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Perfectio hominis: The Philosophical Anthropology of Contemplation in Aquinas

A THESIS

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To Jesus through Mary

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ABBREVIATIONS

Leonine	Leonine Edition of <i>Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia</i>
NE	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
SCG	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>

INTRODUCTION

The human person is set apart from all other creatures of this earth by his ability to know. From time immemorial, philosophers have recognized the human intellect as man's greatest faculty, one which makes him more like a god than a man. However, the ability to know is also eminently human, entering into the definition of our species, "rational animal," and differentiating us from that which is below us in the ordering of the natural world. This mysterious capacity appears to place human beings in a position mid-way between the physical and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural.

Aquinas, following Aristotle, identifies the intellect as man's highest faculty, and consequently, as holding the key to man's fulfillment. Addressing the question of man's ultimate end and happiness, Aquinas claims that contemplation, the highest activity of the intellect, is the ultimate goal of human life. Therefore, to understand what Aquinas means by "contemplation," and to know how it is achieved, is to understand Aquinas's answer to the ultimate philosophical questions about the teleology of man.

There is recognition among scholars that Aquinas's account of contemplation has been overlooked in recent decades, and there have been attempts to rejuvenate philosophical discussion of this area of Aquinas's thought.¹ Perhaps this topic has fallen out of favor in philosophical circles because of its inseparability from Aquinas's theology; however, one cannot engage Aquinas on his own terms without acknowledging the intricate interplay between these

¹ See Rik Van Nieuwenhove, "Contemplation, Intellectus, and Simplex Intuitus in Aquinas: Recovering a Neoplatonic Theme," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (2017): 199, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq2017227108>.

two disciplines in his writing, for whom they are distinct but not exclusive of each other. The true beauty and harmony of Aquinas's philosophy cannot be appreciated or understood without a recognition of how it informs his theology, and vice-versa. This is especially true when dealing with the ultimate philosophical questions, which, because Aquinas posits a unity of Truth, are also at the very heart of Aquinas's theology. An accurate philosophical interpretation of Aquinas's account of contemplation will not only take into consideration his theological views, but will also be in harmony with them. Thus, in order to give the reader a complete account of Aquinas's understanding of contemplation, Aquinas's theology will be engaged to the extent necessary, always with a focus on how the supernatural works with the powers that man has been given by nature.

This thesis will attempt to give the reader a holistic understanding of Aquinas's account of contemplation by 1) inquiring into the philosophical anthropology which underlies contemplation, 2) identifying that in which contemplation consists, and 3) exploring the ways in which contemplation can be attained in this life.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HUMAN PERSON AS CAPABLE OF CONTEMPLATION

1. The Nature of Human Knowledge

Aristotle opens his *Metaphysics* with a statement that has become one of the most famous and oft-quoted phrases in the history of philosophy: “All men by nature desire understanding.”¹ This observation, on its face simple enough to be understood by a child, contains within it a deep mystery. The desire to know is characteristic of all human beings, and man’s unique kind of intellectual knowledge distinguishes him from all other beings in his genus. But what is it about knowledge that is so attractive for man? Why is it that knowledge is so wrapped up with what it means to be human?

Aquinas is deeply indebted to Aristotle for his understanding of human nature, and he builds on Aristotle’s account in order to develop his own doctrine concerning the nature of human knowledge. The exalted status of man, due to his rational nature, is brought out in clear relief by Aquinas. It is evident that Aquinas, in keeping with his axiom that grace perfects nature, sees man’s natural ability to know as the foundation for what is attainable only through the superadded gift of grace: the perfection of man through the contemplation of the divine essence. This chapter will explore Aquinas’s views on man’s natural ability to know, in order to lay the groundwork for understanding the ways in which contemplation is possible for and perfective of human nature.

¹ Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1979), 1.1.980a21.

i. Man's Natural Mode of Acquiring Knowledge

Aquinas, following Aristotle, maintains that all knowledge begins in the senses.² Sense-knowledge is only of that which is material, because the senses are dependent upon matter for their operation. Immortal being cannot be known by the senses; for example, justice cannot be seen and number cannot be tasted. However, the fact that knowledge begins in the senses does not indicate that, for Aquinas, the immortal cannot be known. Garrigou-LaGrange aptly notes that Aquinas's doctrine does not limit human knowledge to that which is material, and does not make man's certainty about things – such as the first principles of reason – depend entirely upon sense experience.³ To understand Aquinas's doctrine in this way would “reduce the higher to the lower, intelligence to sense. . . . reason would remain the prisoner of phenomena, like the senses of an animal, and our liberty, which follows from our intelligence, would disappear.”⁴ In short, human knowledge would be reduced to that of the lower animals.

Aquinas most evidently views the human being's ability to know as different from and more excellent than that of the lower animals. Aquinas maintains that man is properly called a rational substance, as distinguished from sensitive substances (the irrational lower animals) and intellectual substances (the angelic beings):

Therefore, if anything is to be called by a name designating its property, it ought not to be named from what it participates imperfectly, nor from that which it possesses in excess, but from that which is adequate thereto; as, for instance, when we wish properly to name a man, we should call him a *rational substance*, but not an *intellectual substance*, which latter is the proper name of an angel; because simple intelligence belongs to an angel as a property, and to man by participation; nor do we call him a *sensible substance*, which is the proper name of a brute; because sense is less than the property of a man, and belongs to man in a more excellent way than to other animals.⁵

² See *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 3, ad 2 (Leonine 102ra 366-399); ST II-II, q. 173, a. 2 (Leonine 10:386-387); *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 19 (Leonine 53vb 529-536); ST I, q. 78, a. 4, ad 4 (Leonine 5:256); ST I, q. 84, a. 6 (Leonine 5:323-324).

³ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, trans. M. Timothea Doyle (Binghamton-New York: Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1937), 52.

⁴ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection*, 52.

⁵ “Si ergo aliquid nominari debeat nomine designante proprietatem ipsius, non debet nominari ab eo quod imperfekte participat, neque ab eo quod excedenter habet; sed ab eo quod est sibi quasi coaequatum. Sicut si quis velit proprie nominare hominem, dicet eum *substantiam rationalem*: non autem *substantiam intellectualem*, quod est

Man's ability to know is not limited to sense knowledge. Aquinas establishes a hierarchy in the modes of knowing and, following Dionysius, maintains that what is highest in one order touches what is lowest in the order above it.⁶ Human beings hold a unique place among created beings in that their manner of knowing reflects the fact that they are both corporeal and spiritual. As "rational animal," man holds a position between the purely sensible mode of knowledge⁷ proper to the irrational lower animals, and the purely intellectual knowledge proper to immaterial beings. As is the case with the lower animals, all human knowledge begins in the senses.⁸ However, unlike the lower animals, man, as rational, is capable of abstracting universals from sense experiences of particulars;⁹ thus, man is capable of knowing the quiddity of things and is ordered toward the knowledge of being itself.¹⁰ Through sensory knowledge the existence of a particular thing and its accidents, such as color, shape, and height are known. By contrast, this superior form of knowledge knows the essence of a thing – the "chairness" of a chair and the "dogness" of a dog; what it is to be a chair or a dog, apart from the individual instance of this chair or that dog which is experienced through the senses. Man is capable of this higher form of knowledge because he is endowed with intellect, which "differs from sense by nature, not just by

proprium nomen angeli, quia simplex intelligentia convenit angelo per proprietatem, homini vero per participationem; neque *substantiam sensibilem*, quod est nomen bruti proprium, quia sensus est minus quam id quod est proprium homini, et convenit homini excedenter prae aliis animalibus." Emphasis in original. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (=ST) I, q. 108, a. 5, reply, vol. 5, p. 499 (=Leonine 5:499) *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, Doctoris Angelici, Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome, 1889-99). All quotations from the *Summa theologiae* are from the translation by Laurence Shapcote, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012) with emendations, based on the Leonine, by the author of this thesis.

⁶ See *De veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, reply (Leonine 116va 253-409).

⁷ For Aquinas, the lower animals are not capable of knowledge in the most complete sense because knowledge is of universals. However, lower animals do have a sensitive soul whose powers enable them to receive sensible forms which are present and to retain these forms, as well as to perceive, through natural instinct, intentions that are not attained through sensible forms. See ST I, q. 78, a. 4, reply (Leonine 5:255-256).

⁸ See ST I, q. 85, a. 3, reply (Leonine 5:336). While man shares with lower animals a dependence on sense experience, Aquinas holds that even in his sensitive powers man operates in a manner superior to the lower animals, due to his rational nature. See ST I, q. 108, a. 5, reply (Leonine 5:499); ST I, q. 78, a. 4 (Leonine 5:255-257).

⁹ See ST I, q. 84, a. 6, reply (Leonine 5:323-324).

¹⁰ See ST I, q. 84, a. 7, reply (Leonine 5:325).

degree. . . what it is looking for in things is Being; and that Being is, to one degree or another, intelligible or attainable by the intellect.”¹¹ As capable of knowing essences and being, man shares in the intellectual knowledge that is proper to the angels, albeit in an imperfect manner, since man’s knowledge comes not through an immediate intellectual act, as is the case with immaterial beings, but through a reasoning process, the end of which is to understand.¹²

Although Aquinas does not provide an explicit account of this reasoning process, scholars have constructed accounts using the various texts where Aquinas addresses the operations of the intellect. Aquinas identifies three main operations of the intellect: apprehension, composition or division, and reasoning.¹³ William A. Wallace describes apprehension as “the first act of the intellect whereby it simply grasps what a thing is, i.e., its essence or quiddity, without affirming or denying anything of it.”¹⁴ A brief summary of the components of this act, based on John F. Wippel’s account in his book, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, will suffice for the purposes of this paper:

1. External sense power is acted upon by an object.
2. Internal common sense recognizes that external sense is perceiving, distinguishes proper object as belonging to a particular sense, and organizes sense information.
3. Imagination receives information from common sense and produces a phantasm, a likeness of the form of the external object.
4. Agent intellect uses abstractive power to separate phantasm’s intelligible content.
5. Possible intellect grasps intelligible content, resulting in quidditative universal knowledge of the object.¹⁵

¹¹ Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God*, trans. Peter O'Reilly (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1955), 16.

¹² See ST I, q. 85, a.5, reply (Leonine 5:341); ST I, q. 58, a. 4, reply (Leonine 5:85); ST I, q. 79, a. 8, reply (Leonine 5:274).

¹³ ST I, q. 85, a. 5, reply (Leonine 5:341).

¹⁴ William A. Wallace, *The Elements of Philosophy: A Compendium for Philosophers and Theologians* (New York: Alba House, 1977), 14.

¹⁵ See John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 35-38. See also ST I, q. 78, a. 4, ad 2 (Leonine 5:256) regarding common sense; ST I, q. 84, a. 7, reply (Leonine 5:325) regarding imagination; ST I, q. 84, a. 7, ad 2 (Leonine 5:325) regarding phantasms and imagination; *Summa contra Gentiles* II, c. 77 regarding phantasms, agent intellect, and possible intellect.

While man shares numbers one through three with other animals, numbers four and five are specific to man and result in intellectual knowledge. The agent intellect, through a process of illuminating and abstracting from the phantasm, produces an intelligible species which it impresses upon the possible intellect. The possible intellect, in its turn, receives the intelligible species and expresses it through the concept. The intelligible species, impressed and expressed, is the instrument of intellectual knowledge, the medium by which (medium *quo*) an object is understood in a universal way.¹⁶ Thus, through the first operation of apprehension, the intellect knows the concept “man” as a universal, but not this or that particular man, as he exists in reality.¹⁷

The intellect’s second operation – which Aquinas refers to as “composition or division,” but which scholars commonly refer to as “judgment” – is necessary in order to know a thing individually.¹⁸ While the first operation of the intellect is concerned with the essence of a thing, the second operation is concerned with the existence of a thing.¹⁹ Wallace defines judgment as “the second operation of the intellect by which something is affirmed or denied of something else.”²⁰ Judgment, by reintegrating the intelligible content grasped in the first operation by abstraction, makes a thing known as it exists in reality.²¹ Thus, through judgement, the intellect knows that this man exists in this way.

The third operation of the intellect, reasoning, is that “by which [the intellect] passes from what it already knows to what it does not yet know.”²² The intellect does this by forming a

¹⁶ See Robert Brennan, *Thomistic Psychology: A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 179-182.

¹⁷ Wippel, *Metaphysical Thought*, 37-38. See also ST I, q. 85, a. 1 (Leonine 5:330-332).

¹⁸ See *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 5 (Leonine 93ra 1-139) and ST I, q. 86, a. 1 (Leonine 5:347) for Aquinas’s discussion of the knowledge of singulars.

¹⁹ Wallace, *Elements of Philosophy*, 18.

²⁰ Wallace, *Elements of Philosophy*, 17.

²¹ Wallace, *Elements of Philosophy*, 17. See also ST I, q. 85, a. 5 (Leonine 5:341).

²² Wallace, *Elements of Philosophy*, 19-20. See also ST I, q. 14, a. 7, reply (Leonine 4:179).

conclusion based on two or more propositions, the conclusion having new content not contained in the propositions from which it is formed.²³ For example, from the propositions that 1) a whale is a mammal and 2) all mammals nurse their young, the intellect forms the conclusion that whales nurse their young. Thus, through reasoning, the intellect is able to arrive at new knowledge not attainable through the operations of apprehension and judgement alone.

ii. Forms of human knowledge: Ratio vs. Intellectus

As has been discussed, Aquinas identifies this reasoning process as the manner of attaining knowledge that is proper to man. However, Aquinas also maintains that man, by nature, has some knowledge which is immediate: the knowledge of “the first principles of which we have innate cognition.”²⁴ This knowledge is not acquired through the process of reasoning, yet it is proper to man by nature because of his intellect, which Aquinas defines as “the habit of first principles.”²⁵ According to Aquinas, these first principles, “such as being and non-being, whole and part, and such like,”²⁶ are “simply understood”²⁷ and cannot be doubted.²⁸ They are also that by which man judges all other knowledge.²⁹ Aquinas emphasizes that man’s intellect does not

²³ Wallace, *Elements of Philosophy*, 20.

²⁴ “Prima principia quorum cognitio est nobis innata.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 6, ad 6 (Leonine 93vb 265-266), *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, Doctoris Angelici, Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed. (Rome, 1970-76). All quotations from the *De veritate* are from the translation by Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), with emendations, based on the Leonine, by the author of this thesis. It is important to note that when Aquinas speaks of man having “innate cognition” of first principles he does not mean this in the Cartesian sense of innate, as is evidenced by Aquinas’s insistence that all knowledge begins in the senses. See *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 3, ad 2 (Leonine 102ra 366-399); ST II-II, q. 173, a. 2 (Leonine 10:386-387); *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 19 (Leonine 53vb 529-536); ST I, q. 78, a. 4, ad 4 (Leonine 5:256); ST I, q. 84, a. 6 (Leonine 5:323-324). Aquinas’s point appears to be that these first principles are not obtained through the process of discursive reasoning, but rather, as Wallace explains, they are principles which “[the human mind] neither has to learn nor assume but simply grasps as soon as it understands the meaning of their constituent terms.” Wallace, *Elements of Philosophy*, 115.

²⁵ “Habitus primorum principiorum.” ST I, q. 58, a. 3, reply (Leonine 5:83).

²⁶ “Ut ens et non ens, totum et pars, et similia.” ST I q. 2, a. 1, reply (Leonine 4:27).

²⁷ “Simpliciter intellectis.” ST I, q. 79, a. 8, reply (Leonine 5:274).

²⁸ See ST I, q. 18, a. 3, reply (Leonine 4:227-228).

²⁹ See ST I, q. 79, a. 8, reply (Leonine 5:274-275).

move itself to acquire this knowledge, as is the case with reasoning; rather, his intellect is moved by another.³⁰ Garrigou-Lagrange notes that this immediate knowledge “presupposes in us a constantly increasing intellectual light of an order infinitely superior to sensation or to the most subtle imagination; an intellectual light which is a distant image of the divine light and which can illumine nothing without the constant concurrence of God, Sun of spirits, Master of intelligences.”³¹ The fact that man must use discursive reasoning, states Aquinas, is a result of the weakness of this “intellectual light” in man:

Human souls, however, which acquire knowledge of truth by a certain discursion, are called *rational*; indeed, this happens because of the weakness of the intellectual light in them. For if they possessed the fullness of intellectual light, like the angels, immediately in the first aspect of principles they would comprehend their entire meaning, by perceiving whatever could be reasoned out from them.³²

Thus, Aquinas indicates that discursive reasoning, the mode of knowing which is proper to man, is imperfect, and that the perfection of knowledge is an intellective act. The act of reason (*ratio*) and the act of understanding (*intellectus*) do not originate from different powers, but are rather different operations of the same power: *ratio* is related to *intellectus* “as generation to existence (*esse*) and movement to rest.”³³ As movement is imperfect, so discursive reasoning, the necessary process for the acquisition of knowledge by corporeal man, is imperfect. Human knowledge reaches its perfection only in the intellective act of understanding, which is “simple

³⁰ See ST I, q. 18, a. 3, reply (Leonine 4:227-228).

³¹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection*, 52-53.

³² “Animae vero humanae, quae veritatis notitiam per quandam discursum acquirunt, *rationales* vocantur. Quod quidem contingit ex debilitate intellectualis luminis in eis. Si enim haberent plenitudinem intellectualis luminis, sicut angeli, statim in primo aspectu principiorum totam virtutem eorum comprehenderent, intuendo quidquid ex eis syllogizari posset.” ST I, q. 58, a. 3, reply (Leonine 5:83). Emphasis in original.

³³ “Actus autem rationis qui est discurrere et intellectus qui est simpliciter apprehendere veritatem comparantur ad invicem ut generatio ad esse et motus ad quietem.” *De veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, reply (Leonine 116vb 386-389).

and absolute,”³⁴ an act in which one “reads the truth within the very essence of the thing,”³⁵ and to which the movement of discursive reasoning is ordered.

While human beings are capable of both rational inquiry and intellective understanding, Aquinas makes a distinction between the manner in which rationality belongs to the human person and the manner in which a human person can be said to be intellectual. Man’s rationality, he states, is a property that is “adequate and proportionate to (his) nature,” while man’s simple intelligence is an imperfect participation in that which is natural to angelic beings.³⁶ Aquinas often uses the term “participation” when he speaks about the manner in which the intellectual power belongs to man. However, Aquinas does not always use this term univocally, so it is important to make the distinction between the two ways in which it is employed. In one sense, man is said to participate in *intellectus* because, as a body-soul composite, man is not a purely intellectual being. Here Aquinas is using the term “participation” to indicate the distinction between what is proper to man, as rational, and what is proper to a purely intellectual being, such as an angel. In another sense, Aquinas sees man’s intellectual power not merely as touching upon the order of knowledge that is proper to angelic beings, but as a power that participates in the Divine *intellectus*, stating that “All things are said to be seen in God and all things are judged in Him, because by the participation of His light, we know and judge all things; for the light of natural reason itself is a certain participation of the divine light.”³⁷ Here “participation” is used by Aquinas to indicate man’s imperfect possession of what is proper to God Himself, a sense in which even the angels can be said to participate in *intellectus* since only in God are knowledge

³⁴ “Simplicem et absolutam.” *De veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, reply (Leonine 116va 284).

³⁵ “Intus in ipsa rei essentia veritatem quodam modo legit.” *De veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, reply (Leonine 116va 286-287).

³⁶ See ST I, q. 108, a. 5 (Leonine 5:498-500).

³⁷ “Omnia dicimus in Deo videre, et secundum ipsum de omnibus iudicare, inquantum per participationem sui luminis omnia cognoscimus et diiudicamus: nam et ipsum lumen naturale rationis participatio quaedam est divini luminis.” ST I, q. 12, a. 11, ad 3 (Leonine 4:135).

and essence perfectly and completely identified.³⁸ Thus, Aquinas indicates that man's natural mode of *intellectus*, as a participation in God's *intellectus*, is a privileged state.³⁹

2. What It Means to be a Knowing Being

i. The Relationship of Knowledge to Immateriality and Being

After examining the manner in which human beings come to know, it is important to elucidate precisely in what, for Aquinas, knowledge consists. What does it mean for a being to know? A passage from Aquinas's *De veritate* has particular import for the present study. After concluding that in God there is no real difference between His knowledge and His essence, and within the context of discussing God's knowledge, Aquinas identifies knowledge as a type of perfection of the knowing subject:

Note, therefore, that a thing is perfect in two ways. First, it is perfect with respect to the perfection of its existence (*esse*), which belongs to it according to its proper species. But, since the specific existence (*esse*) of one thing is distinct from the specific existence (*esse*) of another thing, it follows that in every created thing of this kind, the perfection of one thing falls short of perfection simply speaking (*simpliciter*) to the extent that perfection is found in other species. Consequently, the perfection of each individual thing considered in itself is imperfect, being a part of the perfection of the entire universe, which arises from the sum total of the perfections of all individual things.

In order that there might be some remedy for this imperfection, another kind of perfection is to be found in created things. It consists in this, that the perfection which is proper to one thing is found in another thing; and this is the perfection of a knower in so far as he knows; for something is known by a knower by reason of the fact that the thing known is, in some fashion, in the possession of the knower. Hence, it is said in *The Soul* that the soul is, "in some manner, all things," because its nature is to know all things. In this way it is possible for the perfection of the entire universe to exist in one thing.⁴⁰

³⁸ See SCG II, c. 101, 4 (Marietti 1860a).

³⁹ For a more extensive discussion of man's *intellectus* as a created participation in the perfection of divine *intellectus*, based on texts from Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles*, see Reinhard Hütter's *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 208-212.

