

Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?

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IN SOME EARLIER PAPERS¹ I have argued that an important development of doctrine concerning truth is to be found as we move from Thomas's *De veritate* to his *Summa theologiae*.² My general impression is that I have failed to convince. Accordingly, I decided to make another attempt.

I will first list some obvious overall changes as one moves from the *De veritate* to the *Summa theologiae*; I will secondly review the *De veritate* treatment itself. And lastly, I will underline some key features in the *Summa theologiae* account which, as it seems to me, are intended to alert the reader that Thomas is criticizing his own earlier work.

First, the obvious overall changes. Thomas changes the order of treatment. In the *De veritate*, the questions are in the order: *veritas, scientia, idea*. In the *Summa theologiae* the order is *scientia, idea, veritas*. This difference is not trivial. In the *De veritate* 1.1 truth is presented as prior to and the cause of knowledge. This accords with treating truth prior to knowledge; on the other hand, the doctrine of truth as cause of knowledge is nowhere to be seen in the *Summa theologiae* (or anywhere else in St. Thomas that I know of), and the *Summa theologiae* questionnaire accords

¹ Cf. my papers, "A Note on Metaphysics and Truth," in *Doctor Communis* (2002): 143–53 (Volume titled: *The Contemporary Debate on the Truth, Proceedings of the II Plenary Session, Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas*); and "St. Thomas's Successive Discussions of the Nature of Truth," in Daniel Ols, OP, ed., *Sanctus Thomas De Aquino: Doctor Hodiernae Humanitatis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 153–68.

² Thomas's *De veritate* (hereafter, *DV*) dates from 1256–57 in its earlier parts; his *Summa theologiae* dates from 1266–67 in its earlier part.

well with the conception of the truth therein proposed, as properly found in the intellect's composing and dividing (with "idea" relating more to the *first* operation of the intellect).

Looking *within* the questions on truth in the respective works, we find, again, that the order of articles has been revised. In the *De veritate* we have first an article on the definition of truth ("what is truth?"), an article which, as can be seen from the objections, focuses on the question of how truth relates to being; secondly, it is asked whether truth is more principally in the mind than in things; thirdly, whether truth is only in the intellect composing and dividing; and fourthly, whether there is one truth by which all [items] are true? In the *Summa theologiae* we have first an article asking whether truth is only in the intellect; secondly it is asked whether it is only in the intellect composing and dividing; thirdly, concerning the comparison of "the true" to "a being"; fourthly, concerning the comparison of "the true" to "the good"; fifthly, whether God is truth; and sixthly, whether all are true by virtue of one truth, or by many. Thus, the basic difference is that what came first in the *De veritate*, the relation between being and truth, is placed third in the *Summa theologiae*, while in the *Summa theologiae* the query concerning whether truth is only in the mind has become fundamental. Nevertheless, in both works, the first article explains the variety of definitions or explanations of truth, but, as we shall see, the *Summa theologiae* significantly changes the account of the definitions, as compared with the *De veritate*.

Let us look now at the *De veritate* treatment. When I say that it has proved very popular with commentators on Thomas, I am speaking mainly of *De veritate* 1.1, which asks what truth is. Its readers very often³ begin their accounts of truth by stressing that truth is found in things, what is sometimes called "ontological truth." In my experience of twentieth-century Thomism there was great insistence on the identity of being and truth, the "truth of things." This, related to the doctrine of the transcendental properties of being, encouraged a view of truth as an inherent formal feature of things, even if a feature obviously identical with the being of things. Jacques Maritain thus says:

The true is being inasmuch as it confronts intellection, thought; and this is another aspect of being, thus revealed, a new note struck by it. It

³ For brevity, I will cite only Jacques Maritain, writing circa 1932; however, one can see this focus in such recent items as John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 9; cf. Leo J. Elders, "The Transcendental Properties of Being," *International Journal of Philosophy* [Taipei] 1 (2002): 41–64, at p. 50.

answers to the knowing mind, speaks to it, superabounds in utterance, expresses, manifests a subsistence for thought, a particular intelligibility which is itself. An object is true—that is to say, conforms to *what it* thus says [about] itself to thought, to the intelligibility it enunciates—to the extent that it is.⁴

No reference to Thomas is given at this point, but the very fact that Maritain here uses the expression “universal modes” to characterize the transcendentals makes it likely enough that *De veritate* 1.1 is in the background.⁵

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1939), 66 (the translator is not named; I have changed “Truth” to “the true” at the beginning; and I added the word “about,” which English, and the text being translated, seem to require). The passage continues (pp. 66–67):

What is then manifest is of the nature of an *obligation* attached to being. An *I ought to be* consubstantial with *I am*. Every being ought to be and is, insofar as it is, in conformity with the expression of it which a perfect Knowledge would produce.

