

Is Truth a Form Inherent in Things? Lawrence Dewan and *De veritate*, Question 1, Article 4

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS ESSAY is to look at whether Aquinas teaches in *De veritate* [*DV*], q. 1, a. 4, that truth is a form inherent in things. I take up this investigation because I am examining Lawrence Dewan's account of Aquinas's teaching on truth.¹ On Dewan's account, a significant development occurs in Aquinas's teaching as regards truth as it is found in things. Before the *Summa theologiae* [*ST*], Aquinas thought that in addition to truth being in the intellect, it was also in things. In *ST*, most explicitly in I, q. 16, a. 6, Aquinas no longer thinks that it is in things, but only in the mind. When Dewan says that before the *ST* truth is "in things" and in the *ST* it is not "in things," in both cases, by "in things," Dewan means "as a form inherent in things." What exactly this means for Dewan will be gradually brought out as I examine the text Dewan thinks most clearly teaches that truth is a form inherent in things: *DV*, q. 1, a. 4.

The essay will be divided into two parts. In the first part, I will lay out Dewan's reading of *DV*, q. 1, a. 4, and why he thinks it definitely teaches that truth is a form inherent in things. In the second part, I suggest an

¹ To my knowledge, only J. A. Aertsen has replied to Dewan's reading of Aquinas on truth; see Aertsen, "Is Truth not a Transcendental for Aquinas?" in *Wisdom's Apprentice: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007). In this article, Aertsen replies to Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 2, no. 1 (2004): 1–20. Aertsen, however, does not examine Dewan's actual argument, which is based on his reading of *De veritate* [*DV*], q. 1, a. 4. The present article examines Dewan's argument.

alternative reading of the text, first based just on the article 4 text itself and then based on other texts throughout Aquinas's works.

Dewan's Reading of *De veritate*, Q. 1, A. 4

This article in *DV* is not the only text where, according to Dewan, Aquinas is thinking of truth, as found in things, as an inherent form in things. Dewan cites other texts from Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences* and other places in *DV*. I focus on this text because Dewan himself singles it out as "definitely teach[ing] that truth is a *form inherent in things*, even if one identical with the entity of things."² Regarding the other texts, Dewan does not seem to be as sure as he is with this one. Why Dewan seems surer on this *DV* text will be brought out.

First, the Latin in article 4 in which Dewan sees Aquinas teaching that truth is a form inherent in things is:

Denominantur autem res verae a veritate quae est in intellectu divino vel in intellectu humano sicut denominatur cibus sanus a sanitate quae est in animali et non sicut a forma inhaerente; sed a veritate quae est in ipsa re, quae nihil aliud est quam entitas intellectui adaequata vel intellectum sibi adaequans, denominatur sicut a forma inhaerente, sicut cibus denominatur sanus a qualitate sua, a qua sanus dicitur.³

The text, in Dewan's translation, is as follows:

For *THINGS* are called "true" from the truth which is in the divine intellect or in the human intellect [!] as food is called "healthy" from 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."⁴

² Dewan, "Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?," 11.

³ Unless otherwise noted, the Latin from *De veritate* is taken from the Leonine edition (vol. 22).

⁴ Dewan, "Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?," 10–11 (all-caps and italics original to Dewan).

Dewan goes on to say regarding this text:

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*.⁵

In an earlier article of Dewan, he also comments on this passage: “Thomas is ready to grant a usage according to which there is a formality within the thing itself, whereby it is called ‘true’: this ‘truth’ is the thing’s own *entitas*, and is as multiple as there are things.”⁶ Dewan also comments on this passage in yet another article of his:

This is difficult to cope with. It appears that the second part of the statement is at odds with the first part.⁷ The second part still seems to be about something called “truth” in the thing *and so called as related to the two intellects*. How, then, is it *being called “truth” as from an inherent form*. It seems one should say, rather, that it is being called “being” as from an inherent form, and that form is that in virtue of which it is called “true” relative to intellect. That is what Thomas will say in *ST* 1.16.6.⁸

I will focus on Dewan’s first comment, for only there he seems to give the reason why this passage definitely teaches that truth is a form inherent in things. The reason goes back to Aquinas’s remarks about “healthy.”

⁵ Dewan, “Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?,” 11.

⁶ Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “St. Thomas’s Successive Discussions of the Nature of Truth,” *Studi tomistici* 58 (1995): 153–68, at 167.

⁷ The first part Dewan is referring to is one not quoted in the other two articles where Dewan treats this passage. The passage is as follows, in Dewan’s translation: “If ‘truth’ is taken as *improperly* said (*improprie dicta*), in which way all are called ‘true,’ thus of several (things) there are *several truths*, but of one true (thing) only one truth” (Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “A Note on Metaphysics and Truth,” *Doctor Communis*, n.s., 2 [2002]: 143–53, at 151).

