

The Acts of “Turning” and “Returning” in Aquinas

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Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I shall offer a reading of Thomas Aquinas’s notion of consciousness from the perspective of how he views the intellectual “embrace.”¹ As an *act*, consciousness can be appropriately named an “embrace.”² God’s knowledge of the world is accordingly understood to be an all-encompassing embrace that necessarily circumscribes created realities. All things are thus fully known in and by God. A creature of God capable of knowing never fully approximates nor exactly imitates the divine embrace of creation. Nevertheless, to acquire knowledge for the creature through an intellectual embrace requires analogical reference to God’s manner of knowing. For Aquinas, human consciousness in particular is an act of an intellect united to objects existing outside yet remaining within the agent, an intellectual embrace of something “other” through which the subject becomes aware of its own activity.³ Such a short-hand explanation is dependent upon the notion that God always remains God in knowing that which is other. Absent any reference to a necessarily sensual interaction with the other, and one gains a first glimpse into divine knowing. Here I shall show that Aquinas understands

¹ An argument for a greater sense of the bodily nature of God’s embrace is advanced in Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: Word, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), *passim*, esp. 184.

² I have availed myself of the following translations of Thomas Aquinas: *Summa contra Gentiles* [ScG], 4 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975 [1955–56]); *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* [De veritate], 3 vols. (London: Hackett, 1994 [1954]); *Summa theologiae* [ST], 60 vols. (London: Blackfriars, 1962–76).

³ ST I, q. 94, a. 2; Blackfriars XIII, 91–95; ST I, q. 85, a. 2; Blackfriars XIII, 57–65; ST I, q. 87, a. 3; Blackfriars XIII, 113–17.

the act of consciousness for the human being to be an act remaining in the agent (*manens in ipso*) that is also incorporative of the material other through an externalization of, or “exit from,” itself (*exiens ab ipso*) in the form of sense knowledge. Furthermore, it is instructive to place this way of human knowing within the context of the much broader theme of creation’s exit from and return to God. Human knowing thus emulates the pattern of existence that is marked by an “exit” from God’s all-knowing embrace vis-à-vis creation and its subsequent redemptive pilgrimage of return. In a nod to J. R. R. Tolkien, we might say that the pattern is akin to a motion of “There and Back Again.” Furthermore, to return to God, and for consciousness to return from its object to itself, is to be expanded and enriched.

The Exitus-Reditus Pattern of Human and Divine Knowing

The human intellect gathers itself together from its contact with exterior things.⁴ Through this motion of gathering, the soul can come to adequate knowledge of its operations: “through knowledge of them [things outside] complete knowledge can be gained of our own intellectual functioning—knowledge of activity (*actus*) through knowledge of its object. Furthermore, through its functioning (*operationem*) the human intellect itself can be completely known—knowledge of capacity through its activation (*actum*).”⁵ The human power of intellection is not activated by itself in a mode of self-sufficiency. Rather, “intellectual activity is specified by the knowledge-form which makes the intellect to be actually knowing; and this form (*species*) is the knowledge-likeness of the principal object known.”⁶ A human intellect “actually knowing” is made possible by the species of an external object, which, as we shall see, is abstracted from the object by the power of intellection. The *species* is not already present within the knower. For it to be *in* the self-conscious knower, an extension (*extensio*) to what is not-self is required. As we shall see, this *extensio* can be understood as a kind of “embrace.”

In contrast, divine knowing possesses all *species* of things within itself without requiring a determination from something “external” to itself: the “likeness in God is no other than his essence, in which the intelligible natures are included (*comprehenditur*). Thus there is no question of the divine act of knowledge, or rather God himself, being specified by anything other than the divine essence.”⁷ According to Aquinas, the proper meaning

⁴ ST I, q. 94, a. 2 co.; Blackfriars XIII, 93.

⁵ ST I, q. 94, a. 2 co. Blackfriars XIII, 95.

⁶ ST I, q. 14, a. 5, ad 3; Blackfriars IV, 21.

⁷ ST I, q. 14, a. 5, ad 3; Blackfriars IV, 21.

of *comprehendere* is "one thing enclosing another (*habens et includens alterum*). Taken in that sense, all that is comprehended must be finite, as all that is enclosed must be."⁸ Things are in God because they are in his knowledge. God contains all created existents in two ways: (1) by intelligible likenesses present as a result of God's creative power; and (2) by the goodness with which he existentially sustains and governs them.⁹ God's creative power remains in God but "extends" to things other than God so that through his power God can know what is other without becoming that other.

Aquinas uses the image of remaining in the self (*manens in ipso*) as an apt means of describing the revealed knowledge that there are processions within God. Aquinas argues that we "cannot conceive divine processions except as corresponding to actions which remain within the agent (*actiones quae in agente manent*)."¹⁰ If we were to say that divine processions could be conceived as somehow exiting the agent, then we would be following the road of Arianism or Sabellianism. According to Aquinas, "careful study of these opinions shows that both took procession to be going forth to something outside (*ad aliquid extra*). This is why neither posited procession within God himself."¹¹ These opinions were unable to see an alternative that would allow for procession within God without subordinating the Son or the Spirit to the unoriginate Father. Aquinas preserves the notion of processions within God by means of the "actions which remain in the agent," namely, understanding and willing. Understanding provides the best analogy for conceiving of processions.

The type of procession involved concerns the aim of the procession, whether it is directed outward or inward. An outward procession aims for what is external whereas an internal procession "remains within the agent." In the human act of understanding, what remains in the agent is the concept of the known thing; it is from this "word of the heart" that the spoken word proceeds outward to communicate what is internal to something external.¹² Aquinas's formulation of the act of the intellect as *remaining in the agent*, along with its usefulness for describing divine procession, will play a prominent role in my interpretation of Aquinas. We will see that it helps to explain Aquinas's use of the *exitus-reditus* schema inherited from

⁸ ST I, q. 14, a. 3, ad 1; Blackfriars IV, 15. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* [= *De veritate*], q. 2, a. 2, ad 5; *Truth*, 3 vols., trans. Robert W. Mulligan, James V. McGlynn, Robert W. Schmidt (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994 [1954]), vol. I, 64.

⁹ ST I, q. 39, a. 8 co.; Blackfriars VII, 137–39.

¹⁰ ST I, q. 27, a. 5 co.; Blackfriars VI, 19; ST I q. 27 a. 3 co.; Blackfriars VI, 13.

¹¹ ST I, q. 27, a. 1 co.; Blackfriars VI, 5.

¹² ST I, q. 27, a. 1 co.; Blackfriars VI, 5.

Neoplatonic thought. It also provides a useful context for relating inner and outer processions in Aquinas. Unlike the inner and eternal processions of the divine life, creatures “exit,” “flow out,” or “proceed” from God; they do so “outside of the unity of divine essence, and return to God in whom they have their end, rational creatures being brought back to their principle by the temporal processions of the divine persons.”¹³ The *exitus-reditus* pattern of human consciousness is evident in the relationships both between the remaining and exiting and between the conversion to the phantasm and the return to self.

God’s relation to the world is one of “comprehending” the world through God’s creative power. As such, the intelligible patterns (ideas) of all things are “contained” (intelligibly) in God. This containment is a type of “embrace,” an intellectual embrace. In a similar manner, human consciousness embraces things other than itself through its intellectual power. For human beings, however, self-return occurs through sensual reception of particular existents. Although particular existents are sensed and initially known in a sensual mode (materially), intellectual knowledge is knowledge of the universal (immaterial) essence of a particular existent.¹⁴ Always turned toward the world of existents, knowledge nevertheless eventually prescind from particulars. The human knower abides in this predicament as a result of his spirit-body composition: remaining rooted *in* the material, he simultaneously is able to transcend that material in an immaterial way.