The passage is to be found in Jacques et Raïssa Maritain, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. V (1932–35) (Fribourg : Éditions Universitaires, 1982), 595–96 (in the work titled: *Sept leçons sur l'être*, originally published in 1934 [a course originally given at the Institut Catholique, Paris, in 1932–33]):

Vous savez que les métaphysiciens reconnaissent un certain nombre de modes universels de l'être. . . . Le *vrai* est l'être en tant même que faisant face à l'intellection, à la pensée, et voilà un nouveau visage de l'être qui se révèle, une nouvelle résonance qui sort de lui; il *répond* à l'esprit connaissant, il lui parle, il surabonde en diction, il exprime, il manifeste une consistance pour la pensée, une intelligibilité telle ou telle qui est lui-même; une chose est vraie,—c'est-à-dire consonante à *ce qu'elle* dit ainsi d'elle-même à la pensée, à *ce qu'elle* annonce d'intelligibilité,—pour autant qu'elle est. Ce qui se révèle alors c'est l'ordre d'un certain *je dois être* consubstantiel au *je suis*: tout être doit être—et est, pour autant qu'il est—consonant à l'expression que se ferait de lui-même une Connaissance parfaite.

Notice, though, that Maritain uses the terme “le vrai,” that is, “the true,” and not, as the translation would suggest “la vérité.” It is that latter word which would suggest most strongly an intrinsic formality.

⁵ His presentation of the conceptual additions to “*ens*” as “universal modes” (ibid., 66) suggests strongly *DV* 1.1: “. . . modus generaliter consequens omne ens.” In contrast, in *DV* 21.1, where essentially the same topic is addressed, only the categories are called “modes,” while “*bonum*” and “*verum*” are simply said to add to “*ens*” “*id quod est rationis tantum*.”

Let us then examine *De veritate* 1.1, having in mind the question: Is the truth that Thomas speaks of *in this article* a truth in things, or is it in the mind? (I stress “in this article” because Thomas’s second article here asks whether the truth is more principally found in things or in the mind.) The article is titled “what is truth? [*quid sit veritas*].” However, the first set of objections (a group of seven) contend that the true [*verum*] is identical with that-which-is [*ens*], while the second set (a group of five) argue for diversity between the two. Thus, the issue of identity of being and truth is front and center.

We have a presentation of the very roots of definability. The concept expressed by the word “*ens*” is the concept first conceived, is indeed most known, and all other intellectual concepts are “resolvable” into “*ens*.” Thus, all other conceptions of the intellect are constituted through *addition* to “*ens*.” It is a lesson on our conceptions and their basis in the concept of “*ens*,” and asks *how* we can be said to “add” to it. The first point is to steer us clear of the idea that we add some different *nature*. Everything we add must have the *nature* of “*ens*.” Accordingly, the additions are presented as “modes” of “*ens*.” One sort of addition is a *special* mode, and thus the conceptions of the *categories* of “*ens*” are seen to add to it: “substance,” for example, says “*ens per se*.” Such additions result in *grades of entity*.

We then come to the sort of mode that attaches to every being, general or universal modes. And this gives rise to a lesson on the variety of ways that this can happen. After explaining how the concepts of “thing,” “one,” and “something” arise, we come to “good” and “true.” They involve consideration of the agreement of one being with another. For this to give rise to such *general* modes, one must have something whose nature involves agreement with that which is, as such [*aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omne ente*]. Thomas says that this something is the soul, which is in a way all things.

We have come, then, to the conceptions that we add to “a being,” just because of the presence of soul in reality. Thomas points to the soul’s cognitive and appetitive powers, and presents the two new concepts:

... the agreement of being with appetite is expressed by the word “good”
 ... the agreement of being with intellect is expressed by the word “true”
 [*Convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum*].

At this point Thomas goes into detail on the concept of *verum*. We are told:

Now, all knowing is brought to perfection [*perficitur*] through the making like [*per assimilationem*] of the one knowing to the thing known

[*cognoscentis ad rem cognitam*], in such fashion that the said assimilation is the cause of the knowing: for example, sight, by the fact that it is given a determination [*disponitur*] by the form of the colour [*per speciem coloris*], knows the colour.

Hence, the primary comparison of that which is to intellect [*fentis ad intellectum*] is that the being is concordant with the intellect: this concord is called “the adequation of thing and intellect” [*adaequatio rei et intellectus*]; and in this, formally, the intelligible nature of the true is brought to perfection.

Therefore, this is what “true” adds to “a being,” viz. the conformity, or adequation, of the thing and the intellect; upon this conformity, as was said, knowledge of the thing follows. Thus, therefore, the entity of the thing precedes the nature of truth [*rationem veritatis*], but knowledge is an effect of truth.

Thomas here is clearly thinking of how the being of things *brings about* knowledge in the knower. His use of the model of the visible thing and the sense of sight makes this clear, as well as the statement that “the said assimilation is the *cause* of the *knowing*.” The thing produces in the sense a likeness of itself, thus causing the knower to see the thing. The thing has primacy, the likeness comes second, and the knowledge comes third.

Thomas, having said that the entity of the thing precedes the nature of truth, and that knowledge is an effect of truth, proceeds to use this triadic structure as a key to the variety of definitions of truth and the true [*veritas et verum*].

Truth and the true is found defined, in one way, in function of that which precedes the nature of truth, and in function of that which constitutes the *foundation* of the true. Augustine’s “the true is that which is,” Avicenna’s “the truth of each thing whatsoever is the property of its being, which has been established for the thing,” and another’s “the true is the undividedness of being and of that which is”: all these should be so seen.

