Understanding in Aquinas

An analogy based on the mediation of how light functions as a necessary condition for our acts of human seeing explains how, in another way, our human acts of understanding perform a similar task.[1] Without light, normally, we cannot see anything with our eyes. Colors would be invisible, but, as we know, the presence of light confers a necessary visibility. Similarly then, with respect to our understanding: our human understanding functions as a source, or as a point of origin, for the experience of intelligibility and this source lies within the dynamic of our human inquiry and it proceeds from the inquiries which, as human persons and subjects, we engage in. This understanding grasps meanings through a mediation that reveals its structure and form.

To our human understanding belong two interacting elements: an active element and a passive element.[2] On the one hand, when a human act of understanding grasps a meaning, the understanding receives a form (a meaning as it exists in a structured way). Structure or form gives meaning in terms of how a given part or element is related to another part or element. Like sense, there is something passive about how our human understanding works and this passive aspect has been referred to as the passive, receptive, recipient, or the possible intellect of our understanding.[3] The Latin speaks of *intellectus possibilis.*[4] The passivity of sense resembles the passivity of our understanding; hence, the passivity of the human intellect.[5] The senses undoubtedly receive. They pass from potentiality to actuality by being moved by an external object which is generically cited as an image, or as an apt image or a phantasm to the degree that it is related to an act of understanding. But human understanding, in order to move from potentiality to actuality in its acts of understanding, must be able also to receive any understanding that comes to it from without, and this necessity of reception accordingly points to why our human understanding possesses a potential, passive, or receptive aspect.[6]

1*Compendium theologiae*, 1, c. 88.

2*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 76, 15; *Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 10, 728-9; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 54, a. 4. Aquinas notes later in q. 87, a. 1 that "the human intellect is either entirely potential with respect to intelligible objects, as is the possible intellect, or it is the actuation of intelligible objects that have been abstracted from sense images, as is the agent intellect" (my translation). Hence, given the initial potency of the human intellect and the fact that, in our acts of understanding, we or the human intellect moves from potency to actuality, on this basis Aquinas is able to construct a definition for the human person which regards a man (or a woman) as "potency in the sphere of intelligent being." See Frederick E. Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies,* supplementary issue of *Lonergan Workshop*, vol. 16, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Lonergan Institute, 2000), p. 175. Aquinas's words speak about man in terms of *omnino in potentia in genere intelligibilium*: as someone who is "altogether in potency in the genus of the intelligibles."

3*Compendium theologiae*, 1, c. 88; *Summa Theologiae* Blackfriars, 1a, q. 79, a. 2.

4*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 671.

5*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 2. Aquinas cites Aristotle and his discussion in the *De Anima*, 3, 4 where the passivity or the potentiality of the human intellect is initially compared to the passivity or the potentiality of our acts of human sensing. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, a more lengthy discussion is given on the passivity of sense and the passivity of the human intellect (*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 675-676).

6*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 2. See Thomas Aquinas, *De virtutibus in communi* qu. un.,

Simply put: "an act of understanding...is the actuation of a passive potency."[7] *Intelligere est quoddam pati*.[8]

However, but in a way which differs from our prior acts of human sensing, while our senses can be harmed by the limited kind of receptivity which belongs to them (for instance, too loud a sound deafens our hearing; too loud a sound can destroy our ability to hear and, if too loud, it can result in our physical deaths), our acts of understanding are not harmed by the kind of receptivity which belongs to them. What is understood can be experienced in a way which points to an overwhelming kind of impact which can belong to them. We can feel this impact. And yet, in the long run, our understanding is not destroyed. Instead, it is enhanced as our understanding moves toward a fulfillment which exists as its growth and perfection by way of a development which refers to something that happens within us as knowers to the degree that we exist as subjects, agents or actors.[9] A connatural relation or connatural unity exists between what, through inquiry, our human understanding desires and what it properly receives. Our human understanding comes to have a virtue or an excellence which it had not had previously.

In the dynamic and receptivity of our understanding, an intelligible object acts upon it from without and this intelligible object presents itself as a nature, an essence, or a "whatness" which exists as the first and proper object of our human acts of understanding (identified as a *quidditas sive natura in materia cororalit existens*, "a "whatness" or nature existing within corporeal matter,"[10] because it is located within the data of our human experience and because our human cognition, our human intellects, also have an incarnate nature or form which distinguishes it from the operation of any other type of mind or intellect.[11] An immaterial form is received (*acceptae*) by an immaterial recipient which exists as our understanding (our human intellect),[12] in an immaterial or intellectual way which, in turn, explains why our understanding or intellect can be properly regarded as an immaterial, spiritual power which exists apart from material realities which exist beyond and outside of ourselves (outside of that which exists as the human intellectual soul).[13] Intelligible forms are apprehended from within

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art. 10, ad 2 (hereafter simply cited as *De Virtutibus*): "Habet homo a natura aptitudinem ad recipiendum," as quoted by Jan A. Aertsen, "Aquinas and the Human Desire for Knowledge," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79 no. 3 (Summer 2005): 430, n. 68.

7J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 24.

8*In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 8, q. 3, a. 2 sol, as quoted by Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 142: "understanding is a certain reception of an influence."

9*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2, ad 2.

10*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 84, a. 7, my translation. As Aquinas notes in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 88, a. 3, the first thing or first object which is known in the context of our present life is the essence of a material thing. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran & H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 597.

11*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 84, a. 7; q. 85, a. 8; q. q. 87, a. 2, ad 2; q. 87, a. 3; q. 88, a. 3.

12*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 68.

13Thomas Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 7, a. 10; trans. in three vols. as *On the Power of God* by the English Dominican Fathers (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1934) 3, p. 59 (hereafter cited as the "*De Potentia*"). While Aquinas does not deny that a positive relation exists between spirit

ourselves through a process of selection which, by an activity which transcends our acts of sensing, is able to separate material and intelligible components from each other.[14] The forms that are understood are not sensed or imagined.

The human mind, as a receptor, has a nature which is thus constituted by a pure unrestricted type of openness, an openness that is orientated toward form or intelligibility,[15] and this orientation is what is meant by our intellectual potency.[16] As that by which it is possible for us to become all things (*quo est omnia fieri*), the possible intellect is able to become all things in an orientation that is directed toward the being of all things in general, the totality of being or the totality of reality.[17] It is not limited to anything which only has temporal or spatial co-ordinates.[18] Hence, the proper object of the human intellect is to be distinguished from its final or formal object: being here as the formal object of our understanding, the formal object of our human intellects.[19] The latter object, the formal object, is

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and matter in our human acts of understanding (a positive relation which is to be understood in terms of an ongoing form of interaction), he also clearly distinguishes between material realities and intellectual or spiritual realities (sometimes referred to as "intelligences"). Material realities exist apart from intellectual or spiritual realities and, for this reason, it can be said that material reality exists in a way which is outside or which is external with respect to that which could exist as some type of intellectual reality. Minds, intellects, or understanding exists in terms of three different forms: whether human, angelic, and divine understanding. Cf. Serroul, p. 117.

14*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 85, a. 1, ad 5; a. 8; cf. q. 84, a. 7; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas*, 14, cited by Francis Selman, *Aspects of Aquinas* (Dublin: Veritas, 2005), p. 101.

15*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 1. Aquinas distinguishes here between knowing subjects and non-knowing subjects since non-knowing subjects possess only one form which is the inherent intelligibility that a non-knowing subject has as a particular kind of thing. But, a knowing subject is able to have other forms beyond the one which it already has. A knowing subject is able to have the forms of other things.

16*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 671-81; pp. 204-206.

17*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 7: "the intellect regards its object according to the common concept of being, because the possible intellect is "that by which it is possible to become all things," as quoted in Giovanni B. Sala, *Lonergan and Kant: Five Essays on Human Knowledge*, trans. Joseph Spoerl, ed. Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 145, n. 67; cf. Aertsen, p. 425 & n. 49.

18*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 681; *St. Thomas Aquinas Philosophical Texts*, trans. by Thomas Gilby (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 237, n. 1.

19*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 2; q. 87, a. 3, ad 1. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 98, 9: "the proper object of intellect [as intellect] is *intelligible being*, which includes all possible differences and species of being, since whatever can be, can be known." When speaking about the "Isomorphism of Thomist and Scientific Thought," in *Collection*, eds, Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 137, Bernard Lonergan notes that Aquinas distinguishes between the proper object of the human intellect and a second kind of object which is "being in its full sweep." In "Christ as Subject: A Reply," *Collection*, p. 177, the two objects are distinguished as, respectively, proper from formal. While our inquiry seeks to know the forms of all things, the forms of all things insofar as all things exist and possess being, our cognitive performance works with images to apprehend forms that are located within matter. Moving from proper objects to final objects requires an extrapolation that can transcend material conditions.

whatever can be understood (whatever possesses intelligibility) where here, by means of this type of orientation and because of it, human understanding already enjoys a relation which joins it to an intelligibly existing world, a world that is constituted by whatever can be understood.[20]

This transcendence accordingly explains why our human understanding exists as an incorporeal, subsistent principle: it is not limited by any acts or organs of sense which have their own finality, their own nature, orientation, and proper object.[21] Our human understanding is not tied to the functioning of any of our bodily organs in the way that our acts of sensing rely on the use of bodily means. As we have already noted, when sensed objects make too great of an impression on our sensing organs, these organs can be destroyed, and with their destruction, our acts of sensing. However, when, oppositely, our understanding receives intelligible objects that are fully intelligible, the plenitude of intelligibility does not destroy our understanding.[22] More is added to our understanding in a way which points to why the reliance of our understanding on our acts and organs of sensing does not restrict the scope of our inquiry, understood as a desire for an understanding about everything which somehow possibly exists.