⁴⁰ "Sciendum igitur est quod res aliqua invenitur perfecta dupliciter. Uno modo secundum perfectionem sui esse quod ei competit secundum propriam speciem. Sed quia esse specificum unius rei est distinctum ab esse specifico alterius rei, ideo in qualibet re creata huiusmodi perfectioni in unaquaque re tantum deest de perfectione simpliciter quantum perfectionis in speciebus aliis invenitur, ut sic cuiuslibet rei perfectio in se consideratae sit imperfecta veluti pars perfectionis totius universi, quae consurgit ex singularum rerum perfectionibus invicem congregatis. Unde ut huic imperfectioni aliquod remedium esset invenitur alius modus perfectionis in rebus creatis secundum quod perfectio quae est propria unius rei in re altera invenitur: et haec est perfectio cognoscentis in quantum est cognoscens quia secundum hoc a cognoscente aliud cognoscitur quod ipsum cognitum est aliquo modo apud cognoscentem; et ideo in III De anima dicitur « anima esse quodammodo omnia » quia nata est omnia

This passage, and particularly its placement in Aquinas's discussion of God's knowledge, contains key points relative to the present discussion. By identifying knowledge as a remedy for the imperfection of being that is concomitant with man's status as creature, Aquinas indicates that man's perfection is dependent upon a relationship with another. In addition, through knowledge, man is capable in some manner of becoming all things, sharing through likeness in what is proper to God by nature.⁴¹ Therefore, through the ability to become other in the act of knowing, man participates imperfectly in God's own manner of being.

This point merits further explication, for, as Jacques Maritain notes in his book, *Degrees of Knowledge*, it contains an apparent contradiction to the principle of identity. How can a man become other, without violating this fundamental principle? In a concise summary of Aquinas's doctrine of knowledge, Maritain gives us Aquinas's answer.⁴² A being is able to have intellectual knowledge insofar as it is immaterial. Immateriality is prerequisite for intellectual knowledge because only in an immaterial substance can a union between knower and known take place in which both maintain their own natures intact. Intellectual knowledge is a type of existence in the knowing subject; "an active, immaterial superexistence whereby a subject not only exists with an existence limited to what that subject is as a thing enclosed within one genus . . . but with an unlimited existence in which by its own activity it is and becomes itself and other things."⁴³ This type of existence, Maritain notes, has been referred to by philosophers as *esse intentionale*, or intentional being, to distinguish it from *esse naturale*, by which a being is said to exist.⁴⁴ A

cognoscere; et secundum hunc modum possibile est ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat." *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, reply (Leonine 52ra 102-126). See also SCG III, c. 112, 5 (Marietti 2860).

⁴¹ See ST I, q. 80, a. 1, reply (Leonine 5:282).

⁴² See Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 112-117.

⁴³ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 113.

⁴⁴ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 114. For an interesting comparison of Aquinas's *esse intentionale* with the modern contemporary notion of intentionality, see Stephen L. Brock, "Intentional Being, Natural Being, and the First-Person Perspective in Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 77, no. 1 (January 2013): 103-133.

simple and eloquent description of intentional being is provided by Yves Simon, in his book

Metaphysics of Knowledge:

What I know exists in me, but the way in which it exists in me is different from the way in which it exists in itself. I am what I know, but the way in which I am the object known differs from the way in which I am myself and the way in which that object is itself. Nevertheless, the object introduced into the soul and the soul that has become that object are bound in the tightest of unions in a single act of existing. Note that this act of existing in no way affects the thing known.⁴⁵

Through intentional being an object has “intentional presence” in the soul, and there is an “intentional transformation of the soul into the object”⁴⁶ such that the soul attains the perfection of the other without surrendering its own nature. In fact, far from obliterating or replacing the soul’s proper nature, it is in and through this very nature that knowledge takes place.

It is evident from what has been said that through intentional being, the knowing subject has a unique relationship to all of reality. This relationship is one which, in an imperfect way, reflects God’s own relationship to reality; for as Aquinas states, “those things that have knowledge, in a way, approach to a likeness to God, *in Whom all things pre-exist*, as Dionysius says.”⁴⁷ The human ability to know, and thus become other, is a “manifestation of a superabundance by which the divine generosity permits some creatures to be more than they are.”⁴⁸ Man, as an intellectual creature, is open to all reality.

ii. Union of Knower and Known

Through intentional being, a unique and very intimate type of union is formed between knower and known. This union is described by Aquinas as that of “an assimilation of the knower

⁴⁵ Yves R. Simon, *An Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 13.

⁴⁶ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 115.

⁴⁷ “In quo quodammodo cognitionem habentia ad Dei similitudinem appropinquant, *in quo omnia praexistunt*, sicut Dionysius dicit.” ST I, q. 80, a. 1, reply (Leonine 5:282). Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸ Simon, *Metaphysics of Knowledge*, 26.

to the thing known,”⁴⁹ which, as has been noted above, occurs in such a way that the knower comes to be the other while remaining wholly himself. The object known is not affected by being known, yet, as Yves Simon points out, its reality is a condition of knowledge in the knower.⁵⁰ This unique type of union differs from the union of soul and body, or the union of matter and form, because, in each of these, two realities are joined to form a new reality.⁵¹ Simon clarifies that in this union “there is no fusion of two realities into a third reality,” but rather “the subject has become the object.”⁵² As such, the object is united to the knower as a perfection of the knowing subject, and thus constitutes a most intimate unity.

3. The Telos of the Intellect

The fact that each thing has a proper end to which it is oriented, a *telos*, is a guiding principle of Aquinas’s philosophy. Within the context of discussing man’s ultimate happiness, Aquinas discusses the telos of man’s intellect in the following way:

Everything that is in potency tends to proceed into act. So, as long as it is not made wholly actual, it is not at its ultimate end. Now, our intellect is in potency to all the forms of things to be known, and it is reduced to act when it knows any one of them. Therefore, it will not be wholly actual, nor at its ultimate end, until it knows all things, at least all these material things.⁵³

Aquinas here explicitly states that the *telos* of the intellect is to know all things, adding the qualification “at least all these material things.” This claim makes sense of what has been

⁴⁹ “Omnis autem cognitio perficitur per assimilationem cognoscentis ad rem cognitam.” *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, reply (Leonine 42rb 162-163).

⁵⁰ Simon, *Metaphysics of Knowledge*, 13.

⁵¹ Simon, *Metaphysics of Knowledge*, 10.

⁵² Simon, *Metaphysics of Knowledge*, 10.

⁵³ “Omne quod est in potentia, intendit exire in actu. Quandiu igitur non est ex toto factum in actu, non est in suo fine ultimo. Intellectus autem noster est in potentia ad omnes formas rerum cognoscendas: reducitur autem in actu cum aliquam earum cognoscit. Ergo non erit ex toto in actu, nec in ultimo suo fine, nisi quando omnia, saltem ista materialia, cognoscit.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles III*, c. 48, 13 (Marietti 2259), *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. P. Marc, C. Pera, and P. Caramello (Turin: Marietti, 1961). All quotations from the *Summa Contra Gentiles* are from the translation by James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, C.J. O’Neil, and Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), with emendations by the author of this thesis.

discussed thus far, and also goes a step farther: not only is man's intellect *open* to all reality and the means through which it is "possible that in one thing the entire perfection of the universe exist,"⁵⁴ but this text shows that knowledge pertains to the *telos* of the intellect: the intellect reaches its ultimate perfection only when it *actually* "knows all things, at least all these material things."

Based on what has been previously established, it is possible to draw further conclusions about what this knowledge would be like and how it would come about. Since the intellect is ordered to the knowledge of essences and being, the intellect that has reached its *telos* would have knowledge of the essences and being of all things. In addition, the intellect would understand all things simply and absolutely in an intellective act, since the movement of discursive reasoning implies imperfection. Finally, in some way, the intellect that has reached its *telos* would be united to all things in the intentional union of knower and known.

⁵⁴ "Possible est ut in una re totius universi perfectio existat." *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, reply (Leonine 52ra 125-126). Emphasis my own.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEMPLATIVE KNOWLEDGE AS THE PERFECTION OF MAN

1. Aristotle's Understanding of Man's Perfection

From what has been stated thus far it is obvious that man, as an intellectual creature, holds a very exalted place among earthly beings. Man's intellect is what sets him apart from all other beings in his genus, and places him at the pinnacle of the created earthly order. According to both Aristotle and Aquinas, the intellect, as man's highest faculty, holds the key to his perfection and happiness.¹ Aristotle lays out his argument in Book X of his *Nicomachean Ethics*:

That which is by nature proper to each thing is the best and most pleasant for that thing. So for a man, too, the life according to his intellect is the best and most pleasant, if indeed a man in the highest sense is his intellect. Hence this life, too, is the happiest.²

Aristotle goes on to identify this “life according to his intellect” with the contemplative life.

Contemplative activity, he notes, is the most perfect of all human activity because it is the highest activity of the best part of the human person and the most continuous.³

While Aristotle holds that contemplation is man's perfect activity and constitutes man's happiness, he also believes that the life of contemplation is “above that of a man, for a man will live in this manner not insofar as he is a man, but insofar as he has something divine in him.”⁴ Aristotle goes on to state that, because man's intellect “is divine relative to a man,”⁵ man should not be content with merely thinking about mortal things, but “should try as far as possible to partake of immortality and to make every effort to live according to the best part of the soul . . .

¹ For Aristotle, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10; for Aquinas see ST I, q. 12, a. 1, reply (Leonine 4:114-115).

² Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1984), 10.7.1178a5-8.

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7.1177a20.

⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7.1177b27-29.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7.1177b30.

for even if this part be of small measure, it surpasses all the others by far in power and worth.”⁶

Thus, Aristotle not only holds that the intellect is man’s highest power, and that its most perfect activity leads to happiness, but also hints at a mysterious connection between man’s intellect, man’s immortality, and the divine.

2. Aquinas’s Understanding of Man’s Perfection

i. Knowledge of God as the Perfection of Man

Aquinas follows Aristotle in identifying man’s intellect as his highest faculty, and, as such, as holding the key to man’s ultimate perfection and happiness. However, the connection between man’s intellect and the divine that Aristotle only hints at, Aquinas makes explicit. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas identifies the telos of man with intellectual knowledge of God:

Since all creatures, even those devoid of understanding, are ordered to God as to an ultimate end, all achieve this end to the extent that they participate somewhat in His likeness. Intellectual creatures attain it in a more special way, that is, through their proper operation of understanding Him. Hence, this must be the end of the intellectual creature, namely, to understand God. . . . Now, the ultimate end of man, and of every intellectual substance, is called *felicity* or *happiness*: for this is what every intellectual substance desires as an ultimate end, and for its own sake alone. Therefore, the ultimate happiness and felicity of every intellectual substance is to know God.⁷

Now it begins to become clear why knowledge is so attractive to man, and why it appears to be so tied up with what it means to be human. Aquinas points out that while all creatures are ordered toward God, intellectual creatures alone are capable of understanding God. It is in the knowledge of God that the ultimate perfection and happiness of man consists.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7.1177b34-1178a2.

⁷ “Cum autem omnes creaturae, etiam intellectu carentes, ordinentur in Deum sicut in finem ultimum; ad hunc autem finem pertingunt omnia in quantum de similitudine eius aliquid participant: intellectuales creaturae aliquo specialiori modo ad ipsum pertingunt, scilicet per propriam operationem intelligendo ipsum. Unde oportet quod hoc sit finis intellectualis creaturae, scilicet intelligere Deum. . . . Ultimus autem finis hominis, et cuiuslibet intellectualis substantiae, *felicitas* sive *beatitudo* nominatur: hoc enim est quod omnis substantia intellectualis desiderat tanquam ultimum finem, et propter se tantum. Est igitur beatitudo et felicitas ultima cuiuslibet substantiae intellectualis cognoscere Deum.” SCG III, c. 25, 1 & 14 (Marietti 2055 & 2068). Emphasis in original.

ii. Man's Knowledge of God in this Life

Aquinas recognizes that his claim necessitates that a clarification be made about exactly what type of knowledge of God constitutes man's ultimate perfection. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas recounts the various ways that man can have knowledge of God in order to identify that which is perfective of man's nature.

The first type of knowledge Aquinas considers is what he describes as “a common and confused knowledge of God which is present in nearly all men.”⁸ This knowledge is reached through natural reason; by observing that nature is ordered, man perceives that there must be an orderer. However, nothing is known about this “orderer,” nor is it even known whether there is only one.⁹ Aquinas concludes that this general and vague knowledge cannot constitute man's ultimate happiness because “the operation of a man enjoying felicity must be without defect,” whereas “this knowledge admits of a mixture of many errors.”¹⁰

The second type of knowledge Aquinas considers is knowledge of God through demonstration. Aquinas states that this type of knowledge is higher than the first, since it attains a more proper knowledge of God by demonstrating that which God is not.¹¹ However, this knowledge is still imperfect since knowledge of a thing attained through the process of negation is knowledge “*that* it is distinct from other things, yet what it is remains unknown.”¹² This type of knowledge cannot constitute man's ultimate happiness, Aquinas notes, since it “still remains in potency to something further to be learned about God, or to the same knowledge possessed in

⁸ “Communis et confusa Dei cognitio, quae quasi omnibus hominibus adest.” SCG III, c. 38, 1 (Marietti 2161).

⁹ See SCG III, c. 38, 1 (Marietti 2161).

¹⁰ “Felicitatis enim operationem oportet esse absque defectu. Haec autem cognitio est multorum errorum admixtionem suscipiens.” SCG III, c. 38, 3 (Marietti 2163).

¹¹ See SCG III, c. 39, 1 (Marietti 2167).

¹² “Per negationes autem habita propria cognitione de re, scitur quod est ab aliis discreta, tamen quid sit remanet ignotum.” SCG III, c. 39, 1 (Marietti 2167). Emphasis in translation.

a higher way.”¹³ It also admits of error, is uncertain, and fails to satisfy all desire for further knowledge.¹⁴

The third and final type of knowledge that Aquinas considers is the knowledge of faith. The knowledge of God that can be attained through faith, Aquinas says, surpasses the knowledge of God that can be gained through demonstration, because “we know some things about God through faith which, because of their sublimity, demonstrative reason cannot attain.”¹⁵ However, the ultimate perfection of man cannot consist in knowledge of God through faith:

For felicity is a perfect operation of the intellect However, in the knowledge of faith is found a most imperfect operation of the intellect, having regard to that which is on the part of the intellect, though the greatest perfection is discovered on the part of the object: for the intellect does not grasp that to which it gives assent in believing.¹⁶

This passage contains an important point, for Aquinas indicates that man’s ultimate perfection and happiness are, indeed, bound up with what belongs to man by nature and are attained only through the perfection of that nature. The knowledge of God through faith, although surpassing all natural means of knowing God, cannot constitute man’s ultimate perfection and happiness because “the intellect assents through faith to things presented to it, because of an act of the will and not because it is necessarily moved by the evidence of the truth itself,”¹⁷ whereas the intellect’s perfect act of knowing involves grasping the object itself. Therefore, Aquinas indicates that the knowledge of God in which man’s ultimate perfection consists involves a union of man’s intellect with God.¹⁸

¹³ “Talis autem cognitio per viam demonstrationis de Deo habita remanet adhuc in potentia ad aliquod ulterius de Deo cognoscendum, vel eadem nobiliori modo.” SCG III, c. 39, 3 (Marietti 2169).

¹⁴ See SCG III, c. 39, 4-6 (Marietti 2170-2172).

¹⁵ “Quaedam de Deo per fidem cognoscimus ad quae, propter sui eminentiam, ratio demonstrans pervenire non potest.” SCG III, c. 40, 1 (Marietti 2174).

¹⁶ “Felicitas enim est perfecta intellectus operatio In cognitione autem fidei invenitur operatio intellectus imperfectissima quantum ad id quod est ex parte intellectus, quamvis maxima perfectio inveniatur ex parte obiecti: non enim intellectus capit illud cui assentit credendo.” SCG III, c. 40, 2 (Marietti 2175).

¹⁷ “Intellectus enim assentit per fidem his quae sibi proponuntur, quia vult, non autem ex ipsa veritatis evidentiaria necessario tractus.” SCG III, c. 40, 3 (Marietti 2176).

¹⁸ See SCG III, c. 40, 6 (Marietti 2179).

Thus, Aquinas concludes that man is incapable of understanding God through any natural mode of knowledge, since through these he is only capable of knowing *that* God is but not *what* God is. Even the knowledge of faith, which provides knowledge of God superior to that of any natural mode, is not the knowledge necessary for the ultimate perfection of man because faith does not consist in the type of knowledge proper to the intellect, but rather in the assent of the intellect through an act of the will. Having exhausted the means by which man can know God in this life, Aquinas states that “it is impossible for the ultimate felicity of man to be in this life.”¹⁹ By this assertion Aquinas does not intend to indicate that it is impossible for man to attain perfection. On the contrary, Aquinas insists that “It is impossible for natural desire to be void, since *nature does nothing in vain*. Now, natural desire would be void if it was not able to be fulfilled. Therefore, the natural desire of man is capable of fulfillment, but not in this life, as we have shown. So, it must be fulfilled after this life.”²⁰ Therefore, Aquinas concludes that “the ultimate felicity of man will lie in the knowledge of God that the human mind has after this life.”²¹

iii. The Beatific Vision: Man’s Knowledge of God in the Next Life

Although some may claim that an investigation into knowledge after this life can be nothing more than pure speculation, the axiom that grace perfects nature allows Aquinas to consider what man’s knowledge of God after this life must be like, and how it is possible for and

¹⁹ “Impossibile est quod in hac vita sit ultima hominis felicitas.” SCG III, c. 48, 1 (Marietti 2246).

²⁰ “Impossibile est naturale desiderium esse inane: *natura enim nihil facit frustra*. Esset autem inane desiderium naturae si nunquam posset impleri. Est igitur impleibile desiderium naturale hominis. Non autem in hac vita, ut ostensum est. Oportet igitur quod impleatur post hanc vitam.” SCG III, c. 48, 11 (Marietti 2257). Emphasis in original.

²¹ “Ultima felicitas hominis in cognitione Dei quam habet humana mens post hanc vitam.” SCG III, c. 48, 16 (Marietti 2262).

perfective of human nature. In *De veritate*, Aquinas contrasts his view of man's ultimate perfection with that of Aristotle:

The ultimate perfection which the soul can attain, therefore, is, according to the philosophers, to have delineated in it the entire order and causes of the universe, which they held to be the ultimate end of man. We, however, hold that it consists in the vision of God; for, as Gregory says: "What is there that they do not see who see Him who sees all things?"²²

Thus, Aquinas teaches that the knowledge of God in which man's ultimate perfection consists is the vision of God Himself and that it is through this vision that man knows all other things.²³

Man's ultimate happiness is found in contemplation, but not in philosophical contemplation. For Aquinas, contemplation in its most proper sense is synonymous with the beatific vision: the ultimate fulfillment of man is to contemplate God's essence.²⁴

Aquinas recognizes that, given his theory of human knowledge, the possibility of a human being knowing God's essence poses a serious aporia:

It is impossible for any created intellect to see the essence of God by its own natural power. For knowledge is regulated according as the thing known is in the knower. But the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Hence the knowledge of every knower is according to the mode of its own nature. If therefore the mode of being (*modus essendi*) of any thing which is known exceeds the mode of nature of the knower, it must result that the knowledge of the object is above the nature of the knower.²⁵

The mode of the human knower is to know through the operations of apprehension, judgment, and reasoning, all of which depend upon initial sense experience and which provide the possibility of knowing only *that God is* and *what He is not* but not *what He is*. Since God is

²² "Unde haec est ultima perfectio ad quam anima potest pervenire secundum philosophos ut in ea describatur totus ordo universi et causarum eius, in quo etiam finem ultimum hominis posuerunt, quod secundum nos erit in visione Dei quia secundum Gregorium « quid est quod non videant qui videntem omnia vident? »" *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, reply (Leonine 52ra 126-133).

²³ See also ST I, q. 93, a. 8, ad 4 (Leonine 5:411). In *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 4, reply (Leonine 81rb 188-252), Aquinas explains that, while it is possible for a created intellect experiencing the beatific vision to know all things that God knows through His vision, each creature will know more or less in proportion to the knowledge that he has of God.

²⁴ See ST I, q. 12, a. 1, reply (Leonine 4:114-115) and ST II-II, q. 180, a. 4, reply (Leonine 10:427-428).

²⁵ "Impossibile est quod aliquis intellectus creatus per sua naturalia essentiam Dei videat. Cognitio enim contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente. Cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis. Unde cuiuslibet cognoscentis cognitio est secundum modum suae naturae. Si igitur modus essendi alicuius rei cognitae excedat modum naturae cognoscentis, oportet quod cognitio illius rei sit supra naturam illius cognoscentis." ST I, q. 12, a. 4, reply (Leonine 4:120-121).

infinitely above the nature of any created species, it is impossible for God to be seen in His essence through any mediating intelligible species produced by man's intellect. Therefore, Aquinas concludes that "If God is to be seen through His essence, He must be seen through no created species, but His own essence (*essentia*) must become the intelligible form of the understanding which sees Him."²⁶ Thus, Aquinas holds that man, by his natural powers, is not capable of the contemplation of God's essence that is man's ultimate perfection. Aquinas explains that the divine essence, infinitely above any created species, cannot be known through any created species, and so must itself become "the intelligible form of the understanding" of the created intellect experiencing the beatific vision. However, man is not, by nature, capable of receiving this form, as Aquinas explains in his *Summa contra Gentiles*:

Nothing is receptive of a more sublime form unless it be elevated by means of a disposition to the capacity for this form, for a proper act is produced in a proper potency. Now, the divine essence (*essentia*) is a higher form than any created intellect. Therefore, that the divine essence may become the intelligible species for a created intellect . . . it is necessary that the created intellect be elevated by a more sublime disposition.²⁷

Thus, the created intellect does not have a natural capacity for the vision of the divine essence, but must be elevated by the "*light of glory*," which "makes the intellect actually powerful enough to understand."²⁸ Therefore, man is not capable of reaching his ultimate perfection, the contemplation of the divine essence in the beatific vision, through his natural powers, but only through his nature once it has been elevated by grace.

²⁶ "Si Deus per essentiam videri debeat, quod per nullam speciem creatam videatur, sed ipsa eius essentia fiat intelligibilis forma intellectus eum videntis." *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 11, reply (Leonine 96rb 181-185).

²⁷ "Nihil est susceptivum formae sublimioris nisi per aliquam dispositionem ad illius capacitatem elevetur: proprius enim actus in propria potentia fit. Essentia autem divina est forma altior omni intellectu creato. Ad hoc igitur quod essentia divina fiat intelligibilis species alicuius intellectus creati . . . necesse est quod intellectus creatus aliqua dispositione sublimiori ad hoc elevetur." SCG III, c. 53, 3 (Marietti 2299).

