

Aquinas's Science of *Sacra Doctrina* as a Platonic *Technê*

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Abstract

Aquinas's characterization of *sacra doctrina* has received sustained engagement addressing its relation to contemporary conceptions of theology and Aristotelian conceptions of science. More recently, attention has been paid to Aquinas's neo-Platonist influences, and the way they lead him to subvert purely Aristotelian categories. I therefore combine these themes by introducing the first study of whether *sacra doctrina* counts as a *technê* in Plato's sense. After examining how Platonic *technê* relate to their *ergon*: *epistasthai*, *gignôskein*, and *epistêmê* and examining *sacra doctrina*'s relationship to each of these Platonic categories, I suggest that *sacra doctrina* is an unqualified Platonic *technê*.

Keywords

Aquinas, Plato, Sacra Doctrina, *technê*

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I. Introduction

"It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason," states St. Thomas Aquinas in the *respondeo* of the first article of the first question of his landmark *Summa Theologiae*.¹ Thomas calls this knowledge *Sacra Doctrina*, a term he identifies with 'divine science' or 'sacred science'² but carefully distinguishes from theology (both natural and revelatory), noting that "theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy."³ Since Thomas makes frequent use of Aristotelian categories throughout the *Summa*, it is natural for scholars to wonder how the *Summa* itself, which Thomas considers under the rubric of *Sacra Doctrina*, fits into traditional Aristotelian categories. The debate generally revolves around whether or not *Sacra Doctrina* is a science, as Thomas asserts it is in the second article of the first question.⁴

In the light of recent research arguing for Platonist interpretations of some aspects of the *Summa*,⁵ however, I would like to address the question of whether *Sacra Doctrina* fits under Plato's concept of *technê*. Discussion of this categorization has the advantage of also applying to aspects of Aristotle's work, yet it is notably without direct coverage in the literature base. The first task at hand is to determine what Plato means by his use of *technê* with regard to necessary and sufficient conditions for an activity (*praxis*) being a *technê*, and including a determination of the schema for classifying

¹ "Prima Pars," in *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers, 1947).

² 'Science' here translating 'scientia' which in turn is Thomas's equivalent for the pure or strict sense in which Aristotle uses 'epistêmê.'

³ "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 1, co.

⁴ Ibid. Q. 1, art. 2, co.

⁵ See, e.g., Stephen L. Brock, "On Whether Aquinas's *Ipsium Esse* Is 'Platonism,'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 60 (December 2006): 269–303; Stephen L. Brock, "Harmonizing Plato and Aristotle on *Esse*: Thomas Aquinas and the *De Hebdomadibus*," *Nova et Vetera* 5, no. 3 (2007): 465–94; John F. Wippel, "Platonism and Aristotelianism in Aquinas," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 272–89.

technai within the general designation. Second it must be determined to what extent *Sacra Doctrina* as used in the *Summa* meets the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for being a *technê* under Plato's system, and how it fits within his sub-classification scheme for *technai*. This project lays the groundwork for general conclusions about the place *Sacra Doctrina* must take in the Platonic system of classification, which then sheds light on how various organizational, rhetorical, and argumentative features of the *Summa* must be interpreted with regard to that system.

II. Terminology in Plato

Given that the available record of Plato's thought is the dialogues attributed to his authorship, a conceptual analysis of *technê* effectively means a textual analysis of the Platonic dialogues to understand and systematize Plato's use of the term. This analysis, especially given the cultural distance between the Athenian Republic and the United States in the third millennium, requires some explicit hermeneutical principles. I therefore propose the following rules for interpretation, in order of importance: (1) explicit definition, (2) implicit definition, (3) traditional interpretation, (4) consistency, (5) logical coherence, and (6) general use in Greek prose. The importance of the first is obvious, while the second is discoverable by close reading in concert with the other characteristics. Traditional interpretation is important as an example of parsimony: unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary, there is no reason to interpret Plato's words in a way they traditionally have not been (bearing in mind that the "tradition" is centuries of scholarship based on the above criteria). Consistency follows from this same principle, as despite evidence that Plato's thought changed from the early dialogues to the late, if there is no evidence of that phenomenon in the particular case at hand it is simpler to treat the word as if it were used consistently. Logical coherence is also a relevant criterion since Plato is a philosopher and, while perhaps not systematic in the modern use of the term, clearly believed his views

to not stand in logical contradiction or difficulty with one another. Thus, while this rule of interpretation must not be used hastily, ignoring subtleties in the text, it does have a clear place in the hierarchy which must be observed. Finally, since Plato was writing for a reasonably general audience, his terminology generally bears some resemblance to the accepted meanings for the words in Greek prose at the time, though of course he refines many of these into technical terms and therefore non-technical definitions may not be overly reliable. These hermeneutic principles are not rigorously defended, but must be articulated in fairness to the reader: they are relatively conservative and unremarkable, though necessary given the cultural gap at work. After all, the question of whether *Sacra Doctrina* is a *technê* hinges nearly entirely on what these words entail, so the articulation of the principles used in that determination must be clear.

1. *Technê*

The LSJ gives the general meaning of *technê* as "art, skill, cunning of hand" but gives its first philosophical citation (from Plato's *Protagoras*) for the more general "an art, craft" and its most numerous philosophical references (from both Plato and Aristotle) for the more technical "an art or craft, i.e. a set of rules, system or method of making or doing."⁶ Philosophers translating the work of Plato have generally settled on "craft,"⁷ but this is woefully inadequate to the technical complexities that the term represents. David Roochnik, among others, maintains that this translation is too narrow by its modern connotation, since moderns presume "crafts" to produce concrete results, or at least distinct

⁶ "technê" in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ed. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940).