The act of converting to the phantasm is an immaterial act incorporating material things. It is this immaterial incorporation that brings the human being closest to divine being: “an intellectual creature chiefly becomes like God by the fact that it is intellectual, for it has this sort of likeness over and above what other creatures have, and this likeness includes all others.”¹⁵ As an intellectual being, the human knower is able to encompass all other material likenesses within the self and thereby approximate most closely God’s manner of beholding all things within the divine essence.

I will be examining first Aquinas’s understanding of the conversion and return with particular attention directed toward the way in which he formulates the ability of the human intellect to “see the essences” of

¹³ Gilles Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, trans. Matthew Levering et al. (Ypsilanti, MI: Sapientia Press, 2003), 64.

¹⁴ *ST* I, q. 84, a. 7 co.; Blackfriars XII, 43.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* [= *ScG*] lib. 3 cap. 25 n. 8; *Summa contra Gentiles*, 4 vols., trans. Anton C. Pegis, James F. Anderson, Vernon J. Bourke, Charles J. O’Neil (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975 [1954–56]), here Bourke I, 99.

created existents (knowledge of the world), of one's own self (self-knowledge), and, at least in the Beatific Vision, of God (knowledge of God). What is of interest to us is the nature of "seeing": what is seen by the intellect, how something is intellectually seen, and, above all, the relationship that obtains between knowing our own processes of understanding and knowing God. In Aquinas's schema, "seeing" the essences is the necessary component of knowing something in an intellectual, immaterial way. All intellectual knowing must thus render the essence of something "visible" to the mind. This is a necessity insofar as intellectual knowledge is not possible without some form of "separation" (abstraction) from the material so that spiritual distance can be gained between the object and the knower whereby the knower can "judge" the degree of adequation of the essence known to the particular individual presented to it. Yet for Aquinas this adequation cannot be fully achieved without recourse to the "ideas" of the divine mind which are the perfect exemplars of what created existents are intended to be. Our inquiry therefore needs to include an explanation of how Aquinas understands divine knowing and its analogous relation to human knowing.

Divine self-knowledge also occurs through a return, but a return without a conversion to a phantasm. "For a thing to 'return to its own essence' (*redire ad essentiam suam*) is simply for it to be self-subsistent."¹⁶ The most perfect creaturely beings (such as angels) return to their essences without the complete return from the external object, even if their knowledge extends to sensible objects, because like God they are capable of beholding them in their essences.¹⁷ The completion or perfection of a return is based upon the degree that a knower is aware of its essence. Self-consciousness as the process of "knowing that they know" is variously complicated, as we have noted, by the activity of "going outside" which occurs in all intellectual substances that are not self-subsistent.

The primary distinction between God's perfect (self-subsistent) possession of self-knowledge and that of all created beings is rooted in different types of exit and return (*exitus-reditus*). We find this to be of particular import when considering the relationship between self-consciousness and identity. Human beings never fully know themselves, until, that is, the time when they will be fully known.¹⁸ God's self-knowledge is perfect, requiring no external reference for the completion of the divine identity.

Aquinas's formulation of divine self-knowledge is influenced by the Neoplatonism of Plotinus, Proclus, and the Pseudo-Dionysius. The tradition

¹⁶ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 2, ad 1; Blackfriars IV, 11.

¹⁷ *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 9 co.; *Truth* I, 42.

¹⁸ See 1 Cor 13:12.

of self-reference from Plotinus and Proclus is particularly important, since it is built upon an ontological metaphor from physical motion whereby circular motion is considered the most perfect type of “movement”:¹⁹ that which “returns upon itself” is the most perfect being. Oliva Blanchette calls the human intellect “pivotal” in the “emanation and return of being in the universe, from the Principle to the effect and back from the effect to the Principle, that is, in function of the intellectual creature whose role it is to collect (*colligere*) all things through its knowledge and lead them back to the Creator. Indeed, the very notion of *return* is closely related to the idea of universe, since *verti* in Latin means to turn.”²⁰ As Rousselot noted, however, Aquinas had not read the third of Plotinus’s *Enneads*, which contained the classical exposition on the appetite of all things for God; had he read this, according to Rousselot, he “would have found there some ideas he had made his own,” namely the commonality between connaturality and the “principle” of love.²¹

In the case of created intellects, ontological perfection is achieved through movement; this is in contradistinction to the divine intellect’s unmoved act.²² Yet for Aquinas movement must be understood “equivocally” (*æquivoce*) in any discussion of this “act of understanding” (*intelligere*).²³ Aquinas clarifies what he means by “equivocally” in relation to the expressions “to move” and “to be passive” in the act of understanding: “Aristotle uses the word ‘equivocal’ in a broad sense to include the analogical; thus he sometimes says that ‘being’ which is used analogically, is used equivocally of the different categories.”²⁴ Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that an “equivocal” definition is a particular type of analogy. An equivocal term can include analogy, but an analogous term need not be equivocal. “Movement” is considered equivocal for persons, because the intellectual act is always one; its operations are simultaneous in the order of understanding. We nonetheless require an explanation as to the “order” of the simultaneity of this understanding. The result is an account that must entail language that is *like* movement in that something is going from potency to act but *unlike* movement in that the intellect is not undergoing some material change in its location.

¹⁹ Cf. *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 2 co.; *Truth* I, 10; *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 8, ad 10; *Truth* II, 43.

²⁰ Oliva Blanchette, *The Perfection of the Universe According to Aquinas* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 298.

²¹ Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 117.

²² Cf. *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 1 co.; *Truth* II, 342.

²³ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 2, ad 2; *Blackfriars* IV, 11.

²⁴ *ST* I, q. 13, a. 10, ad 4; *Blackfriars* III, 89.

What is equivocal about "motion" or "passivity" for Aquinas is the shared *ratio* of knowing through contact with something that was previously unknown or not encountered, as in human knowing. The divine intellect obviously differs from this human process of "movement." The divine intellect is not moved by anything external: God beholds things within Himself and requires no external reference.²⁵ In accounting for God's knowledge of other things, we must note "that a thing can be known in two ways: in itself, or in another." To know something in another is to know in something that is not one's own; for instance, Aquinas uses the image of a mirror in which is seen a "likeness" of one's self.²⁶ Or, when the "eye" perceives a person through the likeness of a "species" the eye knows *in* another, as in seeing a picture of a person. God's knowing differs. God can reflect upon God's own essence, which contains all other essences. God has no need of "sensible likenesses," because God's power of creation, God's "ideas" of created existents, are contained in the divine essence. Beings issue forth from God as from the first cause. God thus knows their being through God's own power of causality. God requires no conversion to a phantasm, simply because the entirety of creation is "in" God through God's creative knowledge. It is through participation in this divine creative "light" that humanity is capable of exercising its own intellectual powers to come to know self, world, and God.

Material Rendered Immaterial in the Act of Knowing: *Conversio ad Phantasma*

Aquinas's account of human cognition is related to his account of angelic and divine knowing. Angels and God are entirely immaterial in nature with no intrinsic or necessary relation to matter. The human person, on the other hand, is inseparable from matter and must seek to emulate the degrees of perfect return that angels and God make upon themselves as intellectual immaterial beings. In human knowing, the conversion to the sensible phantasm makes possible the "return of the subject to itself," the latter being Aquinas's expression of self-consciousness. The act of human knowing is a self-return involving contact with matter.