Then, in another way, truth and the true are defined in function of that *which formally perfects the nature of the true*: thus, Isaac Israeli’s “truth is the adequation of thing and intellect,”⁶ and Anselm’s “truth is a rightness perceptible only to mind.”⁷

⁶ Need it be said that the attribution to Isaac is questionable? Cf. J. T. Muckle, “Isaac Israeli’s Definition of Truth,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 8 (1933): 1–8.

⁷ Thomas here takes the trouble to explain that the “rightness” spoken of by Anselm comes to the same thing as the “adequation” referred to by Isaac; this can be seen in the light of Aristotle’s saying that, in defining the true, we say it is to say “is” of that which is, and “is not” of that which is not.

In a third way, the true is defined in function of *the consequent effect*: thus, Hilary's "the true is declarative and manifestative of being," and Augustine's "The truth is that by which that which is is shown."⁸ The implication is, of course, that these last "definitions" are really about knowledge rather than precisely about the truth which causes it.

Where should one "locate" truth in this discussion? In the order of conceptions, which is the basic approach of Thomas in the article, it is taken as adding a general mode to "being," the added conception of the agreement of being and intellect. The explanatory schema Thomas introduces is definitely of things bringing about a likeness of themselves *in the soul*, a likeness which results in knowledge. Most properly, the nature of truth is located in the likeness itself. This surely is in the knower, and prior to knowledge.

Of course, the context of the sequence of notions, "being," "thing," "one," "something," "true," and "good," suggests somewhat that the "true" we are speaking of is that said of the thing itself. Indeed, this seems to be how many have read the text.⁹ We ourselves should wait for Thomas himself to answer the question, which he does immediately.

De veritate 1.2 asks whether truth is found more principally in the intellect rather than in things. Thomas in the body of the article begins by presupposing that "the true" is said according to priority and posteriority. This, I would say, relates to the fact that we just had the three sorts of definition. Thomas explains that in such cases, it is not necessarily that which has the role of cause¹⁰ of the others that has priority as to the common predication; it is rather that in which firstly the complete nature (or intelligible note, *ratio*) is found. Where is the complete *ratio* of truth found?

In order to establish this, Thomas argues that the completion of a movement is in its terminus. He then contrasts the movement of cognition, terminating in the knower, and in the knower's own mode, with the movement of appetite, terminating in the thing sought. This leads us to the doctrine that while the good is in things, the true is in the intellect. The "movement" referred to is the same one we saw in a. 1, *the causal procedure from the thing to the knowing power*.

⁸ Here Thomas also includes Augustine's "The truth is that in virtue of which we judge of inferiors."

⁹ I have sometimes myself been guilty.

¹⁰ Notice that what Thomas is referring to here, among the applications of the term "true," is not the adequation which he called "*cause* of knowledge"; it is rather the *thing* as "true," to which the first set of definitions applied, that which "constitutes the *foundation* of truth" (*in quo verum fundatur*).

At this point, then, having affirmed the primacy of the soul as the “location” of the true, Thomas has this to say about truth and thing:

The thing is not called “true,” save inasmuch as it is adequated to intellect: hence, it is posteriorly that the true is found in things, whereas [it is] by priority in the intellect.

This, however, is not a sufficient discussion of the situation. A further distinction must be noted, that between speculative and practical intellect. The point is that practical intellect is cause and so measure of things, while speculative intellect is measured by the things which cause it to know. Thus, natural things measure our intellect, but are measured by the divine intellect. This leads to the important determination:

*The natural thing, constituted between two intellects, is called “true” in function of adequation to each. It is called “true” in function of adequation to the divine intellect inasmuch as it fulfills that to which it is ordered by the divine intellect. . . . But in function of adequation to the human intellect the thing is called “true” inasmuch as it is naturally apt to form concerning itself a true estimate, just as, contrarily, things are called “false” whose nature it is to seem what they are not. . . .*¹¹

Having established these two ways in which a natural thing is called “true” by posteriority to mind, Thomas specifies that one of them has priority: The *prima ratio veritatis*, that is, the first of the two mentioned here as regards the natural thing, is present within the thing by priority [*per prius inest rei*] to the second. This is because the comparison with the divine intellect has priority over the comparison to the human intellect: Thus, if the human intellect did not exist, the natural thing would still be called “true” in virtue of the order to the divine intellect; but if both intellects were eliminated, and, *per impossibile*, things remained, they could not be called “true.” The *ratio veritatis* would in no way remain.

We should notice that the grounds here for priority are in terms of the possibility of eliminating the causality of things relative to our intellect. This is not the same doctrine as will be seen in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, where the issue is that it merely *happens* to the natural thing that it be

¹¹ I might call attention to *DV* 1.10, which asks whether any thing is false. Relative to the human intellect a thing which has a deceptive appearance can be called “false,” but Thomas here recalls (having said it in 1.4) that the relation of the thing to the human intellect is “accidental,” and concludes that, simply speaking, every thing is true (as per the relation to the divine intellect).

known by a human intellect. Here in *De veritate* 1.2, all we have is grounds for priority of the relation of the divine to the relation to the human intellect. In the *Summa theologiae* we have grounds for excluding from the discussion the reference of natural things to the human intellect. Here in the *De veritate*, the “true” said of the thing as expressing the relation of natural thing to human mind is still being given a prominent and honorable place in the proceedings.