The positive relation which exists between our acts of sensing, on the one hand, and our acts of understanding, on the other hand, cannot be used to allege that our understanding lacks a pure intellectual potentiality, a pure capacity to think about whatever is thinkable. While nothing is said in Aquinas explicitly about a direct correlation or a relation between the human mind or intellect and the substratum which exists as the human brain, the intentionality of our human understanding remains what it has always been as a desire that continually wishes to have and to receive an understanding of the meaning of the being of all existing things. While full attainment is always another matter, with respect to the issue of potentiality and because we speak about the potentiality of our human understanding, it remains that our human understanding is always seeking to move toward an understanding of all things.[23] "The power of understanding far exceeds...what we would expect to be the intrinsic capacity of the brain."[24] If, as a material component and substratum, the brain has a specific, special function, this could be the adverting to images and phantasms which Aquinas speaks about and which is so essential for us in eliciting acts of insight in our experience of understanding.[25]

20*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 681; p. 206; *Quaestio disputa De anima*, a. 1.

21*Summa Theologicae*, 1a, q. 75, a. 2. See David P. Lang, "Aquinas's Impediment Argument for the Spirituality of the Human Intellect," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 11 (2003): 107-111, where Lang speaks about how Aquinas understood the finality of the human intellect as distinct from that which belongs to our acts of sense which must rely on our bodily organs if we are to engage in operations that are proper only to our different acts of human sensing.

22*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 7, 687-688.

23*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 2. As Aquinas respectively cites Aristotle in the *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1 and q. 2, a. 2, the soul "in some way is all things," the soul is "in some manner, all things." See Aristotle, *De Anima*, 3, 4, 429a18, where Aristotle had noted that "everything is a possible object of thought." Through the activity of the intellect (specified here as the "agent intellect"), a knowledge of all things is potentially or virtually given to us. Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6.

24John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Clarendon Law Series, ed. H. L. A. Hart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), as quoted by Matthew C. Ogilvie, *Faith Seeking Understanding: The Functional Specialty, "Systematics," in Bernard Lonergan's Method in Theology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), p. 78.

25Selman, p. 101, citing *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 84, a. 7.

Given the reception of forms in our human cognitive consciousness, the occurrence of this reception through the construction of images that can trigger our acts of understanding in turn clearly points, in a most obvious way, to an active or a catalytic component in our human understanding which has been identified as *intellectus agens*: agent intellect,[26] or active intellect.[27] The agent intellect relates to our possible human intellect as an act of understanding would necessarily and normally precede the reception of an act of understanding.[28] Where, intellectually, the passive intellect is able to become all things (*potens omnia fieri*), in the same way however, through acts of understanding with respect to the data of sense, the active intellect is able to make all things (*potens omnia facere*).[29] Beyond the initial asking of questions, human inquiry, as an activity, encompasses a distinct set of activities which take an inquirer from initial experiences of sense toward later experiences of truth.[30] Not only does the human understanding receive in a passive way but it also acts in a proactive manner as a cause as for instance, in the first operation of the mind or intellect, it tries to grasp meanings within data by a process which first distinguishes and then separates a formal or an immaterial, universal component from other components which enjoy a purely material or accidental existence.[31]

Understanding occurs because of a differentiated process of dematerialization which leads to a kind of withdrawal from the life of the senses and the need to construct new images that are needed to trigger other, desired acts of understanding,[32] and this process of dematerialization is known as abstraction (*abstrahere*).[33] And so, for this reason, it is argued that the agent intellect is defined, at least initially, by an abstracting activity[34] which can distinguish intelligible components either as they exist apart from each other or as they exist as necessarily joined to each other.[35] If the meaning of a meaning exists as a function of a second meaning, both meanings need to be abstracted at the same time in one act. But, when the meaning of a meaning is not intrinsically related to any other meaning, we can abstract these different meanings independently of each other in different acts of understanding. As had Aquinas

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26*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 10, 728; p. 219; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 3. Gilby, in his *Philosophical Texts*, p. 237, n. 1, prefers to translate the *intellectus agens* of Aquinas as the factive intellect in order to point to the doing or the making which specifies the function of the agent intellect. It exists to "make knowable" by a process that raises what is sensed to that which is intelligible "which is then received and conceived by the *intellectus possibilis*."

27*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 9.

28*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 77, 3; *Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 12, a. 1.

29Crowe, "Practical Knowledge and Its Application," *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 53.

30*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 84, a. 6, ad 1: "For the light of agent intellect is needed by which we can know unchangeable truth in changeable things, and distinguish the things themselves from the [sensible] likenesses of things," as cited by Matthew Lamb, "Lonergan's Transpositions of Augustine and Aquinas: Exploratory Suggestions," *The Importance of Insight Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 20, n. 31.

31*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 4, ad 4.

32*Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 175, a. 4.

33*De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 6; *Quaestio disputata De anima*, 5; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 12, a. 4; q. 79, a. 4, ad 4; q. 85, a. 1, ad 3; ad 5; a. 8; cf. q. 84, a. 7; 3a, q. 9, a. 4; *CT*, c. 88; *Sentencia Libri De anima*, 2, 12, 377; 3, 10, 730; *Sententia super Physicam*, 1, 1, 1.

34*Summa Theologiae* Blackfriars, 1a, q. 79, a. 7.

35*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3; Bernard Lonergan, "The Notion of Structure," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 14 (1996): 118-122.

noted in one example that he gives amongst others,[36] a letter can be understood without there being any need to understand a syllable. As we look at a word consisting of letters and one or more syllables, the meaning of a letter can be abstracted without adverting to the meaning of a syllable, but the meaning of a syllable cannot be abstracted or grasped unless we attend to the meaning of the different letters which constitute a syllable. On the other hand however, other examples reveal a converse scenario where the meaning of an element is only understood if its relation to a greater whole is understood although, at other times, as has been already noted, understanding the meaning of a whole requires an understanding which necessarily includes the understanding of a constitutive part or unit.[37] Whether or not we must understand a whole in order to understand a part or a part in order to understand a whole depends on whether the meaning of a whole is a function of meaning as it exists in a part or whether

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36*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 7, 9, 1461; *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3.

37In the *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 7, 9, 1461 and the *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, Aquinas gives a number of other examples which are perhaps more persuasive. For instance, a foot cannot be properly understood unless we advert to what an animal is. In other words, to grasp or to abstract the meaning of a foot apart from any other bodily part, in the meaning that is grasped or abstracted, as we abstract the meaning of a foot, we must also understand or abstract the meaning of an animal. A foot is unintelligible (its meaning is ambiguous) apart from how it relates to a larger whole whose intelligibility is such that it relates how different parts fit and work together (as is also the case if we try to understand an eye apart from its existence in a socket or a finger that has been severed from a body since both items cannot be not properly understood if their relation to a larger whole is not adverted to and understood). Cf. Lonergan, "Notion of Structure," p. 120. So too, in the same way, snubness, as a quality, cannot be understood apart from its relation to the meaning of a nose. Cf. Bernard Lonergan, *The Incarnate Word*, unpublished manuscript translated 1989 by Charles C. Hefling, Jr. from the Latin of the *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Gregorian University Press *ad usum auditorum*, 1964), p. 142. Accidents, as accidental forms or operations, cannot be understood apart from their relation to a subject within which the accidents exist or inhere; accidents are defined as properties or acts which exist only as they are intrinsically related to something else. To cite a mathematical example, an acute angle cannot be understood apart from understanding a right angle; in order to understand acute angles, we must also understand what a right angle is (cf. *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 7, 9, 1465). Hence, when certain meanings are abstracted from the experience of any given data, they must be abstracted in a way which necessarily connects them to meanings that are more basic since the intelligibility of certain meanings necessarily relies or depends on certain other, more basic meanings. For the sake of understanding, in this species of abstraction, we cannot understand something unless our understanding includes our understanding of something else. As Lonergan paraphrases and quotes from Aquinas (cf. *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3), p. 118, "what is intrinsically ordered to something else 'cannot be understood apart from that other'." These examples all illustrate one species of relation or proportion that is found within abstraction when meanings are related to each other in a one sided, non-reciprocal way. In such a situation, while the meaning of one meaning depends on necessarily understanding a second meaning, the understanding of the second meaning does not necessarily depend on whether or not we have understood the first meaning. However, as we turn to Aquinas in the *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 9, 5, 1828-9, and as we read about how metaphysical principles are only understood in terms of how they interrelate with each other, we discover relations of mutual proportion which also exist as a differentiation within the abstracting powers of our human intellects. The form of a material thing cannot be understood apart from its union with matter (although the form of an immaterial thing can be understood apart from any union with matter). Potency stands to form as the organic body to the soul, the will to habitual

the meaning of a part is a function of meaning as it belongs to a whole. The required understanding grasps a meaning either in a part or in a whole.

