

BRIDGING THE GAPS BETWEEN REASON AND REASON, REASON AND OBJECT

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KNOWLEDGE HAS PROVEN TO BE AN ESSENTIAL fraction of man's existence, for of course without which a person can never be the rational being that he should be. And consequentially, the process of incurring knowledge—pedagogy—serves vital in the temporal perfection of man. The philosopher-saint, Thomas Aquinas, did not miss to acknowledge this, so he wrote “De Magistro” or “On the Teacher.”

For most parts, “De Magistro” seems to follow a “passing down” scheme, which is actually an implication of the ladder setup where one is higher than the other—that there are authorities and subordinates. This alone can justify that knowledge is indeed power. But it should be clear that the article does not in any way advocate dominion over the other. Rather, it intends to pull the person, who wills knowledge, to rise through learning. This is explained further in saying that education is “anticipating future happiness and trusting in the present [teacher] to [realize that happiness].”¹ Hence, education generates action, activity.

Gaining Ideas

As already claimed, idea has actions produced. But how can this be caused by one man to another, considering that both of them are materially existent? Since idea is abstract, can one man give another this form that is immaterial? In answering this question, we start from his primary epistemological process, *ideogenesis*.

1 Halpin, David. “The Nature of Hope and Its Significance for Education,” in *British Journal of Educational Studies* (2001), 393.

Human experience is vital in the epistemology of Aquinas. Having been influenced by Aristotle, he maintains that “there is nothing in the mind that passes not through the senses”²—that the process of knowing starts from the sensory organs. The raw knowledge of the senses will be processed by the internal power of common sense, which is imbued in rational beings. This sense yields phantasms, which play the role of instrumental cause in the process of knowing:

The imaginative power in some way moves the possible intellect (common sense), not by its own power but by virtue of the active intellect. The Philosopher says in III de Anima that [how] colors are to sight, the phantasms are to the possible intellect. Hence, just as light gives to colors a certain instrumental power to cause an immaterial change in the sense, so in the same way the phantasms insofar as they act instrumentally by the power of the active intellect makes the possible intellect actually know with the intelligible species.²

More importantly, St. Thomas explains that a person has been given a principle that enables him to understand: “For in him that is taught, there is an active principle conducive to knowledge, namely the intellect, and those things which are naturally understood, namely first principles.”³

However, the discrepancy between the immateriality of the intellect and the materiality of phantasms cannot be disregarded. The intellect must be immaterial for its functions deal with principles and concepts, not phantasms that manifest materiality in form. This has also been the concern of St. Thomas, which he answered with the concept of abstraction.

Abstraction is a process, which is attributed to the intellect. However, the philosopher-saint proposes a dichotomy in the intellect: the passive and active intellect. To elaborate further, abstraction is supposed to be the work of the active intellect since that division deals with logical and metaphysical consistencies.⁴

To understand the intellect, it would be helpful to consider the levels of its operation.

1. The first operation of intellect, the simple intellectual grasp of some universal feature of an object.
2. The second operation, composition and division, which involves putting various concepts together, by either affirming one of another (composition) or denying one of another (division).

2 * General knowledge has it that this thought is one of the very foundations of Aristotelian teachings. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, in *Questiones Disputatae* (Rome: Marietti, 1964), Question 16, Answer 12.

3 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1924), Book 2, Chapter 75.

4 Cecilio Magsino, *The Intentionality Theories of St. Thomas Aquinas and of Contemporary Philosophy: A Comparative Study* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis, 2001), 100.

3. The third operation, reasoning, which involves a complex ordering of composite thoughts.⁵

It may be taken that the human mind necessarily abstracts especially after apprehension of an object and accepts only what is essential.⁶

The Teachers

The process of gaining knowledge is a complex endeavor. And one, in effect, must have certain support systems in this occasion. Aquinas proposes one that moves from within man and another, which is an outward principle of education—but both function together.

