

The Importance of Rapture in the Thought of Aquinas

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Introduction

ON THE WHOLE, scholars of Thomas Aquinas's thought have not been much concerned with the topic of rapture.¹ Studies of Aquinas's accounts of cognition have tended to focus, rather, on faith and reason, perhaps to the point that one might think these were the only modes of cognition discussed in Aquinas's teaching. This privileging of faith and reason might be understandable if one read only Thomas's *Summa theologiae* or his *Summa contra Gentiles*—and especially if one only read these works in a cursory manner. But Aquinas's earlier *Disputed Questions on Truth* offers a rich account of human cognition that presents prophecy and rapture right alongside faith and reason. And I believe that rapture, construed as a direct

¹ To my knowledge, no study has been published squarely on the subject of rapture in Aquinas's thought. However, I have found records of three unpublished theses: Casey Edler, *Aquinas and the Knowledge of God* (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 2005); Anthony Maret-Crosby, *Seeing the Lord: Rapture and the Knowledge of God in Scholasticism up to Thomas Aquinas* (D. Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2000); and Diane Harwood, *Rapture in the Spirituality of St. Thomas Aquinas* (M.A. Thesis, Western Michigan University, 1978). Patrick Quinn also touches upon rapture in "Aquinas's Concept of the Body and Out of Body Situations," *Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993): 387–400, as do Peter Kwasniewski in "St. Thomas, Extasis, and Union with the Beloved," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 587–603, and Pamela Reeve in "The Metaphysics of Higher Cognitive States in Thomas Aquinas," in *Essays in Medieval Philosophy and Theology in Memory of Walter H. Principe*, CSB, ed. James R. Ginther and Carl Still (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 105–19. Finally, Ezequiel Téllez has provided a Spanish translation of *De veritate*, q. 13, with introduction, in *Tomás de Aquino: De veritate, Cuestión 13: Tratado sobre el Arrebato Místico* (Pamplona: University of Navarra, 1999).

vision of the divine essence experienced in this life, might actually constitute the highest mode of human knowing discussed in *De veritate*.

In this essay, I will attempt to claim a privileged place for rapture in our reading of Aquinas as well as to reflect on some reasons why rapture might not have been given that place all along. Since rapture has not received much attention from scholars of Aquinas's thought, I will begin by offering a brief sketch of the act of rapture. Then, in the second part of the essay, I will show that rapture occupies an important place in Thomas's account of cognition. Briefly stated, my argument for this claim will be that both Thomas's doctrine and his practice suggest that truth is fundamentally relational and, indeed, even interpersonal or communal. Since rapture comprises a direct relationship between a human knower and God, it would seem to be the most perfect mode of cognition and to beget the highest truth humans can experience in this life. Of course, if this contention is correct, then one might ask: why has rapture not been a more central concern of Aquinas's readers? In anticipation of this question, the third part of my essay will examine three objections that might be raised against my thesis of the importance of rapture in Thomas's thought. The first objection contends that rapture is an exceedingly rare occurrence and is therefore not an important part of Thomas's account of cognition. The second objection suggests that rapture, as a direct vision of God, is actually in tension with fundamental principles of Thomas's broader theory of cognition, and should therefore be de-emphasized. And the third objection maintains that Thomas himself appears to have relegated rapture to a marginal place in his mature *Summa theologiae*, thereby rejecting any privileging of rapture that might have occurred in his early *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*. After responding to these objections, I will conclude by suggesting a few ways in which an adequate appreciation of the importance of rapture in Aquinas's teaching—beyond providing us with a deeper understanding of Thomas's account of cognition—carries broader implications for how we understand Thomas's thought and its place within the traditions of western intellectual life.

A Brief Sketch of Rapture in *De veritate*

Thomas explored rapture in several texts and at various stages of his career. The *De veritate* treatment of rapture is particularly interesting, though, because it is situated in the midst of a series of questions about human cognition that consider matters of natural knowledge as well as prophecy, rapture, and faith (qq. 10–14).² Thus, the very structure of *De veritate*

² While Thomas explores rapture most fully at *De veritate*, q. 13 and *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 175, he also discusses the topic in his *lectura* on 2 Corinthians 12, lect.

uniquely encourages the reader to think about the significance of rapture among the various modes of cognition that Thomas examines in these questions. Before trying to assess the significance of rapture in *De veritate*, though, it might be helpful to present a brief sketch of the act of rapture.

Thomas begins his discussion of rapture in *De veritate* by rehearsing the definition of the masters: "Rapture is elevation, by the power of a higher nature, from that which is according to nature to that which is contrary to nature."³ Thomas explains that this description of rapture, which defines it as a movement, provides its genus ("elevation"), its efficient cause ("by the power of a higher nature"), its starting point ("from that which is according to nature"), and the terminus of the movement ("to that which is

1–2 (this *lectura* comprises a part of Thomas's *In epistolas sancti Pauli*). The *lectura* has the virtue of reminding us that Thomas's interest in rapture arose, in part, from St. Paul's rapture and therefore that both the *De veritate* and the *Summa* treatments of rapture are deeply informed by scriptural concerns. Nevertheless, there are several problems surrounding Thomas's *In epistolas sancti Pauli*, including missing sections of text, confusions about authorship, and the existence of multiple editions without clear genealogies to explain the proliferation of versions (see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Volume One: The Person and His Work* [hereafter, *The Person and His Work*], trans. Robert Royal [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996], 250–57, 340; James Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983], 372–73; Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. Landry and Hughes [Chicago: Regnery, 1964], 248). Scholars seem to be largely in agreement, though, that the *lectura* on 2 Corinthians 12 dates from some portion of Thomas's Italian period (roughly 1259–68). Thus, chronologically, Thomas's discussion of rapture in the *lectura* follows his discussion of rapture in *De veritate*, and the *De veritate* treatment seems to prepare the way for the *lectura* rather than vice versa (even if Thomas's wrestling with Paul's rapture is already evident in the *De veritate* account, especially in q. 13, a. 2 and q. 13, a. 5). Moreover, Thomas's discussion of rapture in his *lectura* on 2 Corinthians 12 does not seem to differ substantially from his treatments in the earlier *De veritate* or the later *Summa*. Given the problems surrounding the *In epistolas sancti Pauli*, the fact that the *De veritate* prepares the way for the *lectura* rather than vice versa, and the basic agreement of the *lectura* with the accounts given in the earlier *De veritate* and the later *Summa*, it seems methodologically sound to take our brief description of rapture from *De veritate* without explicitly drawing upon the *lectura* on 2 Corinthians 12. I take up questions about the relationship between the *De veritate* and *Summa* accounts below, in the section entitled "Third Objection: Did Thomas Retreat from Rapture in the *Summa Theologiae*?"

³ *De veritate* (hereafter, *DV*), q. 13, a. 1, in *capite*: "Raptus est ab eo quod est secundum naturam in id quod est contra naturam vi superioris naturae elevatio." English quotations of *DV* are taken from *Truth*, trans. Mulligan, McGlynn, and Schmidt (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), which I have emended from time to time. Latin quotations of *DV* are taken from the Leonine edition (Rome, 1972).

contrary to nature”).⁴ Still, the definition needs to be glossed in a number of ways in order to gain a clear sense of what rapture is.

Rapture as Vision of the Divine Essence

To begin with, the received definition of rapture is remarkably vague in its description of that to which the enraptured person is elevated. This might be due, in part, to the fact that there are several kinds of rapture, each of which involves a different level of abstraction from sense perception and therefore achieves a different level of vision.⁵ When Thomas writes about rapture without qualification, though, it is clear that he has in mind an elevation to the knowledge of God through God himself. And, in *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 2, Thomas insists that St. Paul saw God through the divine essence when the apostle was enraptured.⁶ As Thomas typically construes it, then, what is seen in the act of rapture is the divine essence itself.

Thomas explains elsewhere that it is impossible for the human intellect to see the divine essence directly unless it be strengthened by the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*).⁷ Accordingly, the light of glory must be infused into the mind of the enraptured person in order for it to be able to see the divine essence. Thomas is careful to distinguish between two ways in which the light of glory can be received, though:

The light of glory is infused into the mind in two ways. In one, it follows the mode of a form that becomes connatural and abiding. This makes the mind blessed without qualification, and is the manner in which it is infused in the blessed in heaven. In the other way, the mind receives the light of glory as a passing impression. It was in this way that Paul's mind was enlightened with the light of glory when he was enraptured.⁸

⁴ See *DV*, q. 13, a. 1, resp.

⁵ See, for example, *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, ad 9.

⁶ Aquinas implicitly attributes a vision of the divine essence to Moses in the same text. See also *DV*, q. 12, a. 14, resp., where Thomas is more explicit about Moses' vision of the divine essence.

⁷ See, for example, *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) I, q. 12, a. 2, resp. However, in *DV*, q. 10, a. 11, resp., Thomas suggests that the human intellect can be united to the divine intellect in this life “without being bathed in the light of glory” (*sine hoc quod a lumine gloriae perfundatur*). Perhaps he means only that such an intellect does not receive the light of glory as an abiding form (thereby still allowing that the intellect receives the light of glory in a transient manner). If not, this isolated statement would appear to be an anomaly within Thomas's otherwise consistent teaching on this point. For more on the light of glory, see Michael Waddell, “Aquinas on the Light of Glory,” *Tópicos* 40 (2011): 105–32.

⁸ *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, resp.

