite put our fingers on precisely what it is that makes us aware of so many things in just such a way.

Here we begin veering too far from the *doctrina signorum* itself and explicitly into deep inquiries belonging to philosophical psychology—a task in the cultivation of Poinsot studies which has only just begun and which, I believe, promises some of the richest fruit to come from the retrieval of Scholastic thought. That we might better till and revive that soil, however, let us proceed into a consideration the division of signs.

3.3. Divisio Signorum

There are many ways in which we can divide the sign. One need look only at the proposed trichotomies of Charles Sanders Peirce and the combinatorial possibilities of their valid composition to discern the enormous complexity emerging from many acts of signification. This complexity outlined in nuce by Peirce[112] arises from the triadic constitution of the relation: for an act of signification may be differentiated according to the vehicle's own nature or how it respects the object or interpretant; or it may be according to the object considered as either immediate or dynamic; or according to the interpretant (as immediate, dynamic, or logical). But at a more elementary level—although along the same path—Poinsot takes up divisions which had been his own time become common, but with keener insight following from the above-illustrated understanding of the nature and causality of signs as such. The world would doubtless profit from close and comparative

112 See especially his letters to Lady Welby from 1908 in EP. 2: 478-91.

studies of Poinsot and his predecessors not only as to the specific texts dealing with the various divisions, but precisely as altered by his understanding of signs as relations; for therein consists, it appears at a quick glance, an elaboration of the understanding of signs unparalleled in prior history.

Within this elaboration, we encounter Poinsot's emphatic insistence that the concept is a formal sign—along with his further insistence that it is a *natural* sign—which proves to be the *single most important element in understanding the formal rationale of what it is to be human.* This truth, at which here we can only hint, will unfold through the rest of this article. To begin this unfolding, allow us to retreat to the *summulae* chapters included in the *Tractatus de Signis*. Here, in the second, we find Poinsot to offer first a twofold distinction between the formal and instrumental, and second a threefold between the natural, stipulated, and customary. These lattermost two are often grouped together under "conventional", for each relies somehow upon the use and intention of a cognitive agent.

3.3.1. Formal and Instrumental Signs

Following the oblique statements of Aquinas and the explicit distinctions of Domingo de Soto, Pedro de Fonseca, and the Conimbricenses, Poinsot observes a division between formal and instrumental signs. But unlike many of his predecessors—most notably Fonseca—and following more closely the implications of St. Thomas' doctrine, Poinsot explicitly identifies the being of the sign more properly with the formal than with the instrumental. Indeed, Fonseca, by the end of his brief chapter on the distinction, has discarded the formal as something equivocally denominated a "sign", lapsing back into a kind of recidivist Augustinian conception.[113] As Deely writes, this opens the door to

---

113 1564: *Institutionum Dialecticarum Libri Octo*, lib.1, c.8: "Signa formalia sunt similitudines, seu species quaedam rerum significatarum in potentiis cognoscentibus consignatae, quibus res significata percipiuntur. Huius generis est similitudo , quam mons obiectus imprimit in oculis". Note that here Fonseca is designating the *impression* as the formal sign. Further: "Hinc colliges apertissimum

the nominalism characteristic of all the moderns: most specifically because it fosters the notion of the concept as a terminal rather than purely mediate representation.[114]

By contrast, Poinsot's employment of the division, which we have already invoked in the previous section, makes clear that priority in signification should be understood inversely from the Augustinian reading of Fonseca. In other words, as Poinsot explains the nature of signs, it is made clear that the actuality of signification most properly belongs to the formal and only derivatively does it exist in the instrumental. To begin with, he asserts from the very beginning that the division into formal and instrumental follows a diversity of ordering to the cognitive powers.[115] Subsequently, they are defined:[116]

> A formal sign is the formal awareness which represents of itself, not by means of another. An instrumental sign is one that represents something other than itself from a pre-existing cognition of itself as an object, as the footprint of an ox represents an ox.

Note well the principal distinction: formal sign-vehicles represent without means of another while instrumental sign-vehicles represent by being first cognized as objects. As we saw above, the instrumental sign-vehicle substitutes objectively, whereas the formal substitutes only through intentional representation. Grasping the instrumental sign-vehicle strictly as an object does not in fact suffice for the cognitive grasp that an act of signification has occurred. There must be a *further* realization that, within the instrumentally-significative object as object, there exists a *fundament* which affects a further

---

discrimen inter haec signa et superiora: illa siquidem non sunt a nobis necessario percipienda, ut ipsorum perceptione in rei significatae cognitionem veniamus: haec autem nisi percipiantur, nemini alicuius rei cognitionem adducent. Different etiam hac ratione, quod priora illa, nec admodum usitate nominatur signa, nec satis proprie dicuntur repraesentare: haec vero posteriora, maxime."

114 2010: *Medieval Philosophy Redefined as the Latin Age*, 350-56.

115 1632: *TDS*, 27/7-10: "Nam qua parte signum ordinatur ad potentiam dividitur in signum formale et instrumentale".

116 Ibid, 27/13-18: "Signum formale est formalis notitia, quae seipsa, non mediante alio, repraesentat. Signum instrumentale est, quod ex praeexistente cognitione sui aliquid aliud a se repraesentat, sicut vestigium bovis repraesentat bovem."

cognitive grasp and awareness of the *other* signified object. This twofold objective grasp does not constitute two distinct acts of cognition, but, as it were, "collapses" the two into one act of cognition: the double-relating is realized in its singular relation.[117] Thus, both instrumental and formal signs fully satisfy the rationale for constituting a sign-relation.

Notably, Poinsot later—in a move that anticipates Charles Peirce's various trichotomies—states that the division into formal and instrumental concerns not merely the manner of representation, but the diversity of representations of the object *to* the power:[118]

> ...the division of signs into formal and instrumental is a division into diverse species or kinds which are directly taken not just from diverse respects to a cognitive power, but from diverse relations to a signified as representable to a cognitive power in diverse ways. For any object is representable by a twofold representative medium or means, namely, a means *in which* and a means *through which*. And the first founds a formal representation acting within a cognitive power, the second founds an instrumental representation moving a cognitive power from without. Whence in the representable thing itself signified are distinguished diverse rationales or fundaments for the relations it terminates from these diverse representations or modes of representing in signs, even though the thing represented may be materially the same. And similarly,

---

117 It is a question into which we cannot here delve as to whether the instrumental sign-vehicle needs be sensible to function in the order of substitutive objective causality; suffice it only to say that sensible phenomena clearly can and do function as instrumental sign-vehicles. There are several arguments to be made that instrumental sign-vehicles necessarily are sensible. Cf. Deely 2004: "The Semiosis of Angels" in *The Thomist* 68.2: 205-58.

118 1632: *TDS*, 163/12-36: "divisio signi in formale et instrumentale est divisio per diversas species, quae directe non sumuntur ex solo diverso respectu ad potentiam, sed ex diversa relatione ad signatum ut diverso modo repraesentabile potentiae. Est enim repraesentabile aliquod obiectum duplici medio repraesentativo, scilicet medio *in quo* et medio *per quod*. Et primum fundat repraesentationem formalem intra potentiam informanetem, secundum repraesentationem instrumentalem extra potentiam moventem. Unde in ipso signato repraesentabili invenitur diversa ratio seu fundamentum ad terminandum istas diversas repraesentationes seu modos repraesentandi in signis, licet res repraesentata materialiter sit eadem. Et similiter praesupponit in ipsis signis diversum modum movendi et repraesentandi potentiae, scilicet ut obiectum extra vel ut forma ad intra; hoc tamen praesuppositive se habet at raitionem signi, formalissima vero ratio se habet ut substituti ad signatum, ut tali modo vel tali repraesentabile." *Italics* in English mine. I say that this anticipates Peirce for, in recognizing the triadic *relationality* of the sign, it recognizes also that the sign may be diversified according to any of the three elements contained therein.

> this division of signs into instrumental and formal presupposes in
> the signs themselves diverse manners of stimulatively moving and
> representing to the cognitive power, specifically, as an external
> object or as an internal form; yet this is related presuppositively
> to the rationale of sign, whereas the most formal rationale of a sign
> consists in being something substituted for a significate as repre-
> sentable in this or that way.

Note that Poinsot does not unfurl all the manifold implica-
tions in the diversity of representative relations. Such, in-
deed, seems a task far from finished even today. Essentially,
however, we see the basis for the distinction into formal and
instrumental as consisting in the diverse ways of the vehicle
representing the object: the means *in which* (*in quo*) as con-
stituting a formal and the means *through which* (*per quod*)
constituting the instrumental. The distinction of ablative and
accusative cases helps to indicate the differentiation of the
former as a *pure* means and the latter as an *object* through
which means arise; of the former as an *immediately* significa-
tive and the latter as a *mediately* significative means. The
object may be the same—indeed, if the object could *not* be
the same, then the words of a concrete language and thinking
could never cohere and genuine communication (not only but
especially of a specifically-human kind) would be an impos-
sibility—despite the diversity of manners in which the vehicle,
differentiated in itself, represents that object to the cognitive
power. Moreover, the diverse manners of stimulatively mov-
ing and representing objects to a power presupposed by the
division into instrumental and formal does not destroy the
univocity of "sign";[119] for, albeit diversely, each possesses pre-
suppositvely the foundational quality whereby it may affect
the relation between object and power.

But considering the effect within the power reveals that the
instrumental sign-vehicle alone, however, can never sufficient-
ly provide strictly and entirely of itself a positive cognitive
awareness. For the instrumental sign-vehicle, inasmuch as it

---

119 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, Book II, q.1 *in passim*.

is really distinct from the object signified, has a contingent relationship thereto. In the absence of the significate, the instrumental sign-vehicle signifies only fundamentally or virtually. It requires provision *by* some mind of the relation to the signified object:[120]

> Whence not even the instrumental sign itself, which is an extrinsic object, is said to signify and to manifest, except according as it is cognized, not prior to cognition. For it is a condition of an instrumental sign that it first be something known, in order that it signify...

Here we see Poinsot reject fully the notion that the instrumental can properly be called a sign all on its own; since it must be cognized in order that the signification occur. On the one hand, this makes manifest the necessity of a relation to a power. On the other, it implies that the instrumental sign requires some formal sign present within the power in order that the object be attained. Poinsot makes this latter point explicit just a little farther on:[121]

> Nor does it matter that a sound or name does not signify except by means of a concept, which is a natural sign. For this also holds for a natural instrumental sign, that it does not represent except by means of a concept making it an object of awareness, and yet the natural instrumental sign is not on this account a sign analogically, but truly and univocally. For the fact that [instrumental] signs depend on a concept in representing does not remove the univocal rationale of a sign, since indeed a concept and cognition is that to which the [instrumental] signs represent, not a means by which they represent as by a formal rationale, even though the instrumental signs [if they are stipulated or customary] may be produced from that concept and cognition.

---

120 1632: *TDS*, 261/32-35: "Unde nec ipsum signum instrumentale, quod est obiectum extrinsecum, signare et manifestare dicitur, nisi prout cognitum, non ante cognitionem. Est enim conditio in signo instrumentali, quod prius sit cognitum, ut significet..." Cf. 259/3, 271/22-34.