²⁵ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 5; q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; q. 2, a. 3, ad 2; q. 2, a. 3, ad 6; q. 2, a. 3, ad 14; q. 2, a. 14, ad 11; *Truth* I, 57–58, 63, 72, 74, 75, 129.

²⁶ Cf. Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 43–45 for use of the "mirror" in German Idealism; cf. also Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 261, n. 40: "since 'speculation' is not other than 'reflection' but rather its realization, then *speculative knowledge* means self-authenticating knowledge derived through the activity of mirroring."

Aquinas's attribution of potentiality to the human intellectual soul emphasizes its receptivity while leaving open its genuinely active nature.²⁷ The light of the human intellect is its own; its illuminating capacity is not something coming from without, but a power possessed by the human being reflecting a *participation* in a higher intellect. The distinction between human and divine knowing must be maintained: the knowing that occurs in the human intellect is genuinely the activity of the individual and not a mere manifestation of a higher intellect making use of human form. Each individual human being makes use of their own intellectual capacity to know material objects in an immaterial way.²⁸ This process requires phantasms.

Phantasma can have two English meanings: (1) appearance, illusion, or apparition, synonymous with *phantasia* and *visio*; (2) as *image* or *fancy*, the representation of a thing in its absence and synonymous with *imaginatio*, *phantasia*, and *theorema*.²⁹ Notice the synonym "*visio*" in the first sense; Aquinas frequently uses the metaphor of "seeing" color to illustrate what is meant by the conversion to the phantasm.³⁰ "The object is related to the actuation of a potency as its source and cause of change (*movens*); thus in affecting sight, colour is the source of the act of sight (*color enim in quantum movet visum est principium visionis*)."³¹ Similarly, in being the "likeness" of an object in the intellect, the phantasm can be said to be the source and cause moving the intellect toward knowledge. For instance, God is said to be the cause of created motion by "touching" creation, but in God's own unique fashion as in grief touching the griever, which is a "contact" of power.³²

Phantasmata occur in beings endowed with sensibility (intellect wedded to sense) as they come into physical contact with objects. What the intellect sees *at first glance* when "lighting" objects in the world is likened to the seeing of non-essential (accidental) properties like colors. *Phantasmata* are like accidental properties. Their role in the process of knowing is to be present to the mind as likenesses of properties through which the substance of an object can be known.³³

²⁷ Cf. *ST* I, q. 79, a. 4 co.; Blackfriars XI, 159–61.

²⁸ Cf. *ST* I, q. 105, a. 5 co.; Blackfriars XIV, 75–79 for divine activity in humanity that leaves the latter intact.

²⁹ Cf. Roy J. Deferrari, *A Latin-English Dictionary of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1986), 791.

³⁰ Cf. *ST* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 3; Blackfriars XI, 13.

³¹ *ST* I, q. 77, a. 3 co.; Blackfriars XI, 99.

³² Cf. *ST* I, q. 105, a. 2, ad 1; Blackfriars XIV, 65; *De potentia*, q. 3, a. 7 co. Cf. Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 5, 103–4 for further references.

³³ Cf. *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 1; *Truth* II, 343.

The complete act of knowing occurs through abstraction from phantasms, which makes the substantial essence "visible" to the mind's eye in a manner similar to the way in which color makes form visible through giving form determinative properties available to the five senses. Accidents give particular sensate properties to the form, thus enhancing the dimensionality and texture of form. Similarly, phantasms are the likenesses of these sensate properties through which the mind makes truly visible the extra dimension of a form's intelligibility or essence. Something touched, for example, may not be visible *per se*, but the activity of touching provides the intellect with phantasms that permit a person to make a judgment about that which is touched. The touched object is; it has existence as a being in a particular material form that can be known by intellect. The form existing in the intellect is produced *by* the intellect in conjunction with what it has received through the senses, the *species corporum* or phantasms.

Through the *species corporum* and phantasms the intellect is able to possess the form of an existent immaterially;³⁴ this is in accordance with the immaterial form of the knower. Since the mode of action of the agent's form renders received material immaterial, forms existing in the intellectual soul do not enjoy an independent order of *esse*; neither are they subsistent existents nor mere recollections. Existing in the soul they are rather of the same immaterial *esse* as the immateriality of the human soul. The act of the knower thus renders matter immaterially. Only in this way is the immaterial soul united to a material body able to receive and have conscious knowledge of material bodies other than itself. Aquinas thinks that a being's degree of immateriality determines its capacity as a knower as well as its freedom.³⁵ The greater the immateriality, the greater the expanse of knowledge for that being, since it is in possession not only of its own form but also of the form of another as well.³⁶ Possession of others' forms in oneself is a display of a higher degree of (material) *esse*, not of a different order of (immaterial) *esse*. Human consciousness for Aquinas is an activity internal to the soul incorporating the material "other" in an immaterial mode.

The intellectual soul may be non-material, but phantasms are only *potentially* non-material. Aquinas must thus explain how it is that this likeness is rendered immaterially. Then we will be better situated for understanding how the intellectual soul itself is moved to actuality in grasping the natures of things. For Aquinas, the human intellect is divided into the "active intellect," which abstracts from matter and renders it immaterial in the knower, and the "passive intellect," which is able to be in-formed by

³⁴ *ST* I, q. 84, a. 1, ad 1; Blackfriars XII, 11.

³⁵ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 1 co.; Blackfriars IV, 7.

³⁶ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 1 co.; Blackfriars IV, 7.

sensible species, which are “likenesses” (*similitudines*) of sensed objects.³⁷ The senses provide “likenesses” that are always-already *intellectually* constituted, since sensibility itself is an activity of an animal endowed with intellect (hence the ambiguity of the active-passive distinction, since even the “passive intellect” is not merely a “storehouse” of received impressions). Aquinas holds that “in sense-knowledge the knowledge-form (*species sensibilis*) is the likeness (*similitudo*) of one individual only; so by means of it only one individual (*individuum*) can be known.”³⁸ It is “by means of” this likeness that the essence (*quidditas*) is known; the likeness itself is to be passed through. The “active intellect,” in contrast, works upon the sensible likeness and extracts an “intelligible species” (*species intelligibilis*). The “intelligible species” has a universal character and must accordingly be “abstracted” from the sensible species; the sensible, being a likeness of a *particular* thing, cannot be said to be “universal.”

The particular thing is known, but it is known under the aspect of the “universal nature” that has been abstracted from the received sense-images. The proper object of the intellect still remains the essence: the “universal natures existing in a particular things.” Natures of things (*species rerum*) are thus non-material essences.

The essence is not found behind, or in spite of, the existent itself, but is always already wrapped into the particular and individual existent as it appears (whether in the past, for the imagination, or present, for the senses in act). Yet this essence is universal. “The name *intellect* arises from the intellect’s ability to know the most profound elements of a thing; for to understand (*intelligere*) means to read what is inside a thing (*intus legere*).”³⁹ What is “read inside a thing” is its essence. Universals are abstracted from all material relations: their non-materiality in the mind of the human knower constitutes their universality, since “universals” are not in themselves encountered by the senses. Particulars are experienced by the human knower in sensibility (an *intellectual* endowment resulting from the interaction of sense and intellect), yet they are not “known” by the intellect until the mind has gone through the process of abstracting the universal from the particular and then returned to itself. This process of knowing the universal *in* the particular—however active the “mind” of the knower—is initiated by the object. “Thomas Aquinas has a non-subject-centred conception of the self: the objects out there in the world become intelligible in the act of awakening the intellectual acts on our part which mani-

³⁷ ST I, q. 79, a. 4, ad 4; Blackfriars XI, 161–63. Cf. also ScG lib. 2 cap. 77 n. 3; Anderson, 247.