Thus, the enraptured person receives the light of glory only in a transient manner (*sicut quaedam passio transiens*). And in this way rapture differs from the beatific vision—which is also a direct vision of the divine essence made possible by an infusion of the *lumen gloriae*—for those who are blessed without qualification receive the light of glory as a “connatural and abiding form” (*per modum formae connaturalis factae et permanentis*).⁹

Rapture and Sense Perception

The fact that rapture comprises a direct vision of the divine essence has implications for the role of sense perception in rapture. As Thomas explains in *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 3, “a man living in this mortal body cannot see God through His essence, unless he is separated from the bodily senses (*nisi a sensibus corporeis alienetur*).”¹⁰ Thomas produces two arguments for this claim. He begins the first argument by noting that the act of any cognitive power requires attention. And if the soul gives complete attention to the act of one cognitive power, it must be inattentive to the other powers. But, Thomas asserts, “for the understanding to be raised up to the vision of the divine essence, the whole attention must be concentrated on this vision, since this is the most intensely intelligible object, and the understanding can reach it only by striving for it with a total effort.”¹¹ Therefore, Thomas concludes, the enraptured person must be completely drawn away (*omnino abstrahatur*) from sense perception in order to be elevated to the vision of the divine essence.

Thomas’s second argument for this claim proceeds along the following lines.¹² The more perfect (*perfectior*) the intellect is, the more it is purified (*purior*) from contact with material things. This is why the human intellect, which knows material things through intelligible species

⁹ Thomas notes other differences between rapture and the beatific vision, including the fact that the enraptured person does not receive the gift of glory (*dotem gloriae*) nor does glory therefore flow from the soul into the body (see *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, resp.). Interestingly, though, Thomas asserts that Paul’s rapture was similar to the beatific vision in that his vision overflowed into the affections, begetting acts of enjoyment, love, and charity (see *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, ad 6).

¹⁰ *DV*, q. 13, a. 3, resp.

¹¹ *DV*, q. 13, a. 3, resp.: “*Ad hoc autem quod intellectus elevetur ad videndum divinam essentiam oportet quod tota intentio in hanc visionem colligatur cum hoc sit vehementissimum intelligibile ad quod intellectus pertingere non potest nisi toto conamine in illud intendat.*” Thomas’s diction here is striking: the argument reads as though one could achieve the act of rapture through concentrated effort. Presumably, though, Thomas does not mean to retreat from his basic notion that rapture is an elevation by the power of a higher nature. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 175, a. 2.

¹² The discussion that follows in the text above is a synopsis of the rather lengthy argument Thomas presents in the corpus of *DV*, q. 13, a. 3.

abstracted from phantasms, is less perfect than angelic understanding, which knows purely immaterial forms. Inasmuch as the human intellect still possesses the purity (*puritas*) of intellectual knowledge, though, it retains the power to consider things that are purely immaterial. Thus, Thomas concludes, if the human intellect be elevated to a vision of the divine essence, which is the highest of immaterial things, it must be completely separated from the sight of material things. While this argument is a bit opaque, Thomas appears to be suggesting that in order for the human intellect to be elevated above its ordinary operations to a direct vision of the divine essence, the intellect must be made more perfect than it normally is by being cut off from contact with material things through sense perception.

The conclusion of both arguments, then, is that the human intellect must be separated from sense perception during the act of rapture. Thomas explains that this separation does not, however, entail the separation of the soul from the body altogether. This is true for at least two reasons.¹³ First, inasmuch as the union of soul and body does not require the attention of any cognitive power, this union does not threaten to deprive the enraptured intellect of the attention required for a direct vision of the divine essence. Second, inasmuch as the power of understanding does not proceed from the essence of the soul as united to the body but rather insofar as it is free from the body, the union of body and soul does not extend to the act of the intellect and therefore cannot diminish its purity (*puritas*). Thus, while Thomas takes the act of rapture to necessitate the intellect's being carried out of the senses, he does not take it to necessitate a dissolution of the union between body and soul altogether. In other words, rapture is a vision of the divine essence received in this life, not after death.

Rapture and Nature

One of Thomas's chief concerns in discussing rapture is to assess whether rapture is natural or contrary to nature. This question is set up, at least in part, by the magisterial definition's asserting that rapture is an elevation "to that which is contrary to nature." Inasmuch as Thomas espouses that definition, the groundwork is laid for him to maintain the view that rapture is contrary to nature.¹⁴ And, indeed, Thomas asserts that

¹³ The discussion that follows in the text above is a synopsis of Thomas's more elaborate arguments in *DV*, q. 13, a. 4, resp. Thomas presents similar arguments against rapture's necessitating a suppression of the activities of the vegetative soul.

¹⁴ The *sed contra* of *DV*, q. 13, a. 1 also draws upon the authority of the *Glossa ordinaria* to assert that rapture is contrary to nature.

[m]an's proper activity . . . is to understand through the mediation of sense and imagination. For the activity by which he fixes on intellectual things alone, passing over all lower things, does not belong to man as man, but in so far as something divine exists in him Therefore, when man is transported out of his senses (*a sensibus abstractus*) and sees things beyond sense, his natural mode of knowing is modified (*transmutatur*).¹⁵

Interestingly, though, Thomas does not take a hard line in interpreting the definition's claim that rapture is "contrary to nature." Instead, he draws a distinction between two different ways in which natural and proper activity can be modified:

Sometimes this change takes place because of some deficiency in man's proper power, as happens with insane people and others who are mentally deranged. This kind of transport out of their senses is not an elevation but rather a debasing of man. Sometimes, however, such transport takes place through the divine power, and then it is properly an elevation. For, since the agent makes that which is passive like itself, the transport which takes place by the divine power, and which is above man, has an ordination to something higher than that which is natural to man (*est in aliquid altius quam sit homini naturale*).¹⁶

Thus, Thomas's initial gloss of what it means for rapture to be "contrary to nature" is that the divine power elevates the enraptured person above what is natural for human beings to something higher; he does not view rapture as something beneath human nature, much less as something destructive of it.¹⁷

Indeed, Thomas further qualifies what it means to say that rapture is "contrary to nature" in his reply to the first objection of *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 1:

One can know God in many ways: through God's essence, through sensible things, or through intelligible effects. We have to make a similar distinction about that which is natural to man. For something is contrary to nature and according to nature for one and the same thing according to its different states (*uni enim et eidem rei est aliquid secundum*

¹⁵ *DV*, q. 13, a. 1, resp.

¹⁶ *DV*, q. 13, a. 1, resp.

¹⁷ Elsewhere, Thomas even replaces the preposition *contra* ("contrary to") with *supra* ("above") when presenting the magisterial definition of rapture: "*Raptus est ab eo quod est secundum naturam in id quod est supra naturam, vi superioris naturae, elevatio*" (*Super II Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura*, in *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, vol. 6, ed. Busa [Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980], lectio 1).

naturam et contra naturam secundum eius status diversos), because the nature of the thing is not the same when it is in the state of becoming and when it has complete existence, as Rabbi Moses says. Thus, full stature and other things of the kind are natural to man when he has reached maturity, but it would be contrary to nature for a boy to have full stature at birth.

Thus, it must be said that to know God in some fashion is natural for the human intelligence according to any state. But in the beginning, that is, in this life, it is natural for it to know God through sensible creatures. It is also natural for it to reach the knowledge of God through God himself when it reaches its full perfection, that is, in heaven (*est autem ei naturale quod perveniat ad cognoscendum Deum per se ipsum in sui consummatione, id est in statu patriae*). Thus, if in this life it is raised to the knowledge of God that it will have in heaven, this will be contrary to nature, just as it would be contrary to nature for a baby boy to have a beard.¹⁸

Rapture is not contrary to human nature *absolutter*, then, so much as it is contrary to human nature in this state of existence. We have already noted that Thomas glosses “contrary to nature” as meaning “above” or “higher than” what is natural. But Thomas’s example of the differences between what is natural for an adult and what is natural for a child helps us to understand more clearly that the relationship between rapture and natural knowledge—that is, knowledge natural to this state of human existence—is not a relationship of opposition but rather a relationship of what is higher to what is lower, or of what is more perfect to what is less perfect.¹⁹

Let us now conclude this brief sketch of the act of rapture by returning to the received definition with which Thomas began: “rapture is elevation, by the power of a higher nature, from that which is according to nature to that which is contrary to nature.” While Thomas seems to accept this definition, it should be clear that Thomas’s account of rapture is significantly clearer and deeper than the definition itself. In Thomas’s glossing of the definition, “that which is according to nature” is knowledge through sense perception, and “that which is contrary to nature” is the direct vision of the divine essence. Thus, rapture entails being carried out of sense perception to a direct vision of the divine essence. Thomas is careful to note, though, that these things are only “according to nature” and “contrary to nature” in this stage of human existence. Moreover, Thomas explains that what it means for rapture to be “contrary to nature” is to be a precocious “elevation” to a higher level of perfection

¹⁸ *DIV*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 1.

¹⁹ Indeed, Thomas sometimes characterizes this relationship in terms of “perfect” and “imperfect.” See *DIV*, q. 13, a. 3, sc 7 and resp.

that is not normally found in this life but that is “natural” in the next. This “elevation” is possible only “by the power of a higher nature.” And thus it is by God’s agency, through a temporary infusion of the light of glory, that a person is enraptured to a direct vision of the divine essence while still in this life.

The Importance of Rapture in *De veritate*

In the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, the significance of rapture is derived from its place in Thomas’s broader account of cognition and truth. This account, I would like to suggest, ultimately aspires to describe a relation(ship) between human knowers and God.