²⁸ "Illa igitur dispositio qua intellectus creatus ad intellectualem divinae substantiae visionem extollitur, congrue *lux gloriae* dicitur: non propter hoc quod faciat intelligibile in actu, sicut lux intellectus agentis; sed per hoc quod facit intellectum potentem actu intelligere." SCG III, c. 53, 6 (Marietti 2302). Emphasis in original.

3. Aporiai and Their Solutions

While positing an elevation of human nature by “the light of glory” solves the aporia of how a human being can know God’s essence, it raises new questions. If contemplation of the divine essence is not possible for human nature through its natural powers, can it be considered perfective of human nature? Is there any continuity between the created intellect *in via* and the created intellect experiencing beatitude? Does the axiom that grace perfects nature hold when it comes to man’s ultimate fulfillment? Michael Waddell concisely summarizes the new difficulties:

In Aquinas’s view, the light of glory is a supernatural participation in the divine light that elevates the created intellect to a direct vision of the divine essence in the acts of rapture and the beatific vision. However, the more deeply human knowing participates in the divine light, the less clearly it remains either human or knowing. It is less clearly human because participation in the vision of the divine essence, which the light of glory makes possible, is beyond the natural capacity of any creature, including humans. And it is less clearly knowing because it is difficult to surmise how the divine essence could be *in* the human knower according to the mode of the knower, which would be a requirement for the existence of knowledge as Thomas typically describes it.²⁹

Given Aquinas’s account of the beatific vision, Waddell identifies two aporiai: first, how the beatific vision is continuous with human nature and second, how the beatific vision is continuous with Aquinas’s theory of knowledge. These questions are legitimate, and they must be addressed by anyone wishing to defend Aquinas’s view of ultimate human fulfillment as having anything to do with being human.

i. Continuity with Human Nature

A text from Aquinas’s *Summa contra Gentiles* appears to address the challenge of how knowledge of God in the beatific vision is continuous with human nature, even though it is beyond man’s natural capacity:

²⁹ Michael Waddell, “Aquinas on the Light of Glory,” *Tópicos* 40, no. 1 (2011): 108, <https://doi.org/10.21555/top.v40i1.88>.

The divine substance is not beyond the capacity of the created intellect in such a way that it is altogether extraneous to it, as sound is from vision, or as immaterial substance is from the senses; for the divine substance is the first intelligible object and the principle of all intellectual cognition. But it is beyond the capacity of the created intellect in that it exceeds its power, just as sensible objects of extreme character are beyond the capacity of the senses. Hence, the Philosopher says in *Metaphysics* II that “our intellect is to the most evident things, as the eye of the owl is to the light of the sun.” Therefore, a created intellect needs to be strengthened by the divine light in order that it may be able to see the divine essence (*essentiam*).³⁰

Here Aquinas distinguishes between two ways in which something can be considered beyond the capacity of a thing: the first is one in which something is totally foreign to the nature of the thing, and the second is one in which something is in keeping with the nature of the thing, but is beyond what it is capable of on its own. Aquinas identifies the vision of the divine essence as being beyond the capacity of the created intellect in the second sense, indicating that the nature of the created intellect is such that it can be “strengthened” in order to see the divine essence.³¹ What it means for the intellect to be “strengthened” is clarified by Aquinas in a previous chapter, where Aquinas identifies two ways in which a power can be strengthened: by “simple intensification of the power itself,” or “through the imposition of a new form.”³² Since the vision of the divine essence “is not of the same essential type as the vision proper to a natural created intellect,”³³ the manner in which the intellect must be strengthened for the vision of the divine essence is of the second type, through “the acquisition of a new disposition.”³⁴ In his *Summa*

³⁰ “Divina enim substantia non sic est extra facultatem creati intellectus quasi aliquid omnino extraneum ab ipso, sicut est sonus a visu, vel substantia immaterialis a sensu, nam divina substantia est primum intelligibile, et totius intellectualis cognitionis principium: sed est extra facultatem intellectus creati excedens virtutem eius, sicut excellentia sensibilium sunt extra facultatem sensus. Unde et PHILOSOPHUS in II *Metaphys.*, dicit quod *intellectus noster se habet ad rerum manifestissima sicut oculus noctuae ad lucem solis*. Indigit igitur confortari intellectus creatus aliquo divino lumine ad hoc quod divinam essentiam videre possit.” SCG III, c. 54, 8 (Marietti 2312).

³¹ Waddell notes the significance of Aquinas’s choice of words, stating that “The terminology and analogies that Thomas uses to explain the manner in which the light of glory perfects the human intellect are also telling. . . . Thomas consistently writes of the *lumen gloriae* ‘raising,’ ‘elevating’ and ‘strengthening’ the intellect. His diction does not suggest a radical break between the natural acts of the created intellect and its acts in the state of glory, but rather a continuity.” Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 121.

³² “Simplicem intensionem ipsius virtutis”, “per novae formae appositionem.” SCG III, c. 53, 5 (Marietti 2301a, 2301b).

³³ “Visio non est eiusdem rationis cum visione naturali intellectus creati.” SCG III, c. 53, 5 (Marietti 2301d).

³⁴ “Oportet igitur quod fiat augmentum virtutis intellectivae per alicuius novae dispositionis adaptionem.” SCG III, c. 53, 5 (Marietti 2301e).

theologiae, Aquinas explains the need for this new disposition, in what it consists, and how it is given:

Everything which is raised up to what exceeds its nature, must be prepared by some disposition which is above its nature; as, for example, if air is to receive the form of fire, it must be prepared by some disposition for such a form. But when any created intellect sees God through His essence (*essentiam*), the essence (*essentia*) of God itself becomes the intelligible form of the intellect. Hence it is necessary that some supernatural disposition should be added to the intellect in order that it may be raised up to such a great and sublime height. Now since the natural power of the created intellect does not avail to enable it to see the essence (*essentiam*) of God, as has been shown, it is necessary that the power of understanding be increased by divine grace. Now this increase of the intellectual powers is called the illumination of the intellect, just as we call the intelligible itself light or brightness. And this is the light spoken of in the *Apocalypse XXI: The splendor of God hath enlightened it*—viz. the society of the blessed who see God. And by this light they are made deiform—that is, like to God, according to that which is said in *I John III: When He shall appear we shall be like to Him, and we shall see Him as He is.*³⁵

This “new disposition” is the divine light, the light of glory. While supernatural and thus above nature, this new disposition is also in continuity with nature, as is indicated by an analogy used by Aquinas:

The created light is necessary to see the essence (*essentiam*) of God, not in order to make the essence of God intelligible, which is of itself intelligible, but so that the intellect is made able to understand in the same way as a power is made abler to operate through habit. Even so corporeal light is necessary as regards external sight, inasmuch as it makes the medium actually transparent, and able to be moved by color.³⁶

The manner in which Aquinas speaks seems to indicate not only that the vision of the divine essence is compatible with human nature, but that the very nature of the created intellect is what

³⁵ “Omne quod elevatur ad aliquid quod excedit suam naturam, oportet quod disponatur aliqua dispositione quae sit supra suam naturam: sicut, si aer debeat accipere formam ignis, oportet quod disponatur aliqua dispositione ad talem formam. Cum autem aliquis intellectus creatus videt Deum per essentiam, ipsa essentia Dei fit forma intelligibilis intellectus. Unde oportet quod aliqua dispositio supernaturalis ei superaddatur, ad hoc quod elevetur in tantam sublimitatem. Cum igitur virtus naturalis intellectus creati non sufficiat ad Dei essentiam videndam, ut ostensum est, oportet quod ex divina gratia superaccrescat ei virtus intelligendi. Et hoc augmentum virtutis intellectivae illuminationem intellectus vocamus; sicut et ipsum intelligibile vocatur lumen vel lux. Et istud est lumen de quo dicitur *Apoc. XXI*, quod *claritas Dei illuminabit eam*, scilicet societatem beatorum Deum videntium. Et secundum hoc lumen efficiuntur deiformes, idest Deo similes; secundum illud *I Ioan. III: cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, et videbimus eum sicuti est.*” ST I, q. 12, a. 5, reply (Leonine 4:123). Emphasis in original.

³⁶ “Lumen creatum est necessarium ad videndum Dei essentiam, non quod per hoc lumen Dei essentia intelligibilis fiat, quae secundum se intelligibilis est: sed ad hoc quod intellectus fiat potens ad intelligendum, per modum quo potentia fit potentior ad operandum per habitum: sicut et lumen corporale necessarium est in visu exteriori, in quantum facit medium transparens in actu, ut possit moveri a colore.” ST I, q. 12, a. 5, ad 1 (Leonine 4:123).

makes it possible for God to elevate it to the vision of the divine essence.³⁷ Aquinas provides further confirmation of this:

The sense of sight, because it is altogether material, is not able to be raised to anything immaterial. But our intellect, or the angelic intellect, inasmuch as its nature is elevated above matter, is able to be raised up above its own nature to a higher level through grace. The proof is, that sight is not able in any way to know abstractedly what it knows concretely; for in no way is it able to perceive a nature, unless as *this*. But our intellect is able to consider abstractedly what it knows concretely. Now although it knows things which have a form in matter, still it resolves the composite into both of these, and considers the form itself as it is in itself. And similarly the intellect of an angel, although it is connatural to it to know the concrete existence (*esse*) in any nature, is still able to separate existence itself (*ipsum esse*) by its intellect; since it knows that the thing itself is one thing, and its existence (*esse*) is another. Since therefore the created intellect is naturally capable of apprehending the concrete form and the concrete existence (*esse*) abstractedly, through a certain way of resolution, it is able by grace to be raised up to know separate subsisting substance, and separate subsisting existence (*esse*).³⁸

Therefore, the intellect's natural ability to know being is what makes it possible for man to be elevated to the vision of the divine essence. In the words of Garrigou-Lagrange, "our intellect is capable of knowing God by grace, because it is first of all capable of knowing being by nature."³⁹

Aquinas's distinction between the manner in which man's intellect knows when it is joined to the body and when it is separated from the body is critical to understanding his view on

³⁷ Waddell, in commenting on the passage cited, states that "The analogy to the way in which a habit makes a power more able to act and the way in which the light of glory elevates the intellect beyond its natural capacity suggests that there is some kind of capacity or obediential potentiality for the created intellect to be actualized by a vision of the divine essence already extant at the natural level – bearing in mind, of course, that this potency cannot be actualized either by the created intellect itself or even by the divine essence considered as intelligible form but only by a supernatural disposition that prepares the created intellect to receive the divine essence as a form joined to it as an object of knowledge." Waddell provides a helpful footnote about what he means by "obediential potentiality," and the manner in which the soul might be considered to have a natural capacity for seeing God. See Waddell, "Light of Glory," 121-122.

³⁸ "Sensus visus, quia omnino materialis est, nullo modo elevari potest ad aliquid immateriale. Sed intellectus noster vel angelicus, quia secundum naturam a materia aliqualiter elevatus est, potest ultra suam naturam per gratiam ad aliquid altius elevari. Et huius signum est, quia visus nullo modo potest in abstractione cognoscere id quod in concretione cognoscit: nullo enim modo potest percipere naturam, nisi ut *hanc*. Sed intellectus noster potest in abstractione considerare quod in concretione cognoscit. Etsi enim cognoscat res habentes formam in materia, tamen resolvit compositum in utrumque, et considerat ipsam formam per se. Et similiter intellectus angeli, licet connaturale sit ei cognoscere esse concretum in aliqua natura, tamen potest ipsum esse secernere per intellectum, dum cognoscit quod aliud est ipse, et aliud est suum esse. Et ideo, cum intellectus creatus per suam naturam natus sit apprehendere formam concretam et esse concretum in abstractione, per modum resolutionis cuiusdam, potest per gratiam elevari ut cognoscat substantiam separatam subsistentem, et esse separatum subsistens." ST I, q. 12, a. 4, ad 3 (Leonine 4:121).

³⁹ Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection*, 54.

how knowledge which is independent of sense experience, although not man's ordinary mode of knowing, is indeed consonant with human nature. In treating of the incorruptibility of the soul, Aquinas states:

Nevertheless it must be borne in mind that the soul understands in a different manner when separated from the body and when united to it, even as it exists diversely in those cases; for a thing acts according as it is. Indeed, although the soul, while united to the body, enjoys an absolute existence (*esse*) not depending on the body, nevertheless the body is the soul's housing, so to speak, and the subject that receives it. This explains why the soul's proper operation, which is understanding, has its object, namely, the phantasm, in the body, although this operation does not depend on the body as though it were effected through a bodily organ. It follows that, so long as the soul is in the body, it is not able to understand without a phantasm; neither can it remember except through the powers of cogitation and memory, by which the phantasms are prepared, as stated above. Accordingly, understanding, so far as this mode of it is concerned, and similarly remembering, is destroyed with the destruction of the body. The separated soul, however, exists by itself, apart from the body. Consequently, its operation, which is understanding, will not be fulfilled in relation to those objects existing in bodily organs which the phantasms are: but it will understand through itself, in the manner of substances which, according to their being (*esse*), are totally separate from bodies, and of which we shall treat subsequently. And from those substances, as from things above it, the separated soul will be able to receive a more abundant influx, productive of a more perfect understanding on its own part. . . . Consequently, when the soul shall be completely separated from the body, it will be perfectly likened to separate substances in its mode of understanding, and will receive their influx abundantly. Therefore, although the mode of our understanding according to the present life is destroyed when the body is destroyed, nevertheless another and higher mode of understanding will take its place.⁴⁰

Here Aquinas identifies understanding as the proper operation of the intellect by nature, and indicates that the mode of this operation in the human intellect differs, depending upon whether the soul is united to or separated from the body. Man's intellect, when separated from the body,

⁴⁰ "Sciendum tamen est quod alio modo intelligit anima separata a corpore et corpori unita, sicut et alio modo est: unumquodque enim secundum hoc agit secundum quod est. Esse quidem animae humanae dum est corpori unita, etsi sit absolutum a corpore non dependens, tamen *strumentum* quoddam ipsius et subiectum ipsum recipiens est corpus. Unde et consequenter operatio propria eius, quae est intelligere, etsi non dependeat a corpore quasi per organum corporale exercita, habet tamen obiectum in corpore, scilicet phantasma. Unde, quandiu est anima in corpore, non potest intelligere sine phantasmate: nec etiam reminisci nisi per virtutem cogitativam et memorativam, per quam phantasmata praeparantur, ut ex dictis [hic supra] patet. Et propter hoc intelligere, quantum ad hunc modum, et similiter reminisci, destruitur corpore destructo. Esse vero separatae animae est ipsi soli absque corpore. Unde nec eius operatio, quae est intelligere, explebitur per respectum ad aliqua obiecta in corporeis organis existentia, quae sunt phantasmata: sed intelligit per seipsum, ad modum substantiarum quae sunt totaliter secundum esse a corporibus separatae, de quibus infra (cap. 96sqq.) agetur. A quibus etiam tanquam a superioribus, uberius influentiam recipere poterit ad perfectius intelligendum. . . . Unde et, quando totaliter erit a corpore separata, perfecte assimilabitur substantiis separatis quantum ad modum intelligendi, et abunde influentiam eorum recipiet. Sic igitur, etsi intelligere nostrum secundum modum praesentis vitae, corrupto corpore corrumpatur, succedit tamen alius modus intelligendi altior." SCG II, c. 81, 12 (Marietti 1625 & 1626).

understands in the same manner as the separate substances; Aquinas verifies that this is still a natural mode of knowledge:

But, when it [the soul] will have its being (*esse*) free of the body, then it will receive the influx of intellectual knowledge in the way in which angels receive it, without any ordination to the body. Thus, it will receive species of things from God himself, in order not to have to turn to any phantasms actually to know through these species or through those which it acquired previously. Nevertheless, it will be able to see separated substances, as the angels and demons, *with natural knowledge*, although it will not be able to see God in this way, for, without grace this is not given to any creature.⁴¹

Therefore, when the soul is separated from the body, man's intellect by nature is capable of knowing immaterial being without prior sense knowledge and phantasms. This is necessary for the beatific vision, for Aquinas states that because "the natural affinity of our intellect for phantasms" inhibits us from being able to see separate substance as long as the soul is joined to the body,⁴² "the mind which sees the divine substance must be completely cut off from the bodily senses, either by death or by ecstasy."⁴³ Yet, while the mode of understanding changes when the soul is separated from the body, Aquinas is careful to note that the intellectual powers remain: "The same intellective powers which are now in the soul will be in the separated soul because they are natural. For natural things must remain, although they now have an ordination to the body which they will not have then, as has been said."⁴⁴ Although man's intellect in the

⁴¹ "Sed quando habebit esse a corpore absolutum, tunc recipiet influentiam intellectualis cognitionis hoc modo quo angeli recipiunt sine aliquo ordine ad corpus, ut scilicet species rerum ab ipso Deo recipiat; nec oporteat ad intelligendum in actu per has species vel per eas quas prius acquisivit, ad aliqua phantasmata converti; possit nihilominus ipsas substantias separatas, scilicet angelos vel daemones, *naturali cognitione* videre quamvis non Deum, quod nulli creaturae conceditur sine gratia." *De veritate*, q. 19, a. 1, reply (Leonine 129rb 381-392). Emphasis my own. It is important to note that, although Aquinas holds that man's intellect, separated from the body, can see separated substances with natural knowledge, this in no way extends to the vision of the essence of God.

⁴² "Alias substantias separatas in hac vita intelligere non possumus, propter connaturalitatem intellectus nostri ad phantasmata." SCG III, c. 47, 1 (Marietti 2238).

⁴³ "Unde oportet mentem quae divinam substantiam videt, totaliter a corporalibus sensibus esse absolutam, vel per mortem vel per aliquem raptum." SCG III, c. 47, 2 (Marietti 2239).

⁴⁴ "Eadem potentiae intellectivae quae nunc sunt in anima erunt in anima separata, quia sunt naturales; naturalia autem oportet manere, quamvis nunc habeant ordinem ad corpus quem tunc non habebunt, ut dictum est." *De veritate*, q. 19, a. 1, ad 8 (Leonine 129rb 446-451). In Aquinas's reply to an earlier objection, he has already explained that "the power of understanding and the agent and possible intellects will remain in the separated soul. For the existence of these powers is not caused in the soul by the body, although, while they exist in the soul united to the body, they do have an ordination to the body which they will not have in the separated soul." "In anima separata remanebit potentia intellectiva, et intellectus agens et possibilis: huiusmodi enim potentiae non causantur in anima ex corpore; quamvis in anima corpori unita existentes aliquem ordinem habeant ad corpus, quem non

next life will understand according to the mode of separate substances, its nature will remain specifically the same.

While the immaterial mode of knowledge of which the separated soul is capable is necessary for the vision of the divine essence, it is important to be clear that Aquinas is not saying that the vision of the divine essence is incompatible with the human body-soul composite. If that were the case, then the beatific vision could not be the ultimate perfection of man, for Aquinas clearly states that “the soul is naturally united to the body, for according to its essence (*essentiam*) it is the form of the body. It is, then, contrary to the nature of the soul to be without the body.”⁴⁵ The solution to the apparent contradiction between the assertion that, on the one hand, it is necessary for the intellect to be separated from the body in order to see the divine essence, and, on the other hand, that it is contrary to the nature of the soul to be separated from the body, can be found in the difference that Aquinas posits in the relationship between the soul and body in this life and in the next:

The soul and body appear to be related in a different order according to the first generation of man and according to his resurrection. Now, according to the first generation the creation of the soul follows the generation of the body, for, when the bodily matter is prepared by the power of the separated seed, God infuses the soul by an act of creation. But in the resurrection the body is adapted to the pre-existing soul. However, that first life, which man acquires through generation, follows the condition of the corruptible body in this: man is deprived of that life by death. Then, the life which man acquires by resurrection will be perpetual according to the condition of the incorruptible soul.⁴⁶

habebunt in anima separata.” *De veritate*, q. 19, a.1, ad 6 (Leonine 129rb 434-440). It appears to follow from Aquinas’s position that, although the separated soul will understand according to the mode of separate substances, it will do so through the powers that are specific to man. Aquinas denies that separate substances have an agent and possible intellect, “except, perhaps, in an equivocal sense.” “Patet autem ex hoc quod in substantiis separatis non est intellectus agens et possibilis, nisi forte aequivoce.” See SCG II, c. 96, 8 (Marietti 1818).

⁴⁵ “Anima corpori naturaliter unitur: est enim secundum suam essentiam corporis forma. Est igitur contra naturam animae absque corpore esse.” SCG IV, c. 79, 10 (Marietti 4135). See also SCG II, c. 68 and c. 83 (Marietti 1448-1459 & 1650-1684).

⁴⁶ “Anima et corpus diverso ordine comparari videntur secundum primam hominis generationem, et secundum resurrectionem eiusdem. Nam secundum generationem primam, creatio animae sequitur generationem corporis: praeparata enim materia corporali per virtutem decisi seminis, Deus animam creando infundit. In resurrectione autem corpus animae praexistenti coaptatur. Prima autem vita, quam homo per generationem adipiscitur, sequitur conditionem corruptibilis corporis in hoc quod per mortem privatur. Vita igitur quam homo resurgendo adipiscitur, erit perpetua, secundum conditionem incorruptibilis animae.” SCG IV, c. 82, 7 (Marietti 4167).

In this life, the soul is subject to the limitations of the body, whereas in the next life, the perfections of the soul will overflow into the body.⁴⁷ Aquinas argues that “The perfect operation of the intellect requires indeed a separation from this corruptible body, which weighs upon the soul; but not from the spiritual body, which will be wholly subject to the spirit.”⁴⁸ Aquinas uses the term “spiritual body” not to indicate that the body will be changed into spirit, but to denote its complete subjectivity to the spirit.⁴⁹ The body will be the same in nature and species; it will be “composed of flesh and bones,”⁵⁰ and will be able to touch.⁵¹ However, while the body will be the same in species, it will have a new disposition,⁵² “proportioned to that of the soul,” since the resurrection of the body “is provided for the perfection of the soul.”⁵³ It will be necessary for the soul to be rejoined to the body for its own perfection, and thus for the complete perfection of man’s happiness in the next life.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ See also ST I-II, q. 3, a. 3, ad 3 (Leonine 6:28): “In perfect happiness the entire man is perfected, in the lower part of his nature, by an overflow from the higher. But in the imperfect happiness of this life, it is otherwise; we advance from the perfection of the lower part to the perfection of the higher part.” “In perfecta beatitudine perficitur totus homo, sed in inferiori parte per redundantiam a superiori. In beatitudine autem imperfecta praesentis vitae, e converso a perfectione inferioris partis proceditur ad perfectionem superioris.”