⁸ Dewan, “Note on Metaphysics and Truth,” 151.

Dewan thinks that Aquinas is using “healthy” as said of food in order to explain how truth is a form inherent in things. According to Dewan, what is it that Aquinas is saying about “healthy” as said of food? As he states it: “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?’” So, it seems that Dewan is saying that Aquinas thinks that food can be called healthy apart from any relation to the health that it causes in the animal; food can be called healthy *just* on account of itself, its own quality.

If that is what Aquinas is saying, Dewan seems right in saying that it is a startling assertion if one goes by what could perhaps be said intuitively about the matter. As Dewan asks very well, “why would one call something not taken in relation to the animal ‘food,’ let alone ‘healthy?’” It seems that something is not called food unless one knows what it feeds or nourishes, or who or what eats it. We can confidently say that dead bodies are food because we know that there are animals, such as vultures, that eat and nourish themselves from dead bodies. We cannot go around labeling things as food unless we know the animal or plant or living organism it nourishes. It seems that Dewan is correct in thinking that, indeed, one should not call something *not taken in relation to* a living organism “food.” Food is always food for some living organism, and if we know that something cannot be eaten, we say that it is *not* food.

The same seems to apply to “healthy.” We think that something is healthy *for some living organism*. To say just that “this is healthy,” “that is healthy,” or its opposite, “that is unhealthy,” is strictly speaking incomplete. Unless it is clear from the context, we would be left wondering, “healthy or unhealthy for who or what organism?” When the first humans were out looking for things to eat, many of the plants, fruits, and things of that sort they saw were unknown to them. They could not at that point say whether those things were healthy or unhealthy, or even whether it was food *for them* or not. That could only be said once they had tried the unknown things and no harm came about as a result, but rather nourishment; then they could say, “Food!” or “this is healthy,” or “this is unhealthy”—in other words, “healthy or unhealthy *for us*.”⁹

⁹ Incidentally, it seems that this would be the first reason for calling something healthy, from the effect of the food. Only later would one know the reason why this food is healthy, and this would involve a quality or characteristic of the food itself, such as that it is rich in calcium, or that it is composed solely of carbohydrates, or that it is pure protein, and so forth. This idea will be developed later on.

So, it seems that “food” and “healthy” are relatively said, that is, not said of something except in relation to something other than the thing it is said of. Acorns are said to be food only in relation to something other than the acorn itself, such as a squirrel. Likewise, calcium is said to be healthy only in relation to something other than the calcium itself, such as a human being. Healthy (as said of food)¹⁰ is not like white, which can be said of something not in relation to something other than the thing it is said of; for example, white (referring to skin color) can be said of a person just in himself (or a polar bear), without having to bring in anything other than the person himself. When I say that “he is white,” I do not mean that he is white in relation to this or that other thing. He is white in himself. In contrast, when I say “this food is healthy,” though we do speak like that, in reality we mean “this food is healthy *for men, or for me, or for so and so.*” The food does not seem to be healthy in itself, like the man (or polar bear) is white in himself. Or to put it perhaps as Dewan might put it, “healthy” is said of food not because of an intrinsic form in the food, such as some quality it has, as white is said of a man because of an intrinsic form in the man, namely, his whiteness (or more precisely, the whiteness of his skin), a quality the man possesses apart from any relation to something else. But according to Dewan, Aquinas seems to be saying just this, namely, that healthy can be said of food like white is said of a man, that is, because of an intrinsic form in the food, or a form inherent in the food (these two expressions seem to be used synonymously by Dewan), independent of something other than the food, in this case, an animal, to which food is related, hence the “startling” nature of Aquinas’s remark.

That Dewan is interpreting Aquinas to be saying this seems manifest from what he says in the passage quoted above: “Why would one call something *not taken in relation to the animal* [my emphasis] ‘food,’ let alone ‘healthy?’” Dewan seems to think that Aquinas is calling food, *not taken in relation to the animal*, “healthy,” food as taken *just* in itself, based on its own quality, in the way in which a man is said to be white just in himself, based on his own quality and not in relation to something else.