Every other activity that is performed by the agent intellect in moving toward an understanding of anything is derived from abstraction.[38] However, to come to a better understanding of abstraction with respect to what it is in its own right, a useful distinction notes that the abstraction of a form from material conditions is not to be understood as a form of extraction or subtraction. By extraction, we remove something from its previous position or location and, by subtraction, we remove something which had belonged to something else.[39] We lessen a thing's reality. But, by abstraction, we apprehend a meaning by immaterially detaching and removing it. Abstraction occurs when, as an

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righteousness, the possible intellect to habitual knowledge, the ears to hearing, and an eye to sight. Cf. Lonergan, *Incarnate Word*, p. 140. So too, in the relation between form and act, "as sight stands to actually seeing, [the faculty of] hearing to actually hearing, habitual knowledge to actually understanding, habitual righteousness to actually willing rightly, soul to actually living,...form stands to act." In the dynamics of our human cognition, the same kind of proportionate relation exists between understanding and affirming and between the "what is it?" of inquiry and the "is it so?" of reflection. Cf. *Incarnate Word*, p. 140; "Notion of Structure," pp. 120-121. Relations of mutual proportion exist when, in the relation between two or more meanings, the meaning of one given meaning relies on how it is related to one or more other meanings and these other meanings are similarly only understood if the first meaning is understood. The terms and relations define each other in the context of one definition where meanings are implicitly related to each other in an inseparable manner. To cite an example, an apprehension of color exists in first potency through the eye; in first act through sight; and in second act through seeing. Potency, form, and act exist as metaphysical principles and so they always constitute the being of a concrete, material thing and no concrete, material thing is without them (*Incarnate Word*, p. 140; p. 159). In a similar way, even with respect to things that are physically separated from each other, relations of correspondence exist between conjugates or properties which exist as parts in a relation where "a part cannot be understood without a corresponding part" ("Notion of Structure," p. 120). In more technical terms, "the relative is not *understood* apart from its correlative" (Tyrrell, *Lonergan's Philosophy of God*, p. 103). Fatherhood, for instance, cannot be understood apart from sonhood and vice versa. However, as one attends to a second species of abstraction or a differentiation which exists within abstraction, what is not intrinsically ordered or related to something else, can be understood apart from the need to understand anything else. While this can happen in a unilateral or non-reciprocal fashion where, for instance, a letter can be understood without the need to understand a syllable or an animal can be understood apart from any need to understand a foot, this can also happen bilaterally or reciprocally. For instance, as Aquinas points out (*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3), "*whiteness* can be understood without *man* and vice versa" even if a given man's skin color should happen to be white. The whiteness admittedly exists as an accident but it is an accident with a meaning which can be understood apart from any need to understand what could be the generic nature or meaning of what it means to be a man.

38*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 51, a. 1; *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4: "Indemonstrable principles of demonstration, such as 'every whole is greater than its part,' and similar principles...and also the first conceptions of intellect, such as being and one, and others of that kind (are known through the light of agent intellect)...by this light indeed nothing is made manifest to us except insofar as through it phantasms are made intelligible in act," quoted by Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 16, n. 51; cf. Aertsen, pp. 426-427 & n. 55.

39Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 22.

efficient cause, our agent intellect immaterializes the materials of sense and imagination to appropriate or to assimilate a form to itself (which is then received in the possible intellect) and which is the product or term of this process of immaterialization.[40] Material co-ordinates are subtracted or excised, and the result is a form or a meaning which transcends material conditions and co-ordinates.[41] Through or in one act, that which is understood becomes one or identical with that which understands.[42] Our human understanding grasps a universal significance, a universal meaning, which, at the same time, elevates us in our human understanding of it. A meaning is no longer tied to material co-ordinates. It ceases to be determined or conditioned by them. While this meaning which is discovered, admittedly, always remains within a set of data, now it has become intelligible to us in our understanding and, through becoming intelligible and understandable, it has passed into the intelligibility of our minds (our

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40*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 9, 739; p. 221; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 77, 2-3; pp. 246-247; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1: "knowledge is by assimilation"; similarly, in the *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1: "all knowing is produced by an assimilation of the knower to the thing known, so that assimilation is said to be the cause of knowledge." In "Scotus on the object of understanding," p. 4, and "Scotus on concepts," p. 3, Pini summarizes Aristotle's thesis that, in knowing, an object is known through an intellectual or immaterial assimilation that joins a knower with an object known. According to what Aristotle says in his *De anima*, 3, 4, 430a3-5; 8, 432b-20-23, 431b29-432a1, knowing occurs by identity in the relation between a knower and an object that is known. Through inquiry and the cooperation between our possible and agent intellects, we or the human mind is able to exist in all the things that it knows although extramental things only exist within a knowing intellect through a form which the mind has appropriated and brought into itself.

41In the *Divine Initiative*, p. 9, J. Michael Stebbins uses Lonergan's analysis of abstraction in Aquinas to give a more ample summary about what happens in abstraction.

> For when we inquire, we do not give equal weight to all of the data associated with the object of our inquiry; spontaneously we anticipate that certain elements of the data will prove relevant to an explanation, and others superfluous. Hence forming a phantasm involves schematization: we select elements of the data that seem suggestive of an explanation and try out various arrangements of them in the hope of finding just those elements and just that arrangement which will provide the key to understanding.

42*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 6; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 98, 19. As Aquinas goes on to note in paragraph 20 (2, p. 336), he cannot accept Plato's thesis that human understanding is to be understood as a kind of contact where "understanding is effected through the contact of the intellect with the intelligible thing." The Platonist position employs a set of metaphors which suggest that human cognition is to be understood on the basis of analogies that are grounded in categories drawn from our sense experience and how our sense experience happens or occurs. Understanding is a kind of touch, or it is an overlap of one thing by another, or it is the containing of one thing by another. On this model, understanding is viewed as a form of "picture thinking." Knowing occurs by a confrontation where "everything that is known, is known inasmuch as it is an *object*" although, "for Aristotle, everything that is known, is known inasmuch as it is *in act*." Cf. Frederick G. Lawrence, "The Unknown 20th Century Hermeneutic Revolution: Jerusalem and Athens in Lonergan's Integral Hermeneutics," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy & Education* vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (2008): 95. And so, if understanding is understood not as "picture thinking" but as a form of immaterial assimilation, a theory of cognition emerges which stands apart. It is "intellectualist." Understanding is primarily an

understanding) to enrich it with meanings that had not been previously experienced and known. As a consequence of this transition, an immanently existing meaning within data undergoes a form of self-transcendence as it passes into the minds and the understanding of inquiring knowers to become a basis for later activities.[43] A new union emerges between the intelligibility of our minds and understanding and the intelligibility which this same mind has discovered within a given set of data. And, as a result of this new union, a greater union begins to build and to grow between what a human person knows and the knowing which a human person experiences.

As our acts of understanding gradually become habitual for us in an ongoing process of finding and learning, in seeking to learn something that is quite new and unfamiliar, as would be learners, we always try to use and find new images to order to construct a phantasm that will trigger a novel and an unfamiliar act of understanding. Until an understanding comes, we are not sure if it will come, or how we will get it. In this context, we can only continue to grope about and to hope that a possibly fruitful image will eventually make its presence known. However, once an understanding comes, as learners, we can become expert or an authority within a given subject as single acts of understanding add up to produce an understanding of things which is no longer occasional but which is now habitual.[44] A habitual understanding accordingly creates a new context for any additional learning for us since the subsequent learning which follows becomes more of an application of what is already known than an activity that seeks to uncover any wholly new meanings. From the standpoint of our newly acquired habitual understanding, as knowers, we know how to deal with a particular type of problem in an expeditious manner because this understanding is no longer purely potential nor is it purely actual.[45] It is not purely potential since, in the storehouse of our possible intellect and understanding, insights or forms have already accumulated to reveal how much we already know about a particular subject. In any case, as a general principle, whenever any kind of learning occurs, an understanding of what had not been previously understood always proceeds from an understanding of things that we already have,[46] and so, from this plenum, we draw on past, remembered experiences of understanding either to construct new phantasms that are needed to join and to apply our presently existing knowledge to the given external data of sense,[47] or we construct new phantasms which can more easily suggest the additional insights that are now needed if we are to deal with variations in subsequent problems and difficulties as these arise. For any increments in our understanding, even for any increments that augment our habitual understanding, new phantasms or images are always needed,[48] although, on the other hand, the understanding which comes emerges in a far less haphazard manner because of a

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act of the intellect, an act of the mind (and not an act of sensing). However, on the basis of Plato's understanding of human cognition, a tradition in the history of philosophy can be outlined in a general theory of epistemology that is essentially empiricist and which is ultimately based on a presumed correspondence which is alleged to exist between our human cognition and a thinking which only works with pictures and symbols and which is content with only the meanings that pictures and symbols immediately suggest and imply.