⁷ David L. Roochnik, "Socrates' Use of the Techne-Analogy," in *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates*, ed. Hugh H. Benson, 1st edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 196n8; e.g. Terence Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues* (Clarendon Press, 1989), 7.

results which can be known external to the craft, an intention he maintains is not present in Plato.⁸

Despite these disagreements, Richard Parry points out that:

there are characteristics of *technê* on which Socrates insists... each is...associated with a practitioner... [and] has a function (*ergon*) [*Rep.* 346a, *Euthyd.* 301c, *Euth.* 13d, *Ion* 537c]. If one has a *technê* he knows how to do (*epistasthai*) certain activities [*Rep.* 341e ff.]...[he] knows or recognizes (*gignôskein*) [the *ergon*] by...knowledge (*epistêmê*) [*Charm.* 170c].⁹

These criteria for classification as a *technê* are relatively easy to discern from the text of the dialogues, and the relationship between *technê* and *epistêmê* outlined above has attained general consensus. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, a *technê* is a praxis that (a) has an *ergon* which it relates to by (b) *epistasthai*, (c) *gignôskein*, and (d) *epistêmê*. All of these terms will receive further development both in themselves and as they relate to *technê*, but this may be understood in a preliminary way as an activity that (a) has a function that must be (b) performed, (c) recognized formally, and (d) known causally.

2. Ergon

The question of *ergon's* role in *technê* is hotly disputed and materially impacts the scope of *technê* as a concept as well as the discussion of the hierarchy of *technai*. There seem to be at least four major schools of thought on the issue. One approach (represented by Irwin) is to translate *ergon* as "product" (or "work," used as a concrete noun), and then defend each *technê* Plato mentions as creative of a unique product.¹⁰ Roochnik attacks this project as impossible if fidelity to the texts is observed, and suggests instead that *technai* should be considered as divided between those which are productive and therefore have unique products and those which are theoretical and therefore lack an *ergon*.¹¹ W.C.

⁸ Roochnik, "Socrates' Use of the Techne-Analogy," 186.

⁹ Richard Parry, "Episteme and Techne," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2003), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2003/entries/episteme-techne/>; John Lyons, *Structural Semantics: An Analysis of Part of the Vocabulary of Plato* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1969), 139–228.

¹⁰ Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, 227.

¹¹ Roochnik, "Socrates' Use of the Techne-Analogy," 187–89.

Helmbold advocated a broader approach whereby *ergon* is translated as "action" and therefore becomes internal to the *technê*, the act of performing the craft.¹² Finally, Parry suggests translating *ergon* as function or goal, thereby preserving its conceptual distinction and extrinsic nature without limiting *technai* to activities which produce tangible products.

Liddell and Scott's lexicon fails to be helpful here, offering merely "*that which is wrought or made, work,*" without any philosophical citations.¹³ Free from a linguistic determining factor then, I argue philosophically for Parry's interpretation. Roochnik is correct to point out that not all *technai* have extrinsic concrete products, or at least that arguing that they do would contravene parsimony and contort the sense of the text. Roochnik's solution, however—to fundamentally divide *technai* into productive and nonproductive classes—is equally problematic as Plato never suggests such a rigid distinction. Furthermore, Roochnik's textual argument for this position relies on the equivalency of *technê* and *epistêmê*, which Parry and Lyons' textual analysis refutes. Plato does divide *technai* into classes, but Parry points out that this characterization is made based on the nature of the *ergon* rather than its existence, which is upheld throughout all explicit instances in the dialogues. Therefore, Roochnik's demonstration that not all *epistemai* have an *ergon* does not necessarily imply that this is true for *technai*. Meanwhile Helmbold's introduction to the *Gorgias* seems to conflate *praxis* and *ergon* without offering any compelling linguistic or philosophical reasoning. I therefore submit Parry's 'function' translation of *ergon* as the most philosophically sound rendering for the purposes of this paper. "Function" seems to avoid difficulties with the text of the dialogues which arise when the other

¹² "Introduction," in *Gorgias*, by Plato, trans. W.C. Helmbold, Little Library of Liberal Arts 20 (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1952).

¹³ "ergon" in *LSJ*.

possibilities conflate or stretch Plato's terminology; the extrinsic nature of the *ergon* is preserved, and since the function of a practical *technê* is its product, that identification is preserved as well.

3. Epistasthai

Epistasthai is the verb most commonly associated with *technê*, which Parry renders as "know[ing] how to do" a *praxis* (activity) such that it results in the appropriate *ergon*.¹⁴ Liddell and Scott do not index the term directly, but give *epistasis*, its root, the philosophical definition "method of setting about."¹⁵ The term is not much in dispute, but it is important to recognize that *technai* do need to be performed; there must be a relation of *praxis* between the *epistêmê* and the *ergon*. It is this relation of action between knowledge and function which is in fact characteristic of *technai*, and distinguishes them both from pure *epistemai* (contemplations) devoid of *praxis* and *empeiria* (experiential knacks) devoid of rational action. *Technai* are not types of knowing or types of doing but actions which act upon their associated knowledge; the practitioner of a *technê* "knows how to do" an activity directed towards its function, he has a "method of setting about" an activity directed towards that function.

4. Gignôskein

A key point in Socrates' use of the *technê*-analogy is that the function (*ergon*) of the *technê* must be recognized formally, i.e. it must be conceptually distinct. This is the basis upon which Socrates excludes sophistry, the occupation of rhetoricians, from status as a *technê*: though it does have a function (persuasion), a knowledge of sorts (psychology of persuasion), and acts upon that knowledge for the function, sophistry cannot formally recognize its object. The sophist has no conceptual knowledge of the function of his rhetoric; he does not understand the reasons on the basis of which he is asking assent to his propositions.

¹⁴ "Episteme and Techne."

¹⁵ "epistasis" in *LSJ*.