³⁸ ST I, q. 14, a. 12 co.; Blackfriars IV, 43.

³⁹ *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 12 co.; *Truth* I, 50.

fest our intelligence."⁴⁰ Only in the contrastive light of things in the world does the human intellect become aware of its own light.

When the sensible species is turned into the intelligible species, the sensible can then be understood, at least in one of the presentations of "species," as being a particular instance of the universal. The *species intelligibilis* in the intellect is applicable to an unlimited number of objects; in the case of having the species "human," one knows the nature of all humans without knowing specific instances. The *species intelligibilis* "is not the likeness of humans in what makes them individuals, but only in what makes the species."⁴¹ Species are uniquely identifiable through the "principle" (*principia*) underlying that species. The principle "makes" or "constitutes" the species. Intelligible species, then, are cognitive "likenesses" of principles latent within created species, and the ultimate "principle" existentially sustaining the human being is God. But God can be "seen" (in this life) only through embodied likenesses, excepting the "rapturous" moment which we shall explain near the end of this essay.

Both the intellectual soul and the phantasms are brought from potency to act through their openness and receptivity to something other. Aquinas's juxtaposition of "potentialities" is quite clear: the non-material intellectual soul is receptive to (*in potentia*) non-material "likenesses" of material objects, whereas the phantasms are still too weighed down by their "likenesses" to material objects and are thus in need of some external act through which they will become non-material. Phantasms that have been "acted upon" by the intellect become intelligible species. "Since the phantasm is itself a likeness of a particular thing, the imagination does not need a further likeness of a particular, as does the intellect."⁴² The intellect needs the likenesses of material things derived from the phantasms. Phantasms themselves are thus necessary for the human intellectual soul insofar as it turns to them for the true and complete grasp of the "proper object" or essence. Again, by turning to phantasms the intellect is able to "look at" (*speculetur*) an essence.⁴³

However, the human intellect does not "look at" the world through the mirror (*speculum*) of its own essence, for that would require the possession of innate species, which is contrary to Aquinas's notion of turning to the phantasms.⁴⁴ This mode of knowing is proper to God in whom all things

⁴⁰ Fergus Kerr, *Versions of Aquinas* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2003), 27.

⁴¹ *ST I*, q. 14, a. 12 co.; Blackfriars IV, 43; translation amended.

⁴² *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7, ad 2; Blackfriars XII, 43.

⁴³ *ST I*, q. 84, a. 7 co.; Blackfriars XII, 43.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ST I*, q. 84, a. 3 co.; Blackfriars XII, 19–21. Cf. also Kevin Corrigan, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of*

are contained immaterially: "God alone . . . understands everything by means of his own essence—not so the human soul or even an angel."⁴⁵ The human soul requires its own fashioned nature (*species*), which is the result of the soul's activity and therefore imbued with its substance. What is "looked at" is still not in the mirror of the human soul, however. The "seen" object is an immaterial essence of the thing *outside* the self.

The reason (*ratio*) that material things known exist in the knower not materially but immaterially "is that the act of knowing goes out (*se extendit*) to things outside the knower—for we do know things which are outside ourselves."⁴⁶ Alternative word-choices to the Blackfriars translation of *se extendit* as "goes out," provide new insight into article 84: the terms *comprises*, or *embraces*, or *includes*, capture more readily the sense that knowing is an immaterial possession of a material object *within the self*. For the human act of knowing is an assimilation of another into the higher form of the intellectual soul. By giving greater prominence to the spatial metaphor of an inclusive embrace, we also gain a clearer view of the way in which human knowing images divine knowing, since God knows all created existents through knowing God's self.⁴⁷ Human self-reflection uncovers the ways in which the human intellectual embrace falls short of God's perfect beholding of created existents. Humanity's access to the essence of an existent depends upon direct contact with an existent's sensible properties, and these can be received at varying levels of depth and accuracy. The "treasury" that is the human imagination requires constant re-filling, unlike the freely overflowing divine imagination that brings forth new forms that humanity can only receive and imitate. Aquinas's awareness that human beings can never "comprehend" or "embrace" God speaks well to the dissimilarity present in the similarity between human and divine intellection. There are no limits to God's embrace, whereas the human being's intellectual embrace is limited to its capacities. And since the human being's "capacity for God" is itself a gift, one consummated in the "created" light of glory, the analogy with God's embrace is simply related to humanity's embrace of worldly existents.

However, we must not overlook the fact that this assimilation also requires the *exiens ab ipso* which occurs through the senses. The intellectual remaining (*manens*) is only possible through the union of the soul with the body; it is through its contact with what is "other" in sense

Aphrodisias (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 212, n. 32 for a brief history of "matter" as the receptacle, or "mirror," of the intelligible universe.

⁴⁵ ST I, q. 84, a. 2 co.; Blackfriars XII, 17.

⁴⁶ ST I, q. 84, a. 2 co.; Blackfriars XII, 15.

⁴⁷ Cf. *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 3, s. c. 2; *Truth* I, 68.

knowledge that the intellect knows anything. This is of the essence of the conversion–return pattern of knowing.

Summa theologiae I, q. 84, a. 2 co., concerns the appropriate interpretation of the Aristotelian dictum "*anima esse est quodammodo omnia*."⁴⁸ The human soul can be in a way all things. To be another thing while remaining one's own particular material self requires some mode of interior relation to the other in the act of knowing. As we have seen, the solution lies in immateriality. Another thing can be in a knower in the mode of immateriality and looked at as it is *comprised by* the intellect. The act of knowing *includes* things which are outside: the knower has greater scope and extension (*amplitudinem et extensionem*).⁴⁹ The human is thus a material *comprehensor*, one who includes other bodies within its own body in an immaterial mode.

Since the intellect converts itself to a species that exists within itself, the act of knowing is a remaining in the self.⁵⁰ Knowing takes place within the agent, which means that it has its *terminus* in itself through its possession of the object: "the object in the agent is the activity actually taking place."⁵¹ Yet this remaining greatly differs from the divine remaining, for it is possible only because the human soul is first in a state of embracing what is external to itself as a result of its being a material body–soul unity. The agent's form is constituted to receive other forms in accordance with the principle that the higher (immaterial) power can encompass lower (material) determinations. Whereas divine knowing always possesses the knowledge-likeness of a thing (*species intelligibilis*) present in God's own substance, human knowing is always in potency to knowledge-likenesses that are external to its own substance.⁵² By converting to the phantasm the human knower beholds the "other" in itself immaterially, just as God beholds all things, possible and actual, within God's own self, since God's knowledge is the cause of things.⁵³

In human knowing, the conversion to the phantasm makes possible the "return of the subject to itself" (*reditio subjecti in seipsum*), involving the subject in an *exitus-reditus* pattern of motion. In the "return to self" we find the chiaroscuro in Aquinas's contrast between the divine and human intellects: the divine intellect is the perfect "return to self,"

⁴⁸ Cf. *ST* I, q. 14, a. 1 co.; Blackfriars IV, 7; *ST* I, q. 84, a. 2, arg. 2; Blackfriars XII, 11; *ST* I, q. 84, a. 2, ad 2; Blackfriars XII, 17; *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2 co.; *Truth* II, 561.

⁴⁹ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 1 co.; Blackfriars IV, 7.