⁴⁸ “Ad perfectam operationem intellectus requiritur quidem abstractio ab hoc corruptibili corpore, quod aggravat animam: non autem a corpore spirituali, quod erit totaliter spiritui subiectum.” ST I-II, q. 4, a. 6, ad 3 (Leonine 6:44).

⁴⁹ See SCG IV, c. 86, 5 (Marietti 4222).

⁵⁰ “Ergo et alii homines resurgentे corpora palpabilia habebunt, ex carnibus et ossibus composita.” SCG IV, c. 84, 3 (Marietti 4197).

⁵¹ See SCG IV, c. 84, 14 (Marietti 4208).

⁵² See SCG IV, c. 85, 1 (Marietti 4212).

⁵³ “Quia igitur in hoc perfectioni animae providetur quod corpus recipiat, conveniens erit ut corpus secundum quod competit animae disponatur.” SCG IV, c. 85, 5 (Marietti 4214b).

⁵⁴ See ST I-II, q. 4, a. 5, reply (Leonine 6:42). In this article Aquinas argues that the soul does not need the body to attain perfect happiness through the beatific vision, since it is in the vision of God’s essence that man’s happiness consists. Yet, in one sense the complete happiness of the soul will be hindered until it is reunited with the body: “One thing is hindered by another in two ways. First, by way of opposition, just as cold hinders the action of heat: and such a hindrance to operation is opposed to Happiness. Second, by way of a certain defect, because, as is obvious, that which is hindered has not all that is necessary to make it perfect in every way: and such a hindrance to operation is not opposed to Happiness, but prevents it from being perfect in every way. And thus it is that separation from the body is said to hold the soul back from tending with all its might to the vision of the Divine Essence (*divinae essentiae*). For the soul desires to enjoy God in such a way that the enjoyment also may overflow into the body as far as possible. And therefore, as long as it enjoys God without the body, its appetite is at rest in that which it has, in such a way, that it would still wish the body to attain participation.” “Dupliciter aliquid impeditur ab alio. Uno modo, per modum contrarietatis, sicut frigus impedit actionem caloris: et tale impedimentum operationis repugnat felicitati. Alio modo, per modum cuiusdam defectus, quia scilicet res impedita non habet quidquid ad

Aquinas's care to preserve whatever belongs to the soul and body by nature is indicative of the fact that he sees some continuity between this life and the next. Although the separated soul understands in a manner similar to that of the separate substances, it still retains its agent and possible intellects.⁵⁵ Because it is natural for the human soul to be joined to a body, the complete perfection of man will take place when man's body rejoins his soul. This body, while glorified through an overflow from the soul experiencing the beatific vision, will still be of the same nature and species. Man does not become an angel. The axiom that grace perfects nature rings true, for it is truly man's nature that is perfected in the beatific vision.

While these texts from Aquinas shed some light on how the beatific vision is continuous with and even presupposes man's nature, there still remains the question of how the beatific vision is continuous with Aquinas's theory of knowledge. Waddell perceptively identifies the aporia:

Even if one concedes that the created intellect can be elevated beyond the limitations of its nature and know something above its own mode of being with the help of grace, though, there would seem to be peculiar problems that arise from the prospect of knowing the divine essence. And these problems are not obviously solved by invoking the power of grace to strengthen the light of the created intellect. For example, according to Thomas's own recurring description of knowledge the thing known must be *in the knower according to the mode of the knower*. At the same time, Thomas maintains that the divine essence itself is in the glorified intellect as its intelligible form. But how can what is infinite be in what is finite? Or how can *esse per se subsistens* be in what has *esse* only *per participationem*? In other words, how can the divine essence be in the created knower according to the mode of the knower – not as a finite, participated image, but in such a way that the divine essence itself is the intelligible form of the intellect?⁵⁶

Thus, it is evident that further work needs to be done to explain how the created intellect's vision of the divine essence can be considered "knowing" in the Thomistic sense.

omnimodam sui perfectionem requiritur: et tale impedimentum operationis non repugnat felicitati, sed omnimodae perfectioni ipsius. Et sic separatio a corpore dicitur animam retardare, ne tota intentione tendat in visionem divinae essentiae. Appetit enim anima sic frui Deo, quod etiam ipsa fruitio derivetur ad corpus per redundantiam, sicut est possibile. Et ideo quandiu ipsa fruitur Deo sine corpore, appetitus eius sic quiescit in eo quod habet, quod tamen adhuc ad participationem eius vellet suum corpus pertingere." ST I-II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 4 (Leonine 6:43). Aquinas goes on to explain that the happiness of the soul, when reunited with the body, will thus increase in extent, although not in intensity.

⁵⁵ See *De veritate*, q. 19, a.1, ad 6 (Leonine 129rb 434-440).

⁵⁶ Waddell, "Light of Glory," 123-124. Emphasis in original.

ii. Continuity with Aquinas's Theory of Knowledge

Waddell attempts to address the difficulties he has identified by positing that, in the light of glory, there are significant differences between what it means for something to be “in the knower,” and known according to the “mode of the knower.” Waddell examines the mode of the knower first. Citing a passage from the *Summa theologiae* in which Aquinas states that those who have greater charity will participate more fully in the light of glory and thus will see God more perfectly,⁵⁷ Waddell concludes that “it seems that the separation of intellect and will (and therefore the separation of knowledge and love) that we experience *in via* might be diminished in the perfection of the *lumen gloriae* – or, at the very least, that this separation does not abide in the way we know it in the natural mode of the soul.”⁵⁸ As a result,

the bifurcation of the soul’s receptivity in knowing and its turning outward in loving should also be overcome (or at least diminished), so that receiving would extend into giving and these two acts would tend toward becoming one. Thus, knowing would extend beyond itself *in patria*, as willing does *in via*. This means that the soul’s glorified act of knowing would not be limited by what the soul can contain (or receive) but would also extend into what the soul tends toward outside of itself.⁵⁹

Waddell suggests that this proposal contributes to the solution of the difficulty of the divine essence being known by a created intellect, for

even if the created intellect cannot contain the divine essence, this might not prevent the glorified intellect from knowing the divine essence because the act of the glorified intellect might reach outward toward the divine essence as it exists in itself – as the will does *in via* – and therefore the perfection of the intellect would not be limited by a participated likeness of the divine essence existing in the created intellect. In this way, the mode of knowing that we typically enjoy *in via* would be transcended, and the knower would be perfected by the very being of the thing known and not merely by its image.⁶⁰

Waddell notes that, although this transcendent mode of knowing might explain how the created intellect can know the divine essence as It is in itself rather than through Its image, “it is still not clear how the divine essence could be said to be ‘in’ the knower as its intelligible form – and

⁵⁷ See ST I, q. 12, a. 6 (Leonine 4:125-126).

⁵⁸ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 126.

⁵⁹ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 127.

⁶⁰ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 127-128.

thus how it could be said to be ‘known’ – on this account.”⁶¹ Indeed, in ordinary human knowledge the intelligible species, produced by the intellect, is an instrument of knowledge – a medium by which something is known (*medium quo*) – and not the the very thing itself. Waddell believes that, again, the answer lies in a difference in what it means, in the beatific vision, for something to be “in the knower.” Waddell proposes that what Aquinas says in his *Summa theologiae* I, q. 8, a. 1 about the manner in which God can be said to exist “in” things is key. Noting first that Aquinas’s reply in this article “suggests that God is especially said to be “in” creatures by virtue of standing in relation to them as a formal principle,” Waddell goes on to examine Aquinas’s response to the second objection which he says “suggests that while spiritual things are said to be “in” other things, they are nevertheless in them in such a way that the spiritual things contain the things in which they are.”⁶² Therefore, applying this distinction to the beatific vision, Waddell concludes

Thus, rather than the created intellect having to *contain* the divine essence as something known – which happens, for example, when the created intellect knows forms abstracted from material beings – the rational creature is actually *contained by God* when it knows the divine essence in glory. So, saying that God is ‘in’ the created intellect is really tantamount to saying that the created intellect is ‘in’ God. Accordingly, the fact that the created intellect is finite and cannot exhaustively contain the divine essence need not pose a problem: for the divine essence can be said to be “in” the glorified knower as something containing it rather than as something contained by it. And this might well be just what it means for the divine essence to be “in” the human knower in the state of glory.⁶³

Thus, Waddell’s complete solution posits that the mode of the knower differs in the light of glory “because the act of the glorified intellect might reach outward toward the divine essence as it exists in itself – as the will does *in via*,”⁶⁴ and what it means to be “in the knower” differs because, in the light of glory, “saying that God is ‘in’ the created intellect is really tantamount to saying that the created intellect is ‘in’ God.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 128.

⁶² Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 130.

⁶³ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 130-131. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁴ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 127.

⁶⁵ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 131.

Although Waddell's thesis is intriguing, it appears to be at odds with Aquinas's own discussions of the manner in which man knows God in the beatific vision, and seems to undermine Aquinas's view of the beatific vision as the perfection of man. Waddell's theory that the mode of the knower changes in such a way that the act of the intellect becomes more like the act of the will, tending toward what is outside of itself rather than being receptive, is not found in Aquinas. On the contrary, when Aquinas speaks of the operation of the intellect in the attainment of happiness, he states:

Two things are needed for happiness: one, which is the essence (*essentia*) of happiness; another, that is, as it were, its proper accident, namely, the delight connected with it. I say, then, that as to the very essence of happiness, it is impossible for it to consist in an act of the will. For it is evident from what has been said that happiness is the attainment of the last end. But the attainment of the end does not consist in the act of the will itself. For the will is directed to the end, both absent, when it desires it; and present, when it is delighted by resting in it. Now it is evident that the desire itself of the end is not the attainment of the end, but is a movement towards the end. However, delight comes to the will from the end being present: and not conversely, is a thing made present, because the will delights in it. Therefore, that the end be present to him who desires it, must be due to something else (*aliquid aliud esse*) than an act of the will.

This is evidently the case in regard to sensible ends. For if the acquisition of money were through an act of the will, the covetous man would have it from the very moment that he wished for it. But at the moment it is far from him; and he attains it, by grasping it in his hand, or in some like manner; and then he delights in the money possessed. And so it is with an intelligible end. For at first we desire to attain an intelligible end; we attain it, through its being made present to us through an act of the intellect; and then the delighted will rests in the end already attained.

So, therefore, the essence of happiness consists in an act of the intellect: but the delight that results from happiness pertains to the will. Therefore, Augustine says (*Confessions X*) that happiness is *joy in truth*, because, namely, joy itself is the consummation of happiness.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ “Ad beatitudinem, sicut supra dictum est, duo requiruntur: unum quod est essentia beatitudinis; aliud quod est quasi per se accidens eius, scilicet delectatio ei adjuncta. Dico ergo quod, quantum ad id quod est essentialiter ipsa beatitudo, impossibile est quod consistat in actu voluntatis. Manifestum est enim ex praemissis quod beatitudo est consecutio finis ultimi. Consecutio autem finis non consistit in ipso actu voluntatis. Voluntas enim fertur in finem et absentem, cum ipsum desiderat; et praesentem, cum in ipso requiescens delectatur. Manifestum est autem quod ipsum desiderium finis non est consecutio finis, sed est motus ad finem. Delectatio autem advenit voluntati ex hoc quod finis est praesens: non autem e converso ex hoc aliquid fit praesens, quia voluntas delectatur in ipso. Oportet igitur aliquid aliud esse quam actum voluntatis, per quod fit ipse finis praesens volenti.

Et hoc manifeste appetit circa fines sensibiles. Si enim consequi pecuniam esset per actum voluntatis, statim a principio cupidus consecutus esset pecuniam, quando vult eam habere. Sed a principio quidem est absens ei; consequitur autem ipsam per hoc quod manu ipsam apprehendit, vel aliquo huiusmodi; et tunc iam delectatur in pecunia habita. Sic igitur et circa intelligibilem finem contingit. Nam a principio volumus consequi finem intelligibilem; consequimur autem ipsum per hoc quod fit praesens nobis per actum intellectus; et tunc voluntas delectata conquiescit in fine iam adepto.

Aquinas here shows that happiness cannot be attained by the outward movement of the will toward what is desired, but rather when the thing desired is “made present to us by an act of the intellect.” Aquinas’s claim that the essence of happiness must consist in an act of the intellect is based on the contrast between the proper operations of the intellect and the will, and he insists that happiness consists in the end being made present through an act of the intellect. The analogy Aquinas uses is also revealing: it is only when a covetous man attains the money he desires, “by grasping it in his hand, or in some like manner,” that he is “happy.” Furthermore, when Aquinas speaks of the perfection of the intellect he states that “it is perfected by understanding, and it understands by having in itself the forms of the things understood.”⁶⁷ Of course, here Aquinas is speaking of the natural operation of the intellect, but he continues to refer to the intellect as “receptive” when it comes to the divine essence as intelligible form:

Nothing is receptive of a more sublime form unless it be elevated by means of a disposition to the capacity for this form, for a proper act is produced in a proper potency. Now, the divine essence (*divina essentia*) is a higher form than any created intellect. Therfore, in order that the divine essence (*divina essentia*) may be the intelligible species for any created intellect . . . it is necessary that the created intellect be elevated by a more sublime disposition.⁶⁸

The language of receiving is consistently used by Aquinas when speaking about the intellect and the vision of the divine essence. When Aquinas speaks of the manner of knowing in the beatific vision, he parallels it with the operations of the intellect in its ordinary mode of knowing, and delineates the ways in which it differs. It would seem that, if Aquinas were to hold that the

Sic igitur essentia beatitudinis in actu intellectus consistit: sed ad voluntatem pertinet delectatio beatitudinem consequens; secundum quod Augustinus dicit, *X Confess.*, quod beatitudo est *gaudium de veritate*; quia scilicet ipsum gaudium est consummatio beatitudinis.” ST I-II, q. 3, a. 4, reply (Leonine 6:29). Emphasis in original.

⁶⁷ “Intellectus autem non corrumpitur, sed magis perficitur per hoc quod recipit formas omnium corporum: perficitur enim in intelligendo; intelligit autem secundum quod habet in se formas intellectorum.” SCG II, c. 49, 3 (Marietti 1249).

⁶⁸ “Nihil est susceptivum formae sublimioris nisi per aliquam dispositionem ad illius capacitatem elevetur: proprius enim actus in propria potentia fit. Essentia autem divina est forma altior omni intellectu creato. Ad hoc igitur quod essentia divina fiat intelligibilis species alicuius intellectus creati . . . necesse est quod intellectus creatus aliqua dispositione sublimiori ad hoc elevetur.” SCG III, c. 53, 3 (Marietti 2299).

operation of the intellect differs in the manner that Waddell proposes, an explicit statement of this would be found in Aquinas. Yet it is not. Even in the very text that Waddell quotes to support his claim, Aquinas indicates that the mode of the knower in the beatific vision remains receptive:

Hence the intellect which participates more of the light of glory will see God more perfectly. For he who has more charity participates more of the light of glory: because where there is greater charity, there is greater desire; and desire in a certain way *makes the one desiring apt and prepared to receive the object desired*. Hence he who possesses more charity, will see God more perfectly, and will be more beatified.⁶⁹

Thus, contrary to Waddell's thesis, Aquinas appears to hold that the mode of the intellect in the beatific vision remains receptive. Waddell is correct to posit that the mode of the intellect must change in some way, for Aquinas himself states that the created intellect cannot see the essence of God by its natural power because the mode of God's being exceeds the mode of the created intellect.⁷⁰ However, the changes that Aquinas posits – a mode of knowing in which the intellect is not dependent upon the body,⁷¹ and an “increase of the intellectual powers”⁷² through the light of glory – are, unlike Waddell's proposition, in keeping with the intellect's nature, which is properly receptive.

The more important of Waddell's two propositions, though, as he himself suggests,⁷³ is his account of what it means for the divine essence to be in the knower.⁷⁴ Waddell appears to be trying to address the same problem that Aquinas himself addresses in his *Summa contra Gentiles*

⁶⁹ “Unde intellectus plus participans de lumine gloriae, perfectius Deum videbit. Plus autem participabit de lumine gloriae, qui plus habet de caritate: quia ubi est maior caritas, ibi est maius desiderium; et desiderium quodammodo *facit desiderantem aptum et paratum ad susceptionem desiderati*. Unde qui plus habebit de caritate, perfectius Deum videbit, et beatior erit.” ST I, q. 12, a. 6, reply (Leonine 4:126). Emphasis my own.

⁷⁰ See ST I, q. 12, a. 4, reply (Leonine 4:120-121).

⁷¹ See *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 11, reply (Leonine 96rb 147-217); SCG III, c. 47 (Marietti 2238-2245); ST I-II, q. 4, a. 6, ad 3 (Leonine 6:44).

⁷² “Augmentum virtutis intellectivae.” ST I, q. 12, a. 5, reply (Leonine 4:123).

⁷³ Waddell, “Light of Glory,” 125.

⁷⁴ It is evident that, if Aquinas holds that the divine essence is in the knower in a manner similar to that in which other intelligible species are said to be in the knower, then it would not be necessary to posit such a difference in the mode of the knower.

and *De veritate* – that is, how God can be seen in His essence by a created intellect. In both texts, Aquinas provides an indication of the manner in which the divine essence can be said to be in the knower. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas states:

Now, since the intellect is not able to understand any substance unless it becomes actual by means of some species, which is the likeness of the thing understood, informing it, a person might consider it impossible for the created intellect to be able to see, by means of the divine essence (*divinam essentiam*) serving as a sort of intelligible species, the substance of God Himself: for the divine essence (*divina essentia*) is a certain being subsisting through itself, and we showed in Book One that God cannot be the form for any other being (*esse*).

In order to understand the truth of this matter, we must consider that substance which is subsisting through itself is either a form only, or a composite of matter and form. And a thing that is composed of matter and form cannot be the form of another being (*esse*): because the form in it is already limited to this matter, so that it is not able to be the form of another thing. But that which subsists in such a way that it is a form only is able to be the form of another being (*esse*), provided its being is such that it is able to be participated by another thing, as we showed concerning the human soul, in Book Two. However, if its being (*esse*) is not able to be participated by another, it is not able to be the form of any other thing, for then it would be determined within itself through its own being (*esse*), just as material things are by their own matter. Now, this should be observed as obtaining in the same way in the order of intelligible being (*esse*) as it does in substantial or physical being (*esse*). For, since the perfection of the intellect is truth, in the order of intelligible objects, that object which is a purely formal intelligible will be truth itself. And this characteristic applies only to God, for, since the true is consequent on being (*esse*), that alone is its own truth which is its own being (*esse*), which is proper to God alone, as we showed in Book Two. So, other intelligible subsistents do not exist as pure forms in the order of intelligible beings, but as possessors of a form in some subject: for each of them is a true thing but not truth; just as each is a being (*ens*), but not being itself (*ipsum esse*). Therefore it is manifest that the divine essence is able to be related to the created intellect as an intelligible species by which it understands, but this does not apply to the essence (*essentia*) of any other separate substance. However, it is not able to be the form of another thing according to its natural being (*esse naturale*), for it would follow that, once joined to another thing, it would make up one nature. This could not be, since the divine essence (*essentia divina*) is in itself perfect in its own nature. But an intelligible species, united with an intellect, does not constitute another nature, but perfects the intellect for the act of understanding, and this is not incompatible with the perfection of the divine essence (*divinae essentiae*).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ “Cum autem intellectus substantiam aliquam intelligere non possit nisi fiat actu secundum aliquam speciem informantem ipsum quae sit similitudo rei intellectae, impossibile videri potest alicui quod per essentiam divinam intellectus creatus possit videre ipsam Dei substantiam quasi per quandam speciem intelligibilem: cum divina essentia sit quiddam per seipsum subsistens; et in Primo (capp. 26 sqq.) ostensum sit quod Deus nullius potest esse forma.

Ad huius igitur intelligentiam veritatis, considerandum est quod substantia quae est per seipsum subsistens, est vel forma tantum, vel compositum ex materia et forma. Illud igitur quod ex materia et forma compositum est, non potest alterius esse forma: quia forma in eo est iam contracta ad illam materiam, ut alterius rei forma esse non possit. Illud autem quod sic est subsistens ut tamen solum sit forma, potest alterius esse forma, dummodo esse suum sit tale quod ab aliquo alio participari possit, sicut in Secundo (cap. 68) ostendimus de anima humana. Si vero esse suum ab altero participari non posset, nullius rei forma esse posset: sic enim per suum esse determinatur in seipso, sicut quae sunt materialia per materiam. Hoc autem, sicut in esse substantiali vel naturali invenitur, sic et in esse intelligibili considerandum est. Cum enim intellectus perfectio sit verum, illud intelligibile erit ut forma tantum in genere intelligibilium quod est veritas ipsa. Quod convenit soli Deo nam cum verum sequatur ad esse, illud tantum sua veritas est quod est suum esse, quod est proprium soli Deo, ut in Secundo (cap. 15) ostensum est. Alia igitur intelligibilia subsistentia sunt non ut pura forma in genere intelligibilium, sed ut formam in subiecto aliquo habentes: est enim unumquodque eorum verum, non veritas; sicut et est ens, non autem ipsum esse. Manifestum est igitur

It is important to note that Aquinas approaches this question specifically from the angle of how the divine essence can be in the knower. This approach is evidenced by the fact that he formulates the difficulties in terms of the created intellect's ability to understand substances by means of a species informing it, which is precisely what it means for something to be in the knower in Aquinas's theory of knowledge. Aquinas recognizes that positing that the divine essence is the intelligible species informing the intellect in the beatific vision is problematic on two accounts. First, in the knowledge of created things, the intelligible species is only a likeness of the thing, for the essence of the thing cannot be in the intellect. Second, the divine essence is being itself, and therefore cannot be the form of another thing.