Truth as an Interpersonal Relation

In question one, article one of *De veritate*, Thomas first attempts to explain what truth is.²⁰ He invokes the *De anima*’s claim that the soul “in some way is all things” in order to describe truth as a general mode of being that is comprised of a relation between being and intellect.²¹ In the *De anima*, we should recall, Aristotle suggests that a faculty is actualized by its object, and thus we can deduce that the intellect is actualized by the being(s) to which it is joined in the truth relation.²² In article two of question one,

²⁰ While a good deal has been written about Aquinas’s teaching on truth, Jan Aertsen has provided the magisterial treatment in *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1996), especially 243–89. See also Aertsen’s “Truth as Transcendental in Thomas Aquinas,” *Topoi* 11 (1992): 159–72; idem, *Medieval Reflections on Truth: Adaequatio rei et intellectus* (Amsterdam: Free University, 1984). For more recent works of interest, see John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Michael Waddell, “Truth or Transcendentals: What Was St. Thomas’s Intention at *De veritate* 1.1?” *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 197–219; idem, “Natural Theology in St. Thomas’s Early Doctrine of Truth,” *Sapientia* 59 (2004): 5–21; Lawrence Dewan, O.P., “Is Truth a Transcendental for St. Thomas Aquinas?” *Nova et Vetera* 4.1 (2006): 1–16; Jan Aertsen, “Is Truth Not a Transcendental for Aquinas?” in *Wisdom’s Apprentices: Thomistic Essays in Honor of Lawrence Dewan, OP*, ed. Peter Kwasniewski (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 3–12; and John Wippel, “Truth in Thomas Aquinas,” in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 65–112.

²¹ See *DV*, q. 1, a. 1, resp., in *passim*. See also *De anima* III.8, 431b21 and III.4, 429a18.

²² *De anima* III.4, 415a18–22; see also III.2, 426a1–11 and III.4, 429a11–18. See also *DV*, q. 10, a. 6, resp.: “In another way, [the mind] is related to things as potency to act, inasmuch as determined forms of things are only potentially in our mind, but actually in things outside the soul.” It should be noted that the agent intellect also has its role to play in actualizing the passive intellect (see, for example, *ST* I, q. 85, a. 1, ad 3 and I, q. 87, a. 1, resp.). But even the agent intellect, which is actually immaterial, is not in a state of actuality with respect to the determinate nature of

Thomas again gestures toward the *De anima* to suggest that there is a kind of circular motion that originates in being outside of the soul, then extends into the soul through the intellect, and finally reaches back outward toward being through the act of the appetite.²³ Thus, Aquinas clarifies, the good that perfects the soul in the completion of this circular motion is the very same being from which the circular motion began. On the basis of these texts, one could say that the human soul is actualized by the being from which this circular motion originates and in which the motion finds its fulfillment. Truth, in a certain sense, just is the relation that arises as the intellectual faculty of the soul receives that being into itself.

No sooner than Thomas has made this point, though, he expands his description of truth to remind us that truth consists not only in the relation between human intellect and being(s), but also in the relation between the divine (practical) intellect and created being(s).²⁴ Thus, there

the species of the thing known. See *Sentencia libri De anima*, bk. 3, ch. 4, lines 139–48: “The possible intellect is in potency to intelligibles just as the indeterminate is to the determinate: for the possible intellect does not possess determinately the nature of any sensible thing, whereas every intelligible is a determinate nature of some species; whence [Aristotle] said above that the possible intellect is related to intelligibles just as a tablet to determinate pictures. And, with respect to this, the agent intellect is not in act.” The English translation of the preceding passage from the *Sentencia libri De anima* is my own. The same text is found in the Pirotta edition at bk. 3, lectio 10, par. 738. Cf. *ST I*, q. 79, a. 4, ad 4 and *ST I*, q. 87, a. 1, ad 3.

²³ *DV*, q. 1, a. 2, resp.: “The Philosopher speaks of a sort of circle formed by the acts of the soul: for a thing outside the soul moves the intellect, and the thing known moves the appetite, which tends to reach the things from which the motion originally started.” See *De anima* III.10, 433b21–30. On the importance of the *circulatio* motif in Aquinas’s writings, see Jan Aertsen, “The Circulation-Motive and Man in the Thought of Thomas Aquinas,” in *L’homme et son univers au Moyen Âge: actes du septième congrès internationale de philosophie médiévale*, ed. Monika Asztalos and Christian Wenin (Louvain: Centre DeWulf-Mansion, 1986), vol. 1, 432–39; idem, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas’s Way of Thought* (New York: Brill, 1988), 40–45. See also Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 154.

²⁴ *DV*, q. 1, a. 2, resp.: “A thing is referred differently to the practical intellect than it is to the speculative intellect. Since the practical intellect causes things, it is a measure of what it causes. But, since the speculative intellect is receptive in regard to things, it is, in a certain sense, moved by things and consequently measured by them. It is clear, therefore, that, as is said in the *Metaphysics*, natural things from which our intellect gets its scientific knowledge measure our intellect. Yet these things are themselves measured by the divine intellect, in which are all created things—just as all works of art find their origin in the intellect of an artist. The divine intellect, therefore, measures and is not measured; a natural thing both measures and is measured; but our intellect is measured, and measures only artifacts, not natural things.

A natural thing, therefore, being placed between two intellects is called *true* as it conforms to either. It is said to be true with respect to its conformity with

are analogous levels of truth generated by the different relations that exist between God and created beings, on one hand, and between beings and the human intellect, on the other hand. If we carry forward Thomas's metaphor of circular motion, we might suggest that while the human intellect and appetite are actualized by a circular motion that both begins and ends in created beings, these beings themselves are part of a circular motion that proceeds outward from God in the act of creation—here conceived as an act of *practical intellect*—and then returns toward the divine in a quest for fuller metaphysical actuality. Thus, our understanding of the circular motion of the soul would have to be revised in order to clarify that the point *from which* the metaphysical actuality of the soul's circular motions begins—and therefore the point *at which* it ends—is God. In other words, we would have to acknowledge that the intellect is ultimately perfected by the truth that arises from its relation with God.

Thomas's description of the relationships among the various modes of truth bears out this suggestion. In *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 8, for example, he states:

Hence, it is clear that the truth found in created things can include nothing more than 1) the being (*entitatem*) of the thing and [its] conformity (*adaequationem*) to intellect, [or] 2) the conformity of intellect to things or to the privations of things. All this is entirely from God, because both the very form of a thing, through which it is conformed, and the truth itself, inasmuch as it is the good of the intellect, [are] from God; for, as is said in the *Ethics*, the good of any thing whatsoever consists in its perfect operation. But there is no perfect operation of the intellect except inasmuch as it knows the true; hence, in this consists its good with respect to this sort of thing. Hence, since every good, as well as every form, is from God, one must say, without any qualification, that every truth is from God.²⁵

Thus, the intellectual faculty of the soul, which is actualized by the relation to being that comprises truth, is in fact perfected by a relation to the divine being, which is God.²⁶ Moreover, we should note, the human quest for perfection through truth culminates not only in a relation to a Being, but

the divine intellect in so far as it fulfills the end to which it was ordained by the divine intellect . . . With respect to its conformity with a human intellect, a thing is said to be true in so far as it is such as to cause a true estimate about itself."

²⁵ *DV*, q. 1, a. 8, resp. See also *DV*, q. 1, a. 4, resp. and q. 1, a. 5, resp. Enticingly, but less clearly, see *DV*, q. 10, a. 9, resp.: "Even natural knowledge arises in us from divine illumination (*etiam naturalis cognitio in nobis ex illustratione divina oritur*)."

²⁶ Thomas states this very thing, of course, in his discussion of happiness at *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8, resp. But it is important to note that the account of truth Thomas presents in question one of *DV* seems to drive toward the same conclusion.

in a relation between persons—namely, the human knower and God. Thus, the *doctrine* of truth that Thomas presents in question one of his *Disputed Questions on Truth* is not only relational, but fundamentally interpersonal.²⁷

Interestingly, the *practice* of disputation recorded in the *Disputed Questions on Truth* also seems to manifest an interpersonal (or communal) approach to cognition and truth. In disputation, truth is not sought by examining material beings directly—as, for example, one might do in scientific observation or experimentation—but rather by engaging in discussion and debate with other people. Thus, the quest for truth is a communal project, with the truth relation arising most immediately from relations between or among human intellects and then, by extension, to material things (which are themselves true primarily by virtue of their own relations to the divine intellect).²⁸ If we consider the role that philosophical and theological authorities played in Thomas's disputations, we might further suggest that authors who were not physically present with the masters and students at the disputation were nevertheless part of the community of knowers who generated truth in the intellects of other knowers. And, given what we have already noted about Thomas's view that all truth is fundamentally from God, we might even have to acknowledge that God is a member of the community of knowers in which the truth relation is produced.²⁹ Indeed, since the being and truth of created things exists only through participation in the divine intellect, it would seem that truth can arise in the human intellect *only* in virtue of a relation between the human being and God. To be sure, this relation is often mediated by written and spoken words, by other human intellects, and by

²⁷ Cf. Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things and Reality and the Good*, trans. Lothar Krauth and Stella Lange (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989). Pieper emphasizes the relationality of transcendental truth (see 35 and 37) and even dwells upon the fact that truth is established between two minds (see 51–52). However, he does not educe the point that human knowing is perfected by a relation to the divine intellect, nor does he recognize that truth is therefore an interpersonal relation.

²⁸ One might object, here, that this makes it sound as though the object of the intellect is an intelligible species existing in another intellect rather than a being outside the intellect. Thomas, of course, rejects the notion that the intelligible species is what is known by the intellect, claiming instead that the intelligible species is that *by which* the intellect knows (*ST I*, q. 85, a. 2, resp.). I do not think my claim is incompatible with this point, though, since I am not arguing that we do not or cannot know beings outside the intellect; I am only arguing that, in the mode of disputation, the words and intelligible species of other people's intellects also serve as a kind of bridge to extra-mental objects of knowledge.