121 1632: *TDS*, 271/22-34: "Nec obstat, quod vox seu nomen non significat nisi mediante concept, qui est signum naturale. Hoc enim etiam signo instrumentali naturali convenit, quod non nisi mediante conceptu et notitia sui repraesentat, et tamen non ob hoc est signum analogice, sed vere et univoce. Quod enim signa in repraesentando dependeant a conceptu, non tollit univocam rationem signi, siquidem conceptus et cognitio est, cui repraesentant, non mediante quo repraesentant tamquam formali ratione, licet effective possint ab eo esse." Cf. ibid 259/3.

Thus in an instrumental sign-vehicle we see that the double-relating consists not only in the formal representation of the object in its own objective presence, but also the objective representation of the sign as antecedent to the formal representation. By contrast, in the formal sign-vehicle, the representation of the significate consists not in any objective representation to the interpretant or cognitive power; but only, rather, an actuating of awareness such that the object is rendered terminally present to that interpretant. And yet, absent this formal representation intimate to the cognitive power, *no* object becomes present to the mind cognizing at all. Thus, the instrumental sign, despite possessing this objective representation antecedently to being engaged in the formally-representative relation and therefore univocally fulfilling the fundamental rationale of a sign, affects no relation to the object strictly and purely of itself.

In the broader context of semiotics, particularly in the Peircean paradigm that opens the door to considering biosemiotics and perhaps even physiosemiotics, this raises the question of how signification can occur in the absence of cognitive powers within which the formal representation occurs, and as to whether these instances of semiosis would be univocal with that being described here by Poinsot. But these are suggestions for further research.

3.3.2. Natural and Conventional Signs

Much as a misunderstanding of formal signs, such as that found in Fonseca, opens the door wide to nominalism, so too a misunderstanding of the relationship between natural and conventional signification can lead to dualism. Fully explicating not only how but why this dualistic tendency follows, though a fascinating and rich inquiry, proves unnecessary to demonstrating its occurrence as a fact: for we have hundreds of years of history to see that, having adopted (whether with full consciousness or not) the Fonsecan conception that the formal sign (and thus all concepts, intellectual as well as perceptual)

are signs only equivocally-so-called, modernity severs any potential connection between the natural and the conventional. Put otherwise, *rejecting* that concepts are natural signs and that they fulfill the rationale of a sign, but relegating them instead to the status of internal terminal representations entails that correspondence between conventional instrumental signs, extrinsic to the mind, and natural formal signs, intrinsic to the mind, can never truly be coherent with one another; there is a divide, a gap, essentially unbridgeable, if we separate our signs as equivocal in this manner. Moreover, this gap between the mind and the world results in the further divorce between nature and culture.

By contrast, Poinsot's conception allows us to see the fundamental *unity* of our sign-permeated existence. Reverting again to the second *summulae* chapter, we see Poinsot provide an initial definition of natural and the two kinds of conventional sign thus:[122]

> A natural sign is one that represents from the nature of a thing, independently of any stipulation and custom whatever, and so it represents the same for all, as smoke signifies a fire burning. A stipulated sign [*signum ad placitum*] is one that represents something owing to an imposition by the will of a community, like the linguistic expression "man." A customary sign [*signum ex consuetudine*] is one that represents from use alone without any public imposition, as napkins upon the table signify a meal.

Considering these provisional definitions—and looking at the question headings for Book II in the *Tractatus de Signis*—we might think that the division between natural, stipulated, and customary is mutually and exhaustively threefold, and that, indeed, the heading provided here in this article (between natural and conventional) misses Poinsot's key point.

But reading the text, we notice an anomaly when we turn to question five in Book II: though the question asks, "Whether the division of signs into natural, stipulated, and customary is a sound division", we see the point which Deely elucidates in a footnote, namely, that there is *no discussion of customary signs* in the question at all. One can speculate why this is: but the simplest answer seems to be that *nature itself* and the *imposition of an agent's volition* bring into being an exhaustive division of two kinds of sign. Thus, customary signs, though distinct from stipulation and nature alike, are derivative from either. That is, we can identify customary signs as being either *from* stipulation or *by* nature, but arising from no other source than these two. Poinsot makes no explicit claim that this reasoning of their derivation leads to the omission of customary signs from consideration in the fifth question; but he does explicitly state that such derivation belongs to the customary sign.[123]

Turning our attention back to the division under which we have titled this section—natural and conventional—we run into something of a terminological and translational problem. Ordinarily, we understand "convention" to signify something belonging precisely to culture, and, most especially, we hear in the background some idea of an at-least tacit agreement. We might say, for instance, that it was a convention for men to allow women to go first; or to remove their hats when entering a building; or that one may safely go a certain speed over the posted limit while driving a car. But this is a more limited and etymologically-obtuse employment of the word. To convene, *convenire*, means simply "to come together".

Thus, while we cannot use "conventional" to *translate* both *ad placitum* and *ex consuetudine*—such indeed would "blur one of the major theoretical contributions of the *Treatise* as a whole"[124]—we may use it as a generic term to comprise both.

---

123 See below, n. 132.
124 Deely 1985: "Editorial Afterword" to *TDS*, 467.

For the stipulated and customary alike consist in the attachment of a signification to the vehicle which does not belong to the vehicle solely and strictly of itself; in this they contrast alike with the natural sign.

Indeed it belongs to the natural sign-vehicle, as that which founds a significative relation, that it possess within itself a **mind-independent relation**, a *relatio realis*, to the significate:[125]

> The relation of a natural sign to its significate by which the sign is constituted in being as a sign, is mind-independent and not mind-dependent, considered in itself and by virtue of its fundament and presupposing the existence of the terminus and the other conditions for a mind-independent or physical relation.

The knowability which belongs to the sign-vehicle precisely *as* a vehicle, in other words, belongs to itself *because* of this mind-independent relation. Quite often, this relation is one of efficient causality; *this* being an effect of *that*, inasmuch as *that* has caused *this* to be, means that it bears within itself a transcendental relativity that founds a mind-independent relation to its cause. That the efficient causality of all but God occurs through the determination of some intrinsic form in the locus of the effect allows us to discern the formal similitude between cause and effect. This ontological relation is evident in the case of, say, the hoof and the hoofprint. But the causal relation need not be constrained to the dyadic consequences of efficient causality and intrinsic formal similitude:[126]

> Therefore the knowable in physical objects is absolutely and in itself something mind-independent, but relatively to a cognitive power it is something mind-dependent. But that knowability is greater or more manifest in one thing than in another, is not taken from the mind-dependent relation to a power, which is found in

---

125 1632: *TDS*, 137/9-15: "Relatio signi naturalis ad suum signatum, qua constituitur in esse signi, realis est, et non rationis, quantum est ex se et vi sui fundamenti et supponendo existentiam termini ceterasque conditiones relationis realis."

126 1632: *TDS*, 139/29-37: "Sic ergo cognoscibile in obiectis realibus absolute et in se aliquid reale est, sed relative ad potentiam aliquid rationis. Quod autem cognoscibilitas in uno sit maior aut manifestior altera, non sumitur ex relatione rationis ad potentiam, quae in omni obiecto invenitur, sed ex maiori vi et efficacia movendi et manifestandi, quae in se aliquid reale est."

every object, but from the greater force and efficacy of arousing or stimulating and manifesting, which in itself is something independent of mind.

Put in other words, the knowability of the extra-mental, instrumental sign-vehicle precisely as related to a mind is something mind-dependent, as the rock is not designated *known* from in and of itself, but from the relation that the mind has to it. Nevertheless, that it have in and of itself the knowability whereby it may be mind-dependently designated as "known" it possesses from its own mind-independent qualities—such that it can be greater or lesser in manifesting and therefore signifying the object. But this neither consists in its efficient causality of arousing or exciting alone nor in being a physical and therefore instrumentally significative thing.

In other words, the mind-independent relation by which a natural sign-vehicle signifies the object consists not only in bearing the effects of an efficient cause having impressed some form on it. Indeed, such efficient causality, while often a concurrence of the relation whereby the sign-vehicle substitutes for the object, is *merely* a concurrence and never the proper causality of signs:[127]

> For the fact that smoke represents fire rather than water, that the footprint of an ox represents an ox rather than a man, and that the concept of a horse represents a horse rather than a stone, is founded on some mind-independent or physical and intrinsic proportion of those signs with these significates; from a mind-independent proportion and connection with something, however, arises a mind-independent relation.

Of particular interest here is the explicit identification of the concept of the horse as a natural sign mind-independently related to the object it signifies. The horse as object clearly does not efficiently cause the concept of the horse, even though

---

127 1632: *TDS*, 140/6-14: "Nam quod fumus repraesentet potius ignem quam aquam, et vestigium bovis potius bovem quam hominem, et conceptus equi potius equum quam lapidem, in aliqua reali proportione et intrinseca istorum signorum cum illis signatis fundatur; ex reali autem proportione et connexione cum aliquo realis relatio innascitur."

we gain such a concept only through some impression upon the senses (the object signified by the intellectual *concept* of a horse being illimitable to any quantity or variety of sense impressions). In what then, does the mind-independent relation between the natural sign-vehicle and the object consist? In short, it is that physical (i.e., mind-independent rather than corporeal) and intrinsic proportion. In the case of efficient causes and effects, the mind-independent relation consists in the form present in the effect substituting for the knowability of the object precisely inasmuch as it is proportioned to the form in the cause. A vague footprint in the ground—enough to know a foot has been placed there but not whether it was made by hoof or paw—suffices to substitute for the object only as to a generic rather than a specific cognoscibility. But this generic representation nevertheless does accurately if vaguely signify the object.

The physical and intrinsic proportion of a conceptual vehicle with its object, however, occurs not through a sameness of intrinsic form but by the sameness of the conceptual *esse intentionale* with the object known. The wax receives the form of the ring without its iron; we receive the form of what-it-is-to-be-a-ring without becoming shaped like it at all. In either case, namely that of the natural-instrumental or the natural-formal, signified by the "accuracy of its representation" is the mind-independent relation of **measured** to the **measure**.[128] The smoke signifies not only that there exists a fire, but also—by its color, opacity, and texture—indicates also the qualities of the fuel, the conditions of combustion, extrinsic environmental factors, and even the conditions of light in the surrounding atmosphere. The depth of the hoofprint's impression indicates both the pliability of the ground and the weight of the animal. The better-developed a percept of a horse, the more accurately it can be cognitively represented according to, for instance, length of limb

---

128 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 139/5-28.

THE DOCTRINE OF SIGNS IN JOHN POINSOT

and size of head, or number of toes—or the more accurately the being of the horse can be understood from its concept, including truths such as the length of its pre-natal gestation or age of sexual maturity or chromosomal pairings. In each case, the conceptual sign-vehicle, just as the instrumental, is measured in its significative quality as what is measured by what measures.

The truth that *every* conceptual sign-vehicle bears this kind of mind-independent relation of measured to measure not as a matter of convention but as a matter of its own proper natural being both renders nugatory the idealism characteristic of all modern philosophy *and* opens wide the gates for understanding culture—a point only nascently realized in Poinsot's semiotic but to the development of which we will turn our attention momentarily.

