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SEQ CHAPTER \h \r 1Abstract

Writers who have commented on *The Book of All the Dead* have generously proposed that the cycle culminates in a vision of sort of “implicate order” in which the unbroken wholeness of the totality of existence is experienced as an undivided flowing movement without borders. I chafe at this reading. To explain my reasons for disagreeing with this reading, I would comment on the implications of what one the best writers on my films referred to the “inescapable qualifications” that I introduce into the penultimate film of the *Exultations* region (though, I shall argue, he missed their implication). Discussing these inescapable qualifications would allow I would show that the film *Exultations* is a sort gloss on Canto 33 of Dante’s *Paradiso*, but ends by highlighting the impossibility of rewriting that canto in this destitute time. In Dante’s time, it was still possible to imagine the vision the whole. For us, it is not. Finally I would point out the parallels between the implications of the “inescapable qualifications” that appear in *Exultations (In Light of the Great Giving)* and my art historical writing in which I have treated that same topic, but in a more discursive register: in *Harmony and Dissent* I have tried to demonstrate that many vanguard artists still crave the experience of seeing “in one volume clasp’d of love, whatev’er/the universe unfolds and to experience them as “compounded” and “yet one individual light/The whole.” In their art, however, this hope is balanced by the despair induced by the realization that they cannot. The extent to which they fall short of the ambition constitutes the key measure of irony’s domain.

SEQ CHAPTER \h \r 1On Loving Poetry, and Not Being Capable of Making It; or, what it is like to be a modern

For eighteen years, from 1975 to 1993, I worked on an extended cycle of films, collectively titled *The Book of All the Dead*, that drew on Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia* and Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*. From January to March of this year [that is, 2008, the year of the Brock Images and Imagery IV] Cinematheque Ontario mounted a “Tribute to R. Bruce Elder” and the department in which I teach, the School of Image Arts at Ryerson University, produced a short monograph on the occasion. The monograph included a brilliant essay on *The Book of All the Dead*, written by Christian Roy, who, without question, has produced the most insightful commentary on my work. Dr. Roy wrote this about the films that conclude the cycle, *The Book of All the Dead*, that is to say, that films in the that section of the cycle that, collectively, are the analogue of the third *cantiche* in Dante’s *Commedia*—their titles are *Azure Serene: Mountains, Rivers, Sea and Sky*; *Exultations (In Light of the Great Giving)*, *Burying the Dead: Into the Light*, and *Et Resurrectus Est*.

As Dante [...] takes leave of Virgil as guide, to be led by Beatrice up to the Heavenly Rose, so does Elder now part ways with his own mentor Stan

Brakhage at the latter's bridal banquet, evoking both the Wedding at Cana and the Last Supper where the Bridegroom (Christ) was joined with this Bride (the Church) as One Body beyond time as history. This calls for *Exultations: In Light of the Great Giving* of a "time when Heaven descends to the earth and makes all earth one with heaven" (Elder), resolving all dualities into a *coincidentia oppositorum*: above and below; outside and inside; male and female; the beginning and the end, even life and death at this climax of Holy Week. For if the institution of the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday ushers in a cosmic *missa jubilaea*, it also hinges on the Passion of Good Friday, and the Harrowing of Hell of the Sabbath, or *Burying the Dead: Into the Light* that will fill all with the Paschal proclamation of *Et Resurrectus Est* a garden, outside the City of Lights – as Heavenly Jerusalem? For it was at Giverny that Monet captured the Edenic vision of a floral epiphany of Light, which propelled Elder on his own quest to film *Paradise* as the redemption of history with Nature, paradoxically achieved when all things are made new and strangely iconic in the digital imagery of the Risen Body, whose embrace heals the soul it merges with as a feminine erotic Presence, encompassing all the dead—past and future—in eternal Life.

I am deeply moved by Dr. Roy's insight into and respect for my work. He has correctly identified the aspiration behind the "Paradiso" section of *The Book of All the Dead*. But on the matter of whether it was achieved, I beg to differ. The purpose of this paper is to explain my doubts.