²⁹ Strictly speaking, of course, God cannot be a "member" of the community if by "member" we mean a "part." Perhaps it would be more precise to say that God is the principle of this community.

material things; but we should not let that mediation obscure the metaphysical and theological facts about the two terms of the relation. The truth that exists in human beings is fundamentally a relation between a human intellect and the divine intellect. Thus, both the content of Thomas's doctrine and the very practice by which he came to that content seem to manifest an interpersonal account of knowing and truth.

Reason

Now, while all modes of human cognition enter into this interpersonal relation of truth, some modes can beget only a mediated relation. This is the case with both reason and faith, for which material beings must always mediate our approach to God. Regarding the ability of reason to know God, Aquinas states:

In natural knowledge, our mind looks to phantasms as objects from which it receives intelligible species, as is said in *The Soul*. Hence, everything it understands in the present life, it understands through species of this sort abstracted from phantasms. But no species of this sort is sufficient to represent the divine essence or that of any other separated substance. For the quiddities of sensible things, of which intelligible species abstracted from phantasms are likenesses, are essentially different from the essences of even created immaterial substances, and much more from the divine essence. Hence, by the natural knowledge that we experience in this life, our mind cannot see either God or angels through their essences.³⁰

This does not imply, of course, that reason cannot know God at all in this life. But reason can ascend to knowledge of God as cause or Creator only through knowledge of God's created effects.³¹ Thus, natural reason's approach to God in this life must always be mediated.

³⁰ *DV*, q. 10, a. 11, resp. See also *DV*, q. 10, a. 9, resp.: "As is said in *The Soul*, in this life our understanding is related to phantasms as sight is related to colors, not, however, so that it knows phantasms as sight knows colors, but that it knows the things which the phantasms represent. Thus, the activity of our understanding is directed, first, to the things which are grasped through phantasms." On the notion that natural reason is based in sense perception of material singulars, see also *ST I*, q. 84, a. 6, resp.; *I*, q. 84, a. 7, resp.; *I*, q. 85, a. 1, resp.; *Summa contra Gentiles* (hereafter, *ScG*) *I*, ch. 30, par. 3; *Expositio super librum Boetii De trinitate* (hereafter, *In DT*), q. 1, a. 3, resp.; q. 6, a. 1, resp. (reply to the second question); and q. 6, a. 2, resp. On the claim that natural knowledge cannot know the divine essence directly in this life, see also *ST I*, q. 12, a. 4, resp. and *I*, q. 12, a. 11, resp.

³¹ See, for example, *ScG I*, ch. 11, par. 5; *I*, ch. 33, par. 4; *ST I*, q. 1, a. 7, ad 1; *I*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.; *In DT*, q. 1, a. 2, resp.; q. 1, a. 4, resp.; and q. 5, a. 4, resp.

Faith

The same is true of faith, although the mediation occurs in a different way. One must look a bit more carefully to appreciate how faith's access to God is mediated, for, while the object of natural reason is material being, Thomas states that "faith . . . has God as its principal object (*fides . . . ipsum Deum habet sicut principale obiectum*)."³² Indeed, Thomas describes faith as an initial participation in the full knowledge of God that comprises eternal life.³³ But Thomas also follows the Letter to the Hebrews in maintaining that faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things *unseen*."³⁴ Consequently, he writes,

The object of faith is that which is absent from our understanding. (We believe that which is absent, but we see that which is present, as Augustine says.) . . . Now, whenever the determinate principle of the proper object is lacking, the act must also necessarily cease. Hence, as soon as something begins to be present or to appear, it cannot be an object of an act of faith (*unde quam cito incipit aliquid esse praesens vel apparens, non potest ut obiectum subesse actui fidei*).³⁵

Thus, although faith's object is God, and although faith does beget a relation between the human believer and the divine source of all truth, the object of faith cannot be directly present to the understanding of the believer.³⁶ Instead, faith's access to God must be mediated. Thomas explains:

Faith cannot be posited as a virtue based on the evidence of things [it grasps] because it deals with things that are not apparent. Consequently, it must be called a virtue because of its adherence to some testimony in which the truth is infallibly found. But, just as every created being of itself is empty and liable to fail, unless it is supported by uncreated being, so all created truth is liable to fail except in so far as it is regulated by uncreated truth. Hence, to assent to the testimony of a man or

³² *DV*, q. 14, a. 8, resp.

³³ See *DV*, q. 14, a. 2, resp.: "For man to be ordained to the good which is eternal life, there must be some initial participation of it in him to whom it is promised. However, eternal life consists in the full knowledge of God, as is clear from John 17.3: 'Now this is eternal life. . . .' Consequently, we must have within us some initial participation of this supernatural knowledge. We have it through faith, which, by an infused light, holds those things that exceed our natural knowledge."

³⁴ *DV*, q. 14, a. 2, *in capite*. See also q. 14, a. 8, resp.

³⁵ *DV*, q. 14, a. 9, resp.

³⁶ In support of the claim that faith does not see the divine essence directly, see also *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 4, resp.; *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, resp.; q. 13, a. 2, ad 5; q. 14, a. 8, resp.; and q. 14, a. 8, ad 3.

an angel would lead infallibly to the truth only in so far as we considered the testimony of God speaking in them.³⁷

In the act of faith, then, it is the testimony of God—that is, revelation—that joins the human being and God; faith does not offer a direct vision of God.³⁸ Thus, faith, like reason, begets only a mediated relation between the human believer and God.

Rapture

It is precisely in this regard that rapture transcends reason, faith, and indeed every mode of human knowing *in via*. For rapture comprises an unmediated relation between the human knower and God.³⁹

In *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 2, Aquinas approvingly cites St. Augustine as stating that “when Paul was enraptured, he saw God through God’s essence (*dicit Paulum in raptu Deum per essentiam vidisse*).”⁴⁰ Thus, whereas natural reason can know God only through the mediation of created effects, and

³⁷ *DV*, q. 14, a. 8, resp.

³⁸ In support of the claim that faith is mediated through revelation (which presumably comes through preaching, Scripture, or historical events), see also *DV*, q. 14, a. 8, resp.; q. 14, a. 8, ad 2; q. 14, a. 9, resp.; *ST* II–II, q. 1, a. 1, resp.; II–II, q. 1, a. 9, resp.; II–II, q. 2, a. 5, resp.; and *In DT*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 4. In the *ST*, Thomas uses the language of the “formal aspect of the object of faith” (*formalis ratio obiecti fidei*) and suggests that faith accepts truths *qua* God’s revelation. See *ST* II–II, q. 1, a. 1, resp.; I, q. 1, a. 3, resp.; and II–II, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1. See also *In DT*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1 and q. 3, a. 1, ad 4.

³⁹ In this essay, I have chosen to argue for the importance of rapture only in relation to reason and faith, which have occupied scholars of Aquinas’s writings far more than other modes of cognition have. The relationship between rapture and prophecy, which is very important but much too complicated to treat adequately in this essay, is the subject of a forthcoming article. For purposes of the argument I am making in this essay, suffice it to note that prophecy, as Thomas understands it, always entails some sort of image or sign. A particular prophecy might rely on an image that arises during sleep or during wakefulness, a spoken word, or an allegorical sign. These signs can be received in such a way that the one presenting them is heard but not seen or both seen and heard. And they can be presented by a messenger in the form of a human being, the guise of an angel, or even the image of God. The crucial point, though, is that prophecy—like reason and faith—is always *mediated* (by an image or sign), and does not equal rapture in its comprising a direct vision of the divine essence. Since one might wonder whether the highest level of prophecy, in which one sees the image of God, equals rapture, it should be noted that Thomas states that if one rises to a direct vision of the divine essence and not merely a vision of an image of God, then this surpasses the mode of prophecy and has in fact become rapture (see *DV*, q. 12, a. 7, resp.). On prophecy in general, see *ST* II–II, qq. 171–74 and *DV*, q. 12.

⁴⁰ *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, resp. See also *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, ad 9.

faith can know God only through the mediation of revelation, rapture actually affords a direct vision of the divine essence in this life. Now, as I have argued above, the *De veritate* account suggests that truth is ultimately an interpersonal relation between the human knower and God. And the more immediate the relation between creature and God is, the more perfect it must be. (This is particularly evident in the case of knowing God, since no intermediary is adequate to convey knowledge of the divine essence itself.)⁴¹ Accordingly, since rapture is the only mode of human cognition that provides an unmediated vision of the divine essence in this life, rapture must also be the most perfect mode of human cognition in the interpersonal account of truth that emerges from both Aquinas's doctrine and his practice in *De veritate*.⁴²

This privileging of rapture might sound shocking when heard against representations of Thomas's thought that tend to emphasize the mediated access to God available through faith and reason. But, of course, we know that the pinnacle of human existence is the direct experience of the divine essence that is had in the beatific vision. As Thomas writes in the *Summa theologiae*, "final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the divine essence."⁴³ And what is rapture if not a brief glimpse of the beatific vision that is given to some in this life? Mustn't rapture also be regarded, then, as the most perfect mode of cognition that can be received in this life?

Objections

At this point, one might reasonably ask: if rapture is so significant in Aquinas's *De veritate*, why hasn't it played a more prominent role in our appropriations of Thomas's teaching on cognition? Let me say, straight-

⁴¹ See *ST* I, q. 12, a. 2, resp.

⁴² My claim that rapture is the most perfect mode of cognition discussed in the *De veritate* account of truth should not be taken to contradict Thomas's notion that the quiddity of a material being is the proper object of human knowledge in its natural mode (see, for example, *ST* I, q. 88, a. 1, resp. and I, q. 88, a. 2, resp.) or his suggestion that natural knowledge of immaterial substances, even in a separated soul, is imperfect (see *ST* I, q. 89, a. 1, resp.). As noted above, rapture is a supernatural mode of cognition, and thus its perfection does not arise from its appropriateness to human nature but rather from the level of the union to which the enraptured person is elevated by the light of glory. Thomas attests to the perfection of this union in his *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, bk. 4, d. 49, q. 2, a.4, ad 5, where he writes: "It must be said that to see God through God's essence is the most perfect mode of knowing God (according to its genus)." The English translation of the *super Sententiarum* is my own, following the Latin text of the Busa edition (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstadt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980).