One of the objections in this article, an objection arguing for the primacy of truth in things, bases itself on the convertibility of being and truth. Thomas’s reply argues that whether true is said of intellect or of thing, convertibility with being remains true. Speaking of the true as found in the soul, he makes it a matter of convertibility, not as to predication but as to agreement. However, speaking of the true as said of the thing, where it is a matter of predication convertibility, one notes Thomas’s concern to keep in play the duality of intellects. We read:

... every being is adequate relative to the divine intellect *and is able to render the human intellect adequate to itself*. . . .¹²

In the same way, in the reply to an objection arguing that Augustine rejected definitions of truth which included reference to intellect, Thomas says that this has to do with reference to the *human* intellect, not the divine. However, he goes on to work the human intellect back into the picture, concluding:

... in the definition of the true thing one can include actual vision by the divine intellect, but not vision by the human intellect, *save potentially*. . . .¹³

Thomas, in a. 3, on the truth as found primarily in the intellect’s composing and dividing, concludes by presenting in detail the order of priority. The truth is found by priority in the intellect composing and dividing, secondarily in the intellect forming quiddities (inasmuch as the quiddities imply true or false compositions), thirdly in things as adequate relative to the divine intellect, *or as naturally apt to render adequate the human intellect*, and so on. I stress how seemingly standard is the reference to the relation of natural things to the human intellect.¹⁴

¹² *DV* 1.2, ad 1.

¹³ *DV* 1.2, ad 4.

¹⁴ It is notable that in the *Sent.*, the *DV*, and the *ST*, Thomas uses three different approaches to teaching the doctrine that truth is to be found primarily in the intellect’s composing and dividing. It is also notable that Thomas does not regard the sort of likeness of intellect to thing which compares to the likeness of sensible

The unlikeness of *De veritate* 1.4 to *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 6 is a key point for us. In *De veritate* 1.4 Thomas asks whether there is one sole truth in function of which all are true. He again compares truth to the case of “healthy” as said by priority and posteriority. Accordingly, truth is properly found in the intellect, whether human or divine, just as health is found properly in the animal. In other things it is found relative to the intellect, as health [*sanitas*] is said of some other things inasmuch as they cause or conserve the health of the animal. Thus, we get this line-up:

Therefore, there is in the divine intellect truth properly and firstly; in the human intellect properly and secondarily; in things *improperly* and secondarily, because only relative to *one or other* of the [other] two truths.

We note again the standard relating of natural things to the two intellects.

Thomas now deals with the question of one or many truths. The truth in the divine intellect is one, and from it are derived the many truths in the human intellect. The truths in things are many, just as entity is multiplied in them.

That seems a definite enough statement. Thomas however sees the need to give a priority to calling a thing “true” relative to the divine intellect, rather than to the human intellect. This is, of course, of great importance for our project. What sort of reasons will be give for this? He says:

However, the “truth” which is said about things in comparison to the human intellect is to some degree accidental to the things [*rebus quodammodo accidentalis*], because supposing that the human intellect neither were nor could be, still things would remain in their own essence[s]. On the other hand, the truth which is said about them in comparison to the divine intellect is communicated to them inseparably: for they cannot have being save through the divine intellect producing them in being.

This is basically the same reason as already seen in 1.2. The use of the word “accidental” is new, but the point is the same.

There is now a second consideration of the status of the truth of things relative to the human intellect. We read:

Furthermore, the truth of the thing relative to the divine intellect *is present in the thing by priority* to that relative to the human [intellect], since it is compared to the divine intellect as to a cause, to the human

species to thing as sufficient to constitute the adequation of which “truth” speaks! It was regarded as sufficient in a. 1, and was indeed the basis for saying that truth is the cause of knowledge (I cannot go into this here).

intellect in some measure as to an effect [*quodammodo quasi ad effectum*],¹⁵ inasmuch as the intellect receives from things.

This is the issue of priority of one of the considerations over the other, rather than accidentality. It is not yet the doctrine we will see in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 1.

On the basis of these two points, it is concluded that a thing is called “true” *more principally* relative to the divine intellect rather than to the human intellect. This is a significantly mild conclusion, as compared with what we will find in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 1.

The reason for here introducing this issue, viz. the diminishing of the status of the relating of things to the human intellect, must affect the present question—one truth or many. Thus, Thomas now comes to a more general conclusion for that issue (and the article). We read:

If, therefore, “truth” be taken as properly said, in the way in which all are “true” principally, thus all are true by virtue of one truth, i.e., the truth of the divine intellect. And it is thus that Anselm speaks of truth in the book *On Truth*.

But if “truth” be taken as properly said, according as things [sic] are secondarily called “true,” thus of the many true [items] there are many truths and even of one true [item] several truths in diverse souls.

However, if “truth” is taken as improperly said, according as all are called “true,” thus, of the many true items there are many truths, but of one thing there is only one truth.

I read the first of these three as speaking merely about God thinking of things. The second is about created intellect thinking of things. The third is about the things in their own being. Thus far, the diminishing of the status of the relation to human intellect does not seem to have made any difference.