There is nothing original in saying that Dante's *Commedia* is riven by competing conceptions of language. On the one hand, Dante despairs over language's revelatory powers and announces his doubts so frequently that the *Commedia* has become of the *locus classicus* of examples of what is commonly referred to as the ineffability *topos*.

Chi poria mai pur con parole sciolte
dicer del sangue e de le piaghe a pieno
ch'i' ora vidi, per narrar più volte?

Ogne lingua per certo verria meno
per lo nostro sermone e per la mente
c'hanno a tanto comprender poco seno

On the other hand, as Teodolinda Barolini points out in the fourth chapter of *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante*, concerning this passage, that Dante not only does not withhold speech, but goes on to present a lengthy accumulation of Romans, Anjevins, and other mutilated combatants who have fallen on the battlefields of southern Italy, as if they were all assembled and each demonstrated his wounds. As Bardolino also notes, the text is self-consciousness about its representational mission: its task is to equal in its textual mode the foul mode adopted by infernal reality, which is labeled as though it (reality) too were a genre or style, a foul style. One goal I have for this paper is to explain how reality could have been conceived as a style or manner of composition.

Among the most frequently cited of Dante's many articulations of the so-called ineffability *topos* are the famous lines 70 to 72 of Canto I of *Paradiso*:

Trasumanar significar per verba
Non si poria; però l'esemplo basti
A cui esperiza grazia serba.

Having said this, Dante then goes on to offer the most beautiful collection of poems in history—33 canti so elevated they leave the mind reeling.

The self-consciousness evident in Dante's many remarks on its difficulty he faces in describing what he has experience, highlights the fact that the poem is also concerned with its language and with the relation of language, reality and vision. The horrible images Dante abuts one to another in Malbolgi canti demonstrate the remarkable potency of the language. The words affect us deeply: that they do owes to the strength of the poet, who can call upon words that—or, more precisely can make coin words—that affect us so deeply.

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Dante often expresses despair of conveying his greatest visions in language. But his protestations about the difficulty of the task he confronts have less to do with impotence of language and its resistance to novel compositional forms and more to do with the fallibility of memory. What Dante says, essentially, is that he experienced a higher truth, but after returning to earth, he cannot remember what it was. He remembers only the power and the emotion which went along with it:

Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio
che 'l parlar mostra, ch'a tal vista cede,
e cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio.

Qual è colui che sognando vede,
che dopo 'l sogno la passione impressa
rimane, e l'altro a la mente non riede,

cotal son io, ché quasi tutta cessa
mia visione, e ancor mi distilla
nel core il dolce che nacque da essa.

Così la neve al sol si disigilla;
così al vento ne le foglie levi
si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla.

On the other hand, Dante also realized language can help make memory, just as it can help summons beings into being and so can enrich human being. Language is not itself impotent: the work of language helps undo the frailty of memory—that is why Dante

continues the above passage with an invocation to the Light to grant language and memory.

O somma luce che tanto ti levi
da' concetti mortali, a la mia mente
ripresta un poco di quel che parevi,

e fa la lingua mia tanto possente,
ch'una favilla sol de la tua gloria
possa lasciare a la futura gente;

ché, per tornare alquanto a mia memoria
e per sonare un poco in questi versi,
più si conceperà di tua vittoria.

Here is an earlier passage from *Paradiso*:

O isplendor di Dio, per cu' io vidi
l'alto trionfo del regno verace,
dammi virtù a dir com' io il vidi

The exhilaration Dante experienced in refashioning poetic language is not diluted by—in fact, it depends on—the acknowledgment of the limits' of language creative power. If *Paradiso* abounds in seeming avowals of ineffability, it abounds also in neologisms, new words created to express (formerly) inexpressible thoughts—and to bring new beings (or new spiritual forms) into being. In forging novel linguistic constructions; the poet redraws the boundaries not only of language but also of reality, thereby giving tangible proof that difficulties of 'writing paradise' (or any other realm) can be overcome. This willingness to add to the stock of poetic language, to devise and establish ways of saying what previously could not have been said, is a further sign of Dante's belief in the possibilities of poetic making and in the potency of his own poetic enterprise.