And since the outward action of the teacher would have no effect, without the inward principle of knowledge, which is in us from God, hence among theologians it is said that man teaches by outward ministrations, but God by inward operation.⁷

“God,” as dubbed, also qualifies in the criterion that was conceived by Aquinas. Firstly, the teacher must have the “fullness” of knowledge of Divine matters,* which is necessary to establish his credibility to teach. Also, a teacher must be able to give proofs or, in some cases, validity to what he teaches. Otherwise, his students would find no conviction and certainty in what is being taught. Lastly, and perhaps the most essential for teachers, a mentor must be able to communicate well so as to avoid misunderstanding.⁸

If someone proposes to another things, which are not included in self-evident principles, or does not make it clear that they are included, he will not cause knowledge in the other... for from [the student’s] self-evident principles he realizes that what necessarily follows from [teachings] is to be held with certitude, and that what is contrary to them is to be rejected completely....⁹

Aquinas maintains that education must start with the most credible and immediate authority on teaching—the parents. He says: “education is the work of father and mother in common.”¹⁰With this, it is notable that Aquinas is in the

5 Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 273.

6 George Van Riet, *Thomistic Epistemology* (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1963), 47.

7 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 2, Chapter 75.

* Divine matters does not exclusively refer to Church doctrines, it may in fact be a deeper understanding of life that emanates from the full “is”-ness of the Ultimate Cause.

8 *Summa Theologiae*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 111.

9 *Disputed Questions on Truth*, Volume 2, Question 11.

10 *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement to the Third Part, Question 59.

abundance to nature, even more when he relates education with art. He says that “in those things that can be done both by art and by nature, art copies nature; for if a person is taken ill through a cold cause, nature cures him by heating. Now the art of teaching is like this art.”¹¹ This implies that what is taught should have foundations in the natural phenomena, even more to the natural law. What must be conceived in the mind should be dealt with in relation with reality. Although, of course, he admits that there are metaphysical concepts that are purely immaterial, it is still maintained that these concepts must be taken into consideration with the material things through the progression in abstraction, given that “the human intellect is of itself directed toward the truth, since it is capable of knowing things as beings.”¹²

Aquinas also classifies learning in two ways: one is regarded with the self as finding ways to incur knowledge while the other depicts an external agent as a functioning central element in the process—discovery and instruction, respectively. Discovery is a method by which “natural reason by itself reaches knowledge of unknown things.”¹³ This is exemplified when a man experiences an object, which gives him new knowledge about itself. On the contrary, instruction happens “when someone else aids the learner’s natural reason.”¹⁴ It is admitted that this way of educating will have certain considerations like the intellectual maturity of the potential learner.

For the learner, when he has a gift of intellect that is above average in degree, to gain knowledge by discovery is the more efficient since that manifests the intellectual capacity of the potential learner. However, this case is rare. Meanwhile, for the teacher, knowledge would be more “perfect” to cause it through instruction because he knows almost the totality of the subject matter and he has the capacity to explicitly teach knowledge to a pupil.¹⁵ But it is also very possible and likely that when a teacher begins his work, the learner also begins to discover. This is because when a teacher offers his knowledge, the learner may have his own preexisting knowledge that he can use to deduce or induce from whatever he encounters. Also, by proposing sense knowledge that he has or what we call as phantasm to himself, he is able to discover new knowledge.

The Teacher’s Role

The teacher can never insist in putting knowledge in his pupil’s mind. He can only propose symbols and signs, which are utilized in order to guide students to be educated adequately, to put in action the potential of learners: “the external agent acts only by helping the internal agent and providing it with the means by which it can enter into act.”¹⁶ His first intention must be the adaptation to the learning capacity

11 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 2, Chapter 75.

12 Tomas Alvira, et. al., *Metaphysics*. Ed. Fr. M. Guzman. trans. by Fr. Luis Supan (Manila: Sinag-tala Publishers, Inc., 1991), 155.

13 *Disputed Questions on Truth*, Volume II, Question 11.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

of the pupil. Aquinas indeed explains, “like children, we instruct them (students) at first in very little things, because they cannot grasp the great things from the very beginning.”¹⁷In same manner, for the teacher, who deals with an audience who is not familiar with a topic, “they would not grasp them at once; [the teacher] must prepare their minds beforehand with things that are less out of the ordinary.”¹⁸

The Problem of Misinterpretation and the Value of Correction

The teacher provides only as much as demonstration. It is still up to the student and his intellectual capacity on how he will cope up. This space gives the chance for misinterpretation, for it is admitted that “falsity of the senses can be the cause of falsity in the intellect.”¹⁹This is because there are things, which seemingly come to be encountered by man, that have the possibility of being and not being (due to generation or corruption).²⁰One danger of a failure to properly absorb empirical data through the senses is the formal falsity, which is the direct opposite of formal truth.²¹

Aquinas gives an explicit elaboration of the analogy that comes across with this paradigm: “the teacher only brings exterior help as the physician who heals: but just as the interior nature is the principal cause of the healing, so the interior light of the intellect is the principal cause of knowledge.”²²

In addition, the most common leeway for misinterpretation is the confusion of the universal to what is particular in nature, and vice-versa.