However, we have not finished. We now get what I must say is a very odd conclusion to the article. We read:

For¹⁶ *THINGS* are called “true” from the truth which is in the divine intellect or in the human intellect [!] as food is called “healthy” from

¹⁵ The seeming hesitation to use the word “effect” here perhaps relates to Thomas’s consideration, in *DV* 1.10, that truth and falsity, pertaining as they do to the intellect’s judgment, as distinct from its apprehension, means that the intellect is the agent rather than the patient as regards truth.

¹⁶ The text has “*autem*” here, but I am reading “*enim*”: The only way I can understand this passage is as an explanation of the just-made statement about truth as *improperly* said.

the health which is in the animal and *NOT AS FROM AN INHERENT FORM*; but from the *TRUTH* which is in the thing itself [*a veritate quae est in ipsa re*], which is nothing else but the entity [*entitas*] conformed with the intellect OR CONFORMING THE INTELLECT TO ITSELF, it is denominated *AS FROM INHERENT FORM* [*sicut a forma inhaerente*], just as food is called “healthy” from its own quality, from which it is called “healthy.”

It is not the first part of this that surprises, for it is the usual doctrine of how things are called “healthy” (though I once again salute the relation to *both* intellects). It is the startling assertion that food can be called “healthy,” not merely relative to the health of the animal, as causing it, but also in itself, based on its own quality. Why would one call something not taken in relation to the animal “food,” let alone “healthy”? We do not find this doctrine elsewhere in Thomas, as far as I know. It seems designed to make possible a doctrine of *an intrinsic form of truth in things, even if identical with the entity* of the thing. Yet, at the same time, this “in itself” consideration of the thing, as to its entity, is also said to concern the thing’s being “conformed with the intellect” (presumably the divine intellect) and also “conforming the intellect to itself” (presumably the human intellect). Thomas seems here to be aiming both not to take the thing in relation to intellect and also to take it in relation to intellect!¹⁷

In any case, *De veritate* 1.4, while giving a certain conception of the secondary status of truth in things as related to our intellect, definitely teaches that truth is a *form inherent in things*, even if one identical with the entity of things. *Moreover, Thomas continues to describe the truth-in-things situation by referring to the TWO intellects.*¹⁸

¹⁷ In *Sent.* 1.19.5, where Thomas speaks of truth, and (1) whether it is identical with the essence of things, and (2) whether all are true by the one divine truth, in the former article he uses the doctrine of “healthy” in order to make the point that the *esse* of the thing is only the foundation for the truth, which is formally in the intellect. However, when he comes to the second article, where he asserts the many formal truths in things (and expressly says that it is the same case as with *bonitas*!), he is challenged in the first objection precisely on the basis of his just having used the doctrine of analogy (with the example of “healthy”!); he answers by the doctrine of the *threefold* form of analogy, where the first mode of analogy is the case of “healthy,” but truth actually pertains to the third mode, where the “common nature” is found in each of the things but in more and less perfect realizations. This suggests that he is both using and not using the “healthy” model for truth! Perhaps we should read the second article as really only about “truth” as found in created mind and divine mind.

¹⁸ Concerning *DV* 1.6, on whether created truth is mutable: Thomas clearly treats it as an inherent form. Speaking of its relation to the divine intellect, he says that,

Let us now look at the *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16 treatment. As I mentioned earlier, the order of articles is different. We start right off with the query as to whether truth is only in the intellect. The article begins by contrasting meanings of the words “good” and “true.” “The good” names that toward which appetite tends, whereas “the true” names that toward which intellect tends. This is simply declared. We then have a consideration of the difference between appetite and cognition.¹⁹ This seems to me fundamentally the same approach as in *De veritate* 1.2, though there is not quite the same featuring of a *move* from the thing to the soul. Rather, the doctrine is simply that the thing known is *in* the knower. This makes it easier subsequently for Thomas to focus on the difference between a thing depending on the intellect for its being and a thing merely being knowable by an intellect.

Thus, when Thomas has made it clear that the *ratio veri* is in the intellect as conformed to the thing known, and *derives* from the intellect to the thing understood, so that the thing understood is also called “true” according as it has some order to intellect, he immediately raises the issue of the relation of the thing to the intellect. We read:

The thing understood can have an order toward an intellect either intrinsically [*per se*] or incidentally [*per accidens*]. It has an intrinsic order toward the intellect on which it depends for its being; however, it is ordered incidentally toward an intellect by which it is knowable. For example, we may say that the house is intrinsically related to the mind of the architect, whereas it is merely incidentally related to the mind on which it does not depend. *But the judgment concerning a thing is not made on the basis of what belongs to it incidentally, but according to what is present in it intrinsically.* Hence, each thing is called “true” unqualifiedly in accordance with the order toward the intellect on which it depends. . . . Natural things . . . are called “true” according as they attain to a likeness of the ideas [*specierum*] which are in the divine mind: that stone is

because it is a form as universal as “*ens*,” the creature may change, and so the truth change, but truth remains: The change is from one truth to another. There is great insistence on truth as an *inherent form*, even when speaking of the truth of things as related to the divine intellect. This is perhaps also the meaning in the *Sent.* 1.19.5.2, ad 1.