Recognition of the *ergon* by formal understanding is known in the dialogues as *gignôskein*, which is the verb cognate to *gnôsis*.¹⁶ Liddell and Scott give the generic meaning of "knowing, knowledge, recognition, being known, means of knowing," citing Plato for the fourth use.¹⁷ The "means of knowing," in Parry's analysis of Plato's use in the dialogues, amounts to looking at (*blepôn*) the form (*eidos*) of the *ergon*. A more sophisticated analysis of the *technê*-analogy with regard to sophistry, then, reveals that the difficulty lies in the lack of an *eidos* for the *ergon* of sophistry, persuasion. The connotations of *gnosis* and *blepôn* are slanted towards a precise conceptual look and knowledge rather than a mere cursory appraisal. The use of *eidos* also supports this, as Plato's Forms famously revolve around conceptual (theoretic) distinctions; if no conceptual distinction may be made, then no separate Form has being (*ousia*). The Forms are thus metaphysical explanations for epistemological principles Socrates needs in order to clarify his interlocutors' statements and reveal the truth about human virtue (*arête*) through increased self-knowledge on the part of the interlocutor.

5. *Epistêmê*

Epistêmê is the standard Greek word for knowledge, and is used frequently in the Socratic dialogues. Liddell and Scott's lexicon gives four distinct definitions: "acquaintance with a matter, understanding, skill" is the earliest, with a variant of "professional skill: hence, profession," but no philosophical citations support either of these, while "generally, knowledge" and "scientific knowledge, science, opp. *doxa*" both have multiple Platonic references.¹⁸ This distinction is important as the non-technical uses would be anathema to Plato, conflating *epistêmê* and *technê*.

¹⁶ Parry, "Episteme and Techne."

¹⁷ "gnôsis" in *LSJ*.

¹⁸ "epistêmê" in *ibid*.

Roochnik, however, proposes that *epistêmê* and *technê* are largely interchangeable since Socrates tends to discuss "knowledge of X" and "X techne" in the same breath. Socrates' discussion with Critias where he mentions without particular distinction the "knowledge of medicine" and the "medical craft" is given as an example.¹⁹ Sense seems to indicate, however, that one might mean something different by the knowledge of medicine and the practice of medicine, even though the prior is necessary for the latter and the two are intimately related. Parry demonstrates this view textually with regard to the same medical example across a wide range of dialogues from all three periods.²⁰

The relationship between knowledge and craft suggested above, however, bears further explanation. Without knowledge of the *ergon*, *epistasthai* would be impossible, so in this purely logical sense it is clear that every *technê* requires some corresponding *epistêmê*. Plato's account of the *epistêmê* which must be involved in every *technê* far exceeds (in rigor, not depth) the amount required by this account, however, as *technê* is distinguished from *empeiria* (experiential knack) by its ability to give an account of itself.²¹ In the *Gorgias* Socrates distinguishes cookery from medicine by just this characteristic, and applies this distinction by analogy to the difference between sophistry and philosophy that he is trying to demonstrate.

In order for this analogy to be effective, however, giving a self-account must be a fundamental characteristic of every *technê*, thereby bestowing on the related *epistêmê* the more limited meaning of scientific knowledge, as contrary to mere belief, rather than the more general definition of knowledge or understanding. Given that "scientific" knowledge to the ancient Greeks meant that which was deductively certain and that giving an account implies a causal account, i.e. one which explains how and

¹⁹ Roochnik, "Socrates' Use of the Techne-Analogy," 187.

²⁰ Parry, "Episteme and Techne."

²¹ Ibid.

why it works without regressing to *empeiria*, it seems safe in the context of Platonic *technai* to gloss *epistêmê* as causal knowledge. Causation in Plato's metaphysics follows from the nature of the thing, and this nature is governed by its form (*eidos*), so *epistêmê* must be knowledge of the content of the *eidos* of the *ergon* pertaining to the *technê* in question. This provides contrast both with *gignôskein* which apprehends the being (*ousia*) of the form rather than its content and with *epistasthai* which is the application of the *epistêmê* to the *praxis*. The *epistêmê* of each *technê* is therefore both a necessary and a distinguishing attribute, important to the classification of the *praxis* in question as a *technê* and to its classification among the *technai*.

6. Gnôstikê, epitaktikê, praktikê

Despite the inadequacy of Roochnik's case for a fundamental separation of *technai* into productive and non-productive categories based on the existence of an *ergon*, it is true that Plato divides *technai* into several categories. The categorization is based upon the *epistêmê*, however, rather than the *ergon*. Parry makes this point and explains the distinctions on the basis of his analysis of the *Statesman*, a later dialogue, indicating that these categories do not alter the basic structure of *technai* that have been established in the early and middle dialogues, but are rather an additional useful but not strictly necessary conceptual distinction. Some *epistemai* regard a *praxis* that results in a concrete *ergon*, while other sorts of knowledge direct processes, and a third type is directed to the acquisition of further knowledge. The first sort of *epistemai* are regarded as *praktikê*, practical, while the second and third are *gnôstikê*, theoretical, which are further subdivided into pure *gnôstikê* and *epitaktikê*, which are in and of themselves theoretical since they lack a concrete product, but are immediately oriented toward such a

product. Their *erga* are encompassing of the production of the concrete product through the use of *technai* that make use of practical knowledge (*praktikê*).²²

While Parry does not draw the conclusion, since he indicates that each *technê* has a unique *epistêmê*, it seems reasonable that *technai* may be classified by the sort of *epistemai* of which they make use. This distinction may not be found in the dialogues directly, but can be inferred conceptually from Parry's analysis, and further mirrors Plato's classification of *technai* by their *erga* into soul-concerning and body-concerning in the *Gorgias*. If *technai* are required to have several characteristics, it would seem that a division of kinds (*genê*) within any one of these characteristics would warrant a division of kinds of *technai* themselves. After all, both the *ergon* and the *epistêmê* are essential elements in the *epistasthai* that is necessarily characteristic of and associated with each *technê*. These categories may therefore be used to resolve with a finer distinction where a *praxis* fits in Plato's thought, but do not in any way impinge upon the general criteria for being a *technai*, creating a tiered method of analysis.