⁴³ *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8, resp. See also *DV*, q. 14, a. 2, resp.

away, that I can only speculate about the reasons why rapture has not been given the place I think it deserves in our readings of Aquinas. However, I do think that three objections are likely to be made against my privileging of rapture.

*First Objection: Did Thomas Think Rapture
Is Too Rare to Be Important?*

One objection that might be raised against my privileging of rapture contends that Thomas thought rapture is exceedingly rare and that rapture is not, therefore, an important mode of cognition for Aquinas. But this objection seems to fall short in at least two important ways.

To begin with, it is not obvious to me that one must accept the objection's premise: for there does not appear to be adequate textual evidence to prove decisively whether Thomas thought rapture was rare, common, or something in between. Aquinas does explicitly state that both Paul and Moses were enraptured to a vision of the divine essence.⁴⁴ He also describes a number of other people as having been enraptured, though he is using the term "rapture" in analogous senses here and does not attribute a direct vision of the divine essence to these other people.⁴⁵ Given that Thomas explicitly mentions only a couple of people who have experienced a direct vision of the divine essence in this life, one might reasonably wonder whether Aquinas regards this type of rapture as being an extremely unusual experience. However, the mere fact that Thomas does not mention others who have been enraptured does not necessarily mean that he believed there were no others. Indeed, given the long tradition claiming that Thomas experienced profound visions late in life, one might just as reasonably wonder whether Thomas himself was ever enraptured. In the absence of a clear statement from Thomas about the number of people he regards as having been enraptured, though, it seems to me that all we can do is speculate about how common or rare Aquinas might have thought rapture to be.

More importantly, even if we conceded that Thomas thought rapture was in fact experienced by only two human beings, this would not detract from the importance of rapture as a mode of cognition. For, as I have argued above, the importance of rapture in Thomas's thought follows from its nobility in offering a direct vision of the divine essence in this life, not

⁴⁴ See, for example, *DV*, q. 13, a. 2; *DV*, q. 12, a. 14, resp.; and *ST* II–II, q. 175, a. 3, ad 1.

⁴⁵ Thomas presents Adam, David, Peter, and John the Evangelist as examples of people who have experienced modes of rapture that fall short of the direct vision of the divine essence. See *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, ad 9 and *ST* II–II, q. 175, a. 3, ad 1.

from its frequency.⁴⁶ Thus, the question of rapture's rareness does not really bear on my argument for the importance of rapture in Thomas's thought.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See above, in the section entitled "Rapture."

⁴⁷ One reader has offered a variation on this objection. This variation takes Thomas's discussion of rapture in his *lectura* on 2 Corinthians 12 to be the key to understanding Thomas's view on the subject, and suggests that Thomas's purpose in discussing rapture there is merely to explain a few lines of Scripture about St. Paul. The objection then generalizes from Thomas's task in the *lectura* to claim that "all [Thomas's] discussions of *raptus* are more or less generalized forms of Scripture commentary," and concludes that rapture is not an important mode of cognition in Aquinas's thought but rather a topic that arises in his teaching only because of the need to explain a few verses of Scripture.

We have seen, though, that the importance of rapture is derived not from its frequency but from its comprising a direct vision of the divine essence in this life. And this remains true regardless of whether the instances of rapture that give rise to Thomas's reflections on the subject come from Scripture or from elsewhere.

Several other points should also be made. To begin with, it would be methodologically problematic to make Thomas's *lectura* on 2 Corinthians the foundation of our study of rapture in the thought of Aquinas (for reasons described in note 2, above).

More importantly, the claim that Thomas's discussions of rapture are all "generalized forms of Scripture commentary" does not capture the richness of these discussions. First, while Thomas undeniably has scriptural accounts of Paul and Moses in mind as examples of rapture in all of his discussions of the topic, the *lectura* on 2 Corinthians is the only text in which Thomas constructs his discussion of rapture primarily as an exploration of those scriptural passages. In both the *De veritate* and the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas's discussions of rapture are offered in the context of broader explorations of modes of cognition. For example, in each of these texts, Thomas presents his treatment of rapture immediately after his treatment of prophecy. This is because Thomas regards rapture, in a way, as a degree of prophecy (see, for example, *ST* 2–2.171, prologue; cf. *DV* 12.7 co.). Thus, in both the *Summa* and *De veritate*, Thomas's discussions of rapture must be construed as parts of Thomas's broader explorations of prophecy. In addition, when Thomas takes up the subjects of prophecy and rapture in these texts, he is clearly in conversation with Augustine's *De genesi ad litteram* (e.g., book 12, ch. 6 and ch. 9). And while there are certainly scriptural bases for Augustine's interest in visions of the divine (not all of which concern Paul or Moses), Augustine is also concerned with all sorts of visions for which he has evidence that is not scriptural in any way whatsoever. What is more, when Thomas discusses prophecy and rapture, he also seems to be in sustained conversation with the writings of Avicenna (e.g., *Liber de anima*, 4.2, 4.4, and 5.6) and Maimonides (e.g., *Guide for the Perplexed*, 2.45), which are similarly concerned with numerous levels of prophecy, including direct vision of the divine essence. Thus, Thomas's discussions of rapture must be seen also as arising out of and in response to several rich traditions—Augustinian, Avicennian, and Maimonidean—of reflecting on visions more generally. Finally, in the case of *De veritate* at least, Thomas situates his multivalent exploration of prophecy and rapture in the midst of additional questions about reason and faith, suggesting that Thomas's

*Second Objection: Is Rapture Inconsistent with Thomas's
Broader Account of Cognition?*

A second objection that might be raised against my privileging of rapture, and therefore might also explain why rapture has not received much attention in recent appropriations of Thomas's teaching, is that rapture appears to be at odds with broader principles of Aquinas's cognitive theory. St. Thomas consistently maintains that human knowledge must begin with sense perception of material beings.⁴⁸ In rapture, though, the human knower is supposed to have a direct glimpse of the divine essence without the mediation of sense perception or even imagination.⁴⁹ Thus, the very possibility of rapture would seem to fly in the face of Thomas's other views about human cognition.

Fortunately, this objection is easy to answer, as Aquinas himself anticipated the difficulty and resolved it for us. Thomas does maintain that during the act of rapture one must "be completely withdrawn from the bodily senses (*oportet quod . . . omnino abstrahatur homo a corporeis sensibus*)" and that "one cannot be raised to the vision of the divine essence unless [one] is wholly deprived of the use of the bodily senses (*non potest aliquis videre divinam essentiam nisi abstrahatur ab usu sensuum corporeorum penitus*)."⁵⁰ But he explains that, even though this is not the natural mode of knowledge for humans in this life, it is nevertheless made possible by a supernatural elevation to the way of knowing that is natural for humans in heaven.⁵¹ Thus, rapture is not so much opposed to the natural mode of

treatment of rapture here is really part of a much larger attempt to think very broadly about multiple modes of cognition, natural and supernatural alike. For all of these reasons, then, the objector's claim that all of Thomas's discussions of rapture are "more or less generalized forms of Scripture commentary" does not seem adequate to account for the richness of what Thomas is doing in these texts, nor does the allegation that Thomas's interest in rapture derives merely from the need to explain a few puzzling lines of Scripture ring true.

⁴⁸ See, for example, *DI*, q. 13, a. 1, resp.; q. 13, a. 2, resp.; *ST* I, q. 84, a. 6, resp.; I, q. 84, a. 7, resp.; I, q. 85, a. 1, resp.; *ScG* I, ch. 30, par. 3; *In DT*, q. 1, a. 3, resp.; q. 6, a. 1, resp. (reply to the second question); and q. 6, a. 2, resp.

⁴⁹ See *DI*, q. 13, a. 2, ad 9.

⁵⁰ *DI*, q. 13, a. 3, resp.

⁵¹ See *DI*, q. 13, a. 1, resp. and q. 13, a. 1, ad 1. Someone still wishing to problematize rapture as being incompatible with Thomas's broader account of cognition might be tempted to cite *ST* I, q. 89, a. 1, resp., where Thomas maintains that it is possible for the separated soul to understand intelligible objects without phantasms (viz., through divinely infused species), but he also notes that such knowledge would be imperfect, general, and confused because it is not natural for the soul to be separated from the body or, thus, to understand in this way. As Aquinas goes on to explain, though, when the soul is separated from the body and

human knowledge as it is a remarkable perfection of the mode that is natural to this stage of human existence and an anticipation of the mode that will be natural in the next.⁵²

Thomas himself seems to allow, then, that the dependence on sense perception of material beings that is natural for knowledge in this stage of our existence is not an absolute requirement of all human cognition. So, if rapture has been marginalized in our appropriations of Thomas's teaching, it cannot be because rapture is inconsistent with Thomas's broader account of cognition: for that broader account includes not only natural reason, but also supernatural modes of cognition such as faith, prophecy, rapture, and the beatific vision. Could it be, then, that Thomas's teaching on rapture has been neglected because it conflicts with principles more dear to us than fidelity to Thomas's teaching? Principles, say, of Aristotelian or empiricist epistemology, which might be juxtaposed with more Platonic, Augustinian, or even scriptural views?⁵³ If so, we might

receives species through participation in the divine light, "*neither* is this way of knowledge *not natural*, for God is the author not only of the influx of the light of grace, but also [of the light] of nature/*Nec tamen propter hoc cognitio non est naturalis: quia Deus est auctor non solum influentiae gratuiti luminis, sed etiam naturalis*" (ST I, q. 89, a. 1, ad 3, emphasis mine). Moreover, Thomas later clarifies that he is treating natural knowledge in this section of the text (see ST I, q. 89, a. 8, resp.) and that the knowledge of glory does not suffer the same defects and imperfections that beset the natural knowledge of separated souls (see ST I, q. 89, a. 2, resp.). Thus, while the separated human soul, left to its natural powers, might have only imperfect knowledge of intelligible objects, that fact has no bearing on the status of rapture, which arises under the influence of the *lumen gloriae*.