Every time Dante, *poeta*— that is, etymologically, a 'maker'—coins a neologism, he wins, and celebrates, a victory over silence and meaninglessness, a victory that would not have been possible if the *Commedia's* linguistic exuberance did indeed conceal, as some modern readers would have it, its author's cynicism, even despair, about the nature of the task he has undertaken. Dante's confessions of despair only serve to highlight the power of the poetic imagination. Poetry bridges the abyss between language and reality, between language and vision, and between language and the *trasumanar*.

Dante understood that language is mutable, open to being renewed by the poetic. The limits of the language we have at present (or that Dante had) are not the limits of language *per se*. That would be the case if language simply named the objects that make up the furniture of the world. But language is *poiesis*, a making-as-fostering: what language ultimately fosters is the world we experience. What makes Dante contemporary is his understanding of the power of the creative word (an understanding that allowed him to become intimate with the Word, the Logos, that both transfigures the believer in this life and promises bliss in the life to come).

To apprehend the depths of his beliefs in the matter of language's capacity to forge

experience (and of novel language's capacity to recast experience), we must know what Dante, *poeta*, believed about the transformative power of the word. Coming to understand Dante's real views of language involves accepting first that Dante was really not committed to an apophatic view of language, according to which language cannot present convey the truth of the Divine Being. But that leaves unexplained the question why Dante should resort so often to the ineffability *topos*.

Responding to that question we should bear in mind that statements about language's inability to convey the nature of the Divine were already common by Dante's time. Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-after 394) wrote:

The simplicity of the True Faith assumes God to be that which He is, namely, incapable of being grasped by any term, or any idea, or any other device of our apprehension, remaining beyond the reach not only of the human but of the angelic and supermundane intelligence, unthinkable, unutterable, above all expression in words, having but one name that can represent His proper nature, the single name being, 'Above Every Name.' (*Against Eunomius*, Book 1, Chapter 43)

In the 5th century, the Christian Neo-Platonist, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, arrived at what is now taken as the classical formulation of apophatic or negative theology. He explores this first through affirmative or kataphatic theology, in which he explores what we can say about God by pushing the language we use to talk about God to its breaking point. When we reach the limits of language we see what we cannot say about God and understand the need for an apophatic theology.

In *On the Divine Names*—"names" here intending predicates in general—Chapter I, sections 1-3, Dionysius states, *inter alia*, that the truths about God are unspeakable and unknowable; they surpass our logical and intellectual power. Our logical power and activity is the power (or activity) that formulates arguments, and therefore involves a process in time. Intellective power (and activity), on the other hand, sees in a flash; it is the faculty of insight—that same faculty Augustine is concerned with in his doctrine of illumination. In Chapter 1, section 5, Dionysius writes "Those who enter into union with it [God], according to the ceasing of all intellectual activity, . . . praise it best of all by denying all beings of it" (col. 593). He also stresses the unqualified transcategoriality of God. Of the Transcendent One he writes:

It is not our soul or mind or understanding. . . . It cannot be spoken of and cannot be grasped by understanding. . . . It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. . . . It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. . . . It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. . . . There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. . . . It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, . . . for it is free . . . free of every human limitation, beyond every limitation: it is also beyond denial.

Other theologians were influenced by the Pseudo-Areopagite: the great ninth century philosopher John Scotus Eriugena wrote of God as being Beyond God. He also stated

that, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus, we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is.

Closer to Dante's time, Alain de Lille (d. 1202-3) wrote in the *Theologicae regulae*, in agreement with the Pseudo-Areopagite, that no name properly belongs to God (*Patrologia Latina* 210.630C) and that only negative statements about God can be true and proper. This negative method is also expounded on in his allegorical treatise, *Anticlaudianus*, where in a chariot made by the seven Liberal Arts and drawn by Reason, Prudentia, ascends through the cosmos to the summit of perfection in search of wisdom. On this allegory, once the threshold of wisdom is reached, the Arts, signifying human understanding, must be left in peace as one ascends wordlessly to the divine reality (A5.83-100).