Aquinas solves both of these difficulties by explaining how the divine essence, because it is *pure* form, can be the form of the intellect as its intelligible species in the act of understanding. The first difficulty is solved through the distinction Aquinas makes between an intelligible being that is pure form, and one whose form is in a subject. Only God, Aquinas argues, is purely intelligible form; therefore, unlike any other being, it is possible for His essence to be the intelligible species by which the intellect understands. Thus, in the case of the divine essence as intelligible species, that which (*id quod*) is known and that by which (*medium quo*) it is known are identical. The second difficulty is solved by recognizing that, when an intelligible species is united to an intellect, this does not form a new nature, but rather perfects the intellect without any change to the object known. Therefore, the union of the divine essence with the intellect as its intelligible species in the act of understanding does not in any way alter or diminish the

quod essentia divina potest comparari ad intellectum creatum ut species intelligibilis qua intelligit: quod non contingit de essentia alicuius alterius substantiae separatae. Nec tamen potest esse forma alterius rei secundum esse naturale: sequeretur enim quod, simul cum alio iuncta, constitueret unam naturam; quod esse non potest, cum essentia divina in se perfecta sit in sui natura. Species autem intelligibilis, unita intellectui, non constituit aliquam naturam, sed perficit ipsum ad intelligendum: quod perfectioni divinae essentiae non repugnat." SCG III, c. 51, 3-4 (Marietti 2286-2287).

perfection of the divine essence. Based on Aquinas's approach and conclusion, it appears that, far from positing that the manner in which his theory of knowledge might be discontinuous with knowledge in the light of glory is the solution to the problem of the divine essence being in the knower, Aquinas rather views his theory of knowledge as providing the key to the solution. Further confirmation of this is found in a passage from *De veritate*, where Aquinas discusses the angels' knowledge of the divine essence [my own emphasis]:

It is not necessary, however, for the divine essence to become the form of the intellect itself but only to become related to the intellect after the manner of a form. Consequently, just as one actual being (*ens*) results from matter and a form which is a part of the thing; so, with the necessary differences, the created intellect and the divine essence (*essentia divina*) become one in the act of understanding when the intellect understands and the essence (*essentia*) is understood through itself. How it is possible for a separated essence to be joined to the intellect as a form has been shown by the Commentator in *De anima* III:
Whenever two things are received in something that can receive, and one of them is more perfect than the other, the proportion of what is more perfect to that which is less perfect is like the proportion of a form to what it perfects- just as light is the perfection of color when both are received in a transparent medium.
Consequently, since a created intellect, because present in a created substance, is less perfect than the divine essence, the divine essence (*divina essentia*) bears to it in some way the relation of a form when it exists in it. We are able to find some sort of example of this among natural things: for a thing subsisting through itself is not able to be the form of any matter if it contains matter itself, just as a stone is not able to be the form of any matter. But a thing subsisting through itself which is free from matter is able to be the form of matter, as is clear in the case of the soul. And similarly, in some way, the divine essence (*divina essentia*), which is pure act, and has being (*esse*) entirely distinct from the intellect, becomes related to the intellect as its form in the act of understanding. For this reason, the Teacher says in Distinction II in *Sentences* II that the union of the body with a rational soul is, in a way, an example of the beatifying union of a rational spirit with God.⁷⁶

Particularly notable here is Aquinas's explanation of how a separated essence is joined to the intellect as form. Aquinas, appealing to Averroes, speaks of the form as being "received in

⁷⁶ "Non autem oportet quod ipsa essentia divina fiat forma ipsius intellectus sed quod se habeat ad ipsum ut forma; ut sicut ex forma, quae est pars rei, < et materia > efficitur unum ens actu, ita, licet dissimili modo, ex essentia divina et intellectu creato fit unum in intelligendo, dum intellectus intelligit et essentia per se ipsam intelligitur. Qualiter autem essentia separata possit coniungi intellectui ut forma, sic ostendit Commentator in III *De anima*: *quandocumque in aliquo receptibili recipiuntur duo quorum unum est altero perfectius, proportio perfectioris ad minus perfectum est sicut proportio formae ad suum perfectibile, sicut lux est perfectio coloris cum ambo recipiuntur in diaphano;* et ideo cum intellectus creatus, qui inest substantiae creatae, sit imperfectior divina essentia in eo existente, comparabitur divina essentia ad illum intellectum quodam modo ut forma. Et huius exemplum aliquale in naturalibus inveniri potest: res enim per se subsistens non potest esse alicuius materiae forma si in ea aliquid de materia inveniatur, sicut lapis non potest esse alicuius materiae forma; sed res per se subsistens quae materia caret, potest esse forma materiae sicut de anima patet. Et similiter quodam modo essentia divina, quae est actus purus, quamvis habeat esse omnino distinctum ab intellectu, efficitur tamen ei ut forma in intelligendo; et ideo dicit Magister in II dist. II *Sententiarum* quod unio corporis ad animam rationalem est quoddam exemplum beatae unionis rationalis spiritus ad Deum." *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 1, reply (Leonine 79rb 201-234).

something that can receive.” This clearly shows that Aquinas views the soul as receiving the divine essence, a further indication that Aquinas understands the divine essence to be in the knower in the beatific vision. Aquinas’s embrace of Peter Lombard’s analogy here is also revealing. If “the union of the body with a rational soul” and the “beatifying union of rational spirit with God” are in some sense analogous, this is further evidence of the manner in which the divine essence can be said to be in the knower, for the soul is said to be in the body without being completely contained by it.

In his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas continues to speak of the vision of the divine essence as analogous to the intellect’s knowledge of intelligible things and of the divine essence being in the soul. Aquinas states that “Intellectual vision is of the things which are in the soul through their essence (*essentiam*), as intelligible things are in the intellect. And thus God is in the souls of the blessed, not however in our soul; but through presence, essence (*essentiam*) and power.”⁷⁷ The contrast Aquinas draws between how God is present in the souls of the blessed and how He is present in souls *in via* poses problems for Waddell’s theory, since Waddell bases his claim on a text from Aquinas in which Aquinas is addressing the way in which God can be said to be in creatures in general, sustaining them in existence. Aquinas obviously posits a significant difference between these two ways that God is said to be in the soul, and the example he uses for the beatific vision is the manner in which intelligible things are in the intellect. If Aquinas is to be taken at his word, it appears that he intends to claim that the divine essence is, indeed, “in the knower in the mode of the knower,” and that we can best understand how this is possible by examining the manner in which intelligible things are in the intellect.

⁷⁷ “Visio intellectualis est eorum quae sunt in anima per suam essentiam sicut intelligibilia in intellectu. Sic autem Deus est in anima beatorum, non autem in anima nostra; sed per praesentiam, essentiam, et potentiam.” ST I, q. 12, a. 11, ad 4 (Leonine 4:135).

iii. Theological Implications

Waddell's solution to the problem of the divine essence being in the knower is not Aquinas's solution, and it actually impoverishes Aquinas's account of the manner in which man is perfected in the beatific vision. There is no question that Aquinas holds that all created things are, in some sense, in God, but Aquinas's lengthy discussions surrounding his claim that the divine essence itself becomes the intelligible species of the intellect focus on explaining how the divine essence can, indeed, be in the knower. There is a reason for Aquinas to insist upon this, for, as Yves Simon notes, "The notion of immaterial union plays a central role in the theology of Thomas Aquinas, allowing him to solve the problem of participation in the divine nature and to explain St. Peter's phrase 'sharers of the divine nature.'"⁷⁸ It is this truth that elevates man and the other created intellectual beings above all other creatures to an infinite level, for only beings endowed with intellect are capable of being made, by grace, to share formally in the divine essence. Jacques Maritain's rendering of Aquinas's account and its implications are insightful:

How can a finite subject *formally* participate in the nature of the Infinite?

Thomists give this answer: the soul is thus rendered infinite in the order of its *relation to the object*. A formal participation in Deity, which would be impossible were it a question of having Deity for its essence (for it is a pure absurdity that that which is not God should receive as its essence the very essence of God), is possible if it is a matter of having Deity as object. For a being which is not God to be raised up, in its very basic structure and in the energies from which its operations proceed, so as to have the object of its understanding and love God Himself as He sees and loves Himself, that is, indeed, impossible to the forces of nature alone. Yet, no absolute impossibility can be detected in it. Grace bestows upon us, in a supernatural manner, a radical power of grasping pure Act as our object, a new root of spiritual operation whose proper and specifying object is the Divine Essence itself.

By an intuitive vision of the Divine Essence, the beatified creature will receive – with no shadow of pantheism – infinitely more than the most daring pantheism can dream of: the infinitely transcendent God Himself, not that wretched idol-God mingled with the being of things and emerging through our own efforts, which pantheism and the philosophy of becoming imagine, but the true God who is eternally self-sufficient and eternally blessed in the Trinity of Persons. By vision, the creature becomes the true God Himself, not in the order of substance, but in the order of that immaterial union which constitutes the intellectual act.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Simon, *Metaphysics of Knowledge*, 11.

⁷⁹ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 254-255. Emphasis in the original. Aquinas, speaking of the light of glory, indicates this formal participation in the divine nature: "And by this light they are made deiform, that is, like to God, according to the saying: *When He shall appear we shall be like to Him, and we shall see Him as He is* (1

The observations made by Simon and Maritain highlight the necessity of recognizing how understanding Aquinas's theology helps to elucidate his philosophical thought. For Aquinas, the unity of truth establishes an integral harmony between philosophy and theology.

While Aquinas insists that the contemplation of God's essence in the beatific vision is not possible in this life, he does indicate that there is some continuity between the contemplation that is possible here on earth and that contemplation of Truth in which the beatific vision consists.⁸⁰ Exactly how man can participate in this knowledge will be the focus of the final chapter of this thesis.

John 3:2)." "Et secundum hoc lumen efficiuntur deiformes, idest Deo similes: secundum illud I Ioan. III: *cum apparuerit, similes ei erimus, et videbimus eum sicuti est.*" ST I, q. 12, a. 5, reply (Leonine 4:123).

⁸⁰ "Now, there is nothing in this life so like this ultimate and perfect felicity as the life of those who contemplate truth, to the extent that it is possible in this life. And so, the philosophers who were not able to get full knowledge of this ultimate happiness identified man's ultimate happiness with the contemplation which is possible in this life. On this account, too, of all other lives the contemplative is more approved in divine Scripture, when our Lord says: 'Mary hath chosen the better part,' namely, the contemplation of truth, 'which shall not be taken from her' (Luke 10:42). In fact, the contemplation of truth begins in this life, but reaches its climax in the future." "Huius autem ultimae et perfectae felicitatis in hac vita nihil est adeo simile sicut vita contemplantium veritatem, secundum quod est possibile in hac vita. Et ideo PHILOSOPHI, qui de illa felicitate ultima plenam notitiam habere non potuerunt, in contemplatione quae est possibilis in hac vita, ultimam felicitatem hominis posuerunt. Propter hoc etiam, inter alias vitas, in Scriptura divina magis contemplativa commendatur, dicente Domino, LUCAE 10,42: *Maria optimam partem elegit, scilicet contemplationem veritatis, quae non auferetur ab ea.* Incipit enim contemplatio veritatis in hac vita, sed in futura consummatur." SCG III, c. 63, 10 (Marietti 2383).

CHAPTER THREE: CONTEMPLATION “IN VIA”

1. Contemplation in This Life as Inchoate Beatitude

Aquinas, like Aristotle, holds that man’s perfection is attained through contemplation. As has been shown, for Aquinas, the perfect beatitude and ultimate happiness of man is knowledge of God’s essence through the beatific vision, the contemplative vision of God as He is in Himself. This vision, Aquinas states, is impossible in this life.¹ However, when discussing the contemplative life, Aquinas indicates that there is some continuity between the way that God can be known in this life and the way that He will be known in the next. In his *De veritate*, Aquinas states:

The end of the contemplative life is the consideration of truth . . . the truth, I say, which is uncreated, contemplated in the manner possible, which in this life is indeed considered imperfectly, but will be seen perfectly in the life to come. Hence, Gregory says that ‘*the contemplative life begins here so that it may be perfected in the heavenly fatherland.*’²

Again, in his treatise in the *Summa theologiae* on the contemplative life, Aquinas speaks of the possibility of possessing the beatitude of the beatific vision in an “inchoate” manner in this life:

That which belongs principally to the contemplative life is the contemplation of the divine truth, because this contemplation is the end of the whole human life. Hence Augustine says (*De Trin.* i, 8) that *the contemplation of God is promised us as the end of all our actions and the everlasting perfection of our joys.* This contemplation will be perfect in the life to come, when we will see Him face to face, and whence we will be made perfectly happy. Now, however, the contemplation of the divine truth is competent to us imperfectly, namely *through a glass* and *in a dark manner*: hence it bestows on us a certain inchoate

¹ See *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 11, reply (Leonine 96rb 147-217). Aquinas does make one exception to this claim. Aquinas, in his discussion of rapture, holds, along with Augustine, that Moses and St. Paul experienced the beatific vision while still in this life. Aquinas explains that this is possible through a miracle, since it takes place without the light of glory. However, the conditions necessary in order for this to take place indicate that man is “not altogether in this life,” because it requires a complete withdrawal from the activity of the senses. See also ST II-II, q. 175 (Leonine 10:402-409) and ST II-II q. 180, a. 5, reply (Leonine 10:429). It is interesting to note that, while Aquinas generally insists upon the impossibility of seeing the essence of God in this life, when he speaks of the contemplative life he does indicate that rapture is its highest degree. See *De veritate* q. 10, a. 11, ad 2 (Leonine 96va 225-229), and ST II-II q. 180, a. 5, reply (Leonine 10:429).

² “Finis enim contemplativae vitae est inspectio veritatis . . . veritatis dico increatae secundum modum possibilem contemplanti, quae quidem in hac vita imperfecte inspicitur, in futura autem videbitur perfecte. Unde et Gregorius dicit quod « contemplativa vita hic incipitur ut in caelesti patria perficiatur ».” *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 4, reply (Leonine 100ra 50-58).

beatitude, which begins now and will be continued in the life to come; wherefore the Philosopher (*Ethic.* X) places the ultimate happiness of man in the contemplation of the supreme intelligible.³

Aquinas consistently indicates that, through contemplation in this life, man is able to share in the life to come, in some manner, while still on earth. In what does this contemplation consist?

Although Aquinas does not answer this question directly, his writings provide ample insight into his thought on the manner and degree to which man can possess beatitude, even while in this life.

i. Definition of Contemplation

In order to explore this question it is necessary, first of all, to understand Aquinas's view of contemplation. The difficulty in doing so is that Aquinas does not give an explicit account of contemplation, so one must be constructed from the various texts in which Aquinas speaks of contemplation. The closest Aquinas comes to offering a definition is in his discussion of the actions pertaining to the contemplative life, where he states that “*Contemplation* regards the simple act of gazing on the truth itself.”⁴ It is clear from Aquinas’s discussion that contemplation is the culminating act of the intellect, and thus excludes discursive reasoning.⁵ In his *De veritate*, Aquinas states that “the intelligible natures of things, on which the one contemplating meditates, are the subject matter of the contemplative life.”⁶ While man can contemplate any truth, Aquinas

³ “Principaliter quidem ad vitam contemplativam pertinet contemplatio divinae veritatis: quia huiusmodi contemplatio est finis totius humanae vitae. Unde Augustinus dicit, in I *de Trin.*, quod *contemplatio Dei promittitur nobis actionum omnium finis, atque aeterna perfectio gaudiorum*. Quae quidem in futura vita erit perfecta, quando videbimus eum *facie ad faciem*: unde et perfecte beatos faciet. Nunc autem contemplatio divinae veritatis competit nobis imperfecte, videlicet *per speculum et in aenigmate*: unde per eam fit nobis quaedam inchoatio beatitudinis, quae hic incipit ut in futuro terminetur. Unde et Philosophus, in X *Ethic.*, in contemplatione optimi intelligibilis ponit ultimam felicitatem hominis.” ST II-II, q. 180, a. 4, reply (Leonine 10:427-428).

⁴ “*Contemplatio* pertinet ad ipsum simplicem intuitum veritatis.” ST II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad. 1 (Leonine 10:427). Emphasis in original. Interestingly, the phrase Aquinas uses - “*simplicem intuitum*” - is the same phrase Aquinas uses for God’s judgement of truth.

⁵ See ST II-II, q. 180, a. 3 (Leonine 10:426-427).

⁶ “Materia autem contemplativae sunt rerum scibiles rationes quibus contemplator insistit.” *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 4, reply (Leonine 100ra 46-47).

explains that man's beatitude "consists principally . . . in the contemplation of divine things."⁷

The most perfect "gazing upon the divine truth," and thus man's ultimate beatitude, takes place in the beatific vision. The question thus becomes: In what ways can man contemplate truth in this life, and which form of contemplation most closely attains to the contemplation that is proper to the beatific vision alone?

ii. Philosophical Contemplation

In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas distinguishes between two ways in which man can contemplate God:

To show this, it should be known that all who perceived rightly posited the end of man's life as the contemplation of God. However, the contemplation of God is twofold. The first is through creatures, which is imperfect, for reasons already said, in which contemplation the Philosopher, in *Ethics* X, Chapter IX, placed contemplative happiness, which, however, is the happiness of this life; and to this is ordered all philosophical knowledge which proceeds from creatures. There is another contemplation of God, by which He is seen immediately through His essence (*essentiam*); and this is perfect, which will be in the fatherland, and is possible for man according to the supposition of faith.⁸

The first type of contemplation of God of which Aquinas speaks is that which is accessible through reason alone. The object of the intellect is truth, and, therefore, the perfection of the intellective power consists in the possession of truth. In the view of Aquinas, as also with Aristotle, it is to the contemplation of truth that all other human operations are ordered.⁹ Therefore, the philosophical contemplation of truth perfects man's nature in some manner, and

⁷ "Unde in tali operatione, scilicet in contemplatione divinorum, maxime consistit beatitudo." ST I-II, q. 3, a. 5, reply (Leonine 6:31).

⁸ "Ad hujus evidentiam sciendum est, quod omnes qui recte senserunt posuerunt finem humanae vitae Dei contemplationem. Contemplatio autem Dei est duplex. Una per creaturas, quae imperfecta est, ratione jam dicta, in qua contemplatione Philosophus, X *Ethic.*, cap. IX, felicitatem contemplativam posuit, quae tamen est felicitas viae; et ad hanc ordinatur tota cognitio philosophica, quae ex rationibus creaturarum procedit. Est alia Dei contemplatio, qua videtur immediate per suam essentiam; et haec perfecta est, quae erit in patria et est homini possibilis secundum fidei suppositionem." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Book I, Prologue, q. 1, a. 1 (Mandonnet t.1:7-8), *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, ed. P. Mandonnet, (Paris: Lethieau, 1929). All translations of the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* are by the author of this thesis.

⁹ For Aristotle, see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 10.7.1177b1-26; for Aquinas, see SCG III, c. 37, 7 (Marietti 2152-2160).

thus is a source of delight. At the apex of the philosophical contemplation of truth is the contemplation of the truth about God. Through philosophical reasoning, man can come to the knowledge of God as cause through knowledge of His effects. However, because this knowledge is imperfect, Aquinas notes that the happiness that results is also imperfect:

Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence. To make this clear, two points must be observed. First, that man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek. Second, that the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object. Now the object of the intellect is *what a thing is*, that is, the essence (*essentia*) of a thing, as is said in *De anima* iii. Wherefore the intellect attains perfection, insofar as it knows the essence (*essentiam*) of any thing. If therefore an intellect knows the essence (*essentiam*) of any effect, through which it is not possible to know the essence (*essentia*) of the cause, namely, to know of the cause *what it is*; that intellect cannot be said to reach that cause simply, although, through the effect, it may be able to know of the cause *that it is*. Consequently, when man knows an effect, and knows that it has a cause, there naturally remains in the man the desire to know about the cause, *what it is*. And this desire is one of wonder, and causes inquiry, as is said in the beginning of the *Metaphysics* If therefore the human intellect, knowing the essence (*essentiam*) of any created effect, knows no more of God than *that He is*; the perfection of that intellect does not yet reach simply the First Cause, but there remains in it the natural desire to seek the cause. Wherefore it is not yet perfectly happy. Consequently, for perfect happiness it is necessary that the intellect reach the Essence (*essentiam*) Itself of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as to an object, in which alone man's happiness consists.¹⁰

Despite the fact that the knowledge of God that is attained through philosophical inquiry is necessarily imperfect and therefore cannot constitute man's perfect happiness, Aquinas indicates that this imperfect knowledge of God as cause elicits in man a desire to know God as He is in His essence. Philosophical contemplation reveals an openness in man to what can only be attained by grace.

¹⁰ “Ultima et perfecta beatitudo non potest esse nisi in visione divinae essentiae. Ad cuius evidentiam, duo consideranda sunt. Primo quidem, quod homo non est perfecte beatus, quandiu restat sibi aliquid desiderandum et querendum. Secundum est, quod uniuscuiusque potentiae perfectio attenditur secundum rationem sui obiecti. Obiectum autem intellectus est *quod quid est*, idest essentia rei, ut dicitur in III *de anima*. Unde intantum procedit perfectio intellectus, in quantum cognoscit essentiam alicuius rei. Si ergo intellectus aliquis cognoscat essentiam alicuius effectus, per quam non possit cognosci essentia causae, ut scilicet sciatur de causa *quid est*; non dicitur intellectus attingere ad causam simpliciter, quamvis per effectum cognoscere possit de causa *an sit*. Et ideo remanet naturaliter homini desiderium, cum cognoscit effectum, et scit eum habere causam, ut etiam sciat de causa *quid est*. Et illud desiderium est admirationis, et causat inquisitionem, ut dicitur in principio *Metaphys.* . . . Si igitur intellectus humanus, cognoscens essentiam alicuius effectus creati, non cognoscat de Deo nisi *an est*; nondum perfectio eius attingit simpliciter ad causam primam, sed remanet ei adhuc naturale desiderium inquirendi causam. Unde nondum est perfecte beatus. Ad perfectam igitur beatitudinem requiritur quod intellectus pertingat ad ipsam essentiam primae causae. Et sic perfectionem suam habebit per unionem ad Deum sicut ad obiectum, in quo solo beatitudo hominis consistit.” ST I-II, q. 3, a. 8, reply (Leonine 6:35-36). Emphasis in original.

iii. The Necessity of Grace

The second type of contemplation of God of which Aquinas speaks is that which is accessible through grace alone. In his *De veritate*, Aquinas explains that, in order for man to see God's essence, it is necessary that man's nature be elevated by grace:

For man according to his nature is proportioned to a certain end, for which he has a natural appetite; and according to his natural powers he is able to work to attain that end, which is a contemplation of divine things such as is possible to man according to the capabilities of nature; and in this philosophers have placed man's ultimate happiness.