While discovery stands as a “sign of a stronger mind”—for this reason why one, who has unveiled a truth for the first time and understands and effectively relates it, is more compelling from a man who knows everything that was said to him by other people²³—admittance of mistakes must still be an open option. It must be admitted that certitude is two-fold, the (1) certitude of the many and (2) philosophical certitude, which is a product of reflection.²⁴

For these instances, the teacher must adapt in his pedagogy, considering that his pupils may have previous encounters with the subject matter of teaching. He must divide lessons into various points, which must be found in the universals.²⁵ To cite:

Children are not capable of this instruction as soon as they are born, but only after a long time, and especially when they reach the age of discretion. Besides, this instruction requires a long time. And even then,

17 *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 4, Chapter 55.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas against the Averroists* (West Lafayette: Indiana, 1993), 81.

20 Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (London: Routledge, 1993), 135.

21 J. O’Hanley, *Thomistic Philosophy* (Charlottetown: St. Dunstan’s University, 1948), 50.

22 *Summa Theologiae*, First Part, Question 117, Reply to objection 1.

23 Ralph McInerny, *Thomism in an Age of Renewal* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1966), 43.

24 Van Riet, *Thomistic Epistemology*, 5.

25 *Summa Theologiae*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 106.

on account of the assaults of the passions whereby the judgment of prudence is perverted, they need not only instruction but correction.²⁶

Ends of Teaching

The ends of teaching are two-fold. Like the actions expressed in languages, teaching also involves the contemplative and active purposes.²⁷ While it may be argued that education is really meant for the contemplative life, in the sense that education is directed in the knowledge of the person or himself,²⁸ it cannot be disregarded that the knowledge of the self has a valuable bearing in the participation of individuals with one another in a society.

If the end of education was directed to the society, the purpose is for the active life, which makes more sense and relevance to the institution of connections that man has been borne into. Although, it may be observed that the active life is directed and more concerned with the temporal life, for it cannot be denied that man cannot help but to live in this temporality. As Aquinas tells, "...although [gaining knowledge] is in some sense a function of the contemplative life, ...it is more properly a work of the active than of the contemplative life."²⁹

An example given by Aquinas for the active life is the predicament on the situation of having children. He contests that it does not only mean begetting children because having them also entails their education, which should start at home, from the parents.³⁰ Then it must be understood that education must also be provided beforehand to the parents. Since this situation involves the parents' human act on the offspring, it may be classified to support the necessity of the active life purpose.

Meanwhile, the end of the contemplative life aims at the knowledge of the truth, which one cannot see perfectly in the temporal life.³¹ However, it is essential to have a glimpse of this truth since "the contemplative life begins here in order to be made perfect in the life to come."³² If one would indulge in contemplation and finds a meaning for his life, given that he is provided proper education, he can contribute to the society, which would give the active life a justification to be also an adequate end of teaching. Hence; the contemplative and the active life can in fact support each other toward an efficient purpose for the society.

The gaps between reason to reason and reason to object are bridged by education. However, this noble endeavor must be embarked on by individuals with competence, which includes the acceptance that teaching is not directly causing knowledge to the students. Rather, it is guiding their intellects to arrive at the *idea*, which has formal truths, by way of presenting symbols that aid them in their learning

²⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 3, Chapter 72.

²⁷ *Disputed Questions on Truth*, Volume 2, Question 11, Article 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement to the Third Part, Question 49.

³¹ *Disputed Question on Truth*, Volume 2, Question 11, Article 4.

³² *Ibid.*

journey. Also, education has ends, one for the self and the other for others.

To give more emphasis, even if there are two ways by which one learns, it must never be assumed that one method is already sufficient, for these two are actually the check-and-balance systems for each other. A teacher cannot be a teacher without properly discovering his subject matter. In the same way, that a student cannot simply discover all the formal truths without a competent guide.