¹⁹ Cf. *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 4, ad 1; I, q. 80, a. 1, ad 3; I, q. 14, a. 16; I–II, q. 9, a. 1, ad 3; I–II, q. 9, a. 1, ad 3: I am not sure whether I should get into this, but it does seem as if “tendency” suggests inclination and appetite. The true is being presented, paradoxically here, as “the good” but of cognition as such. It might be considered, nevertheless, that this view of truth as something at the terminus of cognition’s own tendency is quite different from the *DV* 1.1 doctrine that truth is cause (in an obviously efficient-formal sense) of cognition.

called “true” which attains to the proper nature of the stone, in accordance with the preconception in the divine mind. . . .²⁰

Thus, we have the ultimate statement of the conclusion:

Thus, therefore, truth is principally in the intellect; but secondarily in things inasmuch as they are related to the intellect as to a principle.²¹

The mention of the relation of natural things to the human mind has been formally excluded from the discussion; and that, in the very first article, in the most prominent way possible. Indeed, all three replies to objections in the first article turn on the rejection of the mere *per accidens* relationship of the thing to a mind as a basis for calling the thing “true.” Thomas could not be more explicit: “It is the *being* of the thing, *not its truth*, which causes the truth of the intellect.”²²

It is hard to imagine a more categorical exclusion of consideration of the relation of things to our intellect, for the doctrine of “true” and “truth” as said of natural things. Is this stance maintained?

First of all, we have not finished with the first article. Thomas goes on to pass in review “one more time” the various definitions of truth. I would like at least to note the considerable difference between this treatment of them and that found in *De veritate* 1.1. There, we remember, the treatment was based on the triad: entity as foundation; truth as assimilation of the knower to the known; knowledge as effect of truth. So we had, first, the sort of thing said by Augustine: “the truth is that which is” (the foundation); second, “adequation of thing and intellect,” (the formal nature of truth); third, the sort of thing said by Augustine and Hilary: “truth is that by which that-which-is is shown,” “truth is manifestative of being” (the effect following upon truth). Here, in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, a. 1, we lead off with Augustine and Hilary: “truth is declarative or manifestative of being.” This pertains to truth as it is in the intellect (its *principal* reality: no longer a mere “effect of truth”!); then we get such definitions as relate *things* to intellect; for

²⁰ *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 1. My translation.

²¹ *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 1.

²² *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 1, ad 3. In the ad 1, Thomas explains that Augustine, speaking of the truth of the thing, excludes relation to our intellect; and Thomas concludes: “that which is incidental is excluded from any definition.” In the ad 2, the problem of the ancient atheists was that they had to constitute the truth of things themselves through the relation to our intellect: This difficulty is eliminated, says Thomas, “if we lay it down that the truth of things consists in a relation to divine intellect.”

instance, Augustine's "Truth is the highest likeness of the principle, which is without any unlikeness." Here Thomas carefully stresses how the definitions indicate relation to intellect *as to a principle*. Then, lastly, Thomas mentions "adequation of thing and intellect": This can refer to either the truth in the intellect, or to the truth of the thing related to the intellect as to a principle; clearly, it is no longer the key definition it was in *De veritate* 1.1. The treatment of the definitions is carefully following the new approach, eliminating any reference to a "truth" said of natural things relative to the human mind.

In the sequence of articles in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 16, the next issue is the location of truth in the intellect's act of composing and dividing. Here, I will only mention that we have a new way of explaining the answer to this question, relative to the *De veritate* 1.3 approach. However, there is nothing very relevant to our present topic.²³

Summa theologiae I, q. 16, a. 3 asks about "convertibility" of "a being" and "something true." The answer is yes, and the basis for the answer is that "the true" expresses order to knowledge, and that anything is knowable to the extent that it has something of being [*inquantum habet de esse*]. Thus, "the true" is interchangeable with "a being," but adds to that expression the notion of relation to intellect.

When asked how the true can be convertible with being, since the true is primarily in the intellect, two ways of being "convertible" are noted, just as in the *De veritate* 1.2. ad 1. "The true," said of things, is convertible with "a being," as to predication; said of knowledge, it is convertible as *that which makes manifest* with that which is rendered manifest. Thus, the reply has been revised, moving from mere "agreement" in *De veritate* 1.2. ad 1 to Hilary's definition, truth as "manifestative." (Thomas even includes a backward reference to it here: "*Hoc enim est de ratione veri, ut dictum est.*")

Summa theologiae I, q. 16, a. 6²⁴ whether there is only one truth by which all [true items] are true, is most important for our interest. The article begins by announcing the position that in one way there is one truth by virtue of which all are true, and in another way this is not the case. We then have a reference to the doctrine of analogy, as illustrated by

²³ On this article, cf. my "St. Thomas's Successive Discussions of the Nature of Truth," in Daniel Ols, OP, ed., *Sanctus Thomas de Aquino: Doctor Hodiernae Humanitatis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 153–68.

²⁴ With *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 4, we have the issue of priority of good or of true as to notion. This has no parallel in the *DV* 1, and we will leave it aside. *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 5 asks whether God is truth. Again, it does not really relate to the *DV* discussion (though *DV* 1.7 has some parallel features).