But there is an end for which man is prepared by God, which surpasses the proportion of human nature, that is, eternal life, which consists in the vision of God through His essence (*essentiam*), which exceeds the proportion of any created nature, being connatural only to God. It is therefore necessary that there be given to man not only something through which he can work toward that end, or through which his appetite should be inclined to that end, but also something through which man's nature itself should be raised to a certain dignity which would make such an end suited to him; and for this, grace is given. But to incline his will to this end charity is given; and for carrying out the works by which that end is acquired, the other virtues are given.

Accordingly, just as in natural things the nature itself is distinct from the inclination of the nature and its motion or operation, in the same way in man's gratuitous gifts grace is distinct from charity and the other virtues. And that this comparison is rightly taken can be seen from Dionysius where he says that no one can have a spiritual operation unless he first receives a spiritual existence (*esse spirituale*), just as he cannot have the operation of a particular nature unless he first has existence (*esse*) in that nature.¹¹

Human nature is proportioned to the philosophical contemplation of God, but man's nature must be elevated by grace in order to be proportioned to see God's essence. Grace is a new kind of

¹¹ "Homo autem secundum naturam suam proportionatus est ad quemdam finem, cuius habet naturalem appetitum; et secundum naturales vires operari potest ad consecutionem illius finis; qui finis est aliqua contemplatio divinorum, qualis est homini possibilis secundum facultatem naturae, in qua etiam philosophi ultimam hominis felicitatem posuerunt.

Sed est aliquis finis ad quem homo a Deo praeparatur, naturae humanae proportionem excedens, scilicet vita aeterna quae consistit in visione Dei per essentiam, quae excedit proportionem cuiuslibet naturae creatae soli Deo connaturalis existens. Unde oportet quod homini detur aliquid non solum per quod operetur ad finem, vel per quod inclinetur eius appetitus in finem illum, sed etiam per quod ipsa natura hominis elevetur ad quandam dignitatem, secundum quam talis finis sit ei competens; et ad hoc datur gratia. Ad inclinandum autem affectum in hunc finem datur caritas; ad exequendum autem opera quibus praedictus finis acquiritur, dantur aliae virtutes. Et ideo, sicut in rebus naturalibus est aliud natura ipsa quam inclinatio naturae et eius motus vel operatio, ita in gratuitis est aliud gratia a caritate et a ceteris virtutibus. Et quod haec comparatio sit recte accepta, patet per Dionysium in II cap. Ecclesiasticae hierarchiae, ubi dicit quod non potest aliquis habere spiritualem operationem nisi prius esse spirituale accipiat, sicut nec operationem alicuius naturae nisi prius habeat esse in natura illa." *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 2, reply (Leonine 22:794, 121-154).

spiritual existence,¹² a participation in the divine nature,¹³ flowing from a special love of God for creatures, “whereby He draws the rational creature above the condition of its nature to a participation of the Divine good; and according to this love He is said to love anyone simply, since it is by this love that God simply wills the eternal good, which is Himself, for the creature.”¹⁴ Through grace, God makes Himself present to the rational creature in a new manner:

God is in all things by His essence, power and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause in the effects which participate His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode, belonging to the rational creature, wherein God is said to be (*esse*) as the object known in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its operation of knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode God is not only said to be (*esse*) in the rational creature, but also to dwell in him as in His own temple. Therefore, no other effect is able to be the reason that the divine Person is in the rational creature in a new mode, except sanctifying grace.¹⁵

Aquinas’s language here parallels his description of the beatific vision, and, indeed, Aquinas holds that “Grace is nothing other than a certain inchoate glory in us.”¹⁶ Aquinas explains that God gives grace as a habitual gift, inhering in the essence of the soul,¹⁷ so that man might be easily moved by God towards his supernatural good:

Man is helped by God’s gratuitous will, inasmuch as a habitual gift is infused by God into the soul; and for this reason, because it is not fitting that God should provide less for those He loves, that they may acquire supernatural good, than for creatures, whom He loves that they may acquire natural good. Now He so provides for natural creatures, that not only does He move them to their natural acts, but also He bestows upon them certain forms and powers, which are the principles of acts, in order that they may of themselves be inclined to these movements. And thus the movements whereby they are moved by God, become connatural and easy to creatures, according to Wis. 8:1: *she . . . ordereth all things sweetly*. Much more, therefore, does He infuse into those He moves towards the acquisition of eternal supernatural good, certain

¹² See *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 6, ad. 1 (Leonine 22:814, 120-123): “Quamvis gratia non sit principium esse naturalis, perficit tamen esse naturale in quantum superaddit spirituale.”

¹³ See ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4, reply (Leonine 7:315).

¹⁴ “Secundum quam trahit creaturam rationalem supra conditionem naturae, ad participationem divini boni. Et secundum hanc dilectionem dicitur aliquem diligere simpliciter, quia secundum hanc dilectionem vult Deus simpliciter creaturae bonum aeternum, quod est ipse.” ST I-II, q. 110, a. 1, reply (Leonine 7:311).

¹⁵ “Est enim unus communis modus quo Deus est in omnibus rebus per essentiam, potentiam et praesentiam, sicut causa in effectibus participantibus bonitatem ipsius. Super istum modum autem communem, est unus specialis, qui convenit creaturae rationali, in qua Deus dicitur esse sicut cognitum in cognoscente et amatum in amante. Et quia, cognoscendo et amando, creatura rationalis sua operatione attingit ad ipsum Deum, secundum istum specialemodum Deus non solum dicitur esse in creatura rationali, sed etiam habitare in ea sicut in templo suo. Sic igitur nullus alias effectus potest esse ratio quod divina Persona sit novo modo in rationali creatura, nisi gratia gratum faciens.” ST I, q. 43, a. 3, reply (Leonine 4:447).

¹⁶ “Gratia nihil est aliud quam quaedam inchoatio gloriae in nobis.” ST II-II, q. 24, a. 3, ad 2 (Leonine 8:176). See also ST I-II, q. 69, a. 2 (Leonine 6:457); *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2 (Leonine 110va 1-440).

¹⁷ See ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4, reply (Leonine 7:315).

forms or supernatural qualities, whereby they may be moved by Him sweetly and promptly to acquire eternal good; and thus the gift of grace is a certain quality.¹⁸

In this way, Aquinas upholds the axiom that grace perfects nature. He explains that grace “perfects natural existence (*esse naturale*) inasmuch as it adds to it a spiritual existence,”¹⁹ and that it presupposes natural gifts:

Gratuitous gifts presuppose natural ones if both kinds are taken proportionally. Thus virtue, which is the gratuitous principle of operation, presupposes a power, which is the natural principle of the same thing; and grace, which is the principle of spiritual existence (*esse spiritualis*), presupposes the essence (*essentiam*) of the soul, which is the principle of natural existence (*esse naturalis*).²⁰

Man’s nature remains, but it is elevated in its essence so that it is capable of attaining a supernatural good which is beyond its nature. While grace perfects the essence of the soul, God also provides for the perfection of the powers of the soul through the infused virtues, so that man may be able to walk in accord with his new elevated state:

And thus, even as the natural light of reason is something besides the acquired virtues, which are ordained to this natural light, so also the light of grace itself, which is a participation of the Divine Nature, is something besides the infused virtues, which are derived from and are ordained to this light. Hence the Apostle says (Eph 5:8): *For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light.* For as the acquired virtues enable a man to walk in accordance with the light of natural reason, so do the infused virtues enable a man to walk in accordance with the light of grace.²¹

¹⁸ “Modo adiuvatur homo ex gratuita Dei voluntate, secundum quod aliquod habituale donum a Deo animae infunditur. Et hoc ideo, quia non est conveniens quod Deus minus provideat his quos diligit ad supernaturale bonum habendum, quam creaturis quas diligit ad bonum naturale habendum. Creaturis autem naturalibus sic providet ut non solum moveat eas ad actus naturales, sed etiam largiatur eis formas et virtutes quasdam, quae sunt principia actuum, ut secundum seipsas inclinentur ad huiusmodi motus. Et sic motus quibus a Deo moventur, fiunt creaturis connaturales et faciles; secundum illud *Sap.* VIII: *Et disponit omnia suaviter.* Multo igitur magis illis quos movet ad consequendum bonum supernaturale aeternum, infundit alias formas seu qualitates supernaturales, secundum quas suaviter et prompte ab ipso moveantur ad bonum aeternum consequendum. Et sic donum gratiae qualitas quaedam est.” ST I-II, q. 110, a. 2, reply (Leonine 7:312).

¹⁹ “Perficit tamen esse naturale in quantum superaddit spirituale.” *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 6, ad. 1 (Leonine 22:814, 121-123).

²⁰ “Gratuita praesupponunt naturalia, si proportionabiliter utraque accipientur; et ideo virtus quae est gratuitum operationis principium, praesupponit potentiam quae est eiusdem principium naturale; et gratia quae est principium esse spiritualis praesupponit essentiam animae quae est principium esse naturalis.” *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 6, ad. 3 (Leonine 22:814, 135-142).

²¹ “Sicut igitur lumen naturale rationis est aliquid praeter virtutes acquisitas, quae dicuntur in ordine ad ipsum lumen naturale; ita etiam ipsum lumen gratiae, quod est participatio divinae naturae, est aliquid praeter virtutes infusas, quae a lumine illo derivantur, et ad illud lumen ordinantur. Unde et Apostolus dicit, *ad Ephes.* V: *Eratis aliquando tenebrae, nunc autem lux in Domino: ut filii lucis ambulate.* Sicut enim virtutes acquisitae perficiunt hominem ad ambulandum congruenter lumini naturali rationis; ita virtutes infusae perficiunt hominem ad ambulandum congruenter lumini gratiae.” ST I-II, q. 110, a. 3, reply (Leonine 7:314).

Therefore, through the gift of grace and the infused virtues, man's nature is elevated, in its essence and in its powers, so that it is possible for man to achieve a good which is beyond his nature. Of particular interest, then, is how and to what extent the intellective powers of the graced soul can be perfected in this life, for the beatific vision consists in the ultimate perfection of these powers.

iv. Knowledge of God Through Faith

Aquinas states that "man in his intellective powers participates in the Divine knowledge through the virtue of faith, and according to the power of will the Divine love, through the virtue of charity."²² Faith is the infused virtue that perfects man's intellect. Aquinas describes faith as "a habit of our mind, by which eternal life begins in us, and which makes our understanding assent to things which are not apparent."²³ Although through faith man still knows God only through His effects, he is able to access mysteries about God that are not accessible through nature alone.²⁴ Therefore, although Aquinas does see philosophical contemplation as "a certain participation of true and perfect happiness,"²⁵ it is important to recognize that in Aquinas's view there is a sharp distinction between the knowledge of God that can be attained by man through nature and that which can be attained by man through faith. Maritain explains:

In the metaphysical knowledge of God, it is from the heart of the intelligible that our intellect, having discovered the ananoetic value of being and of objects which belong to the transcendental order, rises, thanks to them, to the divine analogate. On the contrary, in the knowledge of faith it is from the very heart of the divine transintelligible, from the very heart of the deity that the whole process of knowledge starts out, in order to return thither. That is to say, from this source, through the free generosity of God, derives the choice of objects and of concepts in the intelligible universe which falls under our senses, which God alone knows to be analogical signs of what is hidden in Him. . . . The mode of conceiving and of signifying is just as deficient in it as in metaphysical analogy, but what is signified . . . is this time the deity

²² "Per potentiam intellectivam homo participat cognitionem divinam per virtutem fidei; et secundum potentiam voluntatis amorem divinum, per virtutem caritatis." ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4, reply (Leonine 7:315).

²³ "Fides est habitus mentis qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum non apparentibus assentire." *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2, reply (Leonine 111ra 223-226).

²⁴ See ST I, q. 12, a. 13, ad. 1 (Leonine 4:137-138).

²⁵ "Quaedam participatio verae et perfectae beatitudinis." ST I-II, q. 3, a. 6, reply (Leonine 6:33).

as such, God as He sees Himself, and who gives Himself to us – obscurely and without our laying hands on him yet, since we do not see Him.²⁶

The knowledge of God attained through faith is higher than that of metaphysical knowledge because, although still dependent upon the use of human concepts and thus still analogical, it is God who has chosen the objects and concepts to express to man what He is most intimately in Himself. Aquinas states that faith is an “initial participation” in the supernatural knowledge of the beatific vision:

For man to be ordained to the good of eternal life, there must be a certain inchoate possession of it in him to whom it is promised. However, eternal life consists in the full knowledge of God, as is clear from John (17:3): “*This is life, etc.*” Consequently, we must have within us some inchoate possession of this supernatural knowledge, and this is through faith, which by reason of an infused light holds those things which are beyond our natural knowledge.²⁷

While through faith man possesses knowledge of God as He is, this knowledge is not possessed in the same manner as it is in the beatific vision. Aquinas makes an important distinction between the knowledge of assent, which belongs to faith, and the knowledge of sight, which belongs to the beatific vision.²⁸ In his discussion of faith and belief in his *De veritate*, Aquinas locates the knowledge of truth and falsity in the possible intellect.²⁹ Judgment of something as true takes place when the possible intellect is determined to something without reservation, either by the intelligible object or by the will. The intelligible object can determine the possible

²⁶ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 241-242. See also Garrigou-LaGrange: “There is a difference in formal object between the dim natural intuition of God known from the outside in the mirror of sensible things without the grace of faith and, on the other hand, the supernatural and quasi-experimental knowledge of God founded on divine revelation and infused faith united to charity and enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Only supernatural knowledge can ultimately attain ‘the deep things of God,’ as St. Paul says. In other words, it alone attains the intimate life of God, the Deity. First it succeeds in doing this dimly through faith and then it does so clearly through the beatific vision.” Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Our Savior and His Love for Us*, trans. A Bouchard (1951; repr., Binghamton: Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1958), 371.

²⁷ “Unde oportet etiam quod ad hoc quod homo ordinetur in bonum vitae aeternae, quod quaedam inchoatio ipsius fiat in eo cui repromittitur. Vita autem aeterna consistit in plena Dei cognitione, ut patet Ioh. XVII³ « Haec est vita » etc.; unde oportet huius cognitionis supernaturalis aliquam inchoationem in nobis fieri, et hoc est per fidem quae ea tenet ex infuso lumine quae naturalem cognitionem excedunt.” *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2, reply (Leonine 110vb 178-187).

²⁸ See *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2, ad 15 (Leonine 111rb 423-441).

²⁹ See *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, reply (Leonine 110ra 61-200).

intellect either immediately, where “the truth of the propositions is unmistakably clear immediately to the intellect from the intelligible objects themselves,” or mediately, “when the understanding, once it knows the definitions of the terms, is determined to one member of the contradictory proposition in virtue of first principles.”³⁰ Alternately, the possible intellect can be determined by the will, “which chooses to assent to one side determinately and precisely because of something that is sufficient to move the will, though not enough to move the understanding, namely, since it seems good or fitting to assent to this side. . . . This may happen when someone believes what another man says because it seems fitting or useful to him.”³¹

When God is seen through His essence, as in the beatific vision, the divine essence itself becomes the intelligible form of the understanding;³² God, the supremely intelligible object, determines the possible intellect immediately. The knowledge of faith, however, is knowledge of assent, where the possible intellect is determined by the will, for “we are moved to believe what God says because we are promised eternal life as a reward if we believe. And this reward moves the will to assent to what is said, although the intellect is not moved by anything which it understands.”³³ Therefore, the knowledge of faith is imperfect “since the understanding does not in this way have its action terminated at one thing so that it is conducted to its proper term, which

³⁰ See *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, reply (Leonine 110ra 117-128): “Ab intelligibili quidem quandoque quidem mediate quandoque autem immediate: immediate quidem quando ex ipsis intelligibilibus statim veritas propositionum intellectui infallibiliter appetit, et haec est dispositio intelligentis principia quae statim cognoscuntur notis terminis, ut Philosophus dicit, et sic ex ipso quod quid est immediate intellectus determinatur ad huiusmodi propositiones; mediate vero quando cognitis definitionibus terminorum intellectus determinatur ad alteram partem contradictionis virtute primorum principiorum.”

³¹ “Quae eligit assentire uni parti determinate et praecise propter aliquid quod est sufficiens ad movendum voluntatem non autem ad movendum intellectum, utpote quia videtur bonum vel conveniens huic parti assentire; . . . ut cum aliquis credit dictis alicuius hominis quia videtur ei decens vel utile.” *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, reply (Leonine 110rb 135-142).

³² See *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 11, reply (Leonine 96rb 147-217).

³³ “Et sic etiam movemur ad credendum dictis Dei in quantum nobis repromittitur, si crediderimus, praemium aeternae vitae; et hoc praemio movetur voluntas ad assentiendum his quae dicuntur quamvis intellectus non moveatur per aliquid intellectum.” *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, reply (Leonine 110rb 142-147).

is the sight of some intelligible object . . . its movement is not yet brought to rest,”³⁴ but, rather, the knowledge of faith “sets [desire] aflame, since every man desires to see what he believes.”³⁵ Ultimately, the imperfection of faith lies in the fact that “the intellect does not grasp the object to which it gives assent in the act of believing.”³⁶ Yet, despite its imperfection, Aquinas holds that faith, which “through assent unites man to divine knowledge,”³⁷ is a participation in the spiritual light which man will participate perfectly in the life to come.³⁸

Therefore, while man is capable of knowing God through philosophical reasoning and through faith, it is evident that, for Aquinas, it is only the soul elevated by grace and possessing the virtue of faith which is capable of sharing imperfectly in the knowledge of God that the soul will have in the beatific vision. What is not evident is that it is simply the Christian believer in the state of grace to whom Aquinas is referring when he speaks of the possibility of contemplating truth imperfectly in this life and possessing an inchoate beatitude. It seems far from human experience that every Christian in this state is experiencing a foretaste of the beatific vision, although the principles, according to Aquinas, are certainly present. Can what is proper to the experience of the beatific vision – intuitive knowledge and the union of knower and known – be experienced, in some manner, even while in this life?

³⁴ “Quia intellectus non hoc modo terminatur ad unum ut ad proprium terminum perducatur, qui est visio alieuius intelligibilis, inde est quod eius motus nondum est quietatus.” *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, reply (Leonine 110rb 179-183).

³⁵ “Cognitio autem fidei non quietat desiderium, sed magis ipsum accedit: quia unusquisque desiderat videre quod credit.” SCG III, c. 40, 5 (Marietti 2178).

³⁶ “Non enim intellectus capit illud cui assentit credendo.” SCG III, c. 40, 2 (Marietti 2175).

³⁷ “Quae hominem divinae cognitioni coniungit per assensum.” *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 8, reply (Leonine 113vb 161-162).

³⁸ See *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, ad. 8 (Leonine 110rb 255-262).

v. Supernatural Contemplation

The Christian tradition and the testimony of personal experience appear to answer in the affirmative. Bernard of Clairvaux, a contemporary of Aquinas, writes:

It must be confessed that they who, at times rapt in spirit through excess of contemplation, are in some small measure able to taste the sweetness of heavenly felicity, are indeed, as often as they experience such a state, free from misery. Plainly these, as cannot be denied, even in the flesh, although but seldom and only in their raptures, enjoy freedom of pleasure, in that with Mary they ‘have chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from them.’ For they that now possess what cannot be taken away from them in truth have experience of that which is to come. But that which is to come is felicity. Moreover felicity and misery cannot exist together at the same moment. As often therefore as they partake of the former, so often do they not feel the latter. Accordingly it is only contemplatives who in this life are in any degree able to enjoy freedom of pleasure, and that but in part, in very small part, and upon the rarest occasion.³⁹

Certainly Bernard is not describing here every Christian in the state of grace, but a particular experience of contemplation while still on earth. This is not an isolated example peculiar to Bernard, but is a recurring theme in the Christian tradition.⁴⁰ Famously, Aquinas himself appears to have had an extraordinary experience of supernatural contemplation at the end of his life, after which he ceased all writing. Jean-Pierre Torrell, in his authoritative biography, describes Aquinas’s experience:

According to Bartholomew of Capua, who had this story from John of Guidice who learned about it from Reginald himself – while he was celebrating Mass in the chapel of St. Nicholas, Thomas underwent an astonishing transformation (*fuit mira mutatione commotus*): “After that Mass, he never wrote further or even dictated anything, and he even got rid of his writing material [*organa scriptorii*]; he was working on the third part of the Summa, on the treatise concerning penance.” To Reginald, who was stupefied and did not understand why Thomas was abandoning his work, the Master responded simply: “I cannot do any more.” Returning to his charge a little later, Reginald received the same response: “I cannot do anything more. Everything I have written seems to me as straw in comparison with what I have seen.”⁴¹

³⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Concerning Grace and Free Will*, trans. Watkin W. Williams (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 26.

⁴⁰ The Christian tradition in this area is vast. In summary, based on personal experiences, spiritual authors posit a supernatural form of contemplation, sometimes called “infused” or “mystical” contemplation. Jordan Aumann explains that “Supernatural contemplation is an experimental knowledge of God. Moreover, as a supernatural activity, infused contemplation requires the operation of faculties that are likewise supernatural, both in their substance and in their mode of operation.” See Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (Manila, Philippines: University of Santo Tomas Publishing, 1998), 330.

⁴¹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 289.

Aquinas's silence following his experience accounts for the fact that it is not known exactly what he experienced, nor is it known how he would explain it if he were to try to do so. However, first-hand accounts of the experience of supernatural contemplation are not entirely lacking.

Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth-century mystic, describes her experience in prayer:

Then that soul was as if drunk with love of true holy poverty. She was filled to bursting in the supreme eternal magnificence and so transformed in the abyss of his supreme and immeasurable providence that though she was in the vessel of her body it seemed as if the fire of charity within her had taken her over and rapt her outside her body. . . . And what shall I say? I will stutter, "A-a," because there is nothing else I know how to say. Finite language cannot express the emotion of the soul who longs for you infinitely. I think I could echo Paul's words: The tongue cannot speak nor the ear hear nor the eye see nor the heart imagine what I have seen! What have you seen? "I have seen the hidden things of God!" And I – what do I say? I have nothing to add from these clumsy emotions [of mine]. I say only, my soul, that you have tasted and seen the abyss of supreme eternal providence.⁴²

A more recent example is that of Thomas Merton, who describes a specific experience in his own life:

Then, as sudden as the shout and as definite, and a thousand times more bright, there formed in my mind an awareness, an understanding, a realization of what had just taken place on the altar, at the Consecration: a realization of God made present by the words of Consecration in a way that made Him belong to me.

But what a thing it was, this awareness: it was so intangible, and yet it struck me like a thunderclap. It was a light that was so bright that it had no relation to any visible light and so profound and so intimate that it seemed like a neutralization of every lesser experience.

And yet the thing that struck me most of all was that this light was in a certain sense "ordinary" – it was a light (and this most of all was what took my breath away) that was offered to all, to everybody, and there was nothing fancy or strange about it. It was the light of faith deepened and reduced to an extreme and sudden obviousness.

It was as if I had been suddenly illuminated by being blinded by the manifestation of God's presence.

The reason why this light was blinding and neutralizing was that there was and could be simply nothing in it of sense or imagination. When I call it a light that is a metaphor which I am using, long after the fact. But at the moment, another overwhelming thing about this awareness was that it disarmed all images, all metaphors, and cut through the whole skein of species and phantasms with which we naturally do our thinking. It ignored all sense experience in order to strike directly at the heart of truth, as if a sudden and immediate contact had been established between my intellect and the Truth Who was now physically really and substantially before me on the altar. But this contact was not something speculative and abstract: it was concrete and experimental and belonged to the order of knowledge, yes, but more still to the order of love.⁴³

⁴² Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 325-326.

⁴³ Thomas Merton, *Seven Storey Mountain* (1948; repr., Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1999), 311-312.

Merton describes something outside of his ordinary life of faith, yet somehow mysteriously still within it. In Merton's description are found elements that seem to parallel the experience of the beatific vision – sudden, non-discursive insight, and the interior presence of the object of intellection. However, a striking difference is noted: the immediate insight is blinding, and belongs more to the order of love than to that of knowledge.

There is no question about whether or not Aquinas directly addresses this type of experience in his writings – he does not.⁴⁴ However, there are texts in Aquinas that indicate how this type of experience might fit into Aquinas's understanding of contemplation in the life of grace. In discussing whether the demons can have knowledge of truth, Aquinas states:

The knowledge of truth is twofold: one which comes of grace, and one which comes of nature. The knowledge which comes of grace is likewise twofold: the first is purely speculative, as when Divine secrets are revealed to someone; the other is affective, and produces love of God; and this properly belongs to the gift of Wisdom.⁴⁵

The twofold division that Aquinas makes in the knowledge that is proper to grace is key. In addition to the knowledge of faith, which is speculative, Aquinas speaks of an “affective knowledge” of truth which produces love for God, a knowledge that he says belongs to the gift of wisdom. Interestingly, the gift of wisdom figures prominently in Aquinas's explanation of contemplation in his *De veritate*: “In contemplation, God is seen through a medium which is the light of wisdom. This elevates the mind to examine the divine, not, however, to immediate vision

⁴⁴ It appears evident that this experience does not fit into Aquinas's category of rapture, since, for Aquinas, rapture is an experience of the beatific vision in this life. In addition, Aquinas mentions only Moses and St. Paul as having experienced rapture, and it seems that Aquinas would have been aware of the sort of phenomenon described by Bernard which was already at that time part of the Christian tradition. For Aquinas on rapture see ST II-II, q. 175 (Leonine 10:402-409) and *De veritate*, q. 13 (Leonine 107va-110ra).

⁴⁵ “*Duplex est cognitio veritatis: una quidem quae habetur per gratiam; alia vero quae habetur per naturam. Et ista quae habetur per gratiam, est duplex: una quae est speculativa tantum, sicut cum alicui aliqua secreta divinorum revelantur; alia vero quae est affectiva, producens amorem Dei; et haec proprie pertinet ad donum Sapientiae.*” ST I, q. 64, a. 1, reply (Leonine 5:139).

of the divine essence (*divina essentia*) itself. And thus through grace He is seen by contemplatives after the fall, although He is seen more perfectly in the state of innocence.”⁴⁶ Aquinas’s appeal to the gift of wisdom as that which “elevates the mind to examine the divine,” yet not to immediate vision, deserves further exploration.

2. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit and Contemplation

The gifts of the Holy Spirit, among which is the gift of wisdom, are discussed at length by Aquinas in both his *Commentary on the Sentences* and his *Summa theologiae*. In both texts, Aquinas indicates that the gifts perfect man for acts which are higher than acts of virtue.⁴⁷ In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Aquinas emphasizes that the gifts are distinguished from the virtues because “virtues end in acts in a human mode, but gifts beyond the human mode,”⁴⁸ while in his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas emphasizes that the difference lies in the fact that “virtues perfect man according as it is natural for him to be moved by his reason,” whereas gifts are “higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God.”⁴⁹ Aquinas explains that the gifts perfect all the powers of man, and he posits that the speculative intellect is perfected by the

⁴⁶ “Quod Deus in contemplatione videtur per medium quod est lumen sapientiae mentem elevans ad divina cernenda, non autem ut ipsa divina essentia immediate videatur; et sic per gratiam videtur etiam a contemplativis post statum peccati quamvis perfectius in statu innocentiae.” *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1, ad 4 (Leonine 123vb 314-320).

⁴⁷ See *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. III, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1 (Moos t.3:1111- 1115) and ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1, reply (Leonine 6:447).

⁴⁸ “Et secundum hoc dico, quod *dona a virtutibus distinguuntur in hoc quod perficiunt ad actus modo humano, sed dona ultra humanum modum.*” Emphasis in original. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. III, d. 34, q. 1, a. 1 (Moos t.3:1114), *Scriptum super Sententiis*, ed. M.F. Moos (Paris: Lethielleaux, 1933). All translations of the *Scriptum super Sententiis* are by the author of this thesis.

⁴⁹ “Manifestum est autem quod virtutes humanae perficiunt hominem secundum quod homo natus est moveri per rationem in his quae interius vel exterius agit. Oportet igitur inesse homini altiores perfectiones, secundum quas sit dispositus ad hoc quod divinitus moveatur. Et istae perfectiones vocantur dona.” ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1, reply (Leonine 6:447). There is a long scholarly debate as to whether this is simply a difference in emphasis, or whether it indicates a change in Aquinas’s view of the gifts. For a detailed discussion of the differences between the two texts and the arguments on each side of the issue, see Edward O’Connor, appendix to vol. 24 of *Summa Theologiae: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, by Thomas Aquinas (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 110-130. While the author of this thesis is sympathetic to the view that there is continuity between the two texts, this discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. There are texts in both the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *Summa* which indicate a connection between the gifts and contemplation.

gifts of understanding and wisdom – the former in regard to the operation of apprehension, that is, the operation by which man knows *that* something is, and the latter in regard to the operation of judgment, the operation by which man knows *what* something is.⁵⁰ It would seem, then, that both the gift of understanding and the gift of wisdom would be active in suprarational knowledge of God. There is evidence that Aquinas holds this to be the case, but also that he believes that it is particularly the gift of wisdom that is active in supernatural contemplation in this life.

i. The Gift of Understanding

Aquinas identifies the gift of understanding as the gift that “is about the first principles of that knowledge which is conferred by grace; but otherwise than faith, because it belongs to faith to assent to them, while it belongs to the gift of understanding to pierce with the mind the things that are said.”⁵¹ Aquinas’s discussion of the gift of understanding in his *Commentary on the Sentences* fills out this notion:

However, in the first way one proceeds in the human mode from sense to memory, from memory to experience, and from experience to first principles, which are known immediately when the terms are known. And the understanding which is the habit of principles perfects this process. Furthermore, in the same way, one proceeds by inquiring from these principles to conclusions. And to this pertains another intellectual power which is called knowledge, pertaining to those things that are subject to reason. However, in those things which are above reason, faith perfects, which is consideration of divine things in a mirror and in obscurity. However, that spiritual things be grasped as if in naked truth, is above the human mode; and this the gift of understanding does, which “enlightens the mind from the things heard through faith,” as Gregory says.⁵²

⁵⁰ See ST I-II, q. 68, a. 4, reply (Leonine 6:450-451) and ST II-II, q. 8, a. 6, reply (Leonine 8:71).

⁵¹ “Donum intellectus est circa prima principia cognitionis gratuitae, aliter tamen quam fides. Nam ad fidem pertinet eis assentire, ad donum vero intellectus pertinet penetrare mente ea quae dicuntur.” ST II-II, q. 8, a. 6, ad 2 (Leonine 8:72).

⁵² “In prima autem via proceditur humano modo ex sensu in memoriam, ex memoria in experimentum et ex experimento in prima principia quae statim notis terminis cognoscuntur. Et hunc processum perficit intellectus, qui est *habitus principiorum*.

Ulterius in eadem via proceditur inquirendo ex istis principiis in conclusiones. Et ad hoc perficit alia virtus intellectualis quae dicitur *scientia*, quantum ad ea quae rationi subjacent; in his autem quae super rationem sunt, perficit *fides* quae est inspectio divinorum in speculo et in aenigmate.

Thus, in both his *Commentary on the Sentences* and his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas attributes to the gift of understanding a more perfect speculative knowledge of God than is attainable simply through the virtue of faith. In his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas goes on to explain how the gift of understanding is related to the beatitude, “Blessed are the clean of heart”:

Two things are contained in the sixth beatitude, as also in the others: one by way of merit, namely, cleanliness of heart; the other by way of reward, namely, the sight of God, as is stated above. And each of these, in some way, pertains to the gift of understanding. For cleanliness is twofold. One is a preamble and a disposition to seeing God, and consists in the heart being cleansed of inordinate affections: and this cleanliness of heart is effected by the virtues and gifts belonging to the appetitive power. The other cleanliness of heart is a kind of complement to the sight of God; such is the cleanliness of the mind that is purged of phantasms and errors, so as to receive the truths which are proposed to it about God, no longer by way of corporeal phantasms, nor infected with heretical misrepresentations: and this cleanliness is the result of the gift of understanding.

Again, the sight of God is twofold. One is perfect, whereby God’s Essence (*Dei essentia*) is seen. The other is imperfect, whereby, though we do not see concerning God what He is, yet we see what He is not; and whereby, the more perfectly we know God in this life, the more we understand that He surpasses all that the intellect comprehends. Each of these visions of God belongs to the gift of understanding: the first, to the gift of understanding consummated, as it will be in the fatherland; the second, to the inchoate gift of understanding, as possessed by wayfarers.⁵³

Aquinas’s last paragraph here is particularly noteworthy. The gift of understanding is possessed both in this life and the next, and is directly related to the vision of God.

Quod autem spiritualia quasi nuda veritate capiantur, supra humanum modum est; et hoc facit *donum intellectus*, qui «*de auditis per fidem mentem illustrat*», ut dicit GREGORIUS (I Mor., c. 32, n. 44; L. 75, 547).⁵³ *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. III, d. 34, q. 1, a. 2 (Moos t.3:1117). Emphasis in original.

⁵³ “Dicendum quod in sexta beatitudine, sicut et in aliis, duo continentur: unum per modum meriti, scilicet munditia cordis; aliud per modum praemii, scilicet visio Dei, ut supra dictum est. Et utrumque pertinet aliquo modo ad donum intellectus. Est enim duplex munditia. Una quidem praeambula et dispositiva ad Dei visionem, quae est depuratio affectus ab inordinatis affectionibus: et haec quidem munditia cordis fit per virtutes et dona quae pertinent ad vim appetitivam. Alia vero munditia cordis est quae est quasi completiva respectu visionis divinae: et haec quidem est munditia mentis depuratae a phantasmatisbus et erroribus, ut scilicet ea quae de Deo proponuntur non accipientur per modum corporalium phantasmatum, nec secundum haereticas perversitates. Et hanc munditiam facit donum intellectus.

Similiter etiam duplex est Dei visio. Una quidem perfecta, per quam videtur Dei essentia. Alia vero imperfecta, per quam, etsi non videamus de Deo quid est, videmus tamen quid non est: et tanto in hac vita Deum perfectius cognoscimus quanto magis intelligimus eum excedere quidquid intellectu comprehenditur. Et utraque Dei visio pertinet ad donum intellectus: prima quidem ad donum intellectus consummatum, secundum quod erit in patria; secunda vero ad donum intellectus inchoatum, secundum quod habetur in via.” ST II-II, q. 8, a. 7, reply (Leonine 8:72).

ii. The Primacy of Love

Based on Aquinas's discussion of the gift of understanding, it seems curious that he consistently gives equal – if not greater – weight to the gift of wisdom when he speaks about supernatural contemplation in this life. Two reasons for this can be identified: 1) the difference between knowledge and contemplation, and 2) the inherent imperfection, in this life, of speculative knowledge of God.

In regard to the first point, knowledge and contemplation are not synonymous, except in the beatific vision.⁵⁴ Josef Pieper explains:

Contemplation is not simply one possible form among others in the act of knowing. Its special character does not flow from its being a particular aspect of the process of knowing. What distinguishes – in both senses of that word – contemplation is rather this: it is a knowing which is inspired by love. ‘Without love there would be no contemplation.’

Contemplation is a loving attainment of awareness. It is intuition of the beloved object.⁵⁵

Pieper goes on to describe the experience of natural contemplation:

There is a contemplative way of seeing the things of creation. I am speaking now of actual things, and of seeing with the eyes; I mean also hearing, smelling, tasting, every type of sense-perception, but primarily seeing.

A man drinks at last after being extremely thirsty, and feeling refreshment permeating his body, thinks and says: What a glorious thing is fresh water! Such a man, whether he knows it or not, has already taken a step toward that “seeing of the beloved object” which is contemplation. How splendid is water, a rose, a tree, an apple, a human face – such exclamations can scarcely be spoken without also giving tongue to an assent and affirmation which extends beyond the object praised and touches upon the origin of the universe. Who among us has not suddenly looked into his child’s face, in the midst of the toils and troubles of everyday life, and at that moment “seen” that everything which is good, is loved and lovable, loved by God! Such certainties all mean, at bottom, one and the same thing: that the world is plumb and sound; that everything comes to its appointed goal; that in spite of all appearances, underlying all things is – peace, salvation, gloria; that nothing and no one is lost; that “God holds in his hand the beginning, middle, and end of all that is.” Such nonrational, intuitive certainties of the divine base of all that is can be vouchsafed to our gaze even when it is turned toward the most insignificant-looking things, if only it is a gaze inspired by love. That, in the precise sense, is contemplation.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ In the beatific vision knowledge and contemplation are synonymous, insofar as the one experiencing the vision cannot but help love God. See ST I, q. 82, a. 2, reply (Leonine 5:296).

⁵⁵ Josef Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958), 72.

⁵⁶ Pieper, *Happiness and Contemplation*, 84-85.

Pieper describes a way of knowing that is quite other than speculative knowledge, although it is no less real. It is a form of knowledge that is experiential and intuitive. It is certitude and delight through contact with a presence, totally other than the certitude of speculative knowledge or the certitude of assent. Contemplation involves both knowledge and love, and thus is an activity engaging both intellect and will. This is highlighted by Aquinas in his discussion of the contemplative life in his *Summa theologiae*:

Theirs is said to be the contemplative life who are principally intent on the contemplation of truth. Now intention is an act of the will, as stated above, because intention is of the end, which is the object of the will. Consequently the contemplative life, as regards the essence itself of the action, pertains to the intellect; but as regards the motive cause of the exercise of that operation, it belongs to the will, which moves all the other powers, and even the intellect, to their actions, as stated above.

Now the appetitive power moves one to observe something, either with the senses or with the intellect, sometimes for love of the thing seen because, as it is written (Matt 6:21), *where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also*, sometimes for love of the knowledge itself that one acquires by observation. And on account of this, Gregory makes the contemplative life to consist in the *love of God*, inasmuch as through loving God we are aflame to gaze on His beauty. And since everyone delights when he obtains that which he loves, it follows that the contemplative life terminates in delight, which is in the affective power, the result being that love is intensified.⁵⁷

Particular to contemplation, and distinguishing it from knowledge in general, is a distinctive kind of affective attachment to the object of knowledge. This is brought out more clearly by Aquinas when he distinguishes between two types of delight attained through the act of contemplation:

There may be delight in any particular contemplation in two ways. First, by reason of the operation itself, because each individual delights in the operation which befits him according to his proper nature or habit. Now contemplation of the truth befits a man according to his nature as rational animal: the result being that *all men by nature desire to know*, so that consequently they delight in the knowledge of truth. And more delightful still does this become to one who has the habit of wisdom and knowledge, the result of which is that he contemplates without difficulty.

⁵⁷ “Vita contemplativa illorum esse dicitur qui principaliter intendunt ad contemplationem veritatis. Intentio autem est actus voluntatis, ut supra habitum est: quia intentio est de fine, qui est voluntatis obiectum. Et ideo vita contemplativa, quantum ad ipsam essentiam actionis, pertinet ad intellectum: quantum autem ad id quod movet ad exercendum talem operationem, pertinet ad voluntatem, quae movet omnes alias potentias, et etiam intellectum, ad suum actum, ut supra dictum est.

Movet autem vis appetitiva ad aliquid inspiciendum, vel sensibiliter vel intelligibiliter, quandoque quidem propter amorem rei visae, quia, ut dicitur Matth. VI, *ubi est thesaurus tuus, ibi est et cor tuum*: quandoque autem propter amorem ipsius cognitionis quam quis ex inspectione consequitur. Et propter hoc Gregorius constituit vitam contemplativam in *caritate Dei*: in quantum scilicet aliquis ex dilectione Dei inardescit ad eius pulchritudinem conspiciendam. Et quia unusquisque delectatur cum adeptus fuerit id quod amat, ideo vita contemplativa terminatur ad delectationem, quae est in affectu: ex qua etiam amor intenditur.” ST II-II, q. 180, a. 1, reply (Leonine 10:424). Emphasis in original.

Second, contemplation may be delightful on the part of its object, insofar as one contemplates that which one loves; even as bodily vision gives pleasure, not only because to see is pleasurable in itself, but because one sees a person whom one loves. Since, then, the contemplative life consists chiefly in the contemplation of God, of which charity is the motive, as stated above, it follows that in the contemplative life there is not only delight by reason of the contemplation itself, but also by reason of the Divine love itself.⁵⁸

Aquinas posits that an act of contemplation produces two types of delight: the delight that accompanies an operation that befits man's nature, and the more intensified delight of that operation when it is engaged with an object which is loved. Contemplation, and the delight that it produces, are inextricably linked to love of that which is contemplated.

In regards to the second point, God is known in the beatific vision immediately, as He is in His Essence, which is not possible in this life. All speculative knowledge of God in this life falls short. However, Aquinas notes that this inherent imperfection is not present in love, and, therefore, that love of God in this life is more perfect than knowledge of God:

Something is required for the perfection of knowledge, that is not requisite for the perfection of love. For knowledge belongs to reason, whose function it is to distinguish things which in reality are united, and to unite together, after a fashion, things that are diverse, by comparing one with another. Consequently the perfection of knowledge requires that man should know distinctly all that is in a thing, such as its parts, powers, and properties. But love is in the appetitive power, which regards a thing as it is in itself. Wherefore, for the perfection of love it suffices that a thing be loved according as it is apprehended in itself. Hence it is, therefore, that a thing is loved more than it is known; since it can be loved perfectly, even if it is not perfectly known. This is most evident in regard to the sciences, which some love through having a certain general knowledge of them: for instance, they know that rhetoric is a science through which man is able to persuade; and this is what they love in rhetoric. The same applies to the love of God.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ "Aliqua contemplatio potest esse delectabilis dupliciter. Uno modo, ratione ipsius operationis: quia unicuique delectabilis est operatio sibi conveniens secundum propriam naturam vel habitum. Contemplatio autem veritatis competit homini secundum suam naturam, prout est animal rationale. Ex quo contingit quod *omnes homines ex natura scire desiderant*: et per consequens in cognitione veritatis delectantur. Et adhuc magis fit hoc delectabile habenti habitum sapientiae et scientiae, ex quo accidit quod sine difficultate aliquis contemplatur."

Alio modo contemplatio redditur delectabilis ex parte obiecti, inquantum scilicet aliquis rem amatam contemplatur: sicut etiam accidit in visione corporali quod delectabilis redditur non solum ex eo quod ipsum videre est delectabile, sed ex eo etiam quod videt quis personam amatam. Quia ergo vita contemplativa praecipue consistit in contemplatione Dei, ad quam movet caritas, ut dictum est; inde est quod in vita contemplativa non solum est delectatio ratione ipsius contemplationis, sed ratione ipsius divini amoris." ST II-II, q. 180, a. 7, reply (Leonine 10:432-433).

⁵⁹ "Aliiquid requiritur ad perfectionem cognitionis, quod non requiritur ad perfectionem amoris. Cognitio enim ad rationem pertinet, cuius est distinguere inter ea quae secundum rem sunt coniuncta, et componere quodammodo ea quae sunt diversa, unum alteri comparando. Et ideo ad perfectionem cognitionis requiritur quod homo cognoscat singillatim quidquid est in re, sicut partes et virtutes et proprietates. Sed amor est in vi appetitiva, quae respicit rem secundum quod in se est. Unde ad perfectionem amoris sufficit quod res prout in se apprehenditur, ametur. Ob hoc ergo contingit quod aliiquid plus amatur quam cognoscatur: quia potest perfecte amari, etiam si non perfecte cognoscatur. Sicut maxime patet in scientiis, quas aliqui amant propter aliquam summariam cognitionem

In this life, there is a perfection in love that is not possible in knowledge. Therefore, God is reached more perfectly in this life through love than through knowledge.⁶⁰

iii. The Gift of Wisdom

It is evident, then, that for Aquinas, love plays a primary role in the contemplation of God in this life. This primacy of love explains his appeal to the gift of wisdom when speaking of contemplation, for Aquinas says that this gift “attains to God more intimately by a kind of union of the soul with Him.”⁶¹ Aquinas distinguishes the gift of wisdom from the intellectual virtue of the same name:

It belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about Divine things after reason has made its inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them: thus Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* ii) that Hierotheus is perfect in divine things, *for he not only learns, but is patient of divine things*. Now this sympathy or connaturality for Divine things is the result of charity, which unites us to God, according to 1 Cor. 6:17: *He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit*. Consequently wisdom which is a gift, has its cause in the will, which cause is charity, but it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge aright, as stated above.⁶²

quam de eis habent: puta quod sciunt rhetoramicam esse scientiam per quam homo potest persuadere, et hoc in rhetorica amant. Et similiter est dicendum circa amorem Dei.” ST I-II, q. 27, a. 2, ad. 2 (Leonine 6:193).