Dewan thinks these remarks of Aquinas on “healthy” said of food “seem designed to make possible a doctrine of *an intrinsic form of truth in things, even if identical with the entity* of the thing.” In other words, the purpose of these remarks on “healthy” said of food is to illuminate some other issue, namely, “true” as said of things. The example with “healthy” said of food is supposed to help us see, with something easier, what is happening at the

¹⁰ For if we say “healthy” of the animal, then it is said of the animal like “white” would be said of a man.

level of truth, which is more difficult to see. Aquinas seems to be setting up a proportion from something more known. Gathering from Dewan's statements above, the argument seems to go like this. Just as food can be called healthy apart from any relation to an animal, so a thing can be called true apart from any relation to an intellect. This is possible because of something in the food itself apart from any relation to the health of an animal and something in a thing itself apart from any relation to an intellect. This something in the food itself apart from any relation to the health of an animal is some quality of the food itself. This something in the thing itself apart from any relation to the truth of some intellect is the entity of the thing itself. The quality of the food and the entity of the thing are both inherent forms, on account of which the former is called healthy and the latter true. So, the basic thrust of the argument seems to be a proportion: "true" is to a thing as "healthy" is to food. The example with "healthy," therefore, said of food is supposed to help us understand in some way a *conclusion* regarding true said of things, namely, that true can be said of things apart from any reference to some intellect, but simply on account of something in the thing itself, some inherent form. Understanding properly what is happening at the level of truth depends on understanding what is happening in the "healthy" example.

**Alternative Reading of the Text Based on the *De veritate* Text Itself:
"Healthy" Said of Food¹¹**

Now, if the reason Dewan thinks that this passage "definitely teaches that truth is a form inherent in things, even if one identical with the entity of things," is Aquinas's use of "healthy" as said of food, then if Aquinas's use of "healthy" as said of food can be understood differently, then perhaps Dewan's conclusion will have to be reconsidered.

Though Dewan's observation ("why would one call something not taken in relation to the animal 'food,' let alone 'healthy'?") is correct, as

¹¹ For another reading of *DV*, q. 1, a. 4 see John Wippel, "Truth in Thomas Aquinas," *The Review of Metaphysics* 34, no. 2 (1989): 295–326, at 316–20. Wippel sees Aquinas as concluding in this article that truth *improperly* speaking is intrinsic to things: "Again, we may ask, does it follow from this that truth of being is intrinsically present to them? No, Thomas would reply, if we take truth strictly (*proprie*) or according to its proper definition. Yes, he would answer, if we take truth broadly and improperly so as to identify it with the being of the thing which has the capacity to be understood by some intellect." However, Wippel does not seem to understand "intrinsic to things" as Dewan does. Wippel does not address Dewan's view, since Wippel wrote his article years before Dewan wrote his three articles on this topic.

shown above, it does not seem clear that that is what Aquinas is in fact saying in the passage. First, I will give a reason based on the text itself of *DV*, q. 1, a. 4, and then some reasons based on other texts throughout Aquinas's works.

It seems that Dewan is taking Aquinas's *words* to be excluding any and all relations to an animal. Again, I gather this from his remark: "Why would one call something not taken in relation to the animal 'food,' let alone 'healthy'?" Dewan seems to be saying that Aquinas is calling food "not taken in relation to the animal" healthy. Is that what Aquinas is doing? Is that what he actually says? Aquinas's words are "*sicut cibus denominatur sanus a qualitate sua, a qua sanus dicitur*": "just as food is denominated healthy from its own quality, from which it is called healthy." At least in terms of the words themselves, Aquinas does not *explicitly* say "just as food, *not taken in relation to the animal*, is denominated healthy from its own quality, from which *alone* it is also called healthy." So, why is Dewan interpreting Aquinas to be saying that "food, not taken in relation to the animal, is called healthy"? Where is he getting the "not taken in relation to the animal"?

Perhaps it could be objected that the distinction Aquinas is making prior to this statement¹² has already implicitly established that Aquinas is taking healthy not in relation to the animal. Aquinas has already said that "things are denominated true from the truth which is in the divine intellect or in the human intellect just as food is denominated healthy from the health which is in the animal and not as from an inhering form."¹³ Aquinas here is clearly taking healthy as said of food in relation to the health of the animal. But then he goes on to say, "but from the truth which is in the thing itself, which is nothing other than its entity conformed to an intellect or conforming an intellect to itself, a thing is denominated [true] as from an inhering form, just as food is denominated healthy from its own quality, from which it is called healthy." Aquinas is clearly contrasting this last quoted part with the first. He begins this second part with the word "but," which normally indicates some kind of opposition with what has been said. The contrast is that healthy in this second part is said of food on account of a quality in the food itself. Aquinas himself expresses the contrast more generally in terms of "inherent form." In the first case, healthy is said of food "not as from an inherent form"; in the second,

¹² "Just as food is denominated healthy from its own quality, from which it is called healthy." All translations in the present article are mine except where otherwise noted.

¹³ *DV*, q. 1, a. 4, resp.

healthy is said of food “as from an inherent form.”