⁵² We might note here that in ST I, q. 88, where Thomas asks whether the human soul can know immaterial substances in themselves, he argues that it cannot because the soul has a "natural relationship to the natures of material things, and therefore it can only understand by turning to the phantasms" (ST I, q. 88, a. 1, resp.). But, throughout this question, Thomas consistently adds the qualification that this is true of the soul "in its present state of life" (see ST I, q. 88, a. 1, resp.; I, q. 88, a. 1, ad 3; and I, q. 88, a. 3, resp.). Thus, even while Thomas insists on the importance of phantasms and on the intellect's proper object being the quiddity of a material thing, he reminds us to be circumspect about the fact that human cognition does not always occur under these conditions.

⁵³ While a more neo-Platonic view of cognition could provide the requisite openness to the possibility of cognition without sense perception, Torrell suggests that, for Thomas, both Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism are always subordinate to Scripture and Christian teaching (see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*. Volume Two: *Spiritual Master* [hereafter, *Spiritual Master*], trans. Robert Royal [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003], 57, 62, and *The Person and His Work*, 116, 153, 155, 228, 238–39). And it certainly seems likely that rapture entered Thomas's thought first as a scriptural and religious concern. At the same time, any philosophical account of cognition that Thomas

wish to re-consider not only the coherence of rapture with Thomas's broader account of cognition, but also the commitments that shape our appropriation of Thomas's teaching.

*Third Objection: Did Thomas Retreat
from Rapture in the Summa Theologiae?*

A third objection could be raised against my privileging of rapture by taking exception with my focus on Thomas's *Disputed Questions on Truth*. It might be the case, one could argue, that rapture is an important mode of cognition in this early disputation, but that rapture also appears to have been relegated to a far less significant place in the *Summa theologiae*, which is widely regarded as Thomas's *magnum opus* and the best guide to his mature thinking. Thus, according to this account, Thomas himself would seem ultimately to have rejected rapture as an important concern, at least in comparison with reason and faith.

In response to this objection, I would like to make two points. First, it is not at all clear that Thomas's perspective on rapture changed from his early *De veritate* to his later *Summa theologiae*. In fact, a quick glance at these two texts shows that the substance of Thomas's teaching on rapture remained remarkably the same.⁵⁴ Most saliently, Thomas continued to present rapture as a direct vision of the divine essence received in this life by a person who is elevated by the light of glory and withdrawn from sense perception without her soul being separated from her body.

What did change, of course, was the apparent prominence of rapture's place within each work as a whole. In *De veritate*, rapture is situated right alongside Thomas's investigations of reason, faith, and prophecy. And, since the *De veritate* contains only twenty-nine questions, the fact that rapture is the subject of an entire question makes it seem like a relatively important topic. In the *Summa theologiae*, rapture is still the subject of an entire question; but, in the sea of the hundreds of questions that comprise that text, the

could embrace would have to be reconcilable with the possibilities for supernatural cognition to which Thomas's faith commits him, including the possibility of a direct vision of the divine essence.

⁵⁴ See *DV*, q. 13 and *ST* II–II, q. 175. Articles three, four, five, and six of *ST* II–II, q. 175 are remarkably parallel to articles two, three, four, and five of *DV*, q. 13. Article one of *ST* II–II, q. 175 and article one of *DV*, q. 13 both deal with the issue of whether rapture is natural or contrary to nature for human beings. In both texts, Thomas tries to maintain that rapture is natural in certain respects and contrary to nature in others, although he invokes different categories and different distinctions to make this point in each text. Finally, in article two of *ST* II–II, q. 175, Thomas addresses the role of appetite in rapture, expanding upon and adding to his treatment of this issue in *DV*, q. 13, a. 2, ad 6.

single question on rapture seems less significant. Moreover, the discussion of rapture is located in the one hundred and seventy-fifth question of the *secunda secundae*—hardly a high traffic location. It is not entirely surprising, then, that reason and faith, which are discussed in more visible places in the *Summa*, have garnered more attention from readers of that text.

However, the simple fact that only one question is devoted to rapture in the *Summa theologiae* certainly does not mean the topic is unimportant. After all, natural law receives only one question in the *Summa*, and the “five ways” are squeezed into a single article.⁵⁵ But these topics are widely regarded as important among readers of Aquinas.

Neither does the fact that the discussion of rapture is not prominently located in the *Summa* necessarily imply that the topic is less important in Thomas’s mind. The structure of the *Summa* is complex, and it is shaped by both scientific and pedagogical aspirations that must trump even Thomas’s personal judgment about the relative interest or importance of a particular matter. To begin with, since *sacra doctrina* is a subalternate science, its principles cannot be *per se nota* but must be borrowed from a higher science.⁵⁶ Thus, the principles of sacred doctrine are received through revelation and faith. Now, faith makes use of reason as grace perfects nature.⁵⁷ And, of course, any science must employ reason to deduce conclusions from its principles. So sacred doctrine must employ both faith and reason, and one would expect them to figure prominently in Thomas’s efforts in the *Summa* to show how theology can be a science.⁵⁸ The act of rapture, on the other hand, cannot be employed when doing *sacra doctrina* because rapture comprises a direct vision of the divine essence and therefore transcends the subalternate character of sacred doctrine.⁵⁹ From a scientific perspective, then, it makes perfect

⁵⁵ One might object, here, that while natural law is the explicit focus of only one question in the *Summa*, the topic is discussed elsewhere in the text (most notably, in other articles of the so-called “treatise on law”). But, of course, rapture is also discussed in questions other than II–II, q. 175 (see, for example, *ST* I, q. 12, a. 11, ad 2). So the objection really does not weaken the comparison I have drawn above.

⁵⁶ See *ST* I, q. 1, a. 2, resp. and I, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1. See also *In DT*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 5.

⁵⁷ See *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2 and I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1.

⁵⁸ See especially *ST* I, q. 1. On *sacra doctrina* as a science, see, for example, John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (hereafter, *Knowledge and Faith*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 51–77, especially 66–76. Mark Johnson, however, argues that *sacra doctrina* is not merely a science but “a wisdom” in “God’s Knowledge in Our Frail Minds: The Thomistic Model of Theology,” *Angelicum* 76 (1999): 25–45.

⁵⁹ Indeed, rapture cannot be said to be “employed” at all because it is a supernatural act that is not within the power of human beings but can only be given to us through a special act of grace.

sense that faith and reason should be featured in the opening “methodological” question of the *Summa* while rapture should not appear there. But one might reasonably suppose that the absence of rapture in this passage is an effect of its perfection as a mode of knowing God, not of being relegated to a lesser status among the modes of cognition.

Of course, rapture is still part of the content of theology, and should properly be considered by sacred doctrine in this way. Now, the subject of sacred doctrine is God, both in himself and as the beginning and end of creatures. Thus, Thomas divides the *Summa* into three parts: part one treats of God; part two treats of the rational creature’s advance toward God; and part three treats of Christ as the way of human beings to God.⁶⁰ Obviously, as a brief glimpse of the divine essence, rapture must be considered part of the rational creature’s advance toward God, and is properly discussed in the *secunda pars*. The second part of the *Summa* is itself divided into two parts: the *prima secundae* considers the general principles of human acts, and the *secunda secundae* considers details of human acts.⁶¹ The *secunda secundae* begins by considering “virtues and vices that pertain to people of all conditions and estates” and then turns to “those things that pertain especially to certain people.”⁶² Throughout these divisions of the *secunda pars*, we see Thomas’s pedagogical principles at work, for he begins

⁶⁰ See *ST* 1.2, prologue. On the structure of the *Summa*, see, for example, Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 304–18; Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 148–59; idem, *Spiritual Master*, 53–58; and Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith*, 91–95, 219–25.

⁶¹ See *ST* I–II, q. 6, prologue. This division, which I have stated as though it were transparent, can in fact be difficult to follow through the various twists and turns of the *prima secundae*. Thomas begins this part of the *Summa*, which treats the general principles of human actions, by considering human acts and passions themselves (q. 6 and following). Then he considers the principles of human actions, turning first to habit as an intrinsic principle (q. 49 and following). He proceeds to discuss habits specifically, which is to say as they are divided into good habits (or virtues, q. 55 and following) and bad habits (or vices, q. 71 and following). Finally, Thomas examines extrinsic principles of human action in his discussions of law (q. 90 and following) and grace (q. 109 to the end of the *prima secundae*). All of this, then, falls under the rubric of general principles of human acts that Thomas creates in the prologue to question six of the *prima secundae*. The *secunda secundae* will comprise Thomas’s investigation of the other rubric in this prologue, namely, details of human acts.

⁶² *ST* II–II, q. 171, prologue. Thomas discusses the theological and cardinal virtues in II–II, qq. 1–170. His treatment of those things that pertain especially to certain people begins at II–II, q. 171, and is divided into three sections: differences that arise from various gratuitous graces, differences that arise from different ways of life, and differences that arise from different duties and states of life.

with what is more general and moves toward what is more specific.⁶³ Since rapture is an experience of grace not granted to all people, it is properly considered in the latter portion of the *secunda secundae* among the things that pertain only to certain people. Thus, Thomas's understanding of the scientific order of *sacra doctrina* leads him to consider rapture in the second part of the *Summa*, and his pedagogical convictions lead him to locate his discussion of rapture in the latter sections of the *secunda secundae*. Rapture's place in the *Summa* seems, then, to be determined by the architectonic principles of the work, and we do not need to posit any devaluation of rapture on Thomas's part to make sense of its location in the text. Indeed, the question on rapture comes a few questions before Thomas's discussion of the religious life and several questions before his discussion of Christ; surely we would not consider these topics to be devalued by Thomas because of their location in the text.