⁶⁰ In her article, “Pati divini: Mystical Union in Aquinas,” Heather McAdam Erb identifies three reasons that, in this life, man is more perfectly united with God through love: “While *in se*, the intellect has a higher, simpler, and more universal object (being), in this life, the will’s union with its highest object (God) is higher, for three reasons: First, it is the nature of the appetitive power to grasp things *in se*, whereas it is the nature of the intellect to grasp things in proportion to itself; second, where the object transcends the power, it is better to love it than to know it; and third, while knowledge ascends to God through creatures, love cleaves to God first, and then to other creatures through him, in the exercise of charity.” See Heather McAdam Erb, “Pati divini: Mystical Union in Aquinas,” in *Faith, Scholarship, and Culture in the 21st Century*, ed. Alice Ramos and Marie I. George (Mishawaka, IN: American Maritain Association, 2002), 94.

⁶¹ “Deum attingens, per quandam scilicet unionem animae ad ipsum,” ST II-II, q. 45, a. 3, ad 1 (Leonine 8:342).

⁶² “Sic igitur circa res divinas ex rationis inquisitione rectum iudicium habere pertinet ad sapientiam quae est virtus intellectualis: sed rectum iudicium habere de eis secundum quandam connaturalitatem ad ipsa pertinet ad sapientiam secundum quod donum est Spiritus Sancti: sicut Dionysius dicit, in II cap. *de Div. Nom.*, quod Hierotheus est perfectus in divinis *non solum discens, sed et patiens divina*. Huiusmodi autem compassio sive connaturalitas ad res divinas fit per caritatem, quae quidem unit nos Deo: secundum illud I *ad Cor.* VI: *Qui adhaeret Deo unus spiritus est*. Sic igitur sapientia quae est donum causam quidem habet in voluntate, scilicet caritatem: sed essentiam habet in intellectu, cuius actus est recte iudicare, ut supra habitum est.” ST II-II, q. 45, a. 2, reply (Leonine 8:341).

The gift of wisdom differs from the intellectual virtue of wisdom because it judges Divine things not through reasoning, but through connaturality with them. To bring this out more clearly it is helpful to look at what Aquinas says about the gift of knowledge, for Aquinas holds that wisdom is the most perfect species in the genus of knowledge since its certainty of judgement is derived from the highest cause.⁶³

Aquinas's first article in his question on the gift of knowledge in his *Summa theologiae* addresses the question of whether knowledge is a gift. In his response to an objection that knowledge is an effect of reason and therefore cannot be a gift, Aquinas posits an important difference between the way that man acquires human knowledge and the way that knowledge is acquired by man through the gift of knowledge:

Certitude of knowledge is found in diverse modes in diverse natures, according to the diverse conditions of each nature. For man forms a sure judgment about a truth through the discursive process of his reason: and so human knowledge is acquired by means of demonstrative reasoning. But in God is sure judgment of truth without any discursive process, through simple intuition, as was stated in the First Part: wherefore divine knowledge is not discursive, or argumentative, but absolute and simple, to which that knowledge is likened which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, since it is a certain participated likeness thereof.⁶⁴

This statement by Aquinas indicates that, through the gift of knowledge, man participates in a manner of knowing which is above that which is proper to his nature.⁶⁵ Thus, Aquinas's discussion of the gift of knowledge verifies that through the gift of wisdom, which is a species of

⁶³ See ST II-II, q. 9, a. 2, reply (Leonine 8:75).

⁶⁴ "Certitudo cognitionis in diversis naturis invenitur diversimode, secundum diversam conditionem uniuscuiusque naturae. Nam homo consequitur certum iudicium de veritate per discursum rationis: et ideo scientia humana ex ratione demonstrativa acquiritur. Sed in Deo est certum iudicium veritatis absque omni discursu per simplicem intuitum, ut in Primo dictum est: et ideo divina scientia non est discursiva vel ratiocinativa, sed absoluta et simplex. Cui similis est scientia quae ponitur donum Spiritus Sancti: cum sit quaedam participativa similitudo ipsius." ST II-II, q. 9, a. 1, ad 1 (Leonine 8:74).

⁶⁵ Aquinas's position here is consistent with what he says in his *Commentary on the Sentences* about the operation of the gifts, where he states that "And therefore since the gifts operate above the human mode, the operation of the gifts must be measured by a rule other than that of human virtue, which is Divinity itself participated by man in his own mode, so that he is no longer humanly acting, but as if made God by participation." "Et ideo cum dona sint ad operandum supra humanum modum, oportet quod donorum operationes mensurentur ex altera regula quam sit regula humanae virtutis, quae est ipsa Divinitas ab homine participata suo modo, ut jam non humanitus, sed quasi Deus factus participatione." *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. III, d. 34, q. 1, a. 3, reply (Moos t.3:1123).

knowledge, man is able to judge divine things not through his natural mode of reasoning but through a higher mode which is non-discursive or intuitive.⁶⁶ In the case of wisdom, this higher mode is a result of the fact that the gift of wisdom judges by a connaturality with divine things, effected by the virtue of charity. Thus, while the speculative knowledge of God possessed through the gift of understanding is inherently imperfect in this life, the gift of wisdom provides affective knowledge, which has no inherent imperfection.

Various Thomistic scholars have noted the role that Aquinas gives to the gift of wisdom in supernatural contemplation and have attempted to construct an account of how it operates. Garrigou-Lagrange and Maritain believe that Aquinas's account of this gift in particular, and his broader account of the life of grace, can explain how experiences of mystical contemplation – such as that described by Catherine of Siena and Thomas Merton – take place. Maritain constructs the following account:

The contemplation of the saints is not only *for* divine love; it is also *through* it. It not only supposes the theological virtue of Faith, but the theological virtue of Charity and the infused gifts of Understanding and Wisdom as well; and these do not exist in the soul without charity. Love as such attains immediately and in Himself the very God attained in faith in an obscure manner and, as it were at a distance. This is so because as far as understanding is concerned, there is distance when there is not vision, while love unites us in our heart to Him who is hidden in faith. Mystical wisdom, moved and actually regulated by the Holy Ghost, experiences the Divine things thus imbedded in us by charity, God becomes ours by charity. Through and in that Love which, so to speak, gives itself to us within our very selves, and, 'in virtue of an incomprehensible union,' it knows that Love affectively.⁶⁷

Maritain posits that the gift of wisdom provides an affective, experiential knowledge of God.⁶⁸

He explains further:

⁶⁶ For further reflection on the non-discursive or intuitive nature of both the gift of knowledge and the gift of wisdom in Aquinas see Van Nieuwenhove, "Contemplation, Intellectus, and Simplex Intuitus in Aquinas," 223.

⁶⁷ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 11-12.

⁶⁸ Jean-Pierre Torrell's discussion of affective, experiential knowledge of God is helpful: "Basically, the word experience, borrowing from the vocabulary of the senses, suggests something of direct contact with reality transposed into the realm of divine things: 'Experience of a thing comes through the senses. . . . Now God is not removed from us, nor outside of us, he is in us. . . . That is why experience of the divine goodness is called 'taste' (*gustatio*). . . . The effect of that experience is twofold: first, certitude of knowledge, second, the sureness of affectivity.' The immediacy of divine reality thus experienced, therefore, certainly bursts into the understanding as well as into the will, and confirms them in their proper order. Clearly Thomas is following here common usage in which the term 'experience' designates something other than a purely intellectual knowledge." See Jean-Pierre

When things divine are intimately joined to us, when they have become ours and are embowelled in us through the love of charity, it is proper to the gift of wisdom to make use of that love, that infused charity, in order to make it pass, under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to the status of an objective medium of knowledge (objectum quo in scholastic terminology). Then we not only experience our love for God, but it is God Himself whom we experience by our love.⁶⁹

In an important footnote to this text, Maritain elaborates on what it means to say that love becomes the objective medium of knowledge:

Under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost love thus passes to the side of the object and takes on an objective condition, not so as to be a known object, but, rather, a means of knowledge or *objectum quo* . . . What we are calling here the *objectum quo* is not charity, nor wisdom taken as habitus; it is the passions which the soul actually undergoes, actual effects that serve as a real medium of knowledge under the illumination of the Holy Ghost. And in this way, God is still known *through His effects* (and it is necessarily so inasmuch as He is not seen through His essence), but these effects are no longer things or objects that are first known and from which the mind is elevated to God through an anametic process as in the knowledge according to the human mode . . . They are touches of connaturality actually experienced under the light of the Holy Ghost through an *objectum quo* in which and by which an experienced contact occurs between God and the soul . . . Thus, God is not only attained without reasoning, in the manner in which substance is seen “per accidens,” but He is Himself touched and experienced in an obscure manner. . . If still greater precision were required, we would say that infused love and the touches of connaturality of which we have been speaking are not of themselves “formal signs” or pure *in quo*’s of understanding, as the concept is, but that under the illumination of the Holy Ghost, they find themselves actually playing a role quite comparable to that of a formal sign, and this is possible because it is no longer a matter of clear knowledge but of a quite experimental, obscure, and apophatic knowledge joining the soul to God as to someone hidden, *quasi ignoto*.⁷⁰

Maritain proposes that the effects produced in the soul by the connatural, experiential, affective manner in which God is known through the operation of the gift of wisdom take the place of the formal sign or concept of the intellect. He explains further that, while concepts “are not suppressed, for that would be contrary to the very nature of our intellect which needs them to be in act. . . . [T]he formal means and rule of knowledge are elsewhere.”⁷¹ Thus, Maritain posits that the connatural knowledge provided by the gift of wisdom excludes the use of distinct concepts.⁷²

Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2, *Spiritual Master*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 95-96.

⁶⁹ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 261-262.

⁷⁰ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 261, footnote 3.

⁷¹ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 264.

⁷² This position is also held by Garrigou-Lagrange: “This infused contemplation is obscure because it is superior both to every sensible image and to every distinct idea. . . . The faculties are, as it were, annihilated according to their human mode; here, there is a deeper and more vital communication of the divine mode of knowing and loving.” Garrigou-Lagrange, *Christian Perfection*, 316-317.

Maritain's account is intriguing and is explanatory of what is described by Merton and others. While it is evident that Maritain bases his explanation on Aquinas's teachings on the life of grace, it is also obvious that he goes beyond Aquinas's explicit texts.⁷³ Bernhard Blankenhorn, in his book *The Mystery of Union with God*, argues that an interpretation such as Maritain's cannot be squared with Aquinas's thought. Blankenhorn believes that Maritain gives an overly affective reading of Aquinas's gift of wisdom.⁷⁴ Blankenhorn also contends that, even under the operation of the gift of wisdom, God is known through distinct concepts and images or phantasms.⁷⁵ Blankenhorn states "Thomas's approach to the gifts of understanding and wisdom rests on the hinge of the apprehension-judgment distinction, which adds considerable precision to the theology of the gifts. . . . Again, concept-bound cognition remains essential in order to account for the *human* reception of divine illumination."⁷⁶ Blankenhorn's most fundamental concern seems to be that Maritain's rejection of concept-bound knowledge appears to threaten the axiom that grace builds on nature:

The affective reading of Thomas is partly correct insofar as wisdom's judgment attains the divine rules through charity's connaturality that assists judgment not by producing new concepts but by an affective inclination to divine things. Yet Aquinas insists on the inseparability of the articles of faith from wisdom's operation. We only grasp these articles with the help of concepts. Also, as we saw in chapter 5 of this volume, Thomas consistently holds that any properly human noetic act in this life involves intelligible species. The Spirit's motion does not replace but rather incites our act of judgment: grace does not destroy nature. To make explicit what Aquinas leaves implicit, the Spirit moves us to employ simultaneously the concept-bound knowledge attained by faith and to judge with the aid of charity's inclination. It seems that only such a reading can account for Thomas's insistence that the gift of wisdom's operation is grounded in the articles of faith. This would explain why Aquinas says nothing about a deliberate or infused silencing of concept-bound noetic activity when the Spirit actualizes judgment. Thus even distinct concepts have a place in wisdom's operation, but wise judgment is not limited to deductions from faith premises that we grasp with concepts. This distinction is important, for it shows how Aquinas can account for mystics' frequent inability to express adequately what they have learned via contact with God (an apophatic theme), even as Thomas greatly revalorizes the mystic's cooperation in union and the role of mediations therein. Finally, Thomas's study of wisdom never excludes the use of images from wisdom's operation, as he

⁷³ Maritain relies heavily upon John of St. Thomas, one of the seventeenth century's foremost interpreters of Aquinas. See Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 262.

⁷⁴ Bernhard Blankenhorn, *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 428-429.

⁷⁵ Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union with God*, 429-430.

⁷⁶ Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union with God*, 439-440. Emphasis in original.

remains consistent with his anthropology of the unicity of substantial form and the principle of the intellect's return to phantasms to complete its act. Here, too, we find Thomas avoiding noetic passivity and promoting the function of corporeal mediations in contemplative ascent.⁷⁷

Blankenhorn's position is based on two propositions: 1) The gift of wisdom's operation is inseparable from the articles of faith. Therefore, wisdom, like faith, must operate through concepts; 2) Human knowledge requires the use of intelligible species and phantasms. If grace is not to destroy nature, the gift of wisdom must operate through these. Blankenhorn gives his own interpretation of Aquinas's view of the gift of wisdom:

Affective union's object is the divine truth presented in the articles of faith, but as loved. Charity's unitive inclination to divine things guides the intellect, but this inclination does not inform the mind as do intelligible forms. Nor does Aquinas state that wisdom takes over the operation of receiving intelligible content (i.e., apprehension). Rather, its act involves a judgement. Thus love's inclination facilitates the wise judgment of the realities that faith receives via revelation, the same realities that the gift of understanding apprehends more fully. Charity effects a nonnoetic mode of access to the divine rules or realities that faith already knows. Wisdom actually judges by the Spirit directly moving the intellect. If the Spirit were to enact wisdom only through charity, then the intellect would not need a special *habitus* to dispose it for the Spirit's motion. Now Aquinas does not describe charity as directly grasping or "sensing" God without the intellect or concepts. Rather, wisdom judges according to the articles of faith, which include the principles of right action. But, to take an example, these articles do not explicate the virtuous act for every situation. Charity's habitual contact with divine things inclines to what is pleasing to God in concrete situations. The human act inclined by charity is perfected and made certain by the Spirit. His impulse and our connaturality manifest more concretely the things of God revealed in Christ. Infused judgement and (habitual) affective inclination move the intellect to divine things by mode of instinct, always in harmony with faith. Thus the divine rules are the things of God as known (1) by faith and the gift of understanding and (2) by wisdom's judgement as inclined by charity and as moved by the Spirit.⁷⁸

Thus, for Blankenhorn, God is the efficient – not formal – cause in the operation of the gift of wisdom. The role of the gift of wisdom is to "perfect and make certain" the human act.

While Blankenhorn makes a good textual case for his interpretation of Aquinas, his interpretation does not appear to be sufficiently explanatory of the Christian tradition of infused contemplation. Aquinas does not give a full, detailed account of the experience of infused contemplation, and thus Maritain obviously goes beyond Aquinas. But is Maritain's interpretation antithetical to Aquinas's thought? There is evidence that Blankenhorn's primary

⁷⁷ Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union with God*, 429-430.

⁷⁸ Blankenhorn, *Mystery of Union with God*, 427-428.

objections to Maritain's account are not conclusive. First, while it is true that Aquinas consistently links the gift of wisdom to the virtue of faith, it does not necessarily follow that wisdom must operate in the same manner as faith. As has been shown, Aquinas takes care to distinguish the operation of the gifts from the operation of the virtues. In addition, when Aquinas discusses sacred doctrine, he specifically contrasts the manner in which divine things are judged by the gift of wisdom with the manner in which they are judged through study and revelation:

Since judgment appertains to wisdom, the twofold manner of judging produces a twofold wisdom. A man may judge in one way by inclination, as whoever has the habit of a virtue judges rightly of what concerns that virtue by his very inclination towards it: and hence in *Ethic.* X we read that it is the virtuous man who is the measure and rule of human acts. In another way, by knowledge, just as a man learned in moral science may be able to judge about virtuous acts, even if he had not the virtue. The first manner of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is set down as a gift of the Holy Spirit: *The spiritual man judgeth all things* (1 Cor 2:15). And Dionysius says (*Div. Nom.* ii): *Hierotheus is taught not only by learning, but by suffering divine things.* The second manner of judging belongs to this doctrine which is acquired by study, though its principles are obtained by revelation.⁷⁹

Both this text and the texts cited previously on the relationship between the virtues and the gifts at a minimum raise the question of whether or not Aquinas held that the gift of wisdom operates in a manner different from the virtue of faith. Second, Aquinas has no difficulty with leaving behind the human operations of sense knowledge, apprehension, and concepts when it comes to knowledge of God in the beatific vision, for man knows God as He knows Himself. Surely Aquinas does not hold that grace destroys nature in the beatific vision, but, rather, that nature is perfected. Thus, neither does Maritain's argument that "in the infused act of contemplation, the gift of wisdom, under God's action, frees faith from the human mode of concept and analogy . . .

⁷⁹ "Cum iudicium ad sapientem pertineat, secundum duplicum modum iudicandi, dupliciter sapientia accipitur. Contingit enim aliquem iudicare, uno modo per modum inclinationis: sicut qui habet habitum virtutis, recte iudicat de his quae sunt secundum virtutem agenda, inquantum ad illa inclinatur: unde et in X *Ethic.* dicitur quod virtuosus est mensura et regula actuum humanorum. Alio modo, per modum cognitionis: sicut aliquis instructus in scientia morali, posset iudicare de actibus virtutis, etiam si virtutem non haberet. Primus igitur modus iudicandi de rebus divinis, pertinet ad sapientiam quae ponitur donum Spiritus Sancti, secundum illud I Cor. II: *spiritualis homo iudicat omnia*, etc.: et Dionysius dicit, II cap. *de Divinis Nominibus*: *Hierotheus doctus est non solum discens, sed et patiens divina*. Secundus autem modus iudicandi pertinet ad hanc doctrinam, secundum quod per studium habetur; licet eius principia ex revelatione habeantur." ST I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3 (Leonine 4:18).

[and] suppresses in some way, not by vision, but by the experience of love, that distance from its object, which is the case in faith all alone,”⁸⁰ necessarily imply a destruction of nature by grace.

Fundamentally, the disagreement between Blankenhorn and Maritain is not about whether, for Aquinas, the gift of wisdom plays an important role in the contemplative life. Both maintain that it does. Rather, their disagreement boils down to how each understands Aquinas’s view of grace building upon nature, and in what manner man is able to possess imperfectly the knowledge of God that we will have in the beatific vision. Based on Aquinas’s explicit texts alone, there appears to be room for both Maritain’s and Blankenhorn’s interpretations. What is clear is that, for Aquinas, the gift of wisdom, which unites the elements of knowledge and love constitutive of contemplation, has primacy in the contemplative life. Aquinas states that both the gift of wisdom and the gift of understanding will remain in the next life, where they will be perfected:

However, those gifts which perfect in the contemplative life will remain as regarding the acts which they have according to their proper matter and the acts which they have according to their proper measure, but they will be perfected according to their mode, because to whatever extent the gifts elevate to a mode higher than the mode of common man. In this life, they are, nevertheless, not able to reach the mode of the fatherland.⁸¹

Thus, it is evident that Aquinas holds that it is through the gifts of understanding and wisdom that man is able to share most perfectly in the life that is to come,⁸² for these gifts perfect man here in the contemplative life and remain – and are themselves perfected – in the contemplation of the beatific vision.

⁸⁰ Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 264-265.

⁸¹ “*Dona autem illa quae perficiunt in vita contemplativa*, remanebunt quantum ad actus quos habent circa propriam materiam et quantum ad actus quos habent circa propriam mensuram, sed perficiuntur quantum ad modum; quia quantumcumque dona ad altiorem modum elevent quam sit communis homini modus, nunquam tamen in via ad modum patriae pertingere possunt.” *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. III, d. 34, q. 1, a. 3, reply (Moos t.3:1123). Emphasis in original.

⁸² These gifts, of course, presuppose sanctifying grace and the theological virtues, a thorough discussion of which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

Aristotle's intuition that the life of contemplation must be "above that of a man, for a man will live in this manner not insofar as he is a man, but insofar as he has something divine in him"¹ was not far off. Aquinas identifies the true life of contemplation that is perfective of man, and shows that it is only possible through man's union with the Divine. Man's intellect, a singular and most precious gift from God, has been given to him in order that God may elevate him to union with Himself, without doing violence to – but rather perfecting – the original nature that man possesses. In the contemplation of the beatific vision, the ultimate union of knower and Known, man finds his perfect happiness and fulfillment.

Aquinas's vision of contemplation as the perfection of man encompasses both nature and grace. Although Aquinas's account of contemplation precludes the possibility of man attaining his ultimate perfection in this life, Aquinas posits that it is possible for man to attain an inchoate beatitude in this life through the contemplation of truth. Both philosophical contemplation and natural intuitive contemplation through love of the object known provide an experience that is analogous to the supernatural contemplation that man attains in an inchoate manner in this life through grace (i.e. the gifts of wisdom and understanding), and which is perfected in the next life in the beatific vision of the divine essence. Thus, the union with the other in which man's natural mode of knowledge consists is the foundation for his ultimate perfection, which is union with God through knowledge of Him.

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b27-29.

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