⁵⁰ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 4, ad 1; Blackfriars IV, 7.

⁵¹ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 2 co.; Blackfriars IV, 9.

⁵² *ST* I, q. 14, a. 2 co.; Blackfriars IV, 11.

⁵³ *ST* I, q. 14, a. 8 co.; Blackfriars IV, 31; *ST* I, q. 14, a. 9, ad 3; Blackfriars IV, 35.

whereas the human intellect must engage in a movement beyond itself in order to achieve a “return to self” that is the mark of a free intellectual being. We must turn next to the place of the phantasm in consciousness as such, in order to fill out our understanding of how Aquinas renders human knowing *analogous* to the act of divine knowing.

Consciousness, Movement, and the Analogy of Generation

The human intellect converts to the phantasm received from another existent in order to gain intellectual *distance*⁵⁴ from the other and to offer a judgment as to its nature. It is also through the phantasm that the human intellect is able to offer a judgment as to the nature of itself: “even our intellect understanding itself is within itself, not only as identified with itself by its essence, but also as grasped by itself in the act of understanding.”⁵⁵ That self-knowledge is naturally internal brings Aquinas to the judgment that the dictum that one knows oneself by a self-return is metaphorical.⁵⁶ Being directed away from the self can coexist with the reality that the self is never completely lost in its contact with the other. Returning from the phantasm is still an occurrence, and eventful happening, within the self, even though what is known is external.

A “return” implies that a journey “away” from the self has occurred. When speaking of the motion of the human intellect, the body is always included: “Whereas we tend to imagine motion in terms of ‘towards’ or ‘away from’ something, for Aquinas it seems that motion is more fundamentally understood to take place ‘within,’ or ‘enveloped by,’ *esse ipsum*.”⁵⁷ This does not mean that all creaturely knowing is ultimately God’s activity, as Avicenna would have it. Rather, this notion of being always “enveloped by” God aptly expresses God’s intimacy with the created order. The motions of human intellectual activity, always related to the motion of other bodies, are thus enmeshed within the act of “to be” (*esse*) such that all human knowledge is rooted in divine actuality. Where precisely has the subject returned from? Our question is of particular interest when we ask it of Aquinas’s account of God’s own return to self, since it is again in comparison to God’s perfect return to self that the human return is adjudged and where the contrast is to be found in the notion of the act of

⁵⁴ According to Aristotle, “it seems that in defining contraries of every kind men have recourse to a spatial metaphor, for they say that those things are contraries which, within the same class, are separated by the greatest possible distance.” Aristotle, *Categories*, part 6, trans. E. M. Edghill.

⁵⁵ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 9; O’Neil, 83.

⁵⁶ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2; *Truth* I, 63.

⁵⁷ Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion*, 104.

"movement." If humanity images divinity in its exit and return from self, how does Aquinas account for a similar divine motion without compromising God's immutability? Next we must examine the connections between the movement implied in the "return to self" (consciousness) and Aquinas's attempt to address the "motions" of eternal generation.

Aquinas simultaneously addresses the theological doctrine of eternal generation and the philosophical dilemmas of movement and immutability through the use of an analogy of generation: the generation of a word by the human intellect. Not only does Aquinas offer an explanation as to how self-consciousness occurs in human knowing through its relationship to language, but he also manages to offer an explanation as to how God the Father can eternally generate the Son without involving Himself in change. The key to the analogy is intelligibility: since God is immaterial and eminently intelligible, all generation within God can also retain the character of immateriality, and thus, of immutability. Our experience of the intellectual generation of a word is as close as the human person approximates to an immaterial form of perfect activity like God's.

In *Summa contra Gentiles* book 4 article 11, Aquinas offers a hierarchical account of self-reflexivity ("reflection") as it relates to the movement of "emanation." For Aquinas, only animate bodies provide us with examples of emanation that will aid our understanding of the primacy and perfection of intellection, since there can be no emanations in inanimate bodies "except by the action of some one upon another one."⁵⁸ A proper understanding of the movement of "emanation" must thus incorporate those bodies that exhibit *self*-movement. All imperfect creatures lack the perfection of absolute self-movement, "since the emanation is always from some first to some second."⁵⁹ This includes the phenomenon of human intellectual self-reflection. "For the human intellect, although it can know itself, does indeed take the first beginning of its knowledge from without, because it cannot understand without a phantasm."⁶⁰ The human being is the highest instance of an embodied self-mover, but even its own "emanation" is contingent. This is because of the composite nature of the human being: it is a soul-body, form-matter composition. God however is no composite, but ultimate simplicity: "the ultimate perfection of life belongs to God, in whom understanding is not other than being . . . accordingly, the intention understood in God must be the divine essence itself."⁶¹ God's "emanation" is never "from some first to

⁵⁸ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 2; O'Neil, 80.

⁵⁹ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 4; O'Neil, 81.

⁶⁰ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 5; O'Neil, 81.

⁶¹ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 5; O'Neil, 81; ScG lib. 1, cap. 45; Pegis, 173–74.

some second" but always a circular self-generation that only "goes out" of itself in a free decision to will the other.⁶² Creation is one such freely willed result.

At the center of this hierarchy of movement and emanation in human beings is the intention understood or "what the intellect conceives in itself of the thing understood."⁶³ This is not the "thing" understood, nor is it the "substance of the intellect." Rather, "it is a certain likeness of the thing understood conceived in the intellect . . . which the exterior words signify."⁶⁴ Aquinas calls this the *verbum interiore* (interior word). The soul does not know itself directly by looking within because "its being is not its act of understanding."⁶⁵ The *verbum interiore* gives a person access to him- or her-self, but since it is an element in the process of converting to the phantasm, it remains simply a medium through which the essence is known, for it contains material reference.

The divine intellect, in contrast, "does not pass from potency to act, but is always actually existent . . . must necessarily have always understood itself."⁶⁶ It is also important to note that the context of the treatise on Trinitarian generation "does not deal directly with the necessary presence of the word in all processes of intellectual understanding, for its focus is narrowed more precisely to the knowledge of *self* in order to consider by analogy a true Word in God."⁶⁷ This narrowed sense of the analogy then focuses our attention also toward the generation of truth in the use of language—hence the importance for Aquinas and subsequent tradition of the "intention" as it is manifested in the word itself.

Since God is incorporeal, we are "left to understand the divine generation according to an intellectual emanation."⁶⁸ As we have only begun to illustrate, God does not receive anything from without, and thus the "very Son begotten by the Father is not outside the Father, but in Him."⁶⁹ The "Word" of God, the Son, is generated in like manner to the interior generation of the intellectual word, but since God's essence actually is

⁶² Cf. Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A "Repetition" of Scholastic Metaphysics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 35, 278 for background on this notion of circularity.

⁶³ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 5; O'Neil, 81.

⁶⁴ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 5; O'Neil, 81. Cf. Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 99.

⁶⁵ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 6; O'Neil, 82. Cf. T. F. Torrance, "Scientific Hermeneutics, According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962): 266, n.2.

⁶⁶ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 10; O'Neil, 83.

⁶⁷ Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 99.

⁶⁸ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 8; O'Neil, 83.

⁶⁹ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 8; O'Neil, 82.

existence, the "being of the Word interiorly conceived, or intention understood, is the very act of being understood."⁷⁰ Procession and generation here must therefore be understood analogously with the operations of the intellect: the movement of change implied is intellectual and can be said to occur in a more eminent (*eminenter*) manner within God, an eternal movement that never required, yet freely chose to involve, finite being.