3.3.3. Stipulated and Customary Signs

However, prior and indeed necessary to discovering and understanding culture's semiotic constitution, we must delve into the constitution and differentiation of stipulated and customary sign-vehicles and the significative relations they provenate. To begin with, as noted above, Poinsot in the fifth question in Book II of the *Tractatus* makes explicit distinction only between the natural and stipulated, which he articulates thus:[129]

> If this division of signs into natural and stipulated is considered entitatively and in the order of mind-independent being, it is an analogous division; if it is considered in the order of the representative or knowable, it is a univocal division, and a stipulated sign is truly a sign in the office and capacity of an object, which it exercises.

We must note, as always, that there exists a persistent ambiguity throughout Poinsot's writing rendered by the linguistic

---

129 1632: *TDS*, 269/8-14: "Si haec divisio signi in naturale et ad placitum entitative et in esse rei consideretur, analoga est; si in genere repraesentativi seu cognoscibilis, univoca est, et signum ad placitum est vere signum in officio et vice obiecti, quam exercet."

indistinction of sign-vehicle and sign-relation. That natural and stipulated signs in the order of mind-independent being are analogously divided follows from the differences of the sign-*vehicle*; conversely, the univocity in the order of the representative or cognoscible follows from the commonality of the sign-*relation*. That is, even though the sign-vehicle as fundament differs as to its own essential being between natural and stipulated—such that the former has in itself the intrinsic proportion to the object and the latter has such only extrinsically—each truly renders present the object to some cognitive power and therefore realizes the essential meaning of the "sign". Put otherwise, the sign-relation univocally results in the representation of something other, even if the sign-vehicles represent the objects analogically.

Thus, even though some extrinsic imposition by an agent is required for the stipulated sign's instantiation, and even though this is by the will and therefore "arbitrary", this arbitrariness is not that of an unconditioned or *ex nihilo* constitution. Rather, and here I must quote at length, the extrinsic denomination of a stipulated sign exists always and only within a context of relations inseparable from the mind-independent realities of existence:[130]

---

130 1632: *TDS*, 141/11-142/11: "in signis ad placitum rationem signi etiam per relationem ad signatum explicandam esse. Sed relatio ista rationis est, et non solum consistit signum in extrinseca denominatione, qua redditur impositum se destinatum a republica ad significandum, ut aliqui recentiores putant, eo quod sine illa fictione intellectus per solam ipsam impositionem denominatur signum. Ceterum haec impositio requiritur quidem tamquam fundamentum relationis et rationis signi, quia per illam habilitatur et destinatur aliquid, ut sit signum, sicut per hoc, quod proportionatur et connectitur aliquod signum naturale cum tali signato, fundat relationem signi ad ipsum.

"Itaque ex denominatione illa extrinseca destinationis et impositionis consurgit duplex relatio rationis: *Prima* communis omni extrinsecae denominationi, quatenus concipitur per intellectum ad modum formae et relationis denominationis, ut esse visum ad videntem, esse amatum ad amantem. *Alia* est relatio particularis, qua uno denominatio distinguitur ab alia. Destinatio enim et impositio reipublicae ad varia munera esse potest, quae non nisi relatione distinguuntur ad ea, ad quae exercenda destinantur, sicut destinantur aliquis et sintituitur, ut sit iudex, praeses, doctor, et aliqua, ut sint signa vel insignia horum munerum, et similiter voces destinantur, ut humane conversationi deserviant. Haec munera ex distionctione reipublicae oriuntur, quae denominatio extrinsica est. Ceterum distinguuntur, quia iudex ordinatur ad tales subditos iudicandum, praeses ad regendum, doctor ad docendum etc.: quae distinctiones sumuntur per ordinem ad sua offica seu obiecta, circa quae exercentur, et nonnisi per relationes explicantur, et non aliter; ergo relationibus ad sua munera et obiecta distinguntur. Idem ergo dicendum de signis ad placitum, licete denominatione extrinseca impositionis fundentur."

...even in the case of stipulated signs the rationale of sign must be explained by a relation to a signified. But the relation in this case is mind-dependent, yet the sign does not consist only in the extrinsic denomination whereby it is rendered or imposed or appointed for signifying by common usage, as some more recent philosophers think, from the fact that, apart from the relation constructed by the understanding, the sign is denominated by the very imposition alone. Yet this imposition is indeed required as the fundament of the relation and rationale of the sign, because [1] it is through this imposition that something is habilitated and appointed to be a stipulated sign, just as it is through some natural sign's being proportioned and connected with a given significate that there is founded a relation of the sign to that significate.

From that extrinsic denomination of stipulation and imposition, thus, a twofold mind-dependent relation arises: [2] The first is one common to every extrinsic denomination, insofar as an extrinsic denomination is conceived by the understanding on the pattern of a form and a denominating relation, as, for example, being seen is conceived relative to the one seeing, being loved relative to the one loving. [3] The other is the particular relation by which one denomination is distinguished from another. For there can be appointment and imposition [4] by the community to various offices, which are not distinguished otherwise than by a relation to those functions for the exercise of which they are appointed, just as someone is appointed and installed as a judge, a president, a teacher, and other things are instituted to be signs or insignia of these offices, and similarly, linguistic expressions are appointed to serve human communication. [5] These offices or functions arise from a distinction of the requirements of public life, which is an extrinsic denomination. They are further distinguished because a judge is ordered to judging a certain population, a president to governing, a teacher to instructing, etc.: which distinctions are understood through an order to their offices, or to the objects concerning which they are exercised, and they are not explained in any other way than through relations; therefore they are distinguished by the relations to their offices and objects. [6] The same therefore must be said of stipulated signs, even though they are founded by the extrinsic denomination of imposition.

As annotated, there are six key points here deserving of attention and explication. First [1] is that the imposition of

will *habilitates* and appoints some object to function as a stipulated sign. Implicit here but worthy of note is that every stipulated sign-vehicle is instrumental. It therefore has a mind-independent entitative being of its own but a mind-dependent reliance for its significative function, unlike natural instrumental signs. By the imposition of will, however, there is attached to it a significance which **holds** to it. This is the *habilitation*. Though determined by an arbitrary act of will, once the imposition has been made, the relations of signification enter into a relational context.

Though the relation is mind-dependent, as a relation within a larger relational context, it is not wholly separate from mind-independent reality. Thus [2], the germination of the mind-dependent imposition or extrinsic denomination has to be somehow patterned off mind-independent realities. Likewise [3], the mind-dependent denominations are held relative to one another. It would not be fitting [4] for judges to be appointed judges for the purpose of teaching, and for the purpose of governing, but rather we have different offices for the exercise of such action. These mind-dependent denominations constitute, as a whole, something which aims to befit the [5] public life of the social order, which, though it is structured through such mind-dependent relations comes into being by nature. Thus, though both offices and stipulated signs come into being by the extrinsic denomination granted only through an imposition of will, each [6] has a certain relation of fittingness to the pattern of social relations which resolves to the natural good of human beings.

Thus the context within which some *habilitation* of a stipulation arises, even as that context helps to bring forward and constitute the habilitation, is itself constituted by the signs of custom which already exist. (*This point alone gives us much to contemplate concerning evolution, the animal use of signs, and the emergence of human languages.*)

To understand why this is the case, let us turn our attention to customary signs. Poinsot writes that there arises "a

special difficulty concerning certain signs which are accommodated to signifying something not from any public institution, i.e., not by dimanating from a public authority, but from the mere inclination of particular individuals frequently to make frequent use of them."[131]   That is, we may recognize immediately that such significations arise by convention because the relation of the sign-vehicle to the significate, even if there may be a *fittingness* in their proportionality, have this proportionality signified only from a mind-dependent attachment.   There may be a fittingness, for instance, to saying a prayer of thanksgiving at noon every day: the sun, being overhead, illuminates most fully, and for the expanse of being open to our senses and minds we ought to be thankful. But someone, having a particularly rough day (and perhaps amidst gloomy climate conditions) may find it circumstantially appropriate instead to pray for fortitude.   The former might be more *essentially* proportionate, given the nature of that-to-which the custom attaches, but the attachment *itself* bears no essential necessity.

That certain times of the day, based upon customary patterns of behavior, give rise to explicit and purposively-established traditions is a case of custom developing into a stipulation; thus, a bell might be rung at noon to signal it is the time for prayer.   Conversely, however, the emergence of this custom itself may be in some way reducible to the natural sign, as something befitting not only the nature of the vehicle alone but also the nature of the sign-user.   Thus, as Poinsot explains, the custom always is reducible to either stipulation or nature as its root:[132]

---

131 1632: *TDS*, 278/1-6: "Specialis difficultas est circa quaedam signa, quae non publica aliqua institutione, i.e., ab auctoritate publica dimanante, sed ex sola voluntate particularium frequenter illis utentium ad aliquid significandum accomdantur."   Two changes from Deely's translation: first, explicit inclusion of *dimanating* (curious to my mind given Deely's concern with this term in other texts, e.g., 1994: *The Human Use of Signs*, gloss on ¶4, p.135-36); second, rendering *particularium* by its English cognate rather than "private".

132 1632: *TDS*, 278/10-17: "Si consuetudo respiciat aliquod signum, destinando illud et proponendo pro signo, tale signum fundatum in consuetudine erit ad placitum. Si vero consuetudo non proponat aliquid vel instituat pro signo, sed dicat simplicem usum alicuius rei et ratione illius assumatur aliquid

> If custom respects some sign by appointing and proposing it for a sign, such a sign founded on custom will be stipulated. But if custom does not propose or institute something as a sign, but expresses the simple use of the thing, and by reason of that use the thing is taken for a sign, such a sign is reduced to a natural sign.

As Poinsot goes on to explain, this entails that customs can either be the *cause* of signs—as by custom we might turn a sound into a stipulation signifying a determinate object, such as the celebratory Spanish interjection "¡olé!"—or the *effects* which lead us to know the cause from the frequent conjunction of use—as when we induce that one thing having happened or happening signifies a relation to something other (as napkins signify a meal, or a dog following someone signifies that he is its master; or a gesticulation, such as a nod, may be taken as an acknowledgment of another's presence). That customs cause signification follows inasmuch as they accrue the force of law: "a custom introducing something for signifying introduces that thing as a sign by the same authority by which the law itself would introduce it."[133]

Importantly, we must note that the relation between stipulative, customary, and natural signification has no absolute and line of demarcation. Some shifts between nature and custom may be long, slow, and subtle, but they unquestionably occur: for though what exists independently of the mind may possess *natures* which do not depend upon it, mind-dependent considerations can have mind-independent effects upon *nature as a whole*, particularly across generations. This appears evident in the dispositional alteration of domesticated animals, for instance, whereby the customs of animal husbandry come to have very real biological consequences. Even more is it evident in the way that human traditions shape the world. But even

---

in signum, tale signum reducitur ad naturale."

133 1632: *TDS*, 279/4-6: "consuetudo introducens aliquid ad significandum eadem auctoritate introducit rem illam in signum, qua ipsa lex introduceret." Cf. 1270: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.97, a.3, c.: "consuetudo et habet vim legis, et legem abolet, et est legum interpretatrix." This final point—that not only may custom have the force of and abolish law, but that it interprets it as well—shows how profound the importance of custom in the constitution of our social behavior.

within the life of an individual, we observe that the volitional freedom of individual acts renders effects of a determinate and determining consequence, influencing the mind-independent realities upon which they come to bear:[134]

> ...when speaking of human custom, even though it proceeds from a free cause and so is denominated a free effect, nevertheless, the formal rationale of signifying is not any free deputation, but the very frequency and repetition of acts, and this signifies naturally, because it is not a moral deputation, that is to say, it is not an extrinsic deputation which denominates only morally, but the intrinsic performance of acts and their frequency and multiplication constitutes the customary sign. Therefore a signification attaches to that sign naturally, even as multiplied free acts generate a habit as a natural and not as a free effect, because the very multiplication of the acts does not function freely relative to generating the habit, so neither to the signifying resulting from the force of the repetition of the acts, even though these acts in themselves [i.e., singly taken] may be free.