III. *Sacra Doctrina* as a Platonic *Technê*

Having formulated well-defined criteria for whether a given *praxis* is in fact a Platonic *technê*, I now turn my attention to a textual analysis of the *Summa Theologiae* with the intent to determine whether *Sacra Doctrina* qualifies as a *technê* given the Platonic criteria. Each criterion will be examined in turn, with

²² Ibid.

reference to Thomas' explicit description of *Sacra Doctrina* in *Prima Pars* Q. 1, art. 1 and elsewhere and the actual method of the *Summa* as an implicit carrying out of the praxis of *Sacra Doctrina*.²³

1. Ergon of Sacra Doctrina

St. Thomas clearly states that the function of Sacred Doctrine is the salvation of men. He begins his first *respondeo* by observing that: "It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason;" he later clarifies that this knowledge goes by the name of *Sacra Doctrina*.²⁴ Thomas continues:

Man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.²⁵

Thus Thomas gives the function of *Sacra Doctrina* explicitly; it is "the knowledge of this truth...in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely," necessitating no appeal to more nuanced hermeneutic principles.

This passage does, however, raise an important question. Here Thomas refers to *Sacra Doctrina* as knowledge, a science; *technai*, of course, make use of knowledge but as argued above are not synonymous with knowledge or science. In order to resolve this difficulty, a new distinction must be introduced, that between the Platonic and Aristotelian use of '*epistêmê*.' Plato typically uses it to mean knowledge generally, sometimes with a connotation of causal or scientific knowledge. In the Platonic dialogues *epistêmê* always refers to a body of knowledge, possibly with reference to the process by

²³ I take it that what I have to say accords well with the more theoretical treatment given in Lawrence J. Donohoo, "The Nature and Grace of Sacra Doctrina in St. Thomas's *Super Boetium de Trinitate*," *The Thomist* 63, no. 3 (1999): 343–401, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1999.0015>.

²⁴ "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.* Q. 1, art. 1, co.

which it became known (and thus its certainty or scientific value), but never directly to the process by which the knowledge is attained and secondarily to the knowledge. Aristotle, by contrast, often uses *epistêmê* to refer to the general process of knowledge accumulation and its product.²⁶

Parry explains this distinction with reference to the question of whether all *technai* have *erga*, including calculation and others without external concrete products. As he determines that they do, the process of gathering knowledge in a scientific way is an acquisitive *technê*, rather than an *epistêmê*, while it would be related to two *epistemai*: one that which is proper to acquisitive *technai*, the knowledge of how to acquire in the prescribed manner, and the other the *ergon* of the *technê*, which is in this case an *epistêmê* proper to another *technê*.²⁷ Aristotle, however, takes those *praxis* which are acquisitive, lacking an external concrete product, to be basically internal to knowledge and thus classifies them as *epistêmê*.²⁸

Aristotle's psychology supports this as, he remarks that: "there are two parts [of the soul] which possess reason—one by which we contemplate the kind of things whose principles cannot be otherwise, and one by which we contemplate variable things."²⁹ The contrast between this description and the tripartite soul Plato describes is reflected in the terminology used. For Plato, rational activities are *technai*, and are further distinguished on the basis of *erga*, *epistasthai*, *gignoskein*, and *epistemai*; none of these, however, are internal to the person, but rather formal characteristics which distinguish *technai*. If rational activities are distinguished internally, however, then the separating characteristics must be rooted in the cognitive faculties, and therefore in the sort of knowledge involved. Aristotle's

²⁶ "epistêmê" in *LSJ*.

²⁷ Parry, "Episteme and Techne."

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ "Nicomachean Ethics," in *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W. D. Ross and J. O. Urmsen, vol. 2, 2 vols., Bollingen 61 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) VI.1.1139a6-7.

emphasis is thus on *epistêmê*, a distinction within reason, rather than following Plato's focus on *technai* which distinguish rational from irrational activity.

Epistêmê is thus used in two distinct but related ways by Plato and Aristotle, whose use Thomas follows in his use of *scientia*. This paper, however, aims at placing Thomas' thought into Platonic categories, so the points made in the *Summa Theologiae* are not discussed in view of their original purpose but rather the text is examined for its conceptual points, which are then compared at that conceptual level to the conceptual structure of the Platonic categories which are themselves gleaned textually, as illustrated above. This may seem rather awkward, but given that Thomas' explicit textual structure is Aristotelian, it is necessary if a real analysis of his thought in Platonic categories is to be made, and this process does not exclude the Aristotelian meaning of the terms involved. In fact, translation helps to some degree in seeing their congruity, e.g. 'science' can be thought of as both a body of knowledge and a process of discovering that knowledge. The relevant procedure, then, is to realize that Thomas means the former by *scientia*, but that his conceptual framework can be analyzed and then applied analogously to the latter meaning, a procedure Thomas makes use of frequently in the *Summa*.

The distinction of Platonic and Aristotelian terminology aside, I return directly to the question of the *ergon* of *Sacra Doctrina*, determined above to be explicitly defined in *Prima Pars* Q. 1, art. 1 as the transmitting of the knowledge necessary so that souls might be saved more surely and fitly than would otherwise be the case. This explicit statement is bolstered by the way Thomas casts his purpose throughout the *Summa*, and the questions he raises that would not be raised if another function of *Sacra Doctrina* were claimed instead. The former is evidenced by his continued emphasis on the linking of philosophical knowledge with Scriptural knowledge, in order that men might be better able to

understand the Scriptures which Thomas holds, following the Apostle Paul, are crucial for rebuke in this life and instruction for the next. In fact, in article one of the *Prima Pars* Thomas quotes 2 Timothy 3:16, but the context adds further weight to this relationship:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:14-17 NRSV-CE).