The generation of the Son within the Godhead is the *principium*—principle and beginning—of the generation of the world. Just as our act of understanding takes its *beginning* from the senses, so divine self-understanding is related to the *beginning* (inner-Trinitarian relations) that is God's own self: "his act of understanding is the principle of things understood by Him, since they are caused by His intellect and will; but His act of understanding is referred to the intelligible which He Himself is as to a beginning, for this intelligible is identified with the intellect understanding, whose emanation, so to say, is the Word conceived."⁷¹ By echoing the Trinitarian mode of eternal procession through their generation of words expressing intelligible content, conscious beings are capable of reflecting God's own self-understanding.

Accordingly, the analogy must preserve the similarity in difference, in order that we might read Aquinas more precisely. Aquinas may not equate the soul's emanation with God's freely creative emanations, but he does liken the "light" of the human intellect to the divine uncreated light. "For the intellectual light in us is nothing more than a participating likeness of the uncreated light in which the divine ideas are contained."⁷² Here Aquinas lays the ground for subsequent use in apologetics of the comparison between the human "light" of the intellect and knowledge of the divine light based upon participation. Aquinas understands this participation in two ways.

First, he thinks in terms of the effect's participation in its cause: "God is the first exemplar cause of all things," and this gives each being its distinctive pattern of intelligibility.⁷³ Each being in the world has its place and purpose based upon the intelligible pattern of its form, which must be given to it from the divine intellect. In this way, the world can again be likened to the generation of words, since created beings express an intelligible content in a physical, incarnated manner. As the "effects" of God's causality, created things show forth their participation in the intelligibility of the cause. While "a relationship to a cause does not enter into

⁷⁰ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 11; O'Neil, 83; ScG lib. 1, cap. 16; Pegis, 100–101.

⁷¹ ScG lib. 4, cap. 11, n. 14; O'Neil, 86.

⁷² ST I, q. 84, a. 5 co.; Blackfriars XII, 33.

⁷³ ST I, q. 44, a. 3 co.; Blackfriars VIII, 17; ST I, q. 44, a. 4, ad 4; Blackfriars VIII, 23.

the definition of a being that is caused, nevertheless it follows from what is bound up in a being by participation, for from the fact that a thing is such it follows that it is caused by another.”⁷⁴ A “being by participation” is not self-caused but caused by another.

Second, for Aquinas there is participation through the likeness of created form to divine form. “Each thing participates in being according to its relation to the first principle of being. Now what is composed of matter and form has being in virtue (*per consecutionem*) of its form; therefore it is related through its form to the first principle of being.”⁷⁵ The notion of imperfect resemblance in participation (“God’s effects resemble God as far as they can, but not perfectly”)⁷⁶ shows itself here as well, since the “form” that any participatory being is happens to be an imperfect realization or approximation to God’s perfect form that is *esse subsistens*. Every being is actual to the degree that it measures up to God’s non-composite form, and each one contributes to the hierarchy of being with the human person at the top of the created *material* order since the human form includes the “likeness” of the intellectual soul. Every form has being, and every being approaches the likeness of God’s simple being; therefore “it must be that form is nothing else than a divine likeness that is participated in by things . . . the nearer a thing comes to divine likeness, the more perfect it is.”⁷⁷ The human person is “privileged” to participate fully in both the material and immaterial created orders. Although the human person is a “composite” in the sense of being both matter and form, body and spirit, and is thus “less” than a perfect example of God’s nature, this creature is able to express most fully within material creation the “form” of God through its “participative” intellect.

In both notions of participation there is a likeness or “similitude” between the participant and the origin. “This likeness . . . is rather indicative of a certain imperfect image than of any consubstantiality.”⁷⁸ The “light” of the human intellect must then be understood as an effect of the divine light as cause, as well as an aspect of the total human form that reflects God’s form, but in a limited manner.

The first type of participation is exemplified by a likeness of self-knowledge, which in God’s case never involves a conversion to the phantasm or recourse to a “journey” away from self. Rather, God is the perfect

⁷⁴ ST I, q. 44, a. 1, ad 1; Blackfriars VIII, 7.

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum De Causis expositio*, lect. 25 [84260]; *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. V. A. Guagliardo, C. R. Hess, R. C. Taylor (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), prop. 25.

⁷⁶ ST I, q. 3, a. 3, ad 2; Blackfriars II, 31.

⁷⁷ ScG lib. 3, cap. 97, n. 3; Bourke II, 67.

⁷⁸ ScG lib. 2, cap. 85, n. 14; Anderson, 289.

form of self-relation, who knows even created things by means of His own creative power, the source of all intelligible natures: "we should say that the divine wisdom holds the originals of all things, and these we have previously called the Ideas, that is the exemplar forms existing in the divine mind."⁷⁹ Reading the effect for its cause requires that one discern the intelligible nature resident in God's mind but inchoately displayed in the creature. "Thomas held that the power of the intellect in penetrating into the essence of a thing, into its ultimate structure or spiritual content [intelligible pattern], would not be possible were it not that man has been given to share in the divine light."⁸⁰ Human knowledge of the cosmos is thus conceived as a gift of participation in divine knowledge.

Without the participation of the intellect in God's light, we could not make sense of Aquinas's use of *mensura* (measure), which proves so central to his view on how persons know the world: he explicitly relates *mens* (mind) and *mensura*.⁸¹ For example, the nature of the light of intellect to "measure" things in the world requires that things be measured according to their nearness to God's perfection, which implies that the knower possesses some sense or awareness of this measure. "Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight"⁸² (Wisd. 11:21). Thus, we may understand by *measure*: the amount, or the mode, or degree, of perfection attaining to each thing.⁸³ The ability to "measure" things in the world, in other words, points us toward the idea that the human intellect participates in a measure greater than its own.

The second type of participation allows "light" to be understood as a deficient yet fully active mode of God's light, and the mark of this is the human "need" of conversion to the phantasm. Form gives being to matter, and the material "being" of the human "form" is given by God, Being itself: spiritual-corporeal: "Form is something 'of God' in things created by God."⁸⁴ Since form relates an existent to the perfection of God—the more perfect the form the more like God that form is—the

⁷⁹ ST I, q. 44, a. 3 co.; Blackfriars VIII, 17.

⁸⁰ Torrance, "Scientific Hermeneutics," 262.

⁸¹ Cf. *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 1 co.; *Truth* I, 61. Cf. Francesca Murphy, "The Sound of the *Analogia Entis*: Part I," *New Blackfriars* 74 (1993): 508–21, esp. 516.

⁸² Augustine sees from this how all creatures bear the Trinity with the Father as measure, Son as number, and Holy Spirit as weight: cf. Augustine, *Confessions* 5.4.7; *De Trinitate* 3.9.18; *De Doctrina Christiana*, 4.20.41; Serge Lancel, *Augustine* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 133. Thanks are owed to David V. Meconi, S.J. for these references.

⁸³ ScG lib. 3, cap. 97 n. 10; Bourke II, 69.

⁸⁴ Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1995), 233.

most spiritual aspect of the human person (his or her “light”) is therefore, for Aquinas, the highest likeness to God’s own perfect being: the complete self-return without the obstruction of matter.

The self-world relation in Aquinas stands upon the ideal of the simultaneity of the illuminating action of light. The light of the knower goes out to the world and lightens (makes intelligible) things in the world, but the process by which a thing (*res*) is illuminated is instantaneous. Light is thereby likened to movement because of its aptness as a metaphor of an active stasis, since the light is “in act” but the act cannot be said to move.