43*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 4: "a knower uses a universal meaning both as a thing known and as a medium of knowing," as cited in Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 593.

44Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 42.

45*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 74, 8-17; *De Veritate*, q. 19, a. 1; *Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 8, 700-704.

46*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 3.

47*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 84, a. 7.

48*Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 2, ad 5; *De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 2, ad 7 (1ae ser.).

routine or a disposition which has formed to construct a mental or an intellectual habit which possesses a stability or a fixity that is typical of habits in general.[49] Since habitual understanding serves as a basis which accelerates the achievement of new, needed, subsidiary insights, its incompleteness explains why it does not exist as fully actual understanding. It enjoys as intermediate status and so, in every transition, as our habitual knowing shifts into our actual knowing, a given habit is reduced to a new condition of act.[50]

However, in speaking about how, as a power of analysis, the reasoning of our agent intellect uses images to grasp meanings, it has to be admitted that, in moving from a set of data which potentially possesses meaning (or which already has some meaning) toward well reasoned, apprehended conclusions which grasp the meaning of a meaning that is to be understood, the reasoning process necessarily employs a structure or a form of its own which consists of essential conditions which must be met if, in the movement toward our later understanding and knowledge, objects are to be related to each other in ways that reveal intelligibly existing laws and which can relate orders of law with each other in an intelligible way.[51] To our reasoning belongs intrinsically rational operations if the business of our reasoning from data and images is to proceed in an intelligent, wise manner. A basic set of principles or laws methodologically grounds how our reasoning occurs and, so, the foundational character of these prime principles or laws explains why they are known as universal or as first principles (*prima principia*), which are known and accepted by all of us as we try and move toward a knowledge of anything.[52]

These principles include (1) "common notions"[53] (variously cited as "first conceptions of the intellect"[54] or as "common conceptions"[55]) which simply refer to predicates or attributes which stand on

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49*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 87, a. 2.

50*Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 11, a. 5, ad 2.

51Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 47.

52*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 2, 1, 277; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 60, a. 2; q. 79, a. 8; 1a2ae, q. 63, a. 1; q. 94, a. 4. Citing Crowe's translation (*Three Thomist Studies*, p. 39, n. 7) of the relevant text in the *Summa Theologiae*, q. 63, a. 1: "inherent in human reason are certain naturally known [*naturaliter cognitum*] principles both of things to know and of things to do." Cf. Martin Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason: A Thomist View of Moral Autonomy*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 268; p. 271 & n. 39. On the basis of naturally known principles, other things can be known through the questions that we asks or through any instruction that we might receive from a teacher. Cf. *Quaestiones quodlibetales*, 8, q. 2, a. 2, as cited by Rhonheimer, p. 296, n. 40; *De Veritate*, q. 11, aa. 1-2; *Sentencia Libri De anima*, 2, 11, 372; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 60, a. 2; q. 117, a. 1.

53*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 4; 2, p. 1011; cf. q. 94, a. 2; *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

54*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4; p. 76.

55*Summa Theologiae* Blackfriars, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 4; p. 88. Please note that Aquinas's terminology is not fixed or constant. Depending on the context, a word or phrase is used to signify a particular idea or meaning but, as the context changes, the words and phrases change even if the intended meaning remains the same. As Lonergan notes in *Phenomenology and Logic: The Boston College Lectures on Mathematical Logic and Existentialism*, ed. Philip J. McShane (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 344, Aquinas wrote for different groups of readers. The *Summa Contra Gentiles*, for instance, is meant for persons who were cultured Aristotelians while his *Quaestiones disputatae* was for persons who had had scholastic training, a scholastic intellectual

their own (but which are needed by us for our reasoning in order to make distinctions between one thing and another in order to have later understanding and knowledge); and (2) "judgments"[56] or "axioms"[57] (*dignitates*) which elicit a predicate from a subject in order to aver or to affirm a truth about the nature of our understanding. Common notions are instanced by *being*, *one*, and *good* although these are not the only examples which exist.[58] As a common notion for instance, *being* (*ens*) exists as the first, primary, and most basic of all our notions since the object of our human understanding as understanding is knowledge about what could be the being of a given thing or a cause.[59] In moving toward an understanding and knowledge of any given reality, a question about being implicitly informs and guides the meaning of any questions that we are asking.[60]

> *Being*, as an object of inquiry and understanding, exists as the most formal and the most general of any possible category.[61] *Being* refers to everything that can be known by us through our human understanding and intellect.[62] It is its natural object where everything that is known presents itself as an instance of being. From *being*, we move toward a derivative knowledge of all other first principles. From *being* (*ens*) and *not-being* (*non ens*) comes the principle of non-contradiction, the most basic axiomatic first principle[63] which avers that "contradictories are not true simultaneously."[64] "The same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time."[65] *Non est simul affirmare et negare*.[66]

From this principle of being and non-contradiction, all other axioms emerge. Examples include "every

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formation.

56*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1 as quoted by Gilby, p. 378, n. 1091.

57*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1; cf *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2.

58*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2; *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4.

59*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 4, 6, 605; 11, 5, 2211; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 13, a. 11, ad 2; 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2. In his "St. Thomas and the Isomorphism of Human Knowing and its Proper Object," *Three Thomist Studies*, pp. 229-230, Crowe cites a number of texts from Aquinas to argue that Aquinas identifies *being* as the first, primary, and natural object of the intellect: *De Veritate*, q. 1, a. 1; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 83, 31; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 5, a. 2; and 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2. Being is implicitly sought by our human inquiry as this inquiry begins to ask questions about anything although knowledge about being as a fundamental category or concept is a product of our subsequent reflection on the activity which is the performance and the experience of our human inquiry. It should also be noted, however, that, in Aquinas, being is to be also understood as "the most common first effect and more intimate than all other effects." Cf. *De Potentia*, q. 3, a. 7; 1, p. 132.

60*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2.

61*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 7, a. 1.

62*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 83, 31.

63*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 65, a. 2.

64*In 1 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3.

65*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2; 2, p. 1009; 2a2ae, q. 1, a. 7; 3, p. 1168; cf. 3a, q. 18, a. 6; *On the Eternity of the World against the Grumblers*, as cited by Mary T. Clark, *An Aquinas Reader* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 179.

66Crowe, "Applying Universals to the Particular," *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 7.

whole is greater than its parts"[67] and "things equal to one and the same are equal to one another."[68] All together, from these first principles, all else follows within our reasoning although, from these general principles, particular conclusions cannot be reached.[69] Distinct inquiries must invoke distinct, less general principles (which are not common to every kind of inquiry) and, in conjunction with employing these principles, we always need to continue to abstract forms which explain why something is a particular kind of thing or why events occur in the way that they do.[70] In moving thus from a knowledge of general principles to a knowledge of particular forms and species (*species specialissima*, species specific to a high degree), as we have been noting, our human cognition grows in perfection as it assumes a determination (as it grows in this specificity).[71] An order of determination (an *ordo determinandi*) designates the orientation of our human cognition as it moves from imperfect to perfect acts of knowing by taking us, as knowers or as potential knowers, through inquiries, discoveries, and demonstrations that, in themselves, in time become, for us, more precise and specific.[72]

Our reasoning thus moves toward our understanding partly because of a prior operative understanding of things which already exists and which is grounded in a natural, self-evident knowledge of our first principles. "Since movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest, in the same way, [our] human reasoning, in the order of inquiry and discovery, proceeds from certain truths simply understood, i.e., first principles."[73] This prior understanding from which later

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67To express this principle in a way which points better to its intrinsic meaning or rationality, we can say that "the whole thing is larger than its parts - otherwise it would be the whole thing and not the whole thing."

68*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2. In *Verbum*, p. 69, Lonergan argues that Aquinas never exhaustively listed all of the self-evident naturally known principles that are basic to our human cognition but, instead, he was content to employ a number of favorite examples. However, according to a commentary by Joseph Bernhart, *Thomas von Aquino, Summe der Theologie*, Bd1: Gott und Schöpfung (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1985), pp. lvii-lix, a number of first principles can be derived from what Aquinas teaches when he discusses a number of different topics: for instance, a) there is no contingent effect without causality; b) nothing can be the cause of itself - otherwise it would be at once causality and effect (cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 22, 6); and c) what is infinite, cannot be grasped through a finite intellect. See also W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 20-23, on what he has to say about the principle of sufficient reason as, implicitly, this can be derived from Aquinas. According to a formulation that Clarke proposes: "Every being has the *sufficient reason* for its existence (i.e., the adequate ground or basis in existence for its intelligibility) either in itself and in another."

69*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 33, a. 1; *In Aristotelis libros Posteriorum analyticorum*, 1, 43, 6, quoted by Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 26.

70*In Aristotelis libros Posteriorum analyticorum*, 1, 3, 1; 1, 41, 12, quoted by Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 27.

71*De Veritate*, q. 3, a. 3; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 85, a. 3.

72Edmund Dolan, "Resolution and Composition in Speculative and Practical Discourse," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 6 (1950), p. 29, citing Aquinas, *In I Meteorologicorum*, lect. 1, n. 1.