But this, I contend, is not Dante's position. Like Augustine, Dante contends that true the true explanation for why we cannot speak of transcendental experiences is that memory, not language, fails. If we cannot find words to convey what we experience, this is not due to the incapacity of language itself, but to the fact we cannot remember clearly.

Augustine's theory of language connects to his theories of mind, time and memory. St. Augustine's resounding text, *De Trinitate*, deliberates how humans, unable to achieve God's vision of all things *sub specie aeternitatis*, can possibly know the future, which is not yet disclosed to us, through the past, which has already escaped us. He begins with a simple example:

Quod licet experiri in eis dictis vel canticis, quorum seriem memoriter reddimus. Nisi enim praevideremus cogitatione quod sequitur, non utique diceremus. Et tamen ut praevideamus, non providentia nos instruit, sed memoria. Nam donec finiatur omne quod dicimus, sive canimus, nihil est quod non provisum prospectumque proferatur. (*De Trinitate* XV.7.13)

This then is familiar to us. Yet how we manage to transcend the given and reach out to past and future is hidden in mystery.

Fieri ista in animo vel ab animo nostro novimus, et certissimi sumus: quomodo autem fiant, quanto attentius voluerimus advertere, tanto magis noster et sermo succumbit, et ipsa non perdurat intentio, ut ad liquidum aliquid nostra intelligentia, et si non lingua, perveniat. Et putamus nos, utrum Dei providentia eadem sit quae memoria et intelligentia, qui non singula cogitando aspicit, sed una, aeterna et immutabili atque ineffabili visione complectitur cuncta quae novit, tanta mentis infirmitate posse comprehendere? In hac igitur difficultate et angustiis libet exclamare ad Deum vivum: Mirificata est scientia tua ex me; invaluit, et non potero ad illam. Ex me quippe intellego quam sit mirabilis et incomprehensibilis scientia tua, qua me fecisti; quando nec me ipsum comprehendere valeo quem fecisti: et tamen in meditatione mea exardescit ignis, ut quaeram faciem tuam semper. (*De Trinitate* XV.7.13)

In the Book XI of his *Testament (Confessiones)*, Augustine presents a heady discourse on time and eternity, based upon Ambrose's beautiful evening hymn, 'Deus Creator omnium. There he asks "Ubi est qua metior brevis? Ubi est longa, quam metior?" And he responds: "Ambae sonuerunt, avolaverunt, praeterierunt, iam non sunt." But memory

makes knowledge possible: "Non ergo ipsas, quae iam non sunt, sed aliquid in memoria mea metior, quod infixum manet."

In *De Trinitate*, as in Book 10 of *Confessiones*, Augustine relates questions of language to questions of credibility. Augustine asks, how he could know that Moses (the traditional author of *Genesis*) was telling the truth? How can anyone know what he meant? If he could question Moses, would Augustine even understand the answer, given that Augustine himself does not speak Hebrew, and Moses would not speak Latin? Language and time are veils that cover human understanding, obscuring the perfect vision of divine eternity, where there is no sequence, no division, no past or future, no passing into nonexistence. All human language is only a pale shadow of the eternal Word, and yet language is humanity's vehicle for thinking about God and communicating God's revelation throughout human history. Only in the beatific vision, the direct contact with God that human beings cannot sustain, does one find a taste of what God's timelessness is like.