“health.” The point is that the thing predicated is found as regards its proper nature only in one of the items of which it is predicated, though in the others there is something which causes or signifies what is spoken of. This is the case with “truth.” We are told:

As has been said [a. 1], truth is by priority in the intellect, and posteriorly in things in virtue of their being ordered to the divine intellect.

Let us note, in passing, the absence of all reference to a relation of natural things to our intellect (quite unlike the *De veritate* parallel). And we continue:

Therefore, if we speak about truth as it exists in the intellect, in accord with its proper nature, thus in the many created intellects there are many truths; and even in one and the same intellect, as regards many known items. . . . [In this respect] from the one divine truth there result many truths.

We then move to the case of the truth of things:

But if we speak about truth according as it is in things, thus all are true by one first truth, to which each one is rendered similar according to its own entity [*entitatem*]. And thus, though there are many essences or forms of things, nevertheless there is one truth of the divine intellect, according to which all things are denominated “true.”²⁵

Thomas has completely eliminated from the doctrine of the truth of things any “inherent form.” There is only one truth by which all these things are called “true.”

I believe that the point Thomas is making can only be adequately appreciated by looking at the corresponding discussion of the *good* in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 6, a. 4: whether all are good by virtue of the divine goodness. The point is very simple. It is taught that all are good by virtue of the divine goodness:

. . . each thing is called “good” by the divine goodness, as by the first exemplar, efficient and final principle of goodness in its entirety.

²⁵ *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 6:

Si vero loquamur de veritate secundum quod est in rebus, sic omnes sunt verae una prima veritate, cui unumquodque assimilatur secundum suam entitatem. Et sic, licet plures sunt essentiae vel formae rerum, tamen una est veritas divini intellectus, secundum quam omnes *res* denominantur verae.

However, it is explicitly added:

Nevertheless each thing is called “good” by the likeness of the divine goodness *inhering in itself*, which is formally its goodness denominating it. And so there is one goodness of all things, and also many goodnesses.²⁶

Goodness requires a different conclusion than truth, because, precisely, the good and the bad are *in things*, whereas the true and the false are in the mind!²⁷

My point, then, is that Thomas, in the *Summa theologiae* 1.16, has revised his presentation of truth. Truth, as always, is primarily in the intellect; so taken, there are many created truths. We can speak of *natural things themselves* as “true,” in so doing, relating them to the *divine* intellect. However, such a way of speaking in no way involves an intrinsic form called “truth,” *not even one identical with entity*. Rather, they are called “true” by virtue of the one divine truth

²⁶ *ST*, I, q. 6, a. 4.

²⁷ In Cajetan’s commentary on *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 6 (cf. the Leonine edition of the *Summa theologiae ad loc.*), he introduces (para. IV) an objection against the text in that it seems to make “true” an extrinsic denomination, whereas it must *before* be present in things, just as goodness is as per I, q. 6, a. 4; Cajetan replies (para. VII) as follows:

... the reply is had from the text, where it says that though there are many essences or forms of things, nevertheless there is one truth etc. These words are added after the proved conclusion to make clear the difference between goodness and truth in this respect; because all things are called “good” in two ways, intrinsically and extrinsically, as is said in q. 6; but they are called “true” *solely by extrinsic denomination*, in such a way that *there is no truth in things formally* [*nulla est in rebus formaliter veritas*]; but rather imitatively or fulfillingly relative to the divine intellect, and causally with respect to our speculative intellect. For, if there were no intellect, then no thing, and no sense, could be called “true,” save equivocally, as is said in *De veritate* 1.4: just as, if there were no animal health, no medicine, no diet, could be called “healthy.” And the reason for all this is one and the same: because in the notion of truth as applied to things there occurs the truth of the intellect; and animal health occurs in “healthy” as applied to medicine and diet; and so on with other such things: for, if the definition is removed, the same name remains only equivocally.

We note, nevertheless, that Cajetan cannot resist mentioning the relation of natural things to the human intellect, even though Thomas has set it aside explicitly in a. 1. What is more disturbing, Cajetan actually makes a reference to *DV* 1.4 but says nothing about the statements therein about truth as an “inherent form” in things.

In this respect, the truth of things is different from the goodness of things. Obviously, the good is convertible with being, just as the true is. The goodness of things is even, it would seem, more identical with the *esse* of things than is their truth. Thus, we read:

... though each thing is good to the extent that it has *esse*, nevertheless the essence of the created thing is not precisely *esse*; and so it does not follow that the created thing is good by virtue of its own essence. . . .

And:

... the goodness of the created thing is not precisely its essence, but something added on: either its very *esse*, or some added perfection, or order to a goal. . . .²⁸

Yet while, as we saw, that “*esse*” can rightly be called “goodness,” as an inherent form in the thing, the *esse* or essence²⁹ of the natural thing cannot be called “truth,” taken as naming an inherent form. Rather, it is by virtue of the essence or *esse AS SUCH* that the thing, taken as deriving from the divine intellect, is called “true.”