73*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 8, my translation. See Aristotle's explanation in the *Topics*, 100a30-100b20, as translated by W. A. Pickard in the *Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, p. 167.

understanding moves thus explains why our human understanding moves from act to act, or from perfection to perfection on the basis of a perfection (an existing prior act of understanding) that we already haave and which is immediately given to our cognitive human consciousness (even if a consciousness of first principles is to be sharply distinguished from correctly understanding and knowing what exactly these principles are and how they exist).[74] Since, then, in trying to understand anything, our human cognition always necessarily works from a prior inchoate knowledge of first principles, by a process that seeks to explicate what is already somehow known in an implicit fashion, our human understanding always works through an already existing inclination, disposition, or orientation which is already given to us and which is not acquired by any subsequent human effort nor is it infused by any external agent that is acting on us from without.[75] The habit in question exists here as a purely natural intellectual habit which is commonly referred to as the habit of first principles (as

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> Things are true and primitive which are convincing on the strength not of anything else but through themselves; for in regard to the first principles of science it is improper to ask any further for the why and wherefore of them; each of the first principles should command assent in and by itself.

As Michael P. Maxwell Jr. explains these matters in his "Lonergan's Critique of Aristotle's Notion of Science," *Lonergan Workshop: Lonergan's Openness: Polymorphism, Postmodernism, and Religion*, vol. 18, ed. Fred Lawrence (Boston: Lonergan Institute, 2005), p. 169, a scientific explanation is self-evidently true when its cited reasons "'contain' or 'establish' the fulfillment of their own conditions for being true."

74*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 2, 11, 372.

75Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 69. In Rhonheimer's analysis of Aquinas in a context which looks at the difference between human and angelic understanding (*Natural Law and Practical Reason*, pp. 270-271), because an angel immediately understands things by knowing first principles and so does not have to reason toward any linked conclusions, it can be said that, strictly speaking, in its proper meaning and definition, understanding is the "natural apprehension of first principles." Everything is immediately understood in the light of first principles. And so, with respect to our human reason, in the discursive human reasoning which seeks understanding, by the inquires that we each undertake, the common object is an explicit knowledge of what is already somehow contained in first principles that are already known. In first principles, conclusions are already implied by our basic premisses although these connections or conclusions, for human beings, are not clearly known or established in our human minds and understanding unless our human reasoning first begins to engage in inquiries which can possibly lead to an understanding of some kind that we are seeking. Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 12.

habitus principiorum),[76] or as the habit of intellect (sometimes simply referred to as *intellectus*).[77] Other designations in Aquinas speak about the "understanding of principles" (the *intellectus principiorum*),[78] or the "*habitus* of indemonstrable principles."[79] From first principles come, for instance, all the syllogisms of our deductive logic.[80] However, through these same first principles, functioning as a medium or means, all of our reasoning moves toward understanding in a logic of discovery which tries to come to more specific conclusions about matters that have yet to be fully or adequately known.[81] The context is the ongoing activity of us, as agent intellects, as we ask new questions and as we seek to abstract new forms from images.[82] Our human reasoning is not to be equated with purely deductive logical procedures but with a combination of activities that is sometimes inductive and sometimes deductive.[83]

76*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 58, a. 3. The naturalness or spontaneity of our human inquiry as it is coupled with experiences of understanding which are already operative within our conscious life as human subjects together explain why the resulting dynamism (which refers to the natural light of our human reason) is to be understood as a kind of first principle within our human cognition. First principles of sense and intellect both function as points of origin within our human cognition. Each stands on a foundation which is primary. Any attempt to produce probative arguments which could lead us to a first principle of sense or to a first principle of the intellect would only presuppose or employ the principle that, allegedly, we are arguing towards. First principles of sense, first principles of intellect, and the natural light of human reason each function as a principle or point of origin within our human cognition although each functions with the other two in a distinctive manner. Cf. Lonergan, *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 603.

77*De Veritate,* q. 16, a. 1; *Quaestio disputata De anima*, 5; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 51, a. 1. Please note with respect to the meaning of *intellectus* that, as Stebbins notes in the *Divine Initiative*, p. 308, n. 74, Aquinas uses *intellectus* at different times to mean either the "intellect as a whole" (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 1, ad 1) or as the "*habitus principiorum*, the grasp of the first principles of demonstration" (cf. *De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 15). The context indicates which is which.

78*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 12.

79*Quaestio disputata De anima*, 5.

80*In Aristotelis libros Posteriorum analyticorum*, 2, 20, cited by Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 17.

81*Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 2, 1, 277; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 68, a. 4: "...reason is speculative and practical: in either one there is to be found an *apprehension of the truth that pertains to discovery*, and a judgment about the truth," as cited by Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 292, n. 25.

82. In collating and analyzing a number of texts taken from Aquinas, *Three Thomist Studies*, pp. 19-22, Crowe argues that, in Aquinas, human reasoning is not to be equated with deduction since, in employing first principles in our reasoning, a potential knower must also continue to abstract forms from sense in an activity which, in our human cognition, is the proper responsibility of our agent intellects. In *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 117, a. 1, Aquinas speaks about a potential knower who engages in further research as he or she initially applies first principles to the data of human sense.

> When anyone applies these universal principles to certain particular things, the memory of experience of which he acquires through the senses; then by his own research advancing from the known to the unknown, he obtains knowledge of what he knew not before.

83Cf. Niamh Middleton, "Aquinas, the Enlightenment and Darwin," *New Blackfriars* 86 no.

First principles, through their specificity, accordingly give a more concrete form to the intellectual light that is proper to us when we refer to our acts of questioning and understanding which can be summarized in terms which refer to the life of our intellects. However, first principles and agent intellects are not to be confused with each other since first principles exist as tools of analysis through which our human reasoning works.[84] It is only later that our human reasoning is later able to identify any of these first principles through an introspective form of analysis which arises when we or our agent intellect begins to question itself and the order of its own procedures. First principles present themselves as self-evident to us in inquiry as our inquiry is brought to bear on the data of our human consciousness since our knowledge of these principles does not arise from any inference that we might make that is based on knowing something which is other than the date of our human consciousness since first principles, precisely because they exist as first principles – they exist in order to move us toward a knowledge of all other objects.[85] Within our cognition, as instrumental causes, these first principles mediate a subsequent knowledge of everything else to us in our human consciousness. But, in marked contrast to any form of subsequent, mediated knowledge, our self-evident first principles are immediately experienced by us as knowers through a direct correlation which links us as knowers with the data of our cognitive experience, data which have been formed by an awakened consciousness that has turned toward itself in self-inquiry as we are engaged in other types and forms of inquiry. The basis of this consciousness that shifts into our awareness of self (our self-awareness), an awareness which desires knowledge of itself, is an implicit cognitive sense or consciousness which already belongs to us as human questioners and knowers and which is immediately given to us in the consciousness which we each have knowing, inquiring human subjects. Full knowledge of first principles only subsequently emerges through a form of self-understanding which occurs as we investigate and understand our consciousness through acts of understanding that lead us toward a knowledge of first principles.[86] Simply stated, "what is first for us is not first in itself"[87] and, conversely, "what is first in itself will not be first for us."[88] Only as our self-inquiry can patiently unfold is it able to identify a number of fixed modes or patterns which are endemic to us with respect to the structure of our human reasoning,[89] giving to our reasoning a heuristic orientation that can move our

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1004 (July 2005): 446. In arguing that Aquinas's understanding of human reason is not limited to a view which regards our human reason as some kind of cipher or calculator, Middleton quotes Richard Gula who argues in his *Reason Informed By Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 224-225, that Aquinas's understanding of human reason "entails the totality of the human tendency to want to know the whole of reality and come to the truth. This sense of reason includes observation and research, intuition, affection, common sense, and an aesthetic sense in an effort to know human reality in all its aspects."

84*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 3; *Quaestio disputata De anima*, 5.

85*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 57, a. 2.

86*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 66, a. 5, ad 4.

87Frederick E. Crowe, "Rethinking God-With-Us: Categories from Lonergan," *Science et Esprit* 51, no. 2 (1989): 173, quoted by Leo Serroul, "Lonergan and Teilhard on the Mystical Body of Christ: A Dialogue of Categories," (paper presented at the Lonergan Workshop, Boston College, Boston, June 21, 2006), p. 6.

88Crowe, "Son and Spirit: Tension in the Divine Missions?," *Appropriating the Lonergan Idea*, p. 309, as cited by Serroul, "Lonergan and Teilhard," p. 6.

89*De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 2. The necessity of self-inquiry accordingly reveals how it can be properly argued that the agent intellect functions as a cause with respect to first principles. Its activity

understanding from present, prior experiences of sensing and understanding toward newer, later experiences of understanding that grasp additional meanings and significances.