Nota bene: "multiplied free acts generate a habit as a natural and not as a free effect". It belongs to the nature of any agent, that is, to have as a dimanative resultance of its freely-willed action that a habit or disposition comes to reside in that very agent itself. Though it is not spelled out in Poinsot explicitly, the inherent suprasubjectivity of sign-relations entails that, as they are effected through frequently repeated intersubjective relations, the consequences of this habituation range farther and wider than any single human being can foresee or even encompass. As we signify through customs to others, we impart to them as well certain habituations. Thus, through certain signs we affect an attitude towards behaviors which may be entirely out of keeping with nature, but which come to be

---

134 1632: *TDS*, 280/26-43: "loquendo de consuetudine humana, quod licet a sua causa libera procedat et sic denominetur effectus liber, tamen ratio formalis significandi non est aliqua libera deputatio, sed ipsa frequentia et repetitio actuum, et haec naturaliter significat, quia non moralis, id est extrinseca deputatio, quae solum moraliter denominat, sed intrinseca processio actuum eorumque frequentatio et multiplicatio constituit signum ex consuetudine. Ergo naturaliter convenit illi significatio, sicut etiam actus liberi multiplicati generant habitum tamquam naturalem effectum et non liberum, quia multiplicatio ipsa actuum non se habet libere ad generandum habitum, sic neque ad significandum ex vi repetitionis actuum, licet ipsi in se liberi sint."

interpreted as natural by the strength of such habituation.[135] Because these habituations are to customary sign-relations, there exists no determinate end on their potential complexity.[136] The semiosic web of human entanglement in convention, that is, knows no natural bounds.

While there remains much more to say concerning the *divisio signorum* proffered by Poinsot, perhaps it would be fruitful instead to consider some of its most poignant consequences for the human being.

4. Discovery in the Age of Relation

Here, we wish only to make passing observations: for in this section we necessarily go beyond the *doctrina signorum* itself and set our eyes upon the broader vista of Poinsot studies still to be discovered, both as to the greater exposition of his thought and as to that thought's importance today. Here we discover not only the paths forged by Iberian scholasticism overgrown by centuries' of ignorance, and not only the routes scouted from other directions by semioticians, but, with the insights of Poinsot's *doctrina signorum* to guide us, the resolution of these paths in orders both experiential (i.e., to *ens primum cognitum*) and metaphysical (within the domain of *ens inquantum ens*).[137]

---

135 Indeed, this may occur even with behavior which we do not realize to be explicitly communicative at all; cf. Deely 1978: "Toward the Origin of Semiotic" in ed. Sebeok, *Sight, Sound, and Sense*, 1: "there is no *one invariant line* by means of which behavior can be separated into 'a kind that communicates and a kind that does not communicate,' for the irrecusable reason that one and the same event can fail and not fail to have significance at the same time in the here and now perceptions and sense impressions of any two distinct organism of same or different species."

136 As Deely writes (2009: *Augustine & Poinsot*, 195): "Relations cannot be founded on relations in the physical order, but they can be in the objective order, and to infinity. Hence an animal capable of dealing with relations can both recognize that there are signs (which consist in relations formally, as distinct from the sign-vehicles which support and convey the sign-relations fundamentally) and makes signs of signs to infinity."

137 Questions about the relationship between the experiential, semiotic direction of resolution and the metaphysical or existential direction of resolution remain in need of careful inquiry—not only as to the questions lingering today but as to historical understanding of the diverse traditions involved. Relatively few scholars have paid close attention to the question

This broader vista that is—daunting in breadth and complexity alike—indeed demands the guidance offered by the *doctrina signorum* offered by Poinsot. Without some orientation, the twists and turns of his own thinking and the directions it points would turn us around all too quickly. But having grasped the various points outlined above, I believe we may discover here a new age of understanding. Thus, in this section I hope to give the readers of *Studia Poinsotiana* suggestions for future research. For my own part, I believe the most promising entry to these genuinely postmodern paths can be made through revisiting the Aristotelian-Thomistic psychology under the guiding light of Poinsot's *doctrina signorum*. And indeed, the *Tractatus de Signis*—as an excerpt derived from the *Ars Logica*—has a natural and as-yet unrecognized, untranslated, and unpublished sequel: namely, the influence it has on Poinsot's psychology. For careful scrutiny of the *Quarta Pars Philosophiae Naturalis* reveals the entire treatment of the soul to be structured through awareness of the *causalitas signorum*, albeit not always in manners immediately evident. A survey of relevant topics treated in the *Cursus Theologicus*

---

of the *via resolutionis* so crucial *ad mente Thomam*—notable ones including Jan Aertsen (1988: *Nature and Creature*), Rudi te Velde (2021: *Metaphysics between Experience and Transcendence*), and Thomas Joseph White (2009: *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity*). Later developments in the Iberian tradition, in particular, throw a wrench into these questions: concerning not only potential univocal flattening of *ens* said both as *primum cognitum* and *inquantum ens*, but also of related and important terms such as *res* and its derivatives, *in re*, *reale*, and *realiter*. As an example of such confusion—one earnestly trying to sort the difficulties out—we can see this article from *Semiotics 2008* by Piotr Jaroszynski, "The Sign: between Metaphysics and Ontology", 627: "If the theory of signs is based upon an ontological conception of being [i.e., Jacob Lorhard's term for Francisco Suarez's 'general metaphysics'], a metaphysician should be very careful, since the signs, no matter how rich and interesting, cannot cover existing reality considered as such. But metaphysics must consider reality as reality (being *qua* being), not reality simply as capable of being reality.

"At [this] point metaphysics and ontology take different paths. Metaphysics has being as its object, and ontology has the concept of being as its object. Metaphysics is concerned with real being, ontology is concerned with possible being. The matter, however, is not so simply, because ontology treats possible being as if it were real being, and thus removes any difference between metaphysics and ontology. Perhaps this is why the ontological concept of being is treated as a metaphysical conception."

That Jaroszynski mistakenly identifies Poinsot's position with that of Suarez is understandable—but easily clarified by wider reading in the *Cursus Philosophicus*. Cf. also Kemple 2019: "Signs and Reality" in *Reality: a journal for philosophical discourse*.

likewise indicates its importance there, too—for instance, in the treatments of human action, passions, and habits (not to mention the sacramentology expounded in the final treatises). Here, we will focus on three particular areas in which these Poinsotian insights into signs will prove greatly illuminative for this tradition of philosophical psychology. First is the recognition that semiosis occurs in *all* our cognitive operations, including sensation. Such recognition might seem incidental to the psychology of the human being, but, in truth, the intellectual distinction of the human person is interwoven with the corporeal animality so tightly that attempts to regard them hypostatically often misinterpret **both** aspects of our cognitive bearing. Second is the process of concept formation and the attainment of formal awareness in specifically-human cognition. Arguably, the key modern philosophical errors leading to the epistemological quagmire are rooted in the nominalist misunderstanding of both what it is that our concepts signify and how. Third, we will touch lightly upon language and the development of culture, which topic goes well beyond anything produced in Poinsot's writings, but to which they are and will prove ultimately germane.

4.1. Sensation and Semiosis

As we noted above (3.2.3), Poinsot distinguishes himself from Descartes in their respective considerations of animal life; the latter relegating their being to naught discernible but the operations of an unfeeling automaton, while Poinsot observes their semiosic nature. This may follow simply enough from reflection upon our own experience of sensation, for in every act of sensation we recognize that not only is there a natural or entitative immutation, but necessarily and most properly an intentional one:[138]

---

138 1635: *Quarta Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, "De anima sensitiva, et potentiis eius in communi", q.4, a.1 (*DAS* hereafter, R.III.102b31–36): "Potentia sensitiva passive se habet respectu specierum, quibus vice obiectorum actuatur tam in esse entitativo quam in esse intentionali, sed per se et principaliter in esse intentionali."

> A sensitive power holds itself passively in respect of the species standing in for the object, by which the power is actuated, both in entitative and in intentional existence—but, according to its own proper nature and principally, in intentional existence.

Put otherwise, the sensitive power though it depends upon the entitative immutation for its actuation, nevertheless has that actuation properly through the intentional immutation—becoming the object *in alio esse*. Neither I nor the dog entitatively become the grilling meat that we smell, even as the reception of olfactory particles does render a change in our physical beings; but both creatures do, in a way, become that meat in *esse intentionale*, just as my eyes do not become the flat blue surface that is the door to my office, but I gain a certain intentional identity with it.

This intentional being already has within it a compressed semiosic structure: for in seeing the door, I see the proper sensible of color—the differentiation of light—and by this, grasp also the common sensible of the extended surface. This occurs simultaneously and yet nevertheless by a kind of significative representation. As Poinsot writes:[139]

> Because the proper sensible reaches directly and through itself primarily to the specification of the senses, and the common sensible affects that specification as a mode of a proper sensible, this modification is nevertheless intrinsically required for the sake of sensation.

Put otherwise, we could never have any sensible experience of proper sensibles without the necessarily concomitant modality of a common sensible. In this, Poinsot seemingly anticipates the claim of Locke, who posits the sensory primacy of their "primary sensibles" to consist in their efficiently-causal necessity to the experience of "secondary sensibles". But there follow from this two important qualifications, and first (to continue from the previous text):

---

139 1635: *DAS* a.2 (R.III.112a31–36): "quia sensibile proprium pertinet directe et per se primo ad specificationem sensationis, sensibile commune pertinet ut modus ipsius sensibilis proprii, per se tamen requiritur eius modificatio ad sensationem… circa sensibile commune continget deceptio sensus, non tamen circa sensible proprium."

> Deception of the senses may occur with respect to the common sensible, but not with respect to the proper sensible.

This importantly distinguishes Poinsot's position from that of Locke: for it places the *receptive priority* of the sensible in the proper (or Locke's "secondary"), rather than the common ("primary"). Though the modalities of common sensibles may be necessary for the entitative immutation, that is, they occupy a secondary place with respect to the intentional. Thus, as Poinsot adds just a bit farther on (emphasis added):[140]

> The common sensible does not immute the sense through a species distinct from the species of the proper sensible, but in that same species *the common sensible is represented* as a condition and modification of the proper sensible.

Now, as we have already seen, it is important to recognize that *representation* may itself signify *either* self-representation or other-representation. What does it mean, we must ask, to say that the common sensible is represented *in* the same specification as the proper sensible? Clearly, the two are different, and so it cannot be a *self-representation*. Thus, the proper sensible *signifies* the common. Indeed, as Poinsot writes in the *Tractatus*:[141]

> ...sense cognizes the significate in a sign in the way in which that significate is present in the sign, but not only in the way in which it is the same as the sign. For example, when a proper sensible such as color is seen, and a common sensible, such as a profile and movement, the profile is not seen as the same as the color, but as conjoined to the color, and rendered visible through that color, nor is the color seen separately and the profile separately; so when a sign is seen and a significate is rendered present in it, the signifi-

---

140 1635: *DAS*, a.2 (R.III.113a42–47): "Sensibile commune non immutat sensum per speciem condistinctam a specie sensibilis proprii, sed in eadem specie repraesentatur sensible commune tamquam conditio et modificatio sensibilis proprii."