Even if the *De veritate* and the *Summa* accounts of rapture were at odds with one another, though, it is not clear to me that one should simply presume in favor of the *Summa*'s view. I think the tendency automatically to privilege the *Summa* over Thomas's other works is a practice that needs to be scrutinized; for it seems to me that, in certain ways, the disputed questions provide a better expression of Thomas's perspective than the *Summa*.⁶⁴ For example, we must remember that, while St. Thomas is a towering intellectual figure, he was not a solitary genius hidden away from other people and their ideas. Thomas's life and his thinking were profoundly shaped by community. He spent much of his youth in a

⁶³ For Thomas's notion that our knowledge progresses from the general to the particular, see *ST* I, q. 14, a. 6, resp.; I, q. 85, a. 3, sc; I, q. 85, a. 3, resp.; *ScG* III, ch. 80; and *In DT*, q. 1, a. 3, resp.

⁶⁴ Regarding Aquinas's disputed questions, Chenu states: "With the *Quaestiones disputatae* which Saint Thomas held while his career as a master was in full swing, we are dealing with the finished product of scholastic thought (both philosophical and theological), as well as with the richest accomplishment of his personal genius" (*Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 280). Regarding the *Summa theologiae*, on the other hand, Chenu has gone so far as to warn that "the praise directed toward the *Summa theologiae* throughout the centuries, the technical difficulties one encounters in it, the power of the synthesis it contains should not mask the original purpose for which it was written . . . By the author's own avowal, it was dedicated to the instruction of beginners in theology. The *Disputed Questions* were the book suited to masters, the *Summa* is the book of the pupil" (*Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 297–98). While there is much truth in Chenu's broad claims about the relationship between the *Summa* and the disputed questions, the point I wish to make in what follows is more modest, namely, that the disputed questions manifest the communal nature of Thomas's thought more fully than the *Summa*.

Benedictine monastery, which must have been an intensely communal experience. The early Dominican constitutions—and the Augustinian rule from which they took inspiration—were also very concerned with community, suggesting that Thomas's life as a Dominican was both deeply and conscientiously communal.⁶⁵ And Thomas's experience of the intellectual life in its university context would also have been profoundly communal. The medieval university was, after all, modeled on the guilds, which were communities devoted to the practice and transmission of arts. Both as a student and as a master, Thomas's days would have been

⁶⁵ I have in mind here things like the Dominican desire for communal unity, as well as the notion that study and contemplation are for the sake of one's neighbor. See the prologue of *The Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers*: "Because a precept of our Rule commands us to have one heart and one mind in the Lord, it is fitting that we, who live under one rule and under the vow of one profession, be found uniform in the observance of canonical religious life, in order that the uniformity maintained in our external conduct may foster and indicate the unity which should be present interiorly in our hearts Our study ought to tend principally, ardently, and with the highest endeavor to the end that we might be useful to the souls of our neighbors" (*St. Dominic—Biographical Documents*, ed. Francis C. Lehner [Washington, DC: Thomist Press, 1964], 212). As an illustration of early Dominican life's indebtedness to the *Rule of St. Augustine*, consider chapter 15 of the same work: "The manner of making profession is the following: *I, Brother . . . make profession and promise obedience to God and to Blessed Mary and to you N., Master of the Order of Preachers, and to your successors according to the Rule of Blessed Augustine and the Institutes of the Friars of the Order of Preachers that I will be obedient to you and to your successors until death.* But when it is made to someone who is a prior, the formula is: *I, Brother . . . make profession and promise obedience to God, and to Blessed Mary and to you, N., Prior of this place, for N., the Master of the Order of Preachers, and for his successors, according to the rule of Blessed Augustine and the Institutes of the Friars of the Order of Preachers, that I will be obedient to you and your successors until death*" (Lehner, 222). The importance of community is also evident in the *Rule of St. Augustine*. See, for example, Chapter 1.2: "The primary reason for which you have come together as one is so that you might dwell as one soul in your home and so that you might be of one mind and one heart in God." (The English translation is my own, following the Latin text from the critical edition in Luc Verheijen, *La Règle de Saint Augustin*, vol. 1 [Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1967], 417.) Torrell has thematized the issue of community in Thomas's thought (noting, for example, the importance of friendship) (see *Spiritual Master*, 198, 277–78, 281, 306, 309). And he even flirts with the notion—borrowed from Chenu—that Thomas's theology is connected with his being a member of the Dominican Order (see *Spiritual Master*, 376–77, 380–83). In my opinion, however, he does not adequately explore the ways in which Thomas and his thinking were influenced by the communities in which he lived, prayed, and wrote. Mary Ann Fatula, O.P., goes further by connecting the theme of friendship in Aquinas's writings with various friendships that shaped his life (e.g., his relationships with Albert and Reginald). See *Thomas Aquinas, Preacher and Friend* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), esp. 31–58.

spent not only in the halls where *lectio* played out as a public act, but also at work in the more fundamentally communal practice of disputation. Thus, as stylized records of the collaborative questioning, debating, and determining that occurred under Thomas's guidance (though not exclusively in his voice), the disputed questions reveal, in an especially clear way, Thomas's perspective as a participant in the practices of his intellectual and religious communities, practices that shaped not only the form of Thomas's writings but also the content of his thought.⁶⁶

The *Summa theologiae*, on the other hand, seems largely derivative when considered in this regard. To say this is not to detract from the accomplishment of the *Summa*.⁶⁷ But we must bear in mind that the *Summa* was written to serve some very specific functions. For example, the *Summa* clearly represents an attempt to organize theological learning on the model of Aristotelian science, which is not the only way even Thomas himself seems to have imagined that it could be organized.⁶⁸ We

⁶⁶ It seems to me that the communal practices of disputation shaped the content of Thomas's thought in at least two significant ways. First, there are obviously arguments in Thomas's disputed questions that were made by other members of his *studium*. While some of these arguments are opposed to Thomas's view, others advance his position. Moreover, Thomas's articulation of his own position—even in the *corpus* of many articles—is clearly shaped by concerns and difficulties raised in the arguments to which he must ultimately respond. Second, and perhaps more controversially, I believe that the very practice of seeking truth in a communal way influenced Thomas's understanding of truth as ultimately being interpersonal (i.e., a relationship between God and the human knower, as manifested in Thomas's discussions of transcendental truth in the opening articles of *De veritate* or his account of the beatific vision). For more on the disputed question as a communal exercise, see Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 88–91, 301; Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 60–61; and M. Michèle Mulchahey, “First the Bow is Bent in Study . . .” *Dominican Education before 1350* (hereafter, *Dominican Education*) (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), 133–34, 167, 169, 170–72.

⁶⁷ Torrell, for example, describes the *Summa* as “the most beautiful specimen” in the genre of “pro and contra” (*The Person and His Work*, 63) and “the ripest fruit of Friar Thomas's genius” (*Spiritual Master*, 303). I do not deny the beauty of the *Summa*—its splendor, its form, and its clarity—nor do I mean to deny the many other virtues that have led generations of scholars to regard it as Thomas's *magnum opus*. But acknowledging the greatness of a work does not necessarily entail judging it to be the greatest in every respect.

⁶⁸ For evidence that the *Summa* was intended to order theology on the model of an Aristotelian science, see *ST* prologue and I, q. 1, a. 2. Cf. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, 303–8; Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 149–59; idem, *Spiritual Master*, 54ff.; and Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith*, 91–95. As evidence that Thomas himself understood that theology could be organized in other ways, we need only consider Thomas's *Commentary on the Sentences* and his *Summa contra Gentiles*, both of which comprise large scale syntheses of theological learning.

also know that the *Summa* was intended for beginners in the study of theology.⁶⁹ Given what we know about Thomas's views on how knowledge develops, we would therefore expect that this text would provide a broad sense of how theological knowledge fits together as a whole but that it might be lacking in matters of detail concerning the various parts of theology.⁷⁰ Moreover, not all "beginners" are the same, and we should ask precisely which beginners Thomas had in mind when he wrote the *Summa*. Were they students matriculating from the arts faculty into the theology faculty at the University of Paris or students undertaking theological studies in the new Dominican *studia* Thomas was helping to form in Italy? If it was the former group of students, then the aspirations of the *Summa* might have been adequately realized in Thomas's shaping the content and structure of specifically theological learning. The more widely accepted theory, though, is that Thomas wrote the *Summa* for his students in the Dominican *studia*.⁷¹ In light of this, it would seem that part of the *Summa*'s task must have been to export the university intellectual community to the new *studia* by initiating Dominican students into the *practices* of the university intellectual community.⁷² (In this way,

⁶⁹ See *ST* prologue. The view that the *Summa* was written for beginners is widely espoused. See, for example, Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, 297–98; Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 145; idem, *Spiritual Master*, 53–54; and Leonard Boyle, O.P., *The Setting of the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas* (hereafter, *Setting of the Summa*) (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), 14–15, 17–18. Jenkins attempts to qualify that these were not "rank beginners" in *Knowledge and Faith*, 79–98. And Mark Johnson tries to offer a *via media* between Boyle's and Jenkins's views in "Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* as Pedagogy," in *Medieval Education*, ed. Ronald Begley and Joseph Koterski (New York: Fordham, 2005): 133–42.