Citing one instance which reveals how self-evident cognitive principles are related to our human nature, the axiom which says that "every whole is greater than its parts" is, in one sense, immediately known to us as a self-evident truth as soon as the meanings of whole and part are both grasped in terms of what each means and how they each relate to each other.[90] The truth of these truths appears to be self-evident (known through itself, *per se notum*) since, in analytic assertions, predicates necessarily exist within the terms signifying the forms or the essences of subjects and not outside or beyond them in a way that would try to refer to the being of some other subject or thing.[91] "Any proposition is said to be self-evident in itself, if its predicate is contained in the notion of the subject."[92] If, in proof, we were to try to offer a contrary argument, a performative self-contradiction would immediately result.

However, with this first principle and with all other first principles (whether these exist as axioms or as common notions), the self-evidential meaning of these terms is only properly grasped if it adverts to examples or to illustrations that are taken from the abstractions of our agent intellect as we try to work with phantasms in order to grasp the meaning of imminently existing forms.[93] To grasp and correctly

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necessarily precedes the actuation of any first principle (whether as a habit or as an act) since, without the posing of any question by us, our human understanding is unable to discover its own powers and what it is able to do. Cf. *Quaestio disputata De anima*, 5. As we grow in awareness of the existence of first principles within our minds (our understanding), we can begin to employ them in a far more vigorous fashion and the result is a more rapid growth in our understanding and knowledge of many other things. Cf. William A. Mathews, *Lonergan's Quest: A Study of Desire in the Authoring of Insight* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 63, citing Hoenen, "De Origine Primorum Principiorum Scientiae," *Gregorianium* 14 (1933): 166-168. Matthews argues that, in his disputed questions, Aquinas had "argued that the agent intellect, the capacity to question, must exist prior to and be the cause of both the habit and the act of the first principles in the possible intellect."

90*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 2, a. 1; 1a2ae, q. 51, a. 1; *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4; p. 76.

91*Peri Hermeneias*, 1, 13, 3; *In Aristotelis libros Posteriorum analyticorum*, 1, 10; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 17, a. 3, ad 2.

92*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 94, a. 2; *Scriptum super libros sententiarum*,1.3.1.2c, cited by William E. Murnion, "The Meaning and Import of Aquinas's Philosophy of Mind," (paper presented at the Second International Lonergan Workshop, Regis College, Toronto, August 1-6, 2004), p. 19.

93*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 15; q.10, a. 13; q.11, a. 1; *Quaestio disputata De anima*, 5; *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, 2, 1, 285. When speaking about how first principles originate in our human cognition, on p. 17, in *Three Thomist Studies*, Crowe cites an argument that Aquinas had elaborated early on in the *Sentences* and to which he refers in a number of later texts. Universals are grasped in a context that begins with sensations. Quoting Aquinas (*In 3 Scriptum super libros sententiarum*, d. 14, a. 3, sol. 3):

> From many sensations there results one memory, and from many memories there results one element of experience, and from many elements of experience there results one universal principle, from which other items many be deducted; and in this way science is acquired, as is said in the beginning of the *Metaphysics* and at the end

understand the meaning of any naturally existing first principle, we must continue to work with understandings that have come to us from grasping meanings within phantasms or images although it is to be noted however that this abstractive, abstracting activity is not to be understood as a cognitive cause in the same manner that it usually functions as a cognitive cause in our human cognition. To come to an adequate knowledge of first principles, any datum of sense will do. Any will suffice.[94] None is more apt for us than another with respect to an act of understanding that can reveal the true meaning of a first principle since the object of our understanding here is not simply or merely an essence or a form that is embedded within a given set of material conditions (a first principle being not a union of form and matter which constitutes a given essence) but an non-incarnate form that exists within the understanding of our minds and which is common to all of our acts of understanding whenever and as they occur. With respect then to the meaning of "whole" and "part," these terms are only understood thus if we grasp what "whole" means and what "part" means,[95] and to understand these meanings, we must work with "intelligible species [that are] received from phantasms."[96] In the end and ultimately, nothing is self-evident without an accompanying understanding which continues to work with sensed, imagined images. First principles are "immediately conceived once the intellect acts upon its objects [that are] mediated by sense images" and so, "in this sense our knowledge of...first principles is dependent on the senses."[97] Our understanding, the human intellect, always functions as an embodied type of intellect.[98]

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of the *Posterior Analytics*.

94Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 69.

95*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 66, a. 5, ad 4.

96*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 51, a. 1, my translation; cf. *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4.

97Aertsen, p. 427.

98With respect to the embodied character of our human understanding and how anyone moves to self-knowledge of first principles, it is to be noted that, in the *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 47, a. 15, Aquinas distinguishes between primary universal principles and other universal principles which can be referred to as secondary universal principles. It is said that primary universal principles are known "naturally" (*naturaliter nota*) while the other universal principles (the secondary universal principles) are known in a way which is natural in a different way: either by requiring "discovery through experience, or through teaching" (*per inventionem secondum viam experimenti, vel per disciplinam*). Cf. *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1. Through personal inquiry and discovery, or through some form of instruction which can also occur through some form of revelation, our human knowing is actualized as we move from what is potentially contained in first principles to what is explicitly contained in conclusions that are given to us in secondary principles. Cf. Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 303, n. 68.

In trying to account in cognitional terms for the ramifications of this difference between primary and secondary principles, it has to be admitted, as an initial consideration, that an inchoate consciousness of first principles is not a knowledge of first principles. Persons apply the meaning of first principles without fully knowing what this meaning consists of. However, in moving toward self-knowledge, primary first principles are more easily known than secondary first principles. Insight into phantasm is always needed as a catalyst but the greater obviousness of primary first principles sets them apart from other first principles which require a form of analysis that is more recondite, an inquiry which perhaps must invoke the authority of primary first principles if secondary first principles are to be known.

However, on the other hand, our human intellect *purely as an intellect or understanding* possesses a structure or a form that is endemic to the life of any intellect or understanding and so, to the degree that our self-understanding seeks to identify components that are purely intellectual or formal, by the same degree we will identify a nature which is constituted by forms that are known as first principles which belong to all intellects or minds whether they exist in an embodied way or not. First principles perennially inform the nature of every kind of mind or intellect (all acts of understanding) and so, from the nature of intelligence or understanding as such as an act or operation, as it manifests its activity in any of our acts of cognition, a basic set of first principles is revealed in a way which is essentially proper and constitutive of it. However, because our kind of understanding works with phantasms in order to move toward acts of understanding which are suggested by the kind of causality which belongs to the apt imagery of phantasms, as knowers, we must also speak about the meaning and proper validity of first principles which are not common to all acts of understanding but which are common to acts and activities as these inform the conduct of our human inquiry within a given discipline or science (*scientia*).[99] Images continue to be apt in their own way and so, as a consequence, this requirement highlights or it re-emphasizes, for us, the strategic importance of abstraction in the manner of our human cognition and the kind of role which must be played by us as agent intellects as we work with images and phantasms to move toward an understanding or an apprehension of some kind of previously unknown form or meaning.[100]

However, with respect to the first principles that are common to all of our acts of human understanding and which belong to all minds and which exist in all minds in all acts of understanding, because these first principles are fixed and invariant, this suggests to us that the workings of our human understanding are related to the workings of all other kinds of understanding, divine understanding most especially (in the wake of its prominence, goodness, and excellence). Through first principles, the natural light of our human inquiry and our acts of reasoning participate in an understanding which preeminently belongs to God since these same principles exist within God's understanding as "eternal reasons," as *rationes aeternae*,[101] as truths that never vary or change.[102] They exist in an essentially uncreated way. Hence, they exist as divine things, as divine realities. Thus, as, with God, since as human beings we share in the same set of first principles which are basic to understanding in general as an activity and actuality (wherever it is, happens, or occurs), it can be argued that while "what absolutely is prior *quoad nos* [in regard to us] is our intellectual light, by which the data of experience are rendered intelligible" on the other hand however, "what absolutely is prior *quoad se* [in regard to itself] is the Light of divine understanding, which causes substances [or the being of things] to exist."[103]

99Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 69.

100*Summa Theologiae*, 3a, q. 9, a. 4, ad 2. In *Verbum*, p. 69, Lonergan argues that the principle of inverse squares is a first principle in mathematics that cannot be grasped by employing any kind of image whatsoever. We need a particular kind of image which is an image of spatial extension. No other kind of image will do. Hence, for coming to a knowledge of secondary first principles, we or our agent intellects must work with images and phantasms to find an image or phantasm that will trigger an understanding which grasps the meaning of a principle.

101*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 47, 7; p. 161; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 84, a. 5; 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 2.

102*De Veritate*, q. 10, a. 6, ad 6; q. 11, a. 1, ad 13; cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 3, ad 1; q. 93, a. 2.

103Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 307, n. 59.

Created understanding, in its operations, participates in both the activity and the being of uncreated understanding,[104] an understanding which only exists in God and which is to be identified with who God is and how God exists.