Knowing the world through participation in God is understood as analogous to divine contemplation of the archetypal “form” of created existents which “flow out” of God in a generative *exitus* from the divine life: “processiones personarum aeternae sunt causa et ratio productionis creaturarum.”⁸⁵ Creation is accordingly “brought forth” (*pro-ductio*) from the eternal divine processions like the bringing forth of a word in speech. It is primarily in analogies of the will that we find Aquinas utilizing concepts of motion. Yet he does apply such notions to the intellect in his imagery of light, in a modified sense. Aquinas shows that the generation of the Son is an act of *nature* as well as will—creation of the world is simply an act of will.

In furthering his reflections on eternal generation, Aquinas tries to make sense of how the Word of God is “conceived” by analogy to animal and intellectual situations of conception and birth. Since corporeal conception and birth involve motion and succession, Aquinas must look again to the “conception and birth of an intelligible word” which “involves neither motion nor succession.”⁸⁶ The intelligible word is at one and the same time conceived and in existence; “at once it is born and distinct; just as that which is illuminated, at the moment of being illuminated, is illuminated because in illumination there is no succession.”⁸⁷ Although Aquinas himself does not explicitly connect divine “conception” of the Son with the simultaneity of illumination that we (purportedly) experience in bringing to birth a word, in bringing divine conceiving into closer proximity with the simultaneity of illumination in our analysis we will show how Aquinas’s use of imagery of light lends itself to an interpretation in terms of movement, even though in this context his emphasis is more upon the static possession of a word that can be contemplated.

⁸⁵ *In I Sent.*, I, d. 14, a.1, q1a 1, sol. Cf. Emery, *Trinity in Aquinas*, 60.

⁸⁶ *ScG lib.* 4, cap. 11, n. 18; O’Neil, 89.

⁸⁷ *ScG lib.* 4, cap. 11, n. 18; 89. Aquinas is here dependent upon medieval optics for his understanding of light. Modern science has since shown that light does travel and “move,” but it does so at such a high speed that the *experience* of illumination is such as to appear instantaneous.

In wrestling with the tension between rest and motion, Aquinas is attempting to avoid subordinationist doctrines of the Trinity. Illumination as simultaneity shows that Aquinas has condensed this movement into a singular event, not only for God's divine life, but also for human experience. Illumination seems to have a point-like immediacy to it, and if we understand the word in terms of a "moment of inspiration," this characterization seems apt. In fact, following Aristotle's *Categories*,⁸⁸ medieval logicians "tended to classify the *terminus* of a movement, the *acquisition* of a changed state, not as successive but as *instantaneous*: a state that could occur only at an instant (and that was therefore not to be confused with the *persistence* of a state)."⁸⁹ As we will see, this accords well with Aquinas's notion of the intellect being "raptured" momentarily into an illuminative vision of God.

Ultimately, the instantaneous nature of cognition and intellectual movement come together in the identification of Word, Wisdom, and light:

But the very word of wisdom conceived in the mind is a kind of manifestation of the wisdom of the one who understands, just as in our case all habits are manifested by their acts. Since, then, the divine Wisdom is called light (for it consists in the pure act of cognition, and the manifestation of light is the brightness proceeding therefrom) the Word of divine Wisdom is named "the brightness of light." Thus the Apostle speaks of the Son of God: "Who being the brightness of His glory" (Heb. 1:3). Hence, also, the Son ascribes to Himself the manifestation of the Father. He says in John (17:6): "Father, I have manifested Thy name to men."⁹⁰

Conceived by the Father, the Son as Word and Wisdom is the expression of God's essence.⁹¹ Aquinas thus likens eternal generation of the Son within a Trinitarian pattern of "self-movement" to movement experienced in the illuminative conception of a human word. Also, based on the Son as the manifestation of wisdom, Aquinas points forward to a possible appropriation of a logic of "life." Human acts manifest the "logic," the inspiration, by which they operate. All acts have the potential to express that inchoate light noted by Aquinas and known in a *manens in ipso*. As this

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Categories*, Part 13: "The term 'simultaneous' is primarily and most appropriately applied to those things the genesis of the one of which is simultaneous with that of the other; for in such cases neither is prior or posterior to the other. Such things are said to be simultaneous in point of time."

⁸⁹ Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa contra Gentiles II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 92.

⁹⁰ ScG lib. 4, cap. 12, n. 4; O'Neil, 91–92.

⁹¹ ScG lib. 4, cap. 12, n. 5; O'Neil, 93–94.

section has shown us, Aquinas can conceive of such *manens* in the more dynamic terminology of generation. Aquinas's openness to such terminology opens him to various interpretations, particularly to those concerned with presenting a more active and eventful God in a Thomistic vein.

Human Knowledge of God and the Importance of Imagery of Light

Most often and quite naturally, Aquinas's imagery of light references the sun. The metaphor of the sun allows for an emphasis upon that which enacts the *lighting* itself. For instance, the divine intellect is likened to the sun in its illumination of the human mind and in its provision of intelligible structures for things in the world. An acting created intellect is subsequently modelled upon the divine act of letting light flow forth into the world. How the natural light (*lumen naturale*) makes knowing possible is analogous to the way that the light of glory (*lumen gloriae*) makes knowing of the divine essence possible.

In *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6 co., we find Aquinas again referring to the *De causis*, but this time in relation to angelic knowing in particular. Here we are told that there are two types of action. "One proceeds from the agent and goes out to an exterior thing, which it changes. An example of this type is illumination, which can properly be called an action. The second type of action does not go out to an exterior thing but remains in the agent as its perfection. Properly speaking, this is called operation. Shining is an example of this type."⁹² At issue in this passage is the motion of going out "to an exterior thing": illumination is such an action, whereas "shining" is not. Aquinas continues by asserting that these two actions are one, "that both issue only from a thing which is actually existing and only in so far as it is in act. Consequently, a body does not shine unless it actually has light; and the same is true of its illuminating action."⁹³ Light, here, is intrinsically related to "act" in that a body, though it may be in a state of actually existing, cannot be said to be luminous unless that state of existing is accompanied by the act of lighting. Light is an active principle, and it seems that in the case of illumination, an action of light "going out" can bring something about in an object that was previously without lighting.

In the case of "shining," however, what is luminous is the interior of that which possesses the act of light, and any consequent "illumination" of that which is external happens as a result of the interior machinations. A knower in act, whether that knowing be appetitive, sensate, or intel-

⁹² *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6 co.; Truth I, 344.

⁹³ *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6 co.; Truth I, 344.

lectual, is a "shining."⁹⁴ For the light to shine within the agent *as its perfection* is for the mutual interaction between what is external (the object itself) and what is internal (the phantasms and intelligible species of the object) to come into agreement in the judgement, since this is the process by which the agent intellect "shines" its light upon what is received and pronounces upon its measured adequacy: "just as a bright body shines when light actually exists in it, so also does the intellect understand everything that is actually intelligible in it."⁹⁵

Such quidditative knowledge is the perfection of the human intellect, since its proper object is the essence existing in a particular thing. Where the human intellect cannot grasp an essence, it cannot be in a relation of the "perfected" to "perfection." All that can be attained in relation to something whose essence remains unknown is an approximation to that essence by way of analogous description—that is, unless there is a means by which the "natural" attainment of knowledge is superseded. In this latter case, the "natural" operations of the intellect, although bound as they are to phantasms, would be elevated to understand something otherwise closed to its "natural" operations. Aquinas considers this to be a possibility in the case of "rapture," based upon the actuality of Paul's experience of being "taken up to the third heaven," or in the Beatific Vision whereby the blessed will see God's essence without any mediation.⁹⁶ "Activities of physical things which come from a divine ordination are said to be natural when the sources of these activities are implanted in things in the way in which their natures are. However, God does not ordain the elevation of rapture for the human being in this way. Hence, they are not alike in this respect."⁹⁷ According to Aquinas, therefore, it is not in the human being's "natural" dynamism to attain rapturous vision of God. Augustine's assertion that in this life we experience a "sprinkling of God's glory" is affirmed.⁹⁸

Nevertheless it is not beyond God to bring about such transportation, for some. Aquinas explains the possibility of this transportation *in this life* by way of an analogy to light: some light "abides" and appears as if it is "connatural" in things like stars or rubies; other light is received as a merely passing impression, such as light in air.