De doctrina christiana (which Augustine was writing at about the same time as the *Testament* [*Confessiones*]) offers remarks that help clarify his conception of language. The interpretation of Genesis 1:2 he offers there moves immediately beyond the literal sense of the words to a spiritual, almost metaphorical sense. The remarks are grounded in his Platonism, which he strived to reconcile with Christianity. He writes of realms of immaterial intellect and formless matter. Heaven, for Augustine, is instantly identifiable as the heaven of Psalm 115:16: the heaven of heavens ("the heaven of heavens are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men"). This heaven of heavens has multiple properties: It is immaterial and it is outside time, although it is not co-eternal with God and is not made of God's own substance—only the Word, the first Wisdom, Jesus Christ, has that distinction. But the heaven of heavens is also identified with God's wisdom (*cf.*: Ecclesiasticus 1:3–4: "Who has searched out the wisdom of God that goes before all things? Wisdom has been created before all things, and the understanding of prudence from everlasting.") Augustine also identifies the heaven of heavens with the immaterial realm of the intellect, where knowledge is received directly (without mediation) and simultaneously (without the passage of time).

For Augustine, as for other Medieval Platonists, wisdom and truth pre-exist human's awareness of it. Truth is an order of being, a pattern that relates all things. This pattern embodies Reason and it is Reason to which beings are indebted for their being. A person ascends from knowledge of shadows and illusions, through knowledge of particulars to the knowledge of the order of the cosmos and apprehends the reason why things are, *i.e.*, the cause to which things owe their being.

But the mind that knows things is not intractable: in knowing, the mind is reformed, to on the pattern of what it apprehends. Thus, the mind is transformed: this idea of transformation of vision had a Biblical basis, for the transformation of vision/reality is hoped for in the bible. Paul, the most philosophical of the apostles, in the famous thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, said (as Jerome's Vulgate has it): '*Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate.*' Paul wrote in Koine Greek, and, in that Greek, the word for "mirror" is "*esoptron.*" The Vulgate's word "*speculum*" is its exact equivalent. But what is it to see "per speculum in aenigmate"? The "*in aenigmate*" of the Vulgate is a transliteration of the Koine's "*en ainigma,*" which can be translated as 'by means of an obscure saying.' A more-or-less literal translation of Paul's claim, then, is 'now we see in a mirror by means of an obscure saying.' St. Paul says, then, that at present, we know reality by means of a poor, an enigmatic—or, better, a

riddling—reflection i.e., a reflection-as-a-showing or reflection-as-a-demonstration). But a transformation of knowledge is to come: For though now we see by means of a dark, riddling reflection-as-showing, when that transformation comes, we will see face to face (“*tunc autem facie ad faciem*” in the Vulgate).

What does Paul mean when he writes of doing away with these riddling reflections, and seeing “*facie ad faciem*”? To do away with riddling reflections is dispense with the mistaken assumption that objects exist outside of us and are reflected, darkly, in the mirror of mind. To begin to see “*facie ad faciem*” is to come to know the unity of subject and object.

St. Augustine proposed a similar idea:

quae se quoque in me comperiens mutabilem erexit se ad intelligentiam suam et abduxit cogitationem a consuetudine, subtrahens se contradicentibus turbis phantasmatum, ut inveniret quo lumine aspergeretur, cum sine ulla dubitatione clamaret incommutabile praeferendum esse mutabili, unde nosset ipsum incommutabile (quod nisi aliquo modo nosset, nullo modo illud mutabili certa praeponeret) et pervenit ad id, quod est in ictu trepidantis aspectus. (*Confessiones* XIII 17)

True knowledge involves the divine element in the soul knowing the Divine (that which is unchangeable). Augustine’s claim that the knowledge of the image of God does not come through phantasms amounts to the assertion that knowledge originates in the known (the divine), which knows itself through us. Augustine would have us believe that true knowledge (knowledge of God) originates in its object: God can bypass the human consciousness in order to put this image, this knowledge, in us unaltered.

Many readers will be familiar with the claim that Mediaeval era’s dominant epistemology held that truth was an ‘adequation’ of the mind to the thing. Most will know, too, that prior to St. Thomas’ time, there were two principal traditions regarding truth. One of these, primarily a Neo-Platonic conception of truth, and known to St. Thomas through the writings of Augustine, Anselm and Avicenna (Ibn Sina), emphasized what we might call ‘ontological truth’ or the truth of being; the other, rooted in the tradition of Aristotelian traditions, emphasized what we might call ‘logical truth,’ or truth as an adequation of mind and reality. The core idea of the latter tradition had appeared already in Aristotle, for Aristotle had asserted that the sense-organ can take on the form of the object without its matter (425b22–23), which is why, Scotus affirms, even after the cognized objects are gone, there come about in us “*sensus et imaginationes*.” Aquinas repeats the phrase in his commentary but substitutes “*sensationes*” for “*sensus*,” with exactly the same meaning as in Averroës: what is left behind in sensing something. Indeed, though the claim that truth is “*adequatio intellectus et rei*” is most commonly identified with St. Thomas, many before him had maintained that position).

I wish to argue that what St. Thomas meant by that apothegm not what he usually believed to claim. I contend that what he intends by that saying is more a synthesis of the Neo-Platonic and the Aristotelian views than it is a rehearsal of Aristotelian view. To properly establish that, one would be to show that St. Thomas conception of truth is closer to the coherence theory of truth than the correspondence theory. Unfortunately, space does not allow me to do that job properly, so instead I shall provide a bald outline of what my argument would be if had space enough to make it. And to do that, I point out some features of the intellectual context of Aquinas’ philosophy

(to help me make clear how Aquinas' though diverges from the cartoon view of the "philosophia Aristotelico-Thomistica").

The Neo-Platonic tradition and Aristotlean tradition, which, together, are supposed to dominated the Medieval period, supposedly offered opposed metaphysical theories, contending anthropologies and contrasting epistemologies. One way of encapsulating the essential difference between the two traditions on epistemological matters is point out, first, that both traditions asserted that truth belongs to the human intellect, but differ on way truth comes to be there. The Neo-Platonic (Augustinian) tradition, maintains that truth comes to be there by divine illumination, while the Aristotelian tradition maintains that truth is the result of the mind's receiving *species* (forms) from individual material object.

This term, "*species*," is complex, and we do well to ponder some of the large variety of meanings the term had in Ancient and Medieval worlds. The original sense of the term "species" was of an aspect, i.e., an outward appearance. Early Greek atomists proposed that objects emit what they called "*eidola*," copies of the object's form. These reproductions penetrated the viewer's eye and vision resulted. The philosopher-poet Lucretius embedded this theory of vision as intromission in *De rerum natura* (especially Book 4. Part II)

nunc agere incipiam tibi, quod vehementer ad has res
attinet esse ea quae rerum simulacra vocamus,
quod speciem ac formam similem gerit eius imago,
cuius cumque cluet de corpore fusa vagari;
quae quasi membranae summo de corpore rerum
dereptae volitant ultroque citroque per auras,
atque eadem nobis vigilantibus obvia mentes
terrificant atque in somnis, cum saepe figuras
contuimur miras simulacraque luce carentum,
quae nos horrifice languentis saepe sopore
excierunt ne forte animas Acherunte reamur
effugere aut umbras inter vivos volitare
neve aliquid nostri post mortem posse relinqui,
cum corpus simul atque animi natura perempta
in sua discessum dederint primordia quaeque.
dico igitur rerum effigias tenuisque figuras
mittier ab rebus summo de cortice eorum;
id licet hinc quamvis hebeti cognoscere corde.

However, that view was not the only view thinkers of antiquity proposed. Earlier the Pythagoreans had proposed a view that was more widely accepted, and it contraverted this intromissive thesis, arguing that if this theory were true, then, in order to see large objects, large species would have to penetrate the eye, and that is clearly impossible. Accordingly, the Pythagoreans argued instead that the viewer's eye must be the source of the power of seeing: the eye, they claimed, issues a fiery beam that, in making contact with the object, makes vision possible. The Stoics and some of the pre-Platonic antecedents largely agreed with the Pythagoreans, except for them eye does not emit a fiery beam but, rather, a aery substance – or rather a mixture of fire and air – they referred to as "*pneuma*"; they also proposed that this emission assumes the shape

not of a beam, but, in imitation of the light emitted by the sun, of a cone and offered as well, the claim that the sun must illuminate this pneumatic element in order for the form it conveys to be visible. (Thus, for the Stoics, and their pre-Platonic antecedents, there is similarity between the sun and the eye as the paired sources of visibility.) Alexander of Aphrodisias presented the Stoic theory: “Some people explain vision by the stress of air. The air adjoining the pupil is excited by vision and formed into a cone which is stamped on its base by an impression of the object of vision, and thus perception is created similar to the touch of a stick.”

Plato attempted to synthesize the views of the Pythagoreans and the view that, later, the Stoics would adopt. He claimed that the fiery beam emitted by the eye interacts with a force that emanates from the object and that the beam returns from this interaction to the eye carries an impression of the object. Describing the gods creation of humans and human sensation, Plato stated

And of the organs they first contrived the eyes to give light. When the light of day surrounds the stream of vision, then like falls upon like, and they coalesce, and one body is formed by natural affinity in the line of vision, wherever the light that falls from within meets with an external object. And the whole stream of vision, being similarly affected in virtue of similarity, diffuses the motions of what it touches or what touches it over the whole body, until they reach the soul, causing that perception which we call sight. . . . And now there is no longer any difficulty in understanding the creation of images in mirrors and all smooth and bright surfaces. For from the communion of the internal and external fires, and again from the union of them and their numerous transformations when they meet in the mirror, all these appearances of necessity arise, when the fire from the face coalesces with the fire from the eye on the bright and smooth surface (*Timaeus* 45b-46c).

For Plato, then, the visible form, like images in the mirror, are the product of the meeting of “internal and external fires.” Plato provides a grounds for subsequent thinkers to conceive of seeing as a communion of internal and external forces, as a co-production of the experiencing subject and external entity. .

This notion of experience joins with theory of language-as-making to form the Medieval belief in truth as “*adequatio intellectus et rei*.” In the eleventh book of the *Testament*, Augustine discusses the creation of world. In the middle of the discussion, he embarks on a heart-stopping digression, introducing the topic learning into his discussion. The connection between the two topics, the creation of the world and learning, is his notion of the word. God created the universe through the agency of the word, Augustine avers. “*Ergo dixisti et facta sunt* and “*atque in verbo tuo fecisti ea*.” This word, that God spoke to bring forth the universe, is the word that John referred as being “the beginning.” Then comes the astonishing claim: Augustine asserts that what was there in the beginnings continues—this beginning continues to speak to human beings as a teacher.

In *De magistro* Augustine had argued that it is the word of God, the interior *magister*, that is responsible for the process of learning. Truth us what we attain through hearing the interior *magister* speak.

Quis porro nos docet nisi stabilis Veritas? Quia et per creaturam

mutabilem cum admonemur, ad veritatem stabilem ducimur, ubi vere discimus, cum stamus et audimus eum et gaudio gaudemus propter vocem sponsi 58, reddentes nos, unde sumus. Et ideo principium quia nisi maneret, cum erraremus, non esset quo rediremus. Cum autem redimus ab errore, cognoscendo utique redimus; ut autem cognoscamus, docet nos, quia principium est et loquitur nobis. (*De Verit.* 11.8.10).

Whatever we learn comes to us through the echoing of the word within that activates the learning process. In the beginning, the word brought forth the world, and the same word, active within us, serves as the inner teacher and brings forth what we know. "Ipsium est Verbum tuum, quod et principium est, quia et loquitur nobis," Augustine asserts. (*De Verit.* 11.8.10) The word makes understanding, just as it made (and continues to make) reality in the first place. True understanding and reality are at one.

The doctrine of Ideas, and the notion that Creation (and knowledge) follow prototypes in the mind of God, are central to Thomas' thought, too. The differences between Augustine's and Aquinas' epistemologies mostly arise from their differing conceptions of the light of reason: according to the *Doctor Angelicus*, in opposition to the *Doctor Gratiae*, we do not know through an illumination from outside ourselves. Instead, he judges that we know by the activity of an inherent intellectual light, a power essential to each human soul and given each by God. And this light of reason makes truth appear.

The *Doctor Angelicus*, partly because of his faith commitments and partly because of his acquaintance with Aristotle's works, accorded a more expansive role to the body, the senses, and empirical particulars than Plato or Augustine did. Nonetheless, like many Medieval thinkers, Aquinas believed that human's spiritual capacities cooperate with material particulars, or with the common natures derived from the material particulars, to produce the objects that we know. What is more, it acquires the forms of these objects of knowledge, and, in ascending to the highest forms of knowledge, takes on more and more attributes of the divine. I shall try to establish this, though my argument be very sketchy.

In *De veritate* 1.1 Thomas goes into detail on the concept of 'verum.' We are told:

Omnis autem cognitio perficitur per assimilationem cognoscentis ad rem cognitam; ita quod assimilatio dicta est causa cognitionis; sicut visus, per hoc quod disponitur per speciem coloris, cognoscit colorem. Prima ergo comparatio entis ad intellectum est, ut ens intellectui correspondeat; quae quidem correspondentia adaequatio rei et intellectus dicitur. Et in hoc formaliter ratio veri perficitur. Hoc est ergo quod addit verum supra ens, scil. conformitatem, sive adaequationem, rei et intellectus; ad quam conformitatem, ut dictum est, sequitur cognitio rei. Sic ergo entitas rei praecedat rationem veritatis; sed cognitio est quidam veritatis effectus.' (*De Verit.* I, a. 1)

There we have it: the addition which Truth makes to Being consists in a conformity between the thing and the intellect; and on this conformity follows, as has been said, cognition of the thing.

Some Thomists take the assertion that truth consists of an adequation of the intellect and things to imply that the object reforms the mind by casting an image of itself into the mind, and so to imply the mirror theory of knowing. I see no warrant in Thomas'

writing for this conclusion. This reading seems to me an instance of reading backwards into history: because epistemologists from, say Locke to twentieth-century logical positivists and operationalists assumed the existence of “sensa” (akin to what we, moderns, think of as images in the mirror), Thomas must have as well. That conclusion is unwarranted. The first difference with the Lockean theory, or what I have called the ‘reflection theory,’ is that in the Lockean theory, the mind that receives the impression of the external object is passive, while in Aquinas’ view the practice of *imitatio*, or mimesis, is not merely a passive receiving, but one that involves collecting images and assembling intelligible relations amongst them and, in that process, bringing forth a new entity through the communion of internal and external reality.. I shall try to provide grounds for these claims.

Complementum autem cuiuslibet motus vel operationis est in suo termino,” writes Aquinas. “Motus autem cognitivae virtutis terminatur ad animam” From this, he concludes “oportet enim quod cognitum sit in cognoscente per modum cognoscentis.” This, it seems to me, rules out the mirror theory of knowing. The mirror image does not depend on the mode of the glass in anything like the same way that the known is known according to the mode of the knower (which, as Aquinas points out here, involves some sort of activity) nor does the image in a mirror reshape the mirror in the same way that knowledge reshapes the mind. I shall so return to that latter point, concerning the extent to which the known reshapes the knowing agent. What Aquinas affirms here, that truth must be fitted to the intellect, not compatible with its own constitutive structure, is momentous—and rarely acknowledged.

The idea reflected here, that things are known according to the mode of the knower, surely, is another *topos* of Medieval philosophy. It appears in St. Thomas in a number of forms: “Omne quod recipitur in aliquo, recipitur in eo per modum recipientis”; “Quidquid est in aliquo, est in eo per modum eius in quo est”; “Cognitum autem est in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis.”; “Cognita sunt in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis.” Much earlier, Boethius had expounded it in the *Consolatio Philosophiae*: omne enim quod cognoscitur non secundum sui uim sed secundum cognoscentium potius comprehenditur facultatem (5P4). Or, again, “omne iudicium secundum sui naturam quae sibi subiecta sunt