Thomas includes as many aspects of this charge as possible in the *Summa*: in the *Prima Pars* he attempts to teach and defend the basic tenets of a Christian theology in accord with the Church, in the *Secundae* he attempts to give guidance on righteousness so that men might do good, and throughout he uses Scripture for his teaching, reproof, correction and training, always stressing the salvific effect of faith in God. The entire structure of the *Summa* thus supports what Thomas says about the *ergon* of *Sacra Doctrina* in the first article. There would be no need to question, as Thomas does in *Prima Pars* Q. 102, art. 2, whether man's fitting destiny is paradise, if man's achievement of that end were not of concern for *Sacra Doctrina*. The entire *Secunda Secundae* would be moot if not for Thomas' concern with righteousness in accord with faith for the purpose of salvation.

2. Epistasthai in Sacra Doctrina

A *technê* accomplishes its *ergon* via its characteristic *epistasthai*, a knowing-how-to-do its function. The first step in demonstrating that a characteristic *epistasthai* exists is establishing that there is something done, that the concept in question is in fact a *praxis*. Of course, in a strict sense this is also necessary for the above discussion of the *ergon*, since only activities have functions, whereas other concepts may have reasons for being thought about, but do not have functions in themselves. The issue is resolved textually in my discussion above regarding the distinction between *epistêmê* and *technê*, or more

precisely between the Platonic and Aristotelian senses of *epistêmê*, but a conceptual affirmation is still required.

The first hint of an affirmation of *Sacra Doctrina* as *praxis* is provided by the gloss of question one: "Whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required?"³⁰ Plato identifies philosophy as a *technê*, and thereby necessarily a *praxis*, and so the "further" referred to must also be a *praxis* simply for the sake of grammar, and the "doctrine" here denoted is clearly *Sacra Doctrina*. Another hint follows in the reply to objection two:

Sciences are differentiated according to the various means through which knowledge is obtained. For the astronomer and the physicist both may prove the same conclusion: that the earth, for instance, is round: the astronomer by means of mathematics (i.e. abstracting from matter), but the physicist by means of matter itself. Hence there is no reason why those things which may be learned from philosophical science, so far as they can be known by natural reason, may not also be taught us by another science so far as they fall within revelation. Hence theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy.³¹

Here are four clear indications of the *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina*. The first is that sciences (of which Thomas will imminently assure his readers *Sacra Doctrina* is one) are described as differentiated by means, just as *epistasthai* is the means, the *praxis*, which distinguishes *technai*. The second is that sciences are described as having defined practitioners, a characteristic of *technai*, and a sure indication of *praxis* as only that done has a doer. Third, mathematics, here described as a science, is explicitly described as a *technê* in the *Charmides*, the *Gorgias*, and other places.³² Finally, science is indicated to be a process of both learning (an acquisitive *technê*) and teaching (a commanding *technê*), making explicit that Thomas' use of *scientia* indicates an activity, not merely a body of knowledge. Since Thomas holds that *Sacra Doctrina* is *scientia*, it also must be an activity.

³⁰ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 1.

³¹ Ibid. Q. 1, art. 1, ad 2.

³² Parry, "Episteme and Techne."

A *technê* may not be any activity however, but rather must be a knowing-how-to-do, as indicated in the original set of characteristics given above. Since the *ergon* of *Sacra Doctrina* is a kind of knowledge, the *epistasthai* must be a means of acquisition, as is alluded to by comparison to the mathematician and the physicist, who each know how to acquire a certain kind of knowledge (that of calculations and that of matter). The characteristic *epistasthai* sought, then, is a means of acquiring, giving an account of, and transmitting the knowledge necessary for the efficacious salvation of souls. This is accomplished by proceeding "from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed."³³ The science of God and the blessed, in turn, is revealed not from human knowledge but "learned through revelation,"³⁴ it is "revealed by God, [and] must be accepted by faith."³⁵

The *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina*, then, is an activity of accepting God's revelation by faith, then giving an account of that revelation in accord with philosophic knowledge, since Thomas observes in article one that theology is also treated of in philosophy, and that the same conclusions must be reached.³⁶ This parallels the distinction between mathematics and physics, which reach their conclusions by different means but must be demonstrated to be consistent with each other. *Sacra Doctrina* nonetheless retains its unique role, however, as in the *sed contra* of article two, Thomas quotes Augustine: "to this science alone belongs that whereby saving faith is begotten, nourished, protected and strengthened."³⁷ This is accomplished by allowing the light of Grace to infuse the human intellect

³³ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 2, co.

³⁴ Ibid. Q. 1, art. 1, co.

³⁵ Ibid. Q. 1, art. 1, ad 1.

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Pars prima Summae theologiae, qq 1-49, cum comentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani.*, Leonine, Sancti Thomae de Aquino opera omnia 4 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1888), <http://archive.org/details/operaomniaiussui04thom> Q. 1, art. 1.

³⁷ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 2, sc. see Augustine, *De Trinitate* (Brooklyn, N.Y: New City Press, 1990) xiv, 1.

and recognizing signs from the divine. Thomas explains:

The knowledge which we have by natural reason contains two things: images derived from the sensible objects; and the natural intelligible light, enabling us to abstract from them intelligible conceptions. Now in both of these, human knowledge is assisted by the revelation of grace. For the intellect's natural light is strengthened by the infusion of gratuitous light; and sometimes also the images in the human imagination are divinely formed, so as to express divine things better than those do which we receive from sensible objects, as appears in prophetic visions; while sometimes sensible things, or even voices, are divinely formed to express some divine meaning.³⁸

This infusion of natural reason by gratuitous light is the *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina*, the action its practitioner undertakes in order to acquire and give an account of the knowledge necessary for the efficacious salvation of souls.