When Aquinas says in the first case that healthy is said of food “not as from an inherent form,” he means an inherent form in the food. The health of the animal, which in the first case is the reason for calling the food healthy, is not an inherent form in the food. The health of the animal is not in the food at all; it is in the animal, an inherent form¹⁴ in the animal. Food is related to the health of the animal insofar as the food can preserve or cause the health of the animal, but the health of the animal as such is not in the food at all, and that is why Aquinas says that in the first case food is called healthy not as from an inherent form. Now, because in the second case food is being called healthy on account of a quality in the food itself, it would be called healthy “as from an inherent form,” for a quality of the food itself would be a form inhering in the food itself.

The objection to myself—the rebuttal to my point that Aquinas does not *explicitly* say what Dewan claims him to say—can be summed up as follows. Aquinas seems to be saying that food can be called healthy in two ways: (1) from the health which is in the animal, and not as from an inherent form (*a sanitate quae est in animali et non sicut a forma inhaerente*), and (2) from a quality in the food itself (*a qualitate sua*), as from an inherent form (*sicut a forma inhaerente*). The way Dewan seems to be understanding this distinction is that Aquinas is saying that food can be called healthy in two ways: (1) *in relation to the animal*, for the health of the animal is in the animal, and (2) *not in relation to the animal*, but in relation to food itself, for the quality of the food itself is not in the animal, but in the food. So, Dewan might say that, even though Aquinas does not *explicitly* say “just as food, *not taken in relation to the animal*, is denominated healthy from its own quality . . .” the context of the contrast he is setting up clearly says so.

However, there seems to be a problem with assuming that Aquinas is taking “food” in *his* original (2) in the previous paragraph not in relation to the animal (as Dewan’s (2) assumes he is doing with it). It seems that, by definition, as Dewan points out and is obvious to all, food is always food for some living organism. If I consider the grass in front of my house as grass, that consideration involves no relation to an animal. “Grass” as grass simply speaks to the nature of this thing considered in itself. But if I call the grass food, I necessarily bring in what the grass is food for, such as a cow. The grass cannot be thought of as food except in relation to some living organism which feeds on it, which eats it and gets nourishment from it, that is, which maintains or preserves its health from it. As it was said

¹⁴ For those unfamiliar with Aquinas’s terminology, “inherent form” can be understood as an intrinsic characteristic or feature.

earlier, food seems to be an essentially relative term.

So, if Aquinas is indeed using the word “food” as we use the word food and understanding by “food” what we also understand by “food,” as when we say that grass is food for cows, then he must necessarily still be taking food in relation to an animal; but Aquinas is indeed using the word “food” in this common sense, for that is clearly the sense he uses it in the first part of the distinction, which Dewan thinks is correct. Why would he use the word “food” with a different meaning in the second part of the distinction? Is Aquinas not distinguishing two ways in which one and the same thing (namely, food) can be called healthy? It seems that even Dewan’s very objection to Aquinas assumes that Aquinas is taking “food” in the same sense in both cases. So, it seems that Aquinas cannot possibly be saying—as I modified him in order to fit what Dewan is claiming—“just as food, *not taken in relation to the animal*, is called healthy from its own quality.” Food is taken in relation to the animal in the second part of the distinction as well as in the first. It has to be, if indeed he is talking about food *as such*. So, Aquinas is not considering food *apart from any relation to the animal* in the second part. So, it should be said instead that food as food, meaning *taken always in relation to the animal*, is called healthy from its own quality. If there is any discrepancy in Aquinas’s use of the term from the first to the second part of the distinction, it would seem to be in the use of the word “healthy,” not “food.”

Now, in the above objection to myself, I say that “Aquinas seems to be saying that food can be called healthy in *two ways*.” Strictly speaking, however, it does not seem that Aquinas is saying that food can be called healthy in two ways. Yes, there is indeed a two-ness here, a distinction, but it does not seem to be as regards two *ways* of calling food healthy. All Aquinas says in this “distinction” is that food is called healthy *from* the health which is in the animal, and then he adds that food is called healthy *from* its own quality (which is, indeed, the very point or context of the distinction). The two-ness is not in terms of opposition, an either/or, a disjunction,¹⁵

¹⁵ Cruz Gonzalez Ayesta sees a two-ness here as well, though perhaps not the same two-ness that I am bringing out. Nevertheless, regarding the two things she sees here she makes a general remark that can be applied to the two elements I am bringing out—“to distinguish is not to separate nor to oppose”—and she proposes an interpretation of this passage in light of Anselm’s understanding of truth as a measure. Since her interpretation does not address Dewan’s interpretation in his most recent article, it does not seem relevant here. Later, however, when addressing Dewan’s talk of “extrinsic denomination,” her interpretation is relevant; see *La verdad como bien según Tomás de Aquino* (Pamplona, ES : Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2006), 179.