141 1632: *TDS*, 208/35-47: "sensus cognoscit signatum in signo eo modo, quo in signo praesens est, sed non eo solum modo, quo cum signo idem est. Sicut cum videtur sensibile proprium, v.g. color, et sensibile commune, ut figura et motus, non videtur figura ut idem cum colore, sed ut coniuncta colori, et per illum visibilis reddita, nec videtur seorsum color et sorsum figura; sic cum videtur signum et in eo praesens redditur signatum, ibi signatum attingitur ut coniunctum signo et contentum in eo, non ut seorsum se habens et ut absens."

cate is attained there as conjoined to the sign and contained in it, not as existing separately and as absent.

Put otherwise, the difference between sign-vehicle and significate requires *only* a modal distinction between the one and the other; they may be present in wholly the same specifying form. In sensation, we make use of signs *without having to create them* (and in this sensation is distinguished from perception and intellection). That the proper and common *sensibilia* are modally distinct and yet the former really signifies the latter gives us, I believe, much greater precision in understanding sensory operations, including how it is that we might be deceived even at the level of sensation concerning the common. We may think of simple examples: such as the straight stick appearing bent when half-submerged in water, or the extension of the sky in an inferior mirage, or when stable objects may appear to move when seen out of the corner of the eye.

But the specifying form which presents the proper and common sensibles *also* presents that which is sensible *per accidens*. The sensible truly delivers not only the specifications of sense faculties, that is, but also their perceptual objects which are in no way separate objects of sensation—but which are, necessarily separable as perceived and interpreted. Poinsot writes:[142]

> The incidentally [*per accidens*] sensible is represented in the same specifying form as the sustaining subject of both these, namely, the sensible and common... [And] the incidentally sensible is the substance within which the proper and common sensibles inhere as the object [of sensation]; and the incidentally sensible is distinguished from that which is sensible through itself, because the incidentally sensible does not belong to the object of the senses, except insofar as it is the subject of the objects of the senses, whence it is placed into the rationale of the sense powers' objects, and thus

---

142 1635: *DAS*, a.2 (R.III.113a48–b3): "Sensibile autem per accidens repraesentatur in eadem specie tamquam subiectum sustentativum utriusque scilicet sensibilis proprii et communis." And ibid, (R.III.114b44–115a9): "Sensibile per accidens est substantia, cui tamquam obiecto inhaerent sensibilia propria et communia. Et distinguitur sensibile per accidens a sensibili per se, quia sensibile per accidens non pertinet ad obiectum sensus, nisi in quantum est subiectum obiecti sensus, unde subiective trahitur ad rationem obiecti sensus, et sic vere et proprie attingitur a sensu, non ut ratio formalis immutans sensum, sed ut subiectum, cui per accidens inest talis ratio."

truly and properly it is attained through the senses—not as the formal rationale by which the senses undergo immutation, but as the subject within which such a rationale exists incidentally.

As Poinsot goes on to explain this point, objects are not able to move faculties in the order of cognition except that they suppose existence of some kind, and thus the proper and common sensibles must have existence from that which has it of itself: substance. Thus, substances are incidentally sensible, such that the objects sensed have a subject from which their existence comes.[143]

Is this not a robust suggestion for an intelligible account of realism? Does this mean that, to be a realist, one must be a "semiotic realist"?[144]

4.2. Concepts and Awareness

We will leave this discussion of sense-realism for further exploration. For sensation does not properly complete the cognitive operations of animal or human alike; the purpose of sensation can be found only in some further perfection which more fully completes the principal orientation of the being's nature. For the sake of brevity, we will here elide over most pressing and important questions concerning the formation and function of phantasms in our cognitive lives (on which Poinsot's subtle distinctions in the *Quarta Pars Philosophiae Naturalis* offer much to explore) and focus instead upon the intellectual concept. Both constitute formal

---

143 Interestingly, as Poinsot points out at the conclusion of his exposition, *if* one could preserve the sensible without the subject, then the effect upon the sense faculties would be the same. Understanding better as we do now, for instance, the nature of light, we can see that there is a kind of preservation of the proper sensible by which is communicated the common *without* the subject yet existing—as the light reaching us today from a star long-since-dead—we yet see that the existence of the sensible depended upon the existence of the subject.

144 Cf. Deely 2008: *Descartes & Poinsot*, 86-87. As a final note on this section, it is worth considering that, although the particulars of physical causality may have been misunderstood in Poinsot's time, his analysis of exterior sensation yet stands rife with fascinating distinctions and insights worthy of exploration nonetheless—not for their explanatory power of corporeal phenomena, that is, but for their general philosophical acumen useful for better understanding the idioscopic revelations rendered up unto and beyond our own day.

signs, but where the percept signifies the object inasmuch as it grasps the incidentally sensible together with certain patterns of the *per se sensibilia* (common and proper alike), the intellectual conception distinguishes the incidentally sensible so as to render present for itself the actuality of the intelligible: grasping them under the light of *being*.[145]

What we have seen concerning the semiosis of sensation gives us, I would say, one of the necessary integral ingredients for a semiotic realism. But another is to be found in the notion of the intellectual concept as a formal sign. That the intellect truly knows *beings* as they are *in themselves*, certainly requires that they become known to us somehow; requires an *awareness* of the *being* of the object, and not merely its objective presentation. I cannot see or touch or feel directly and immediately the substantiality of the sensed thing.[146] I know it only *through* those signs which are sensed. But since the being of it is contained, as it were, in the same *species impressa* of sensation, some further action beyond sensation is required in order that the substantiality implicitly signified by the sensible object be distinguished from the proper sensibles and common modalities thereof so as to result in an intellectual awareness.[147]

But the development of intellectual awareness should not be thought to come all at once. We accomplish the distinction of intelligible from sensible—of the intellectually-grasped

---

145 Cf. Maritain 1959: *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 202: "According to the terminology that it has seemed to us opportune to adopt, the cisobjective subject attains, in order to become them intentionally, things themselves, or transobjective subjects posited in extramental existence. It does so by means of constituting them its objects, or by positing them for itself—by means of the concept or of the uttered presentative form [*species expressa*]—in 'known' existence, *in esse objective seu cognito*."

146 It is for just this reason that I find Maritain's threefold distinction of "perinoetic, dianoetic, and ananoetic" intellections unhelpful: for *all* kinds of knowing are through some sort of substitutive signification, which substitution nevertheless does not mean we do not really get to the things themselves.

147 In the words of Aquinas, something must be done to make it *actually* intelligible. 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.84, a.6, c.: "quia phantasmata non sufficiunt immutare intellectum possibilem, sed oportet quod fiant intelligibilia actu per intellectum agentem; non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis". Poinsot elaborates on this point at length in 1635: *Quarta Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, q.10, especially, a.1-2 (R.III295b4–313b26).

meaning from the apparent deliveries of our lower faculties—not by any magical insight, x-ray vision, or cognitive *leap*, but by a process of *inductive ascent and descent.* As Poinsot writes in the *summulae*:[148]

> And induction, with respect to its motion of *ascent*, is ordered towards discovering and proving universal truths, insofar as they are universal, that is, insofar as they are established from the singulars contained under them. Nor can it be proven that something is universally such unless the singulars belonging to it are such. Thus the *descent* from universals to singulars especially is ordered towards demonstrating the falsity of a universal, insofar as it is universal; for the falsity of a universal is best shown by descending down from them and showing some singular *not* to be such. But, nevertheless, supposing the truth of a universal proven discovered and proven through ascent, likewise the descent preserves this truth by showing the correspondence of that universal to those singulars contained under it.

Though not given extensive elaboration in this text, it is clear that this inductive ascent and descent—which clearly, combined with the ordinary and widely-accepted and agreed-upon operations of deduction, anticipates the threefold procession of scientific inquiry discussed by C.S. Peirce of abduction and induction—engages the intellectual discovery in a process of *experimentation* upon singulars and particulars. This experimentation, of course, need not be the laboratory inquiries of idioscopic investigation, but the intellectual discovery of truth clearly relies upon thinking-through the intelligibility of universals not in the abstract but the particular. Poinsot confirms this return to the concrete as necessary in his consideration of

---

148 1631: *Prima Pars Ars Logicae,* summulae, lib.3, c.2, "De inductione" (R.I.60a35–b12): "Et inductio, quantum ad *ascensum*, ordinatur ad inveniendas et probandas veritates universales, ut universales sunt, id est in quantum constant ex singularibus sub eis contentis. Nec enim potest probari, quod aliquid universaliter sit tale, nisi quia eius singularia sunt tali. *Descensus* autem ab universali ad singularia praecipue ordinatur ad demonstrandam falsitatem universalis, ut universale est; optime enim ostenditur falsitas universalis descendendo sub illo et ostendendo aliquod singulare non esse tale. Sed tamen supposita veritate universalis comprobata et inventa per ascensum, etiam descensus deservit ad ostendendam correspondentiam universalis ad ipsa singularia sub eo contenta. Praecipuum tamen inductionis munus est reducere ad sensum probationem universalis a singularibus ascendendo."

phantasms' necessity to the actuality of understanding.[149] Put otherwise, the concept—the formal sign—most fully signifies the terminal meaning it represents *as it belongs to things*, and not merely in the abstract. The process of discovery (*via inventionis*) requires resolution (*via resolutionis*) between the object as *informing* and as *terminating*. That is, as Poinsot writes in q.4, a.1 of the *Quarta Pars*:[150]

> An object informs a power in a twofold manner: first, as a principle of cognition by means of the impressed specifying form; second, as a terminus of cognition in the expressed specifying form, that is, the word of the intellect. And when the object terminates in such an expressed specifying form, it also has the relationship of informing, insofar as—through that cognition being terminated at the very object in a cognitive existence and through the mode of a terminus—the object is made one with that power perfectly and in ultimate actuality. And through this union the relationship of informing is formally included in the cognitive existence; but this nevertheless still presupposes a required operation, which is the very cognition elicited by the one cognizing. Otherwise it would neither inform vitally nor be the very object in cognitive existence through the expressed specifying form. It also presupposes the operation not only in order that there be cognizing but also in order that the expressed specifying form or word be produced; but this belongs to the operation insofar as it is speech, not precisely as it is cognition.

Thus to highlight two points, and first: Poinsot distinguishes here between a *power*—that is, the receptive cognitive fac-

---

149 See 1635: *Quarta Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, q.10, a.4 (R.III.331a34–333a46; see especially 332a36–47).