Here something must be said about theology's role in the *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina*. The term is used fourteen times in the *Summa Theologiae*, eight in an unmodified sense and therefore instructive for discerning how Thomas uses the term.³⁹ First Thomas notes that theology is the part of philosophy which treats of God.⁴⁰ Next he distinguishes that theology which is part of *Sacra Doctrina* from natural theology which is part of philosophy, on the principle that they have a different method, the former making use of revelation while the latter relies on natural reason.

In the *sed contra* of article seven of question one, however, Thomas seems to identify theology and *Sacra Doctrina*, stating: "But in this science, the treatment is mainly about God; for it is called theology, as treating of God. Therefore God is the object of this science."⁴¹ Nonetheless, all that is

³⁸ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 12, art. 13, co.

³⁹ Roberto Busa, "Index Thomisticus," Corpus Thomisticum, accessed June 25, 2023, <https://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/index.age>.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *ST Ia (v1)* Q. 1, art. 1, ad 2.

⁴¹ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 7, sc; for further analysis see Brian Davies, "Is 'Sacra Doctrina' Theology?," *New Blackfriars* 71, no. 836 (1990): 141–47.

explicitly said here is that it is "called theology," and thus this indicated that it is believed to treat mainly of God, especially since the objections clearly indicate that *Sacra Doctrina* is concerned with human matters that are not theological. It seems that Thomas is merely hedging in this *sed contra* rather than making an explicit identification, and the rest of the text supports this.

Another difficulty occurs in question 88, article two, where Thomas contrasts the treatment of angels in philosophy and theology.⁴² Since theology was admitted in article one to be a constituent part of philosophy in some cases, 'theology' here must be viewed as used loosely to mean that component of theology which is a constituent element of *Sacra Doctrina*. Thomas' use of 'theology' in the *Prima Secundae*, however, supports the case for *Sacra Doctrina's* status as a *technê*. In objections two and three of article two, question seven, theology is contrasted with sophistry and oratory, respectively.⁴³ Thomas refines the points of contrast in his replies, but it remains that theology is to be no part of either discipline, both explicitly excluded by Plato from being *technai*. Further, this distinction is made on the basis of theology's *epistasthai*, that it includes a knowing-how-to judge the morality of actions. This clearly fits within the above assigned *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina* as a whole of accepting and giving an account for God's revelation in faith, since the knowing-how-to judge of theology is in the light of the revelation of God.

In the *Secunda Secundae*, Thomas provides a summary account of the *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina*:

The reasons employed by holy men to prove things that are of faith, are not demonstrations; they are either persuasive arguments showing that what is proposed to our faith is not

⁴² Aquinas, *ST Ia (v1)* Q. 88, art. 2, ad 2.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Prima secundae Summae theologiae qq. 1-70 cum commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani.*, Leonine, Sancti Thomae de Aquino opera omnia 6 (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1891), <http://archive.org/details/operaomniaiussui06thom> Q. 7, art. 2, ad 2-3.

impossible, or else they are proofs drawn from the principles of faith, i.e. from the authority of Holy Writ, as Dionysius declares (Div. Nom. ii). Whatever is based on these principles is as well proved in the eyes of the faithful, as a conclusion drawn from self-evident principles is in the eyes of all. Hence again, theology is a science, as we stated at the outset of this work.⁴⁴

Here again, theology is used in its restricted sense as theology within sacred doctrine, which must be scientific since all of sacred doctrine is considered scientific on the basis of article two of question one of the *Prima Pars*. Manifest here is that the higher science, revealed by God through faith, from which *Sacra Doctrina* takes its first principles, is a science only in a unique sense, since only the mind of God can apprehend its first principles. The *epistasthai* of sacred doctrine therefore consists in knowing-how-to make the arguments and proofs from faith as necessary to the efficacious salvation of souls, always the task of holy men.

3. Gignôskein in Sacra Doctrina

The third requirement of a *technê* established above in accord with Parry is that it must include *gignôskein*, a formal recognition of the *eidos* of the *ergon*. Two distinct tasks are entailed here: analysis of what constitutes the *eidos* of the *ergon* and demonstration of how *gnosis* of that *eidos* may be achieved in the context of the *epistasthai*. To review, the *ergon* in question is the knowledge necessary for the efficacious salvation of souls, and the *epistasthai* is knowing-how-to make the arguments and proofs from faith (by virtue of grace enlightening human reason) necessary to give an account of that knowledge. It is within this context that the relevant *eidos* and *gignôskein* must be sought.

The knowledge required for the *ergon* is indicated in *Prima Pars*, Q. 1, art. 1 to be that which comes from revelation. This revelatory knowledge is known as *divina scientia* by analogy to the self-knowledge of God, a linguistic indication of the conceptual structure of such knowledge, which is

⁴⁴ Thomas Aquinas, "Secunda Secundae," in *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Brothers, 1947), <http://isidore.co/thomas/summa/SS.html> Q. 1, art. 5, ad 2.

predicated on the essence of God. The knowledge sought may be for the good of men, but the form (*eidōs*) of all revelation is God himself, meaning that in Aristotelian terminology God is the object of the *scientia* that is *Sacra Doctrina*. Thomas argues for this in *Prima Pars*, Q. 1, art. 7:

In sacred science, all things are treated of under the aspect of God: either because they are God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end. Hence it follows that God is in very truth the object of this science. This is clear also from the principles of this science, namely, the articles of faith, for faith is about God. The object of the principles and of the whole science must be the same, since the whole science is contained virtually in its principles.⁴⁵

Therefore *gignōskein* does occur with regard to the *eidōs* of the *ergon* in the process of *Sacra Doctrina*, and it occurs by way of faith, earlier seen to be the way we recognize the self-revelation of God.⁴⁶ After all, "our intellect adheres to God by grace of faith,"⁴⁷ and it is faith by which we recognize "invisible things, that exceed human reason."⁴⁸ As the activity of *Sacra Doctrina* progresses, faith enables recognition of God, who is the form of the object of that activity. Thomas describes this in the question on how we come to know God as "the light of glory strengthening the intellect to see God,"⁴⁹ indicating that it is the grace of faith and only this grace which enables sight of the essence of God, and making such a process unique to *Sacra Doctrina* since philosophy is by itself bereft of the gift of faith.