All of this serves to underline that the truth is in the mind, not in things. When I presented this view of change of doctrine to my friend Jan Aertsen, he protested that the truth would no longer be a “transcendental.” Is this so? I said to him, and I continue to believe, that it would be a “logical transcendental.” After all, the transcendentals are so called as transcending the Aristotelian categories.³⁰ The doctrine of the categories is one that pertains to logic, but is used in metaphysics as well. It should not be surprising that some transcendental predicates have different sorts of verification than others. This seems, in Thomas’s mind, to be the case with “good” and “true.” Both are predicated of

²⁸ The first of the two quotations is from *ST*, I, q. 6, a. 4, ad 2, and the second from ad 3.

²⁹ In *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 1, ad 3, it is the *esse rei* which is said to cause the truth in the human intellect; in I, q. 16, a. 6, it is the *entitas*, or the *essentia*, or the *forma* which is considered as related to the divine intellect and so called “the true.” (In *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 4, on the conceptual priority of the true over the good, it is said that the true “*respicit ipsum esse simpliciter et immediate; ratio autem boni consequitur esse secundum quod est aliquo modo perfectum.*” This immediacy of the true relative to *esse*, I take it, has to do with *esse* as causing the truth in our intellects.)

³⁰ Cf. *ST*, I, q. 30, a. 3, ad 1 (and the entire article). On the relation between logic and metaphysics, cf. my paper: “St. Thomas and Analogy: the Logician and the Metaphysician,” forthcoming in a festschrift for Armand Maurer, CSB.

every being, but the real foundation for every creature being called “true” is the divine mind, whereas the real foundation for every creature being called “good” is both the divine goodness and that creature’s own inherent goodness.

What *philosophical* importance has the change, if any? My contention is that the attribution to things themselves of a real “truth” role, relative to our minds, a position which invites a view of truth as an intrinsic quality in things (even though identical with *entitas*), is one which tends to break down the distinction between the mode of being of things in their own proper nature and the mode of being of those things in a mind. This, in turn, is a recipe for metaphysical idealism.³¹ What I believe Thomas is reinforcing is the unqualified priority of the ratio of being over that of truth.³² Thus, in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 13, a. 7, we read:

Sometimes the relation is a natural thing in one of the extremes and is merely a thing of reason in the other. And this occurs whenever the two extremes are *not of one order*. For example, sense and science are related to the sensible [thing] and the scientifically knowable [thing], which *inasmuch as they are certain things existing in natural being are outside the order of sensible and intelligible being*; and therefore in the science and the sense there is a real relation, inasmuch as they are ordered toward scientifically knowing or sensing things; but *the things themselves, considered in themselves, are outside the order of such [events]*. Hence, in them there is *no* relation really to science and sense.³³

³¹ Failure to appreciate that difference was exactly the error with which Thomas charged Plato: *ST*, I, q. 84, a. 1.

³² Thus, “being” is obviously considered a more proper name for God than “truth”: *ST*, I, q. 13, a. 12.

³³ This is, of course, an extremely delicate area of discussion. Thus, in *ST*, I–II, q. 110, a. 2, on whether grace is a quality of the soul, it is argued by an objector that it cannot be a mere quality, since substance is more noble than quality, and yet grace is more noble than the substance of the soul. Thomas replies:

It is to be said that every substance either is the very *nature* of the thing of which it is the substance, or else is a part of the nature (in which way the matter or the substantial form is called “substance”). And because grace is above human nature, it cannot be that it is the substance or the substantial form: rather, it is an accidental form of the soul itself. For that which is in God substantially is brought to be accidentally in the soul participating the divine goodness: *as is clear in the case of science*. Therefore, in accord with that, because the soul imperfectly participates the divine goodness, the very participation in the divine goodness which is grace has being in a more imperfect mode in the soul than [the mode of being by which] the soul subsists in itself. Nevertheless, it is more noble than the nature

The things we quite rightly call “intelligible” are *outside* the order of intelligible being. They are the principle of our intellect, precisely inasmuch as they participate in being. Such a role of “principle” does not suppose a real relation in them to our mind.³⁴ N.V

of the soul, inasmuch as it is an expression or participation of the divine goodness, *though not as to the mode of being* [*non autem quantum ad modum essendi*].

So also, I would say, the thing outside the soul has substantial being, even though it is material being; in the soul it has immaterial being, but not substantial being. Thus, we read, as well:

The actually intelligible [*intelligibile in actu*] is not something existent in natural being [*in rerum natura*], speaking of the nature of sensible things, which do not subsist apart from matter. [*ST*, I, q. 79, a. 3]

Cf. *ST*, I, q. 18, a. 4, ad 3.

³⁴ As for their being a principle, cf. *ST*, I, q. 16, a. 5, ad 2:

verum intellectus nostri est secundum quod conformatur suo principio, scilicet rebus, a quibus cognitionem accipit.

That this passivity of our intellect relates to things precisely as participants in being, we can gather from *ST*, I, q. 79, a. 2, on the passivity of all created intellect, where this is explained in terms of the intellect, as such, relating to *ens universale* as its object.—That the known is the principle and the measure of the truth of the mind, and that it is thus not really related to the mind, is once again affirmed in Thomas’s *In Metaph.* 5.17 (1003–4 and 1026–27): While the known acts on the knower, the knower’s operation does nothing to the known: To be known is not to have something *done* to one, the way to be *hit* or *burnt* is.