but is rather from two aspects or two elements of one thing, *one relation*. Food is called healthy, yes, from the health which is in the animal, and that seems obvious and unquestionable, as Dewan well notes, but food is called healthy from its own quality too, that is, from *both* of these “sides” or for both of these reasons. In other words, two things are involved in calling some food healthy. Food is denominated healthy *from* two sources, not that food is denominated healthy in two ways, as if implying some sort of disjunction, either this or that, each sufficient on its own for calling food healthy, but not both. Perhaps it should be noticed that Aquinas does use the word “from” (*ab*) in both cases. Healthy said of food has two parts to it, two aspects, two causes: (1) the animal, or more generally, the living organism, and (2) the food itself, that is, the thing itself that is food for some living organism.

That this is so seems manifest from the way we speak. Liver, for example, is said to be healthy *for a pregnant woman*—aspect/cause (1)—because of the high levels of iron it contains, which is aspect/cause (2). Healthy will always be healthy *for this or that living organism*, but the *reason* for some thing being healthy for this or that organism is *also* because of something *in the thing*. Aquinas says as much, regarding what I am calling the second aspect, in *ST* I, q. 16, a. 6, which treats the same issue as *DV*, q. 1, a. 4. Though Aquinas does not mention food, he does mention the other things of which healthy is also said in relation to the one health of the animal, namely, medicine and urine. Oftentimes Aquinas will explicitly mention food or diet along with medicine and urine;¹⁶ so what he says there about medicine and urine can be applied to food as well. He says in *ST* I, q. 16, a. 6, “and although health is not in medicine nor in urine, nevertheless in

¹⁶ Aquinas often puts medicine, food/diet, and urine together when explaining analogous naming. See *Summa contra gentiles* I, ch. 34, no. 1: “In this way, therefore, from the aforesaid it remains that those things which are said of God and other things are predicated of them neither univocally nor equivocally, but analogically, according to the order or respect to something one. Which indeed happens in two ways: in one way, according as many things have a respect to something one; for example, according to a relation to one health, the animal is called healthy as the subject of health, medicine [is called healthy] as productive [of health], food [is called healthy] as conservative [of health], urine as a sign of health.” See also: *Summa theologiae* [*ST*] III, q. 60, a. 1, resp. “I answer it ought to be said that all things which have an order to something one, though in diverse ways, are able to be denominated from that one thing, just as from the health which is in the animal, not only is the animal—which is the subject of health—denominated healthy, but also medicine is called healthy inasmuch as it is productive of health, and the diet inasmuch as it preserves that health, and urine inasmuch as it signifies the same health.”

each of them there is something through which the former causes health, and the latter signifies health.”¹⁷ Applying this to healthy said of food, one may thus paraphrase that, “although health is not in the food, nevertheless in it there is something through which it preserves the health of the animal.” So, for example, milk is said to be healthy *for the bones*—aspect (1)—*from/through* the large amounts of calcium the milk has—aspect (2). Oranges are said to be very healthy for the immune system on account of some quality in the oranges themselves, namely, the vitamin C they have. Carrots are said to be healthy for the eyes on account of the vitamin A carrots provide. And just because I do not explicitly say “healthy” for this or that organism does not mean that I am excluding that element from the reasons for calling milk, oranges, or carrots healthy.¹⁸ It is implied or self-understood. Am I not allowed to say that oranges are healthy on account of their vitamin C? Are we only allowed to say that oranges are healthy because they make *us* healthy or preserve *our* health? If so, the question remains, but *why* are they healthy for us? So, food, which is always food for some animal, is indeed called healthy (and also unhealthy) from its own quality, but not *just* from its own quality.

Perhaps for the sake of clarifying this point further, two additional things should be noted: first, that there seems to be an order in calling food healthy, an order that goes back to the order in which we know and name things: we name things as we know them. Now, we usually know effects before causes, and therefore we would first name something by its effects, rather than by its causes. As regards calling food healthy, it seems that it would first be named healthy from its effects. If that new, unknown fruit or leaf or plant was eaten and did not make them sick, then it would be called good to eat, healthy; if not, then bad to eat, or unhealthy. The food would be called healthy or unhealthy from its effect, namely, the preservation of the health of the people or the ruining of it. Only later would one come to know the reason why one plant was healthy and the other was not, that is, what was it about the plant, its properties or qualities that in one case caused health and in the other sickness, such as a toxin in the leaves. Then, one would be able to call this plant unhealthy not only on account of the sickness it causes in us but also on account of its own properties: “It is unhealthy from the toxins in its leaves.” And we do speak like this in daily life, saying that so and so food is unhealthy because it has too much fat, or too much sugar, and so forth.