150 1635: *DAS*, a.1 (R.III.106b35–107a17): "Obiectum enim dupliciter informat potentiam, uno modo ut principium cognitionis media specie impressa, alio modo ut terminus cognitionis in specie expressa seu verbo intellectus. Et quando obiectum terminat in tali specie expressa, etiam habet habitudinem informantis, quatenus per cognitionem terminatam ad ipsum obiectum in esse cognito et per modum termini fit unum cum ipsa potentia perfecte et in actu ultimo. Et in hac unione formaliter importatur habitudo informationis in esse cognito, praesuppositive tamen requirit operationem, quae est ipsa cognitio elicita a cognoscente, alias non informaret vitaliter et in esse cognito ipsum obiectum in specie expressa. Praesupponit etiam operationem non solum ut cognoscentem, sed etiam ut producentem ipsam speciem expressam seu verbum, sed hoc habet illa operatio, in quantum dictio, non ut praecise cognitio est." Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 261/35-42: "Est enim conditio in signo instrumentali, quod prius sit cognitum, ut significet, et quando Divus Thomas vocat speciem impressam medium cognitionis, dicit esse medium *quo*, non *in quo*; medium autem quo est principium cognoscendi, non actu manifestativum obiecti seu rei cognitae."

ulty—and a *specifying form or specifier*, by saying that both, "concern an object, but a specifier as vicegerent of the object and containing it as its substitute, the power as tending toward the object as a thing to be apprehended"[151]. Put otherwise, through the relationship engendered by the concept, the faculty is toward the thing as the terminative object, while the *specifying form* is concerned with the object insofar as it *substitutes* for it, and precisely in that vicegerentive substituting for it, stimulates a cognitive power towards that object. This stimulative operation of the specifying form is the *obiectum movens* of which Aquinas speaks.[152]

It is thus, second, that through the signification of the *verbum* informing the intellect that it realizes the vitality of its own action. It is important to realize the intimate relationship (and simultaneous distinction) between these two: the act of understanding and the *verbum* through which that act is brought into unitive being with the object. Among the many passages in which Poinsot explains their relation, we read:[153]

---

151 1632: *TDS*, 124/21-25: "utraque quidem versantur circa obiectum, sed species ut vices geners obiecti et ipsum continens quasi eius substitutum, virtus autem potentiae ut tendens ad obiectum apprehendendum."

152 This *exact* phrase (*obiectum movens*) appears in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas precisely six times: i.1256-59: *De veritate*, q.6, a.2, ad.3; i.1266-70: 1259/65: *SCG*, lib.2, c.73, n36; *De malo*, q.6, c. and q.14, a.3, c.6; and 1271-72: *ST* IIa-IIae, q.145, a.2, ad.1. Aquinas also says that *obiectum movet* in i.1256-59: *DV* q.5, a.10, c. and q.27, a.3, c., as well as 1271: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.9, a.1, c. and q.10, a.2, c. A handful of other examples exist in different and less clear formulations.

153 1635: *Quarta Pars Philosophiae Naturalis*, q.11, "De intellectione et conceptu" (*DIEC* hereafter), a.2, 356a1-22: "verbum manifestare repraesentando, intellectionem autem manifestare operando et cognoscendo, et verbum dicitur notitia terminative seu per modum termini, in quo fit notitia, non formaliter et per modum operationis, ut etiam advertit S. Thomas 1 p. q. 34 a. 1 ad. 2. Differt autem esse manifestativum et expressivum per modum repraesentationis vel per modum operationis et actus. Quorum primum dicit rationem imaginis et similitudinis tamquam res expressa et dicta, secundum autem dicit rationem actus ultimi et tendentiae ad obiectum ut cognitum, non faciendo illud praesens per modum similitudinis, sed praesens factum vitali actu attingendo et operatione ipsa seu actu ultimo repraesentatum obiectum cognoscendo." In the years between 2008 and 2012, a dispute occurred between John Deely and John O'Callaghan. It began with Deely's review (2008: "How to Go Nowhere with Language") of O'Callaghan's 2003 book, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence*, in which Deely levelled a number of criticisms. O'Callaghan responded in 2010 ("Concepts, Mirrors, and Signification: Response to Deely"), and Deely offered (in the context of a broader consideration of the relationship between semantics and semiotics) response to the response in 2012 ("Analytic Philosophy and The Doctrine of Signs: Semiotics or Semantics: What Difference Does It Make?").

It belongs to the word to manifest by representing, but to the understanding it belongs to manifest by operating and cognizing; and awareness is said to belong to the word terminatively or through the mode of a terminus on the basis of which awareness comes to be—not formally and through the mode of operation, as St. Thomas shows in *ST* Ia, q.34, a.1, ad.2. Now the existence of what is manifestative and expressive is differentiated through the mode of representation or the mode of operation and act. The first of these expresses the rationale of an image and similitude, as a thing expressed and said; while the second expresses the rationale of the ultimate act and the tendency towards the object as known, not by making that thing present through the mode of a similitude, but—that having been made present in a vital act—by reaching and cognitively grasping the represented object through the very operation or ultimate act.

That the understanding accomplishes a vital activity of becoming the object in intentional being *through* the word it produces[154] for this very purpose brings to light the highest accomplishment of a sign-relation in human existence—but also, at the same time, shows the indeterminacy our specifically-human lives. Construed as they are not only to *this* or *that* object, but, the union with such objects being a kind of *vital actuality*, the sign-relations through which cognition always and only ever (for we human beings, at least) can be realized have an impor-

---

O'Callaghan argues that the act of understanding and the concept are two ways of naming the same thing. He claims this to be the position of Aquinas. In the course of the argument, he further claims that Poinsot advocates for a representationalist consideration of concepts, such that they "concept-mirrors". Two key errors undermine O'Callaghan's position: first, Aquinas manifestly and repeatedly indicates a *real relation* between the act of understanding and the *verbum*; and, moreover, he claims that the *verbum* is distinct from the *species intelligibilis*, indicating that, even if he does not use the language of *species impressa* and *species expressa*, he does make the same distinction.

Second, O'Callaghan's reading of Poinsot is based upon a text from the *Cursus Theologicus*, concerning the Divine Ideas (i.1637-44: *Cursus Theologicus*, d.21, a.1, 538 in the Solemnes edition, t.3, q.15, d.1, a.1 in the Vives), in which O'Callaghan fails to acknowledge or properly interpret the dialectical context, in which Poinsot is giving a minor interpretative concession to Pater Vasquez that only insofar as they are considered as *ideas* and not as founding relations to objects known can concepts be considered as mirrors. By contrast, as Deely more than amply demonstrates, in those texts where Poinsot explicitly considers concepts in their role as sign-vehicles provenating relations to objects known, the notion that concepts function as mirrors is explicitly denied.

154 Cf. 1632: *TDS*, 243/19–244/30 for more on the simultaneity of the intellectual awareness and concept-formation.

tance far beyond any mere extrinsic system or "epistemology". The awareness we possess—an awareness always either intuitive or abstractive—constitutes the world of our experience. Every *object* has presence to us; and sometimes these objects are present also as things. But very often, the object present to us not only through a sign but also in itself as a thing, because of the manner in which that object is signified, we misunderstand that presence. Thereupon ensue myriad difficulties: not only of individual cognition but also of cathexis and of social and cultural constitutions. The more deeply obscured the semiosic nature of such awareness, the more uncontrollably problematic become our relations with the world and with one another.

4.3. Language and Culture

Permeating these complexities of semiosic relations constituting social realities and cathectic bearings alike are the institutions of language and culture, which phenomena constitute by far the prevailing majority of our experiences today.[155] Language, often, is a phenomenon misunderstood by being regarded only as the particular concrete systems through which we establish material vehicles of signification. Conceived, rather, as most fundamentally the constitution of those *species expressae* through which we make the world present to ourselves at not merely the perceptual but the intelligible level, by contrast, we see the deeper importance of language: as the universally necessary means by which we execute our most life-constituting act of being-human. To begin with, as a way of clarification, by speaking of the "universal necessity" of the word, two things are meant by "universal". First, inasmuch as one is human, there is need for the word: our *humanity* indeed issues forth in language, the *abundantia cordis*:[156]

---

155 Which truth should not be misconstrued as though this entailed no need of knowledge about nature; to the contrary, a knowledge of cultural complexities and intricacies sans knowledge of nature proves a remarkably dangerous thinking.

156 1632: *TDS*, 242/14-23: "ex abundantia cordis os loquitur, et sic verbum dicitur conceptus, qua-

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

To seek and break out in manifestation, to bring into *being* what we possess and have within ourselves: this is *of our very nature* as intellective beings. We cannot leave to reside in ourselves, inert and passive, the truth that we ascertain. It spills forward, not as a mere effusion of excess but as that very *vital* cognitive life affected by the formal awareness characteristic of our intellectual being. We realize our humanity through the linguistic and post-linguistic.

But second, and closely related to this first, *culture* needs the word. To some extent, this necessity is patently obvious—could any culture, in the true sense of what we signify by this term, arise without language?—and need not be stated; and yet, today, we see culture increasingly shaped by the inarticulate, by a kind of raw feeling only obliquely significant, or with its significance muted, suppressed, under wordless and often unconsciously-thinking activity. The mode of our inherently-social animality consists in a shared conduct of verbally-infused rationality. To see what I mean, let us consider this passage from Poinsot's *De intellectione et conceptu* a.2, where he writes:[157]

> According to St. Thomas and his school, the word is required in the intellect, not on the part of the power or its operation as productive, but on the part of the object itself: either [1] such that

---

tenus exprimitur et formatur a potentia ad manifestandum ea, quae cognoscuntur. Naturaliter enim intellectus manifestationem quaerit et in eam prorumpit; et talis manifestatio expressiva vocatur dictio seu locutio interior, et ipsum verbum est species seu similitudo aliqua expressa et dicta."

157 1635: *DIEC*, a.2 (R.III.356b16–29): "apud D. Thomam et eius scholam verbum requiritur in intellectu, non ex parte potentiae aut operationis eius ut productivae, sed ex parte ipsius obiecti, vel ut reddatur praesens, si sit absens, vel ut reddatur sufficienter immateriale et spirituale in ratione termini intellecti et cogniti intra intellectum, nec solum sit intelligibile in actu primo per modum speciei impressae, vel denique ut reddatur obiectum manifestatum in aliqua repreasentatione tamquam res dicta et locuta."

> it can render the object present, if it is absent; or [2] to render it sufficiently immaterial and spiritual so as to fulfill the rationale of a terminus of something understood and cognized within the intellect (nor should it only be intelligible in actuality first by the mode of the impressed specifying form); or [3], finally, to render the object manifest in some representation as a thing said and spoken.

There exists a certain *fittingness*, that is, on the part of the power as productive, which fittingness consists in that contracting and focusing of the faculty through an expressed specification completing that act of understanding; the perfection of that act, that is. Conversely, the need on the part of the object, as Poinsot here states, can be threefold: first, in the rendering in objective presence what is physically absent; or, second, the rendering "sufficiently immaterial and spiritual... to fulfill the rationale of a terminus of something understood"; and third, rendering the object manifest in a representation. Now, we can understand these first two dependencies on the part of the object as pertains to fulfilling the act—that is, as rendering the object in relation to the act of understanding. The vital operation of understanding requires the presence of the object if the thing understood is not itself present; simultaneously, it requires an object of sufficient spirituality or immateriality, which conditions pertain to none of the things which we encounter in their physical presence according to this state of life (such that, even when the thing *is* present, to be *intellectually* grasped, we need something contributed by the *verbum mentis*). But we can also understand these two as dependencies for rendering the object *communicable*, which necessity appears explicitly in the third dependency: that by the word, we manifest the object *as a thing said and spoken*. That the vibrations of my voice or the text of my article affect your understanding towards the objects signified comes only incidentally to the physical immutation of your ears or eyes. I speak or write of language—and the sounds and shapes serve as material vehicles for a commonality of expression to be obtained by you with me. But I can convey no intelligible meaning except by somehow rendering that meaning present, not

only in the material representation, but also in the immaterial pattern whereby you grasp that which I signify.