⁹⁴ *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6 co.; Truth I, 344.

⁹⁵ *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 6 co.; Truth I, 355.

⁹⁶ Cf. Pamela Reeve, "Exploring a Metaphor Theologically: Thomas Aquinas on the Beatific Vision," in *Studies in Thomistic Theology*, ed. Paul Lockey (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1996), 294: the light of glory is not a medium, rather "the only effect of the 'light' is to increase the power of the intellect."

⁹⁷ *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 9; q. 13, a. 1, ad 11; Truth II, 185.

⁹⁸ *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 3, s. c. 6; Truth II, 193–94.

In like fashion, also, the light of glory is infused into the mind in two ways. In one, it follows the mode of a form which 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. The very name shows that this took place quickly (*raptim*) and in passing.⁹⁹

The relationship between "shining" and "illumination" is like the passing sun shedding its light upon all in its path; to be blessed is to have a "shining" connaturality with the divine light that is internal (intrinsic) to the agent. But the light of glory cannot be light received from the essence of God, as if God were the sun shining or illuminating the human receiver. For Aquinas the light of glory is *created*. This light raises the created intellect to the vision of God, "not on account of its affinity to the divine substance, but on account of the power it receives from God to produce such an effect."¹⁰⁰ The light of glory (*lumen gloriae*) can be given briefly to a person in this life, but only through (instant) illumination. The distinction is between what abides (connaturally) and what is given staccato-like, since it departs the receiver as quickly as it was given: only Christ was both wayfarer and possessor of the beatific vision; the rest of humanity can only be wayfarers.¹⁰¹

Any consideration that a "vision of God's glory" would be natural to the process of "*visio*" in general is here foreign;¹⁰² this fact reinforces Aquinas's position that the light of the intellect remains a participation in God's light through its likeness and approximation to that perfect act. For a person to make a "complete return to self" is to "shine" upon the intelligible things of the intellect as marked by phantasms and thereby to come upon its own act of knowing and to see it in its degree of likeness to God's perfection: the activity of remaining in the self.

Aquinas further comments on "rapture" in relation to vision of God.¹⁰³ Here he states that rapture does not take place "according to the act" (*non secundum actum*) whereby the person no longer uses the senses or even the imagination; striving, dynamic motion seems absent. Yet previous to this, Aquinas does attribute some form of movement to the contemplative mind.

⁹⁹ *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 2 co.

¹⁰⁰ *ScG lib. 3*, cap. 54.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1 co.; *Truth II*, 341.

¹⁰² Cf. George Pattison, *Thinking about God in an Age of Technology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154.

¹⁰³ Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 175, a. 2, ad 1; *Blackfriars XLV*, 101: "Rapture (*raptus*) adds something to ecstasy (*extasis*). For ecstasy implies simply 'standing outside oneself' as

Contemplation does indeed enjoy rest from external movements. Nevertheless, to contemplate is itself a certain movement of mind, so far as every operation is called a movement. Accordingly, Aristotle states that sensation and understanding are a kind of movement in the sense that movement is the *act of a perfect thing*. In like manner, Dionysius distinguishes three movements in the soul while contemplating, namely *straight, circular and spiral*.¹⁰⁴

We are to understand by the *act of a perfect thing* as indicating a state of highest actuality. The higher degree of actuality is again likened to intellectual intensity, which is meant to signify a single repose, even though it is described in Dionysian language as circular movement: "in intellectual operations one that is simply uniform is described as a circular movement."¹⁰⁵ The image of a spiral, however, suggests an active motion of deepening or heightening. Movement as the *act of a perfect thing* combined with this image can alter our understanding of *act* in Aquinas. To be *in act*, in the sense of the divine *actus purus*, is to be in a kind of perfected movement, a vital activity.

Summary Conclusion

The conversion to the phantasm and the return of the subject to itself have proven to be of central importance to Aquinas's account of knowledge. Human knowledge is obtained always through an interaction between subject and object wherein both elements of the relation are active. The object summons the human subject to consciousness through its self-presentation and the subject realizes its place within the world (through self-return) by means of its embrace of the object.

Consciousness arises in this circuit of exchange, but we have seen that knowledge of God is not directly linked to human consciousness for Aquinas. Such knowledge is an inference that can be made from what can be known of the interaction of intellect with things in the world, but other than the rare ecstatic moments of rapture encountered by some, knowledge of God does not enter into the subject-object relation. Participation in God for Aquinas is indirect, by analogy, and a cause-effect relation (in this life).

when a person is placed outside his usual disposition. But rapture ("being caught up") adds a note of violence to this." Cf. Peter A. Kwasniewski, "St. Thomas, *Extasis*, and Union with the Beloved," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 587–603, esp. 588, n. 1 and 591, n. 10 for extensive references to ecstasy in Aquinas.

¹⁰⁴ *ST* II–II, q. 179, a. 1, ad 3; Blackfriars XLVI, 7. Cf. *ST* II–II, q. 180, a. 6 co.; Blackfriars XLVI, 37–39.

¹⁰⁵ *ST* II–II q. 180, a. 6 co.; Blackfriars XLVI, 37.

Through experiencing the movements of our own minds, according to Aquinas, we come to an understanding of what it might mean for the divine intellect to be involved in active self-movement (and so for this God to be triune). Our understanding is thus analogous and taken also from our experience of how other beings in the world are involved in movement, intellectual as well as material. Although we can know “movement” in God metaphorically, there is nonetheless no human participation directly in divine “movement.”

For Aquinas, human beings imitate God’s (so-called) creative way of self-existing in an *exitus-reditus* pattern. We do move in a process of return to God, but we are not a “part” of God’s own self-movement of exit and return, for that is an interior “movement” remaining in itself whereby the *exitus* is understood as entailing God’s extension of power through creating. Creation is therefore “encompassed” by God’s power at all times, but the perfection of divine circular motion is not considered the “space” in which all other motion occurs. Rather, God’s power is an extension *outside* God until the eschaton, at which time a fullness of inclusion *inside* divine circular motion becomes possible. The final union with God—attained in this life only in rare circumstances of rapture—intended for the intellectual being is a contemplative union, one of rest in the paradox of *stasis* wedded with *kinesis* as the intellect beholds the ever-incomprehensible fullness of the divine essence. Aquinas’s understanding of the movement of the intellect as it relates to God’s own manner of knowing, though filled out in every direction and considerate of ambiguities, remains susceptible to different emphases concerning the nature of the *activity* of human and divine knowing. Some modern theologians have exploited such ambiguities in order to claim Aquinas for their own.¹⁰⁶ N V

¹⁰⁶ A note of gratitude is owed to Paul S. Fiddes and Simon Gaine, O.P. for helping me to read Aquinas.