¹⁷ ST I, q. 16, a. 6, resp.

¹⁸ To not mention something is not to deny it. If in introducing myself to someone I mention that I am a philosopher but do not mention that I am a father, in leaving out that I am a father, I am not saying or implying that I am not a father.

A second thing to be noted is that, as pointed out earlier, “healthy” is said relatively, kind of like “large.” If I say that this cup is large, it is large *with respect to* something else. It implies a relation. And in every relation there are two terms or two extremes. In the relation of “healthy” *as said of food*,¹⁹ the relation is between food and the animal. Just as I am toward José María a father, milk is toward us healthy, a dead body is toward a vulture healthy, and so forth. “Father” expresses a relation that always involves the man who generated and the human being generated. Likewise, it seems that “healthy,” in this sense, expresses a relation, and thus it involves always food and the animal. Now, I am a father on account of something in me, that generative act, and also on account of the human being that was generated from that act. Likewise, it seems that food is healthy on account of the food itself, some quality or property or characteristic it has, *and* on account of the animal, whose health is preserved by the food. The same thing can be healthy for one person and not healthy for another. Wheat bread is healthy for me, but not healthy for a person with Celiac disease, but this is on account of something in the wheat bread itself—namely, gluten—and something in the person, such as a deficiency in their immune system.

Application to “True” Said of Things

Now it seems that it is this alternative understanding of a *dual* implication of “healthy” as said of food which Aquinas is carrying over to illuminate “true” as said of things. With respect to true, there is also this dual implication, these two ingredients or two causes: namely, an intellect and a thing. As with “healthy” as said of food, which always involves a relation or order of food to some animal, “true” as said of things always involves a relation of a thing to some intellect. Now, just as food is called healthy on account of the health of the animal, as Aquinas says in the first part of the distinction in the passage under examination, so a thing is called true on account of the truth in the human or divine intellect. But just as food is truly called healthy *also* on account of some property or quality of the food itself,²⁰ but taken always in relation to the animal, so also a thing is called true on account of something in the thing itself, namely, its entity or form, but taken always in relation to some intellect, in other words, without dropping the opposite term of the relation, which seems to be what Aquinas

¹⁹ This is a very important clarification, since “healthy” can be said in other ways where a relation is not implied, as when the animal is said to be healthy.

²⁰ But as noted earlier, this reason for calling food healthy comes after in the order of our knowledge, since we usually know causes aftereffects.

says in the passage itself under the second part of the distinction: “but from the truth which is in the thing itself, which is nothing other than the entity conformed to an intellect or conforming an intellect to itself.”²¹

And so, food is called healthy both on account of a form that is not inherent in the food, but rather in the animal, namely, the health of the animal, and also on account of a form that *is* inherent in the food, namely, some quality, property, characteristic, or element of the food itself. The same applies to “true” as said of things. “True” is said of a thing both on account of the truth of some intellect, a form not inherent in a thing, but rather in some intellect, and also on account of the entity of the thing related via conformity to some intellect, the entity understood as a form inherent in the thing. In sum, “true” said of a thing involves a non-inherent form and an inherent form, just as “healthy” said of food involves a non-inherent form and an inherent form.

Therefore, when Aquinas says that “true” is said of a thing on account of an inherent form, just as “healthy” is said of food on account of an inherent form, he does not mean that the inherent form in food on account of

²¹ In the following text from a later article, Aquinas again includes, perhaps more explicitly and clearly, these two elements of the truth of a thing. *DV*, q. 1, a. 8, resp. “It ought to be said that in created things truth is found *in* things and in the understanding as is clear from the aforesaid, in the understanding, indeed, according as they are conformed to the things whose notion it has, but *in* things according as they imitate the divine understanding, which is their measure just as art is the measure of all things that are made through art, and in another way according as they are naturally apt to cause a true grasp of themselves in the human understanding, which is measured by things as is said in *Metaphysics* X. Now, a thing, actually existing outside the soul, through its own form imitates the art of the divine understanding, and through the same form is naturally apt to cause true knowledge in the human understanding, through which form any thing whatsoever also has being [*esse*]. *Wherefore, the truth of actually existing things includes in its own notion/definition [ratione] their entity and adds on a relation of conformity either to the human understanding or to the divine understanding*” (my emphasis). The next text is from *DV* q. 1, a. 10, in reply to the third objection on the contrary. Aquinas distinguishes a twofold perfection in things and its connection to truth in things. Again, it is taught that the notion of “truth in things” is constituted by two elements, the form of a thing and its relation to either the divine or human understanding: “To the third, it ought to be said that perfection is twofold; namely, first and second. The first perfection is the form of each single thing, through which it has being; wherefore from it no thing fails while it remains; the second perfection is operation, which is the end of a thing, or that through which it reaches the end, and from this perfection sometimes a thing fails. Now, from the first perfection results the notion of truth in things, for from this, that a thing has a form, it imitates the art of the divine intellect, and gives birth to knowledge of itself in the soul.”