Indeed, it is only through language itself that we are able to make objectively present that which can never be intuitively present to us, at least, in this life: such as relations or spiritual entities, or, even the full cognitive grasp of our own souls, acts of understanding, and concepts—realities present to us in a different manner, perhaps, but never intuitive present as objects.[158] Doubtless we all have had the experience of striving to articulate something and finding it to remain somehow absent—not only in communication to others but for our own sense of completion—so long as we lack the proper *words* for signifying *what it is*.

Given that culture consists essentially in relations (however much those might be attached through convention to physical objects), most especially complex patterns of relations constituted as customary significations, it is not difficult to see the importance of objective presence through language. Increasingly, I believe, as we find ourselves relating to objects not physically but only representationally-present—as is the case when life becomes increasingly mediated through networked digital technologies—we must reckon with the essentially (if often obscurely) linguistic constitution of those objects' being. Put otherwise, we linguistically constitute and shape every phenomenon as culture—and, indeed, our very use of language renders natural things as culturally-encompassed—and yet think so very little about the means of this, namely, the words we speak and from whence they come. We are thus threatened by an *inopia cordis*. By contrast, as Poinsot elaborates on the *abundantia cordis* in his *De intellectione et conceptu*:[159]

---

158 I.e., present to us in the "lived experience" of "being the one who experiences" and therefore disclosed in a manner rather different from the relational and objectivizing disclosure of things made known through signs.

159 1634: *DIEC,* a.1 (R.III.349a11–20): "Procedit verbum ex abundantia intelligendi quatenus intellectus quanto perfectius intelligit, tanto magis facit impetum ad manifestandum se; naturaliter enim intellectus est manifestativus et communicativus sui, et quia manifestat res ut intellectas, oportet,

> The word proceeds from the abundance of the understanding to the extent that, as much as the intellect understands more perfectly, it is subject to a great impetus to manifesting itself; for the understanding is naturally manifestative and communicative of itself, and because it manifests things as understood, it is necessary that it articulate or express that act of understanding substantially.

This *expressive bursting forth* entails not only a full grasp of what has been impressed upon us from without, I would argue, but a fullness in our discovery of the *relations* between the things impressed upon us, the relations between our grasp of them and ourselves, and one another, and the discovery of the possibilities for unity in being among all the diverse elements and aspects of our human experience: for the exploration of our cognitive being within the illimitable suprasubjectivity which grows with every new emanation of understanding and the *signa verborum* whereby those emanations are made known, to ourselves and to others. While Poinsot offers little in the way of direct exposition concerning the constitution of our particular languages and lacks much of the sophistication and nuance of modern semiological inquiries, his fundamental insights into the nature of stipulative and customary signification, as well as his deeper understanding of the sign-relational constitution of human experience, promises a rich area of future research and inquiry. Flipping through the thousands of pages of his *Cursus Theologicus*, for instance, one discovers profound insights into the relationship between customs and habits;[160] or how determinate objective specifications render knowledge within or related to this or that science;[161] or how signs play an integral role in the constitution and efficacy of the sacraments;[162] and so on and on. With nearly every page turned, one finds not only a fascinating insight on the very words intuitively present to the eyes, but ever-unfolding resonance with all that is conjured abstractively present by the names "John Poinsot" and, even more suggestively, "Joannes a Sancto Thoma".

---

quod illud dicere seu exprimere sit substantialiter intelligere."
160 E.g., i.1637-44: *Cursus Theologicus*, "De distinctione habituum", d.13, a.3 (Vives t.6, 275)
161 Ibid, "De distinctione virtutum intellectualium", d.16, a.1 (Vives t.6, 436-39, etc.).
162 Ibid, Vives t.9, 1-384 *in passim*.

5. Conclusion: Discovering and Nourishing Our Roots

As the "black hole" of late Latin Scholasticism (1350–1650)[163] gradually falls under the light of dedicated scholarship, it may be revealed that nothing in John Poinsot's doctrine of signs prove truly and entirely *original from* him,[164] even if conceived *independently by* him. That is, all the key points of his doctrine may have first been advocated by some other. Roger Bacon, for instance, boldly challenged the Augustinian definition of signs in the thirteenth century.[165] Scotus proposed a distinction between intuitive and abstractive cognition in the early fourteenth, and Pierre d'Ailly may have instigated the distinction between instrumental and formal signs in the latter half of the same. Domingo de Soto indeed distinguishes between the *relativum secundum dici* as naming the *esse-in* qualities which found relative habitudes, while the *relativum secundum esse* signifies the *esse-ad* itself.[166] Some other figure—perhaps one lost, or obscured, or who spoke this truth

---

163 Cf. Deely 2004: "Iberian Fingerprints on the Doctrine of Signs", *The American Journal of Semiotics* 20.1-4: 97-101. Cf. Deely 2008: "Introductory Remarks on the Value of Poinsot's Work to Philosophy Today" in the Reiser edition of the *Cursus Philosophicus* reprinted by Georg Olms Verlag, xii-xiii: "it remains that they [the *Cursus Philosophicus* and *Theologicus* of Poinsot] are veritable mines of gold for any postmodern effort to retrieve and understand from our own perspective and for our own interests (in the postmodern morning light) what were the achievements of the Latin Age." Or as another confrere in studying this period (namely, Domenic D'Ettore) remarked to me at a conference in 2023, echoing this sentiment, this period of intellectual history is "a gold mine into which hardly anyone has wandered."

164 A critique offered by both E.J. Ashworth (1988: "The historical origins of John Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs*") and Marmo (1987: "The Semiotics of John Poinsot")—as though this mitigated the enormous merit of Poinsot's contributions. Though an accomplished scholar in the history of medieval philosophy, Ashworth's review article unveils a deficit of understanding. As Deely wrote in an unpublished "review of reviews", Ashworth's critique "rests wholly on a material identity of terminology without any examination of the differences in supposition of the materially same terms." We might extend this repudiation to Marmo's criticism as well, whose misunderstanding (cf. his p.120-21) seems rooted in a profound misunderstanding of the Thomistic doctrines of relation and analogy alike. Cf. Deely 1988: "The semiotic of John Poinsot: Yesterday and tomorrow", *Semiotica* 69.1/2: 31-127 *in passim*; see especially 35-36 and 38-44, which respond directly to Ashworth (though omit mention of Marmo).

165 c.1267: *De signis* in *Opus maius*, reference to the English translation by Thomas S. Maloney, *On Signs*.

166 1543: *In Porphyrii Isagogen, Aristotelis Categorias, librosque de Demonstratione, Absolutissima Commentaria*, 204b.

without writing it—may have proposed that the relation of sign-vehicle, object, and cognitive power stands necessary to the sign's actuality.

But, original though these contributions may have been with other thinkers, each seems to reach its perfection in the teaching of Poinsot: brought thereby not into a mere collection of others' insights but truly a cohesive *doctrine* concerning the nature and functioning of *signs*. This synthesis and emergence seems to show, perhaps more than any particular doctrinal adherence or moral aspiration, the Thomistic nature of Poinsot's mind—for St. Thomas himself seems largely unoriginal if the distinct points of his teaching are viewed out of context; nearly all are mentioned or defended by earlier thinkers. Yet the synthesis of Augustine and Aristotle, of Boethius and Pseudo-Dionysius, of Avicenna and the Church Fathers (even when only related through their commonality in his one mind): this truly produces a scope of brilliance not only historically unique but philosophically singular. It is a mistake to believe that merit of human thinking consists in the *ex nihilo* of "wholly new" doctrines; for nothing exists in the human mind that is "wholly new". "Originality" in thinking, always, stems from beings outside ourselves, and in those, too, there exists a history and a development. Nothing from nothing comes. Brilliance, rather, comes from insight into the truths and falsehoods, the insights and mistakes that one encounters, in himself and in others. To perceive clearly the reality and, conversely, articulate it—despite the confusion of opinions and doctrine—this is what one finds so admirably constituted in the oeuvre of St. Thomas Aquinas. So too, I believe, will prove the works of John Poinsot.[167]

---

167 As Henri Du Lac wrote in a commentary delivered at the American Catholic Philosophical Association's annual meeting of 1951: "On Being Thomistic (Commentary)" in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, 151: "I certainly want to join Mr. Mullaney in his condemnation of the two extremes he cites—that of cultural relativism which regards philosophy not as true or false but as an examination of different sets of opinions in their historical settings; also of that extreme which regards a quotation from St. Thomas as a substitute for the student's own thought. However, I do not think that John of St. Thomas touches this second extreme [of which error

Deely often wrote that Charles Peirce was the last of the moderns, first of the postmoderns. In the strictest sense, this is true. But the postmodernity which Peirce brings to light through his foundational work in the development of semiotics was already advanced further in some areas (such as the causality proper to signs) by someone deceased nearly 200 years prior to his birth. Poinsot cannot be called "*post*modern" in a literal sense, as his death occurred just as modernity began. Yet as the Way of Signs begins treading new and brighter paths in the Age of Relation, we would be fools to ignore one of the greatest trailblazers along that Path.

Mullaney accuses Poinsot]. My reading of John of St. Thomas has not been exhaustive, but I recall no place where he merely cites a teaching of St. Thomas without giving reasons which establish the truth of that teaching. He may find the reasons in the writings of St. Thomas, but he uses them because they prove the point under discussion—not simply because some one said so."

References Historically Layered

AERTSEN, Jan (7 September 1938—2016 January 8).

1988.   *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Boston: E.J. Brill).

ARISTOTLE (384—322bc).

i.360-330bc. *Κατηγορίαι*, in the *Basic Works of Aristotle* prepared by Richard McKeon, in the English translation by E.M. Edghill, *Categories* (New York: Basic Books, 1941): 1-37 (complete).

c.353-47bc. *Φυσικὴ ἀκρόασις* in the English translation by Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

i.348-30bc. *Μετά τα Φυσικά* in the English translation by Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion Press, 2002).

ASHWORTH, E. Jennifer

1988.   "The historical origins of John Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs*", *Semiotica* 69.1/2: 129-47.

AQUINAS, Thomas, O.P. (1225—1274).

1256–59.   *Quodlibet VII* in *Opera omnia jussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 25/1: Quaestiones de quolibet: Quodlibet VII, VIII, IX, X, XI* (Rome-Paris: Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, 1996).

1259/65.   *Summa contra Gentiles* in the Latin-English edition, Latin text based on the Leonine edition, translation by Laurence Shapcote (1864—1947) of the English Dominican Province, revised by The Aquinas Institute (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2018), in two volumes: Books I-II and Books III-IV). English translations are original to the author unless otherwise noted,

with consultation of the translation by Shapcote.

1265-66.   *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 24/1: Quaestiones disputatae de anima.* Ed. B. C. BA-ZÁN (Rome-Paris: Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, 1996).

i.1266-70.   *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, Volumen II, cura et studio P. Bazzi, M. Calcaterra, T.S. Centi, E. Odetto, P.M. Pession, in Studio Generali Fratrum Praedicatorum Taurinensi, S. Theologiae Lectorum, editio viii revisa (Taurini-Romae: Marietti, 1949): 438-699.