The self-evident character of first principles accordingly reveals an intrinsic necessity or a compulsion within our mental operations that is informed by first principles since, with respect to all first principles, no mind or no thinking subject is able to think without employing them, without submitting to their actuality, to their guidance, rule, and direction. No other way exists by which we or anything other can think if, by thinking, we think about a means which leads to understanding. A basic, innate set of principles must always be invoked if our understanding is to possess a rationality that is truly

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104*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 12, a. 11, ad 3; q. 79, a. 4. See *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 71, a. 6, ad 4 and q. 91, a. 2, ad 1 where Aquinas speaks about how the natural law which exists in the created structure of human reason exists primarily as a participation in God's eternal law. As Rhonheimer speaks of it in his *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 226: "natural law is not different from the eternal law" but it "is the eternal law *as participated by man*." By way of participation, God's eternal law exists within the created structure of our human reason through every actuation of natural law which occurs whenever our human reason functions in a reasonable and rational way. Natural law expresses and realizes God's eternal law. It functions as an order of secondary causality. The same point is made less explicitly in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 90, a. 3, ad 1 when Aquinas speaks about how laws can exist in a person in two different ways. A person can be a source of laws as a lawgiver although, at the same time, the same person can participate in the law of another through a receptivity which suggests the goodness and the value of obedience. In the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 2, Aquinas goes on to speak of natural law as something that has been imprinted or impressed by an eternal law which exists fully only in God. Similarly, in 1a2ae, q. 93, a. 5, by a divine imprinting, God has impressed "on the whole of nature the principles of its proper actions." All natural actions and movements are subjected to the requirements of God's eternal law even as this subjection is expressed in different ways or in different modes.

In talking, for instance, about our human understanding as a created divine impression, it is accordingly noted by Aquinas (in the *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 88, a. 3, ad 1) that "the light of our understanding [*lumen intellectus nostri*], whether natural or gratuitous, is nothing else than the impression of first truth [*impressio veritatis primae*] upon it." Cf. Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 263. Our human understanding participates in divine understanding whereby "from one first truth, many truths result in human minds." Cf. Rhonheimer, p. 263, citing Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*. First principles basic to human understanding, which can be known through our self-reflection and self-understanding, reveal a likeness or a similitude of our human understanding to the "first Truth" or, in other words, the first principles which exist in God's understanding. However, this participation in God's understanding does not occur immediately in God (where all truths would be known in a first truth) but through the mediation of a created image which refers to our created human understanding that has been made in the image (*imago*) of God's divine understanding in the operations which it performs and does.

With respect to the question of passive and active participations in God's eternal law, a passive participation is expressed through what natural inclinations already exist in the life and being of created things, given the different forms or species which exist among created things and how natural inclinations are accordingly directed towards an order of "proper acts and ends" (*ad debitum actum et*

proper to it. While, on the one hand, contingent propositions can be denied without risk of denying the truth of any first principle, demonstrable propositions that can be proved by referring to apprehensions of evidence that point to the truth of a given demonstrable proposition are so connected to basic, first principles that it is impossible to deny the truth of a provable, demonstrable proposition without also denying the truth of one or more first principles that cannot be denied without risk of contradiction.[105] If conclusions are untrue, first principles would have to be untrue.[106] Hence, conclusions that are demonstrated from first principles are to be held with a kind of assent and belief which is certain.[107] Any conclusion that follows with necessity is to be accepted in its truth while, on the other hand, its direct contrary is to be rejected with the same degree of rational compulsion. However, our "assent may be given to or withheld from whatever neither follows necessarily from nor is contrary to self-

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finem) which have already been determined by the kind of understanding which is already present within the intelligence and the intelligibility of God's eternal law. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 2; *Sententia super Physicam*, 2, 14, 268, as cited by Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 139: "nature is nothing other than the principle of a certain art [*ratio cuiusdam artis*] – namely of the divine art – implanted in things [*indita rebus*], by which things move to a determined end." However, for us as human beings, this participation in God's eternal law occurs both passively and actively because of a context which says that the law which we receive or which we have received as human beings from God as Creator is one which says that we should always act in accordance with the normative requirements of our reasoning and understanding. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 6. For this reason thus, it can be said that the rational ordering of our natural acts of human reasoning can be identified with created natural law which, in its reasonableness and rationality, participates in an uncreated eternal law which belongs only properly to God as the term of God's divine self-understanding. Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 2; Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 95; pp. 139-142; p. 226; p. 257; and, in addition, Aquinas, *Super Epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos Lectura*, 2, lect. 3, as quoted by Rhonheimer, p. 144: natural law is "the light of the natural reason (*ratio naturalis*)." Natural law is constituted by our natural human reasoning as the term of our human understanding, our natural human reason being nothing other than an "impress [or stamp] of the divine light in us [*impressio divini luminis in nobis*]." Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 91, a. 2. As our natural human inclinations, by their disposition and relations with each other, reveal an order which properly leads to activities that later are guided and directed by a higher ordering which comes from the ordering activities of our natural human acts of thinking and reasoning (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 71, a. 2, ad 2; q. 94, a. 3; 1a, q. 87, a. 4; 2a2ae, q. 154, a. 12), as human beings, we accordingly participate in God's eternal law in a manner that operates in two differing modes: passively, *per modum cognitionis* (through our understanding and knowing as a form of reception) and actively, *per modum principii motivi* (through a moving principle or a *natural inclination* which points to the role of our desires as a first principle in the structure and order of our human willing and which constructs a context for the possible effectiveness of acts of understanding which come to us within the order of our human cognition). Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3, 113, 5; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 93, a. 6; q. 91, a. 2; Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 244; p. 248.

Beyond a purely passive reception of our created natural inclinations and the being of created species of intellect or cognition within the context of God's creative activity, on the one hand and also passively, whenever our understanding occurs as a desired term or object of our human reasoning, a receptive or passive aspect is to be clearly distinguished, a passive aspect which refers to a created, passive participation in God's eternal law (as this law is specified as the term of God's divine understanding and willing) and which also refers to the fact that our human reasoning does not produce

evident principles."[108] While demonstrable propositions, to some extent, refer or rely on arguments or conclusions that follow from first principles and, with argument and evidence, the truth of a demonstrable should become obvious for us or, at some point, it should be known and accepted),[109] basic first principles are to be regarded as "indemonstrable principles of demonstration" which are so primitive, foundational, or basic that, as a consequence, no argument needs to reveal their reality or truth[110] and, in fact, no argument can reveal their reality or truth. With respect to first principles and their truth and certainty, in apprehending their meaning an apprehension of their truth is given. The two exist together.

As an actor, the agent intellect of our human reasoning is to be understood thus as an analytic power which uses images to distinguish elements of a problem in order to see how these different elements can be related to each other. "By way of analysis (*secundum viam resolutionis*), reason gathers one

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any understanding as if it were simply a term or product of our reasoning and thinking. As our human acts of reasoning are completed by a given act of understanding, a law is grasped in its specificity. A law is articulated and it is known as a requirement or as an obligation that we must try to meet and observe. Cf. Rhonheimer, p. 247. But, on the other hand however, whenever our human reasoning occurs as a proactive activity which manifests a desire for understanding and knowledge, as a rational act, in its love for reasonableness and goodness, our human reasoning is to be understood as a dynamic that is joined to God's eternal reasoning as an activity (God's reasoning here being the same as God's understanding as a pure act that is lacking in any kind of potentiality). Cf. Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, pp. 67-68. A very close relation exists between human and divine understanding (an order of dependence of the human on the divine), and if the laws of our human minds and understanding exist in a more primary and basic way in the laws which are constitutive of God's divine understanding, then the relation which exists between these two kinds of laws presents another way by which it is possible for us to speak about how our human understanding exists as a participation in the dynamism of God's divine understanding whose term is a word which refers to an eternal law that understands everything about everything.

105*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 82, a. 2.

106*De Veritate*, q. 24, a. 1, ad 18.

107*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

108*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1.

109*De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1 & ad 12. As Aquinas argues, teaching is a form of demonstration which should not be understood mechanistically or as something that resembles some form of rote memorization. In teaching, we work from and with first principles to try to convey an understanding of something to another person and, at times, we use syllogistic reasoning to do this, but in the arguments and clues we employ, we go through the steps that our own mind or intellect has passed through in order to come to the understanding which we now wish to have another grasp and understand. We manifest our own reasoning process to another person's reasoning process and, thus, by trying to stimulate another person's understanding, we try to take our students through a rational process which is truly their own. The understanding is something which they also experience within themselves and so, as a consequence, their understanding becomes a personal possession. The learning which occurs through our teaching and instruction occurs as "an *authentic cognitive process*." Cf. Rhonheimer, *Natural Law and Practical Reason*, p. 283.

110*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 4.

simple truth from many things."[111] It moves from what is particular to what is universal.[112] Its activity reveals how a specific contribution comes from us in our understanding and cogitation as we respond to questions which ask about the natures of things (the intelligibility of things).[113] Like light, its activity, actuality, and presence reveals meanings that had only existed potentially within phantasms until, at last through the abstraction of our understanding, meanings are grasped and made actual in our acts of understanding.[114] The light of intellect invisibly grounds the transitions which must occur within us, within our human reasoning, if our human knowing is to move from potentiality to actuality, if meanings are to be grasped which before had not been known or experienced. Admittedly, to know things which transcend the capabilities of our human knowing, "a higher light is needed."[115] But, on the other hand, to the degree that the light which belongs to us in our understanding and intellectual life, precisely because it is created, to the degree that it participates in an uncreated light,[116] a light with no beginning or end, by the same degree thus, we can speak about how the activity of our human minds participates in an understanding which is not potential but which is fully realized or actual, an understanding that only belongs to God (or, allegedly, other divine beings) who, as divine, are fully perfect.[117] There is nothing potential in them. Nothing is lacking. They have nothing further to do or to achieve. God is pure act (*actus purus*), a pure act of understanding who understands everything about everything.[118] Full understanding in such a situation exists without any need for any form of

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111*Super Boetium De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1, sol. 3; my translation.