which it is called healthy *alone* suffices to call food healthy, as the round shape *of* and *in* the tennis ball alone suffices to call the ball round or the whiteness *of* and *in* the man alone suffices to say he is white; he means, rather, as examined above, an inherent form, such as calcium in the milk, insofar as related to the health of the animal, such as the bone structure of the animal. Likewise, he does not mean that the inherent form in a thing on account of which it is called true *alone* suffices to call a thing true; he means rather an inherent form, namely, the entity of a thing, insofar as related to the truth of some intellect. Again, this is exactly what Aquinas says in the text itself: “sed a veritate quae est in ipsa re, **quae nihil aliud est quam entitas intellectui adaequata** [‘conformed with the intellect’ in Dewan’s translation] **vel intellectum sibi adaequans** [‘conforming the intellect to itself’ in Dewan’s translation].”

But then Dewan sees this as a contradiction in Aquinas’s text: “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!”²² So, Dewan says that Aquinas seems to be both *taking* the thing in relation to the truth of some intellect when he says, “entitas intellectui adaequata vel intellectum sibi adaequans,” and *not taking* the thing in relation to the truth of some intellect when he gives the example of healthy said of food as from an inherent form, which Dewan interprets as Aquinas calling food healthy *not in relation to* the health of the animal but *only* from itself. But it has been argued that Aquinas cannot correctly be understood as doing the second. If so, then the apparent contradiction is dissolved.

This apparently contradictory text actually seems to give some support to the alternative way of interpreting this text as presented above. Just as Aquinas is explicitly not taking the entity of a thing just in itself, as Dewan thinks he does because of the “healthy” example that comes at the end, so Aquinas is not taking food just in itself apart from any relation to the health of the animal. In both cases, he is taking them in relation to another, even though that relation is not explicitly made as regards the quality of the food, as it *is* with regard to the entity of a thing, but it can be understood to be there, as has been argued.

²² Dewan, “Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?,” 11.

Alternative Reading of the Text Based on Other Texts throughout Aquinas's Works

Perhaps another argument against Dewan's "true solely by an inherent form apart from a relation to some intellect" interpretation regards Aquinas's general but seemingly consistent understanding of truth throughout his works, namely, that intellect is included in the very notion of truth. In *DV*, q. 1, a. 2, which is presupposed by article 4 of the same question, he says in the context of answering the question whether truth is chiefly found in the intellect or in things that, if "either intellect [i.e., the divine and the human] were understood to be removed although things remained through an impossible supposition, in no way would the definition/notion of truth remain." In other texts, Aquinas insists on truth being primarily in the intellect and in things only in relation to some intellect. For example, in *ST I*, q. 16, a. 1., which answers the same question as *DV*, q. 1, a. 2, Aquinas again points out that "it is necessary that the definition of true be derived from the intellect to the thing understood so that even the thing understood is called true according as it has some order to an intellect." In *ST I*, q. 16, a. 3, he says, "just as good adds the notion of desirable above being, so also true [adds] a comparison to an intellect," which is what he already teaches back in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, ad. 2: "Just as goodness expresses the notion through which essence is ordered to the appetite, so truth expresses the notion through which essence is ordered to the intellect."²³ In *ST I*, q. 17, a. 1, he says: "Since the true and the false are opposed, and opposites are about the same, it is necessary that falsity first be found there where first truth is found: this is in the intellect. But in things, there is neither truth nor falsity except through an order to the intellect." Therefore, there seems to be some evidence throughout Aquinas's works that truth implies some order to the intellect.²⁴

²³ In the same text, but in his reply to the third objection Aquinas also says, "just as 'one' adds the idea [*rationem*] of undividedness, and 'good' the idea [*rationem*] of an end, and 'true' the idea [*rationem*] of an order to knowledge."