It is however important to distinguish seeing God as the form of sacred knowledge from seeing the essence of God himself, which Thomas states in *Prima Pars*, Q. 12, art. 11 that we cannot do in this life. Thomas offers the knowledge that "God is three and one"⁵⁰ as an example of knowledge rooted in faith and above human reason, superbly illustrating the above distinction: the trinitarian nature of God informs human theological judgement even as full comprehension of the trinitarian mystery is

⁴⁵ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 7, co.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *ST Ia (v1)* Q. 1, art. 1.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, "ST Ia" Q. 12, art. 13, co.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Q. 31, art. 1, co.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Q. 12, art. 2, co.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Q. 12, art. 13, ad 1.

impossible. God is the form of sacred doctrine since the source of that doctrine is the self-revelation of God recognized by faith, but the essence of God himself remains hidden in this life, so the requirements of *technai* do not indict the coherence of Thomas' positions.

4. Epistêmê of Sacra Doctrina

The fourth and final requirement for a *praxis* to be a *technê*, according to my above analysis following Parry, is that the *epistasthai* must involve a conceptually distinct *epistême*.⁵¹ The *epistasthai* must therefore be carried forward to the *ergon* by a kind of real knowledge, rather than mere experiential knack, that body of knowledge must be distinguishable from others, and it must be unique to the *praxis* in question. Thomas states that "[sacred] doctrine argues from articles of faith to other truths,"⁵² thereby using knowledge of articles of faith and knowledge of philosophy to further the salvation of men. Thus as long as both of these forms of knowledge are conceptually robust and distinct, and their use is unique to *Sacra Doctrina*, the requirements for *technai* have been fulfilled.

First it must be ascertained that knowledge of the articles of faith is both more than an experiential knack and distinct from other types of knowledge. Thomas evades the former question by positing knowledge of the articles of faith as "proceed[ing] from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed."⁵³ This allusion to Aristotle's hierarchy of the sciences⁵⁴ works equally well by analogy for *technai*. In the *Sophist*⁵⁵ and the *Statesman*⁵⁶ Plato gives

⁵¹ It is important to note here that *epistême* is being used in the distinctly Platonic sense defined above, not in the more Aristotelian form as loose synonym for *technê* generally, which is here rendered following Thomas as *scientia*. Plato and Aristotle often use identical terms for distinct conceptual structures, and it is especially important to avoid confusing them here.

⁵² "ST Ia" Q. 1, art. 8, ad 1.

⁵³ Ibid. Q. 1, art. 2, co.

⁵⁴ For further analysis M. V. Dougherty, "On the Alleged Subalternate Character of Sacra Doctrina in Aquinas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 77 (July 1, 2003): 101–10, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpaprocc20037716>.

evidence for a hierarchy of *technai*, from the practical occupations that he uses so often as examples (the cobbler, the shipwright), dubbed *praktikê*, through *epitaktikê*—the commanding *technai* which supervise and plan their actions (i.e., a naval architect), to the purely theoretical disciplines of philosophy and mathematics—*gnôstikê*.⁵⁷ The *Summa Theologiae* as a whole seems to wander through all of these as Thomas directs his attention to matters entirely theoretical and minutely pastoral in turn, but the discipline Thomas isolates as *Sacra Doctrina* seems to fall clearly within the realm of *epitaktikê*. It both proceeds from a higher science and directs a process for the salvation of souls,⁵⁸ so it cannot be either purely theoretical or purely practical, but falls within the 'commanding' division of theoretical *technai*.

The plausibility of this explanation naturally relies on the knowledge of revelation and articles of faith being real knowledge, not just beliefs held by certain people or assumptions that rhetoricians have determined that people are likely to accept. The appropriate standard for this determination, however, is not the Aristotelian one of demonstration or proof,⁵⁹ but rather the ability to give a meaningful causal account. In the *Gorgias* Plato cites medicine as an example of a *technê*, yet a doctor in ancient Athens could hardly have known with certainty whether his diagnosis was correct or what regimen to prescribe; what the doctor could do, however, was give a cogent account of what factors influenced his decision-

⁵⁵ Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant omnia*, ed. Henri Estienne, trans. Jean de Serres, vol. 1 (Geneva: Stephanus, 1578), 253–55, <http://archive.org/details/platonisoperaqua01plat>.

⁵⁶ Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant omnia*, ed. Henri Estienne, trans. Jean de Serres, vol. 2 (Geneva: Stephanus, 1578), 258–59, <http://archive.org/details/platonisoperaqua02plat>.

⁵⁷ Parry, "Episteme and Techne."

⁵⁸ See Brendan Case, "Judging According to Wisdom: *Sacra Doctrina* in the *Summa Theologiae*," *New Blackfriars* 98, no. 1077 (September 2017): 582–98, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12153>.

⁵⁹ Robin Smith, "Aristotle's Theory of Demonstration," in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 51–65, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781444305661.ch4/summary>.

making.⁶⁰ Socrates indicates in the *Charmides* that a doctor's test is to give an account of his actions.⁶¹ Again, in the *Laws* Plato distinguishes the slave-doctor who merely applies remedies which have worked in the past with the free doctor who gives the patient an explanation of the treatments being applied and the reasoning behind them.⁶² Giving an account, then, is Plato's consistent standard for whether the knowledge of a practitioner is the *epistême* needed for *technai*.