112In Aristotle and Aquinas (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1, 24, 85b 30-35; Aquinas, *In Aristotelis libros Posteriorum analyticorum,*1, 38, 334), an ethical example illustrates how analysis works as a distinct form of inquiry. Citing Frederick E. Crowe's account of it from *The Lonergan Enterprise* (Cambridge: MA: Cowley, 1980), p. 19:

> The series of questions and answers begins with the simple, indeed, trivial, fact that one person comes to visit another. Why did he come? Because he needed money. But what did he want the money for? To pay a debt. And why should he pay the debt? Because that is the just thing to do. And why be just? Thus one is led step by step to questions of right and wrong, and of the ultimate good which is the basis of all ethical activity.

Cf. Crowe, "'All my work has been introducing history into Catholic theology,'" *Developing the Lonergan Legacy*, p. 86. Another example can be cited from the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 74, 4:

> ...when we say, *I will to walk in order to become healed*, we are of the impression that we are assigning a cause. If, then, it be asked, *why do you want to become healed?* causes will be assigned one after the other until we arrive at the ultimate cause...

113*Summa Theologiae* Blackfriars, 1a, q. 79, a. 3.

114*Sentencia Libri De anima*, 3, 9, 739.

115*De Veritate*, q. 9, a. 1, ad 18.

116*Quaestio disputata De anima*, 15. "The [human] soul, being lowest in the order of intellectual substances, participates in intellectual light or in intellectual nature, in the lowest and weakest measure."

117*Compendium theologiae*, 1, c. 88.

118*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 14, a. 2.

prior reasoning.

Understanding emerges as a result of reasoning but not in a manner, however, which can be compared to some kind of mechanical process where the employment of established procedures invariably produces the results that we want whenever we want them. "The knower as such is not an efficient...cause."[119] Human knowing is not to be equated with the activity, or the efficient causality of how we exist as agent intellects. Our human knowledge is not essentially a product or a *poiēsis* of human effort,[120] as we try to move from a state of not knowing or a lack of understanding toward a condition of knowing or an experience of understanding.[121] As essential as is the reasoning which is needed if we are to move toward understanding (prior to any experience of understanding), we can never know beforehand if and when understanding will, in fact, occur or be given to us despite the procedures that we may use in order to try to attain some kind of understanding. The absence of any guarantees in this matter accordingly points to a feature of understanding which distinguishes it from any form of making or producing.[122] There is nothing which a person can do whose term is necessarily

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119*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 6, as quoted by Gilby, *Philosophical Texts*, p. 217, n. 588. See also *De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 12.

120In his *Triune God: Systematics*, p. 727, Lonergan explains the difference between *operatio* and *actio* in Latin and *energeia* and *poiēsis* in Greek:

> ....the medieval Latin words *operatio* and *actio* were used indifferently to signify what the Greeks without any confusion [had] indicated by the words *energeia* and *poiēsis*... For *operatio* and *actio* as *poiēsis* refer to an exercise of efficient causality; but *actio* or *operatio* as *energeia* refer to second act, and second act is explained by way of a fundamental proportion, namely, that of potency to act. For example, as the possible intellect is to an intelligible species as first potency to first act, so the intelligible species is to the act of understanding as second potency to second act. See *De potentia*, q. 1, a. 1 c.

121Patrick H. Byrne, "The Thomist Sources of Lonergan's Dynamic World-view," *The Thomist* 46 (1982): 128. For an understanding about how our human understanding has been viewed as as essentially self-caused or self-willed thing, see Stebbins's discussion of this theory as it is presented in terms of a doctrine or theory of vital act in the *Divine Initiative*, pp. 107-110. As a general doctrine, this teaching claims that, from a state or condition of potency, "living beings move themselves to all their acts." Cf. Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, pp. 551-553. No extrinsic principles or causes need to be invoked. With respect to our human cognition, the self-actualization of our human knowing should be viewed as a mistaken notion about how our human understanding occurs. While, since Descartes, modern assumptions tend to think about our human cognition in terms of self-movement or self-cause, this is an interpretation with an origin that can be detected in the thought of Duns Scotus. Cf. Stebbins, p. 108. "If the [human] intellect did not somehow produce its own act of understanding, argues Scotus, it would not be an image of the Trinity; for Augustine contends that Father, Son, and Spirit are related as the mind's memory of itself, knowledge of itself, and love of itself." Cf. Stebbins, p. 328, n. 53, citing Lonergan's citation of Scotus, *Opus oxoniense* 1, d. 3, q. 7.

122*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 85, a. 2. Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of activity. One remains within an agent (as in seeing or understanding) and another which effects an outer, external change.

an act of understanding (even if an act of understanding, when it comes, is something which is personally possessed or which is enjoyed by a given knower) and, as a consequence of this fact, understanding presents itself as essentially a gift which can only be elicited (as opposed to something that is simply produced or caused). It does not exist as essentially a reward or a recompense of some kind that has been somehow earned. Understanding is admittedly given to persons who ask questions and who look for understanding. But, essentially, it is something which is received. Understanding exists as a reception.[123] It is a "being-acted-upon." It is an act as opposed to an action[124] (an action being something which is produced or which comes from a subject or agent as its source or point of origin)[125] and, hence, as an act, understanding should not be viewed as an active, efficient potency (as something which a person does or produces) but more properly as a passion (as a *passio*), as a passive potency, something which a subject receives or accepts: the act of a subject which exists within a subject who, as a patient or as a receiving subject, undergoes and experiences what is undergone and experienced[126] but who can only undergo and receive certain operations according to its form or nature which, in turn, specifies a subject's operations in terms of what can be received and what cannot be properly received by a given subject.[127] "Act is limited by the potency in which it is received,"[128] and every form possesses an inclination or disposition of its own which specifies what it may properly receive.[129] Hence, until understanding dawns, we must continue to work and to hope for understanding and, until it somehow comes and dawns, we cannot speak about what we have understood. The receptive character of our human understanding accordingly explains why Aquinas speaks about our understanding as "movement to the soul"[130] from an agent object instead of a movement "from the soul" to outer things. Intellectual knowledge is received from external things in a way which shows that understanding operates "from things to the soul," *via a rebus ad animam*.[131] After or apart from the efficient causality which occurs and exists in inquiry through our asking of questions, it is only after the initial reception of an act of understanding that an efficient causality re-appears in us within the order of our human cognition. On the basis, for instance, of a received form or habit of understanding, we can re-experience an understanding which we have already received, or we can effectively and

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123*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 79, a. 2; William E. Murnion, "St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of the Act of Understanding," *The Thomist* 37 (1973): 100. In this paper, based on a dissertation entitled, *The Meaning of Act in Understanding: A Study of the Thomistic Notion of Vital Act and Thomas Aquinas's Original Teaching*, Murnion argues that Aquinas understood human understanding not as a form of self-projection (as essentially a purely human doing or making) but as a receptive form of human activity which requires the participation and co-operation of us as potential human knowers in activities which transcend our human governance. Simply put: our understanding only occurs if, through diligent inquiry, we try to work with powers and forces that are beyond our human control.

124*Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 28, a. 3, ad 1; *Sententia super Physicam*, 3, 5, 320.

125*De Veritate*, q. 22, a. 12; *Sententia super Physicam*, 3, 5, 322; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 41, a. 1, ad 2.

126*De Veritate*, q. 26, a. 1; a. 3; *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 41, a.1, ad 2; Bernard Lonergan, *De ente supernaturali: Supplementum schematicum*, (Montreal: College of the Immaculate Conception, 1946); re-edited by Frederick E. Crowe (Willowdale: Regis College, 1973), p. 62, cited by Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 98.

127Stebbins, *Divine Initiative*, p. 107.

128Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 147.

129*Summa Theologiae*, 1a2ae, q. 6, a. 4, ad 2.

130*De Malo*, q. 6, a. un., arg. 14a.

131*De potentia*, q. 9, a. 9, quoted by Crowe, *Three Thomist Studies*, p. 190, n. 3.

expeditiously deal with a certain set of problems and difficulties that are given to us because our understanding is grounded in a familiarity which already knows how certain problems should be dealt with.[132] A form which has been received within an act of understanding or, in addition, a habit of understanding which has been received by any given human subject or soul becomes an efficient cause as it can lead us toward more current or more perfect acts of understanding. Within the context of a mature kind of understanding which has arisen over time and trial, an understander will rarely encounter anything that has not been already understood to some partial extent.

132Lonergan, *Verbum*, pp. 150-151; Byrne, "Thomist Sources," *Thomist*: 128-129; 133.