²⁴ See, e.g., *In I de interp.*, lec. 3: "For the true, as the philosopher says in *Ethics* 6, is the good of the intellect. Hence, of whatever true is said, it is necessary that it be through a respect/relation to the intellect" (translated from the Latin editio altera retractata in vol. 1 of the Leonine ed.). This sounds like the way Aquinas explains whatever "healthy" is said of. The medicine, the urine, and the food are all called healthy in relation to one thing, the health of the animal. It is necessary that, of whatever "healthy" is said, that this be through a relation to the health of the animal. Therefore, intellect is to whatever "true" is said of, as the health of the animal is to whatever "healthy" is said of. So, just as everything is called healthy because of some relation to an animal's health, so everything is called true because

And even if Dewan were correct in claiming that there was in Aquinas some truth which did not involve in some way a relation to *an intellect*, it seems that in even more general terms “true” or truth for Aquinas involves a comparison, order, or relation of one thing to another. In speaking of “good,” “true,” and “one” with respect to being in a passage from his *Commentary on the Sentences* Aquinas says that “true and good add a certain relation.”²⁵ In d. 19, q. 5, a. 1, of the same commentary (on part I), he says that the *ratio veritatis* consists in a *relatio adaequationis*.²⁶ In his commentary on Aristotle’s *De anima*, he says that “truth and falsity consist in a certain comparison of one [thing] to another.”²⁷ Close to the previous text is *DV*, q. 1, a. 1, where Aquinas places good and true under one of two ways of understanding a general mode that follows every being (*ens*). The first way is insofar as the general mode follows each being (*ens*) in itself (“uno modo secundum quod consequitur unumquodque ens in se”); the second way is insofar as the general mode follows one being (*ens*) as ordered to another (“alio modo secundum quod consequitur unum ens in ordine ad aliud”). The second way is further subdivided: in one way according to a division of one thing from another; in another way according to an agreement of one being to another.²⁸ Under the latter are found “good” and “true.” Good and true express a mode of being that follows every being as related to another. Aquinas seems to be saying therefore that *order* or *relation* of one to another is of the very essence of the true, more specifically, the relation of *convenientia*, which can be translated as agreement, fitness, suitability, or correspondence. “The name good expresses the *convenientiam* of a being to the appetite, whence in the beginning of the *Ethics* it is said that ‘the good is what all desire’, but the name true expresses the *convenientiam* of a being to the intellect.”²⁹ It seems that Aquinas does not, throughout all his works, depart from a relational understanding of truth,

of some relation to an intellect.

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, he says, “for truth of its own definition [*de sui ratione*] implies a commensuration of a thing to an understanding” (*Super Ioan* 18, lec. 6; translated from the Marietti ed. as found at corpusthomisticum.org).

²⁵ *In I sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 3: “But the others which we said, namely, good, true and one, add above being, not indeed some nature, but some notion/intelligibility: but one adds the notion of indivision, and because of this is closest to being, because it adds only negation: but true and good add a certain relation.”

²⁶ *In I sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1.

²⁷ *In III de an.*, ch. 5.

²⁸ *DV*, q. 1, a. 1.

²⁹ *DV*, q. 1, a. 1.

and where it seems that he may, as in *DV*, q. 1, a. 4, careful consideration seems to show otherwise.

It seems that the fact that Dewan finds this startling teaching of Aquinas *only* in this passage from *DV*, and nowhere else, as Dewan says, is a sign that perhaps Dewan's interpretation of it needs to be reconsidered in light of what Aquinas says everywhere else. In other words, this being the only passage with such a teaching does not seem to favor Dewan's interpretation.

In sum, therefore, there seem to be many reasons against interpreting Aquinas at *DV*, q. 1, a. 4 to be saying what Dewan says Aquinas is saying, namely, that "truth is a form inherent in things," which means that things can be called true *not on account of a relation to some intellect* but *just* on account of something inherent or intrinsic to the thing itself, namely, their entity, just as a man is called white not on account of a relation to something other than the man himself, but just on account of something inherent or intrinsic to the man himself, namely, the color of his skin: like the whiteness of a man, truth would be an intrinsic formal feature of things. Dewan's understanding of Aquinas's use of "healthy" as said of food in the *DV* passage, which underlies his claim about Aquinas thinking there that truth is an intrinsic formal feature of things, does not seem to be the only way of understanding Aquinas in that text.

Now, if Aquinas is not teaching at *DV*, q. 1, a. 4, that truth is a form inherent in things, then the basis of Dewan's claim for thinking that there is a development in Aquinas's teaching on the truth of things as one moves from *DV* to *ST* may have to be reconsidered. For, according to Dewan, before *ST*, "definitely" in that *DV* article, Aquinas teaches that truth is a form inherent in things, but in *ST* Aquinas no longer thinks that truth is a form inherent in things. Aquinas's account of truth, though having real and obvious differences in his different systematic treatments of truth, seems to be more unified than Dewan seems to portray it, especially as regards Aquinas's understanding of "true" as said of things. N.V.