This is a standard which (unlike the thorny question of whether Thomas' arguments tend to constitute proven demonstrations)⁶³, the *Summa Theologiae*'s example of *Sacra Doctrina* clearly meets. In question twelve of the *Prima Pars* Thomas attempts to explain to his reader how knowledge of God is acquired in all the theological detail he can muster, including the influences of grace, faith, and natural reason, as well as distinctions between essential and existential knowledge. Thomas thus gives an account of how he himself learns the material he is about to present. Furthermore, in *Prima Pars* question one, Thomas outlines his general purpose, much as a doctor explains his desire to see the patient healthy again and the general methods he will use in accomplishing that goal. In question 102 of the *Prima Pars*, Thomas explains why this end is fitting for man, and devotes the whole second part of the *Summa* to the behaviors man must adopt in order to reach this end. Thus all of Thomas' purposes and methodologies are on full display for his reader at the theoretical level, and nothing is left to *empeira*. Individual portions of this knowledge-base might be false or unproven, much as a boat-builder does not know every true principle of boat-building, but the account of why the practitioner does as he does is nonetheless related, and the knowledge thus counts as *epistême*.

⁶⁰ Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant omnia*, 1578, 1:501a.

⁶¹ Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant omnia*, 1578, 2:170e–71.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 2:720d.

⁶³ See, e.g., Guy Mansini, "Are the Principles of *Sacra Doctrina* per Se Nota?," *The Thomist* 74, no. 3 (2010): 407–35, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.2010.0022>.

Thomas' *epistasthai*, his way of proceeding, is argument from certain knowledge to confirmation of other knowledge—the very method of proceeding that Aristotle outlines as a syllogism, and the method Plato's Socrates uses to frustrate his opponents. In all the examples I have cited above, Thomas refutes his "objections" by demonstrating internal contradiction or contradiction of other accepted truths, and this is exactly how, according to Plato's statement and example, the *technai* of philosophy proceeds. The truths of philosophy are grounded in man's self-knowledge as follows from Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that his interrogations are directed to the attainment of true self-knowledge, so that he might understand the prophecy of the oracle at Delphi.⁶⁴ This procedure does not rely merely on whatever happens to convince Thomas' readership (the experiential knack of the sophistic author), but on two distinct *epistemai*: knowledge of the truths of revelation and knowledge of the method and principles of philosophic argument. That each of these is also present in other disciplines is not a difficulty—shipbuilding is acknowledged as a distinct *technê*, yet it combines elements present in both cooperage and architecture. These are nonetheless associated in the progress toward the single *ergon* and under the single *gignôskein* as Thomas explains when he says that all things are treated under the aspect of God.⁶⁵

Thus all that remains is to show that these forms of knowledge are in fact characteristic of *Sacra Doctrina*, which Thomas demonstrates in *Prima Pars* Q. 12, art. 2, co. Only *Sacra Doctrina* specifically treats the realm of human living with regard to God rather than some other standard, and so knowledge of how to do this is the characteristic knowledge upon which the *epistasthai* depends. Furthermore, this *epistasthai* rests on a unique method of arguing as indicated above,⁶⁶ and only a

⁶⁴ Plato, *Platonis opera quae extant omnia*, 1578, 1:21b.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *ST Ia (v1)* Q. 1, art. 7, co.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *ST Ia-IIae (v1)* Q.1, art. 5, ad 2.

characteristic *epistême* could provide a principled system for this argument; as philosophic method is uniquely distinct, there must be some additional knowledge or knack to enable a different method. Thomas' self-conscious discussion of his method meanwhile speaks plainly to the principled nature of his system rather than its mere utility in persuading without causing understanding. This is further vouchsafed by the *ergon*, for if only persuasion and not understanding is the result of Thomas' teaching, then he has not fulfilled his purpose to make more efficacious the salvation of souls.

The ability of the practitioner to give an account of his method and the presence of understanding in those taught are Plato's implicit tests for the presence of *epistemai*, as indicated in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere. Since the above examples demonstrate that *Sacra Doctrina* clearly meets both tests, it is clear that the *epistemai* in question are genuine and not mere experiential knacks. Since they are not present in philosophy alone or in divine contemplation alone, they are also fully characteristic of the *epistasthai* of *Sacra Doctrina*. This lends very strong support to the contention that knowledge of divine revelation and philosophical method are the characteristic *epistemai* of *Sacra Doctrina*, thus fulfilling the fourth and final condition for the status of *technê*.

IV. Conclusions

A careful reading of the *Summa Theologiae* has revealed that Thomas' self-described praxis of *Sacra Doctrina* does indeed meet the requirements for *technai* laid down by Plato in the Socratic dialogues. *Sacra Doctrina* is revealed as a praxis involving knowing how to accomplish an *ergon*, which is understood both in its conceptual essence and its concrete causation, so Parry's four criteria of *ergon*, *epistasthai*, *gignôskein*, and *epistemai* which were adopted for

this determination have been solidly met. This knowledge enables a more comprehensive analysis of what Thomas draws from Plato and the way their philosophical systems interact at the conceptual level, since the activity of *Sacra Doctrina* now has a clear place in the Platonic schema. Although comparisons of Plato and Thomas have traditionally focused on rhetoric and metaphysics, there are fruitful grounds for comparison of method analogous to those concerning Thomas's claim that *Sacra Doctrina* is a *scientia*. The progress of this discussion is crucial if we believe Thomas when he insists that the *Sacra Doctrina* necessary for the more fit and sure salvation of men is rightly a matter of argument.⁶⁷

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⁶⁷ Aquinas, *ST Ia (v1)* Q. 1, art. 1, 8.

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