⁷⁰ For the notion that the intellect first grasps the whole and then progresses toward knowledge of its parts, see *ST* I, q. 85, a. 3, resp.; I, q. 85, a. 3, ad 2; I, q. 85, a. 3, ad 3; *In DT*, q. 1, a. 3, resp.; *Commentary on the Physics*, bk. 1, lectio 1, par. 7–11; and *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, bk. 2, lectio 1, par. 278.

⁷¹ See, for example, Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 142–46; Mulchahey, *Dominican Education*, 280, 293; and Boyle, *Setting of the Summa*, 14–15, 17–18, 30. Jenkins, however, argues that the *Summa* was written for university theology students (*Knowledge and Faith*, 85–90, especially 89). While Jenkins brings helpful nuance to our understanding of the "beginners" for whom the *Summa* was written, his contention that the *Summa* was written for university students must be reconsidered in light of the rich historical account of Dominican education presented by Mulchahey, whose *Dominican Education* appeared a year after Jenkins's own book.

⁷² Mulchahey notes the influence of the *studia generalia* on the format of education in the Dominican schools (see *Dominican Education*, 134). Gilles Mongeau, S.J., explores the pedagogy of the *Summa* as a set of spiritual exercises, but he does not explore ways in which this pedagogy also provides a communal formation. See Mongeau, "The Spiritual Pedagogy of the *Summa theologiae*," *Nova et Vetera* 2.1 (2004): 91–114.

the *Summa theologiae* might have been as much of a “missionary work” as the *Summa contra Gentiles* is sometimes supposed to have been, for the practices embodied in the *Summa theologiae* would themselves have helped to provide a communal formation for the non-university Dominican student.) This theory helps to make sense of the simplified *quaestio* format of the *Summa*: for the initiate (or apprentice) must be eased into the community’s (or guild’s) practices, and disputation, while familiar to graduates of the university arts faculty, would have been more foreign to non-university students. This theory would also suggest, though, that Thomas intended the *Summa* to prepare students for the full-blown communal practices recorded in the *De veritate* and other disputed questions—as a book of etudes, for example, prepares an individual musician to play with an ensemble. Of course, if this is correct, then the disputed questions would seem to offer a fuller expression of Thomas’s perspective as a member of intellectual community than is afforded by the more propaedeutic *Summa theologiae*; and, therefore, if the views in the disputed questions differ from the views in the *Summa*, one might do well to bear in mind that the disputed questions bear witness to an authentic aspect of Thomas’s theologizing that does not shine through so clearly in the *Summa*.⁷³ This would seem especially important when what is at stake is the privileging of rapture that we find in Thomas’s interpersonal account of truth in *De veritate*; for, in this teaching, Thomas’s deeply communal lifestyle, his intellectual practices, and his doctrine coalesce.

Conclusion

If what I have suggested here is at all persuasive, it would imply that rapture, far from being a marginal concern or even an inconsistency in

⁷³ Again, to privilege the disputed questions in this respect is not to prefer them over the *Summa* in every way. And it is certainly not to deny the possibility of development in doctrine from an early work (such as *De veritate*) to a later work (such as the *Summa*). Obviously, when such development occurs, the later work must be taken to reveal Thomas’s final opinion (although it must also be acknowledged that the bare fact that one view was penned later than another does not necessarily make it the better view, even considered simply within the context of an author’s own “system” of thought). Nevertheless, we must also bear in mind the purpose(s) for which a work was written, as well as its audience, its context, and the occasion of the text, so that we can appreciate the ways in which these factors might influence what the author states and how he chooses to state it. Chronologically, the *Summa* was indeed Aquinas’s last word on many subjects. Pedagogically, however, it was meant to be something more like a *first* word. And these are just two of the many variables that must be taken into account when we assess the value of Thomas’s many works with respect to the various uses to which we readers might put them.

Thomas's portrayal of human knowing, occupies an important place in the interpersonal account of truth and cognition that Thomas presents in his *Disputed Questions on Truth*. Indeed, as a direct vision of the divine essence, rapture comprises the highest mode of cognition that a human being can experience in this life. Moreover, while the *De veritate* account helps us to see the relationship between rapture and other modes of cognition with special clarity, the substance of Thomas's teaching on rapture remains the same throughout his career. Thus, we must afford rapture a prominent place not only in our reading of the *Disputed Questions on Truth*, but in our understanding of Thomas's thought in general.

Lest we think that the significance of rapture in Aquinas's writings is merely a matter of exegetical importance, though, let me conclude by noting a few ways in which an adequate appreciation of the importance of rapture in Aquinas's teaching—beyond providing us with a deeper understanding of his account of cognition—carries broader implications for how we understand Thomas's thought and its place in western intellectual life.

It goes almost without saying that there is a long interpretive tradition of emphasizing the Aristotelian philosophical elements of Aquinas's writings, and it is beyond doubt that Aquinas was deeply influenced by his engagement with Aristotle's philosophy. In recent years, though, there has been increasing discussion of the neo-Platonic, theological, and even mystical elements of Aquinas's thought, and I believe the present study has something to contribute to those conversations.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ For discussion of Aquinas and neo-Platonism, see the classic studies by Louis-Bertrand Geiger, O.P., *La participation dans la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1953); Cornelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquin* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950); and idem, *Participation et causalité selon saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961). More recently, see, for example, Rudi a te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1995); Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1992); Wayne Hankey, "Aquinas and the Platonists," in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, ed. Stephen Gersh and Marten Hoenen (New York: de Gruyter, 2002), 279–324; D. C. Schindler, "What's the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in Plato, Plotinus, and Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera* 5.3 (2007): 583–618; and Richard Schenk, O.P., "From Providence to Grace: Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-Thirteenth Century," *Nova et Vetera* 3.2 (2005): 307–20.

On the theological nature of Aquinas's thought, see Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, 116, 153, 155, 174, 228, 238–39; idem, *Spiritual Master*, vii, 370. See also Thomas O'Meara, O.P., *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), xi.

Finally, on mystical aspects of Aquinas's theology, see Torrell, *The Person and His Work*, xxi, 89; idem, *Spiritual Master*, vii, viii, 3, 66, 76, 97; idem, "St. Thomas Aquinas:

To begin with, appreciating the importance of rapture helps us to see at least one way in which Thomas's teaching on cognition resonates with the neo-Platonic tradition.⁷⁵ The very possibility of direct knowledge of an immaterial being—much less the divine essence—poses challenges for a straightforwardly Aristotelian theory of cognition in which all human knowing originates in sense perception. But neo-Platonic accounts of cognition—especially Augustinian ones—are more obviously equipped to explain direct vision of immaterial entities such as the vision of the divine essence that occurs in the act of rapture, and Thomas's incorporating these acts into his broader account of cognition seems to constitute a resonance with the neo-Platonic tradition.

The importance of rapture in Aquinas's thought also reminds us that Thomas's theory of cognition is shaped in crucial ways by theological concerns and not merely by philosophical ones. To be sure, philosophy can raise questions about the possibility of knowing the divine essence. But the belief that the act of rapture occurs seems, for Thomas, to be more of a theological conviction than a philosophical one. That Thomas elaborates an account of cognition that accommodates the experience of rapture, therefore, suggests that this account is shaped by theological concerns as well as by philosophical ones.

Theologian and Mystic," *Nova et Vetera* 4.1 (2006): 1–16; Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., *Aquinas and His Role in Theology*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 45, 47ff. See also Heather McAdam Erb, "'Pati Divina': Mystical Union in Aquinas," in *Faith, Scholarship, and Culture in the 21st Century*, ed. Alice Ramos and Marie George (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002): 73–96; idem, "Being and the Mystic: The Metaphysical Foundations of Aquinas' Mystical Thought," *Verbum* 6.1 (2004): 135–59. Oddly, while Erb champions the mystical aspects of Aquinas's thought, she seems to downplay the importance of "supernatural phenomena" such as rapture (see, for example, "Pati Divina," 74, 85, 87, 88, and "Being and the Mystic," 140, 151–52). Chenu takes a similar tack in *Aquinas and His Role in Theology*, 51.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, while Thomas's reliance upon neo-Platonism in his metaphysics is now widely accepted (in particular, with respect to the role of participation in his thought), the influence of neo-Platonism on Thomas's account of cognition has been less widely explored and less widely embraced by mainstream Thomists. However, for works that consider the neo-Platonic backdrop of Aquinas's views on cognition—even if only in passing—see Kevin Doherty, S.J., "St. Thomas and the Pseudo-Dionysian Symbol of Light," *The New Scholasticism* 34 (April 1960): 170–89; Cornelio Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27.3 (1974): 449–91; and Deborah Black, "The Influence of the *De divinis nominibus* on the Epistemology of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Studies Conference* 10 (1985): 41–52.

Finally, the kinds of theological concerns manifested in Thomas's treatment of rapture have tended to be associated with mystical theologians more than with scholastic ones. Because scholars do not often cross the lines between mysticism and scholasticism, and because Thomas is often regarded as a quintessentially scholastic thinker, one can understand how students of Aquinas and students of mysticism alike might have looked past Thomas's discussions of rapture. If my arguments about the importance of rapture in Aquinas's thought have force, though, it would seem that we must (re)conceive Thomas's scholasticism in a way that is more open to those elements of his writings that might be regarded as "mystical."

Thus, in addition to fostering a deeper understanding of Thomas's views on cognition, acknowledging the importance of rapture in Aquinas's thought should also lend support to those swelling currents of scholarship that seek to draw out the neo-Platonic, theological, and even mystical elements of Aquinas's teaching. And this, in turn, should contribute to the ongoing project of discerning Thomas's place within the traditions that comprise the history of western thought.⁷⁶ **N V**

⁷⁶ I would like to thank Kevin Hughes for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.