1266-68.   *Summa theologiae, prima pars* in the Latin-English edition, Latin text based on the Leonine Edition, translation by Laurence Shapcote (1864—1947) of the English Dominican Province, revised by The Aquinas Institute (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). English translations are original to the author unless otherwise noted, with consultation of the translation by Shapcote.

1268.   *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 45/1: Sentencia libri De anima* (Rome-Paris: Commissio Leonina-J. Vrin, 1984).

1268.   *Opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita, t. 45/2: Sentencia libri De sensu et sensato cuius secundus tractatus est De memoria et reminiscencia* (Rome-Paris: Commissio Leonina-J. Vrin, 1984).

1269-70.   *Summa theologiae, prima secundae* in the Latin-English edition, Latin text based on the Leonine Edition, translation by Laurence Shapcote (1864—1947) of the English Dominican Province, revised by The Aquinas Institute (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2012). English translations are original to the author unless otherwise noted, with consultation of the translation by Shapcote.

BACON, Roger (c.1214—1292)

c.1267.   *De signis* in *Opus Maius*. Reference is to the English translation by Thomas S. Maloney, *On Signs* (Toronto, CA: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013).

CANNON, James J.

1961.   "The Development of Logic in the Dominican School" (PhD Dissertation, Yale University).

CONIMBRICENSES (publ. i.1592—1606/07).

1606/07.   *De signis* in *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis e Societate Iesu in universam dialecticam Aristotelis* originally published in Coimbra, Lyons, and Cologne with some variation between texts. (Köln: Georg Olms Verlag, 1976). Translation in 2001 by John P. Doyle, *The Conimbricenses: Some Questions on Signs* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2014).

DEELY, John (26 April 1942—2017 January 7)

1985.   "Editorial Afterword" and critical apparatus to *Tractatus de Signis: The Semiotic of John Poinsot* 2nd ed. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2013).

1988.   "The semiotic of John Poinsot: Yesterday and tomorrow", *Semiotica* 69.1/2: 31-127.

1994.   *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

1994.   "A Morning and Evening Star: Editor's Introduction" in ACPQ 68.3: 259-77.

1994.   *The Human Use of Signs or: Elements of Anthroposemiosis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc).

2001.   *Four Ages of Understanding: the first postmodern survey of philosophy from ancient times to the turn of the 20th century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

2004.   "The Semiosis of Angels" in *The Thomist* 68.2: 205-58.

2004.   "Iberian Fingerprints on the Doctrine of Signs", *The American Journal of Semiotics* 20.1-4: 97-101

2007.   *Intentionality and Semiotics: A Story of Mutual Fecundation* (Chicago: Scranton University Press).

2008.   *Descartes & Poinsot: The Crossroad of Signs and Ideas* (Scranton, PA: Scranton University Press).

2008.   "How to Go Nowhere with Language", *ACPQ* 82.2: 337-59

2008.   "Introductory Remarks on the Value of Poinsot's Work to Philosophy Today" in vol.1, *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008): v-xiv.

2009.   *Augustine & Poinsot: The Protosemiotic Development* (Chicago: Scranton University Press).

2010.   *Semiotic Animal: A Postmodern Definition of "Human Being" Transcending Patriarchy and Feminism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press).

2010.   *Medieval Philosophy Redefined: The Development of Cenoscopic Science, AD354 to 1644 (From the Birth of Augustine to the Death of Poinsot)* (Chicago: Scranton University Press). A second posthumous edition has been published by St. Augustine's Press.

2012.   "Analytic Philosophy and The Doctrine of Signs: Semiotics or Semantics: What Difference Does It Make?", *The American Journal of Semiotics*, 28.3–4: 325-63

DE FONSECA, Pedro, S.J. (1528—1599)

1564.   *Institutionum Dialecticarum Libri Octo* (Lyon: Petri Rigaud, 1610).

D'ORS, Angel

2001.   "Peter Hispanus O.P. Auctor Summularum (II): Further Documents and Problems" in *Vivarium* 39.1-2.

DE SOTO, Domingo (1495—1569).

1543.   *In Porphyrii Isagogen, Aristotelis Categorias, librosque de Demonstratione, Absolutissima Commentaria* (Venice: Guerraeos Fratres et Socios, 1573).

DU LAC, Henri

1951.   "On Being Thomistic (Commentary)" in *Proceedings of the ACPA*, 25: 147-51.

GRABMANN, Martin (5 January 1875—1949 January 9).

1923.   *Das Seelenleben des hl. Thomas von Aquin: Nach seinen Werken und den Heiligsprechungsakten dargestellt* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1949), originally delivered as a series of lectures and later published and expanded. Reference to the English translation by Nicholas Ashenbrener, *The Interior Life of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1951).

GRADIM, Anabel

2022.   "The Semiotics of John of St. Thomas" IO2S Deely [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6753592].

HEIDEGGER, Martin (1889—1974).

1927a.   *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), originally published in the *Jahrbuch fur Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Forschung*, ed. E. Husserl. English translation by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

1939.   *Vom Wesen und Begriff der* Φύσις. *Aristoteles, Physik B, 1*, in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976): 239-302.   English transla-

tion by Thomas Sheehan in *Pathmarks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 183-230.

HENNINGER, Mark

1989.   *Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325* (New York: Oxford University Press).

JAROSZYNSKI, Piotr

2008.   "The Sign: between Metaphysics and Ontology" in Deely and Sbrocchi (eds.), *Semiotics 2008*: 627-39.

KEMPLE, Brian (31 May 1986—).

2017.   *Ens Primum Cognitum in Thomas Aquinas and the Tradition: The Philosophy of Being as First Known* (Boston: Brill).

2019.   "Signs and Reality: an advocation for semiotic realism" in *Reality: a journal for philosophical discourse*, "The Philosophy of Realism", 1.1: 75-123.

KREMPEL, A.

1952.   *La doctrine de la relation chez saint Thomas: exposé historique et systématique*

1959.   "S. Thomas et la notion de relation transcendentale" in *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques Et Théologiques* 43:87-94

LEBLANC, Hélène

2022.   "Formal sign in Coimbra", IO2S Deely [DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.6770575].

LYONS, Nathan

2019.   *Signs in the Dust*

MARITAIN, Jacques (18 November 1882—1973 April 28).

1959.   *Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. from the 4ᵗʰ French ed. of original 1932 edition, *Distinguer pour unir: ou, Les degrés du savoir* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer), under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Scribner's).

MARMO, Constantino

1987.   "The Semiotics of John Poinsot" in *Versus* 46: 109-29 .

MINERD, Matthew Kenneth

2017.   "The Logic of Intentionality in Hervaeus Natalis".

O'CALLAGHAN, John

2003.   Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence

2010.   "Concepts, Mirrors, and Signification: Response to Deely", *ACPQ*, 84.1: 133-62

PEIRCE, Charles Sanders (10 September 1839—1914 April 19).

References of Charles Sanders Peirce are to three distinct editions of collected works: *CP* refers to Peirce, Charles Sanders, *Collected Papers*, vols. 1-6 edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss; vols. 7-8 edited by A.W. Burks (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958-1966). This is also available in a digital edition, located on the InteLex Past Masters Online Catalog <www.nlx.com>. Citations of the format *CP*.1.100 refer to the edition, volume, and paragraph number, respectively.

EP refers to the two-volume set of the Peirce Edition Project, *The Essential Peirce*, where *EP*.1 covers 1867-1892 and *EP*.2 covers 1893-1913 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992 and 1998). References of the format *EP*.2: 260-62 refer to edition, volume, and page numbers, respectively.

W refers to the *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, vols.1-8 (out of a planned 30) edited by Edward C. Moore, Max H. Fisch, Christian J.W. Kloesel, Don D. Roberts, and Lynn A. Ziegler (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982—).

Included here also are the *New Elements of Mathematics*, a four-volume set edited by Carlyn Eisele (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1976) referenced by *NEM*.

1878.   "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" in *W*.3

1895.   "Of Reasoning in General" in *EP*.2

1902.   "Parts of Carnegie Application (L 75)", *NEM* 4: 13–73.

1902.   "Minute Logic", *CP*.2.

POINSOT, John, O.P. [Joannes a Sancto Thoma] (1589—1644).

The works of John Poinsot have gone through a number of editions over the centuries. While no fully-critical edition of the *Cursus Philosophicus* has been published, the edition prepared by Beatus Reiser and published by Marietti in 1931 has been generally recognized as of sufficiently-high quality and precision so as to be regarded definitive. This edition was republished in 2008 by Georg Olms Verlag, including an introduction contributed by John Deely.

The *Cursus Theologicus*, on the other hand, has been undergoing critical preparation at the Abbaye Saint-Pierre de Solesmes since 1931. To date, the first five of eight volumes have been produced. As these are prohibitively expensive, however, the author of this text has relied upon the Vives edition (reprinted in 2023 by the Lyceum Institute) and it is these volumes which here are cited. It is also important to note that only the first three volumes were published in Poinsot's own lifetime. To simplify the presentation of this uncritical edition, we have simply included the dates inclusive of its writing to the death of its author, noting here that these volumes were not completed until 1667 (some 23 years after Poinsot passed away).

1631.   *Prima Pars Artis Logicae*, vol.1., in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008).

1631.   *Prima Pars Artis Logicae*, in the edition prepared by John Deely, *Tractatus De Signis*, 2nd edition (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2013).

1632.   *Secunda Pars Artis Logicae*, vol.1., in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008).

1632.   *Secund Pars Artis Logicae*, in the edition prepared by John Deely, *Tractatus De Signis*, 2nd edition

(South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2013).

1633. *Prima Pars Naturalis Philosophiae*, vol.2, in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008).

1634. *Secunda Pars Naturalis Philosophiae*, vol.2, in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008).

1635. *Quarta Pars Naturalis Philosophiae*, vol.3, in *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser in 3 vols. (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008).

i.1637–44. *Cursus Theologicus* eds. Ramirez and Combefis (Paris: Vives, 1885) in nine volumes (t.1–9). Reprinted (New York: Lyceum Institute, 2023).

RAPOSA, Michael.

1994. "Poinsot on the Semiotics of Awareness", *ACPQ* 68.3: 395-408

RATZINGER, Joseph (16 March 1927—).

1970. *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Herder and Herder).

ROENSCH, Frederick (8 April 1928—2013 December 20).

1964. *Early Thomistic School* (Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press).

SUÁREZ, Francisco, S.J. (5 January 1548—1617 September 25)

1597. *Disputationes Metaphysicae XXVIII-LIV*, in *Opera Omnia*, a Carolo Berton, t.26 (Paris: Ludivocum Vives, 1861).

TE VELDE, Rudi (8 December 1957—).

2021. *Metaphysics between Experience and Transcendence: Thomas Aquinas on Metaphysics as a Science* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag).

TORRELL, Jean-Pierre, O.P. (1927—).

1993. *L'Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin: Sa personne et son œuvre* (Paris: Editions du Cerf). Reference to the English translation by Robert Royal, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1: The Person and His Work* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

WHITE, Thomas Joseph, O.P.

2009. *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press).

Contra Errores
Publishing House

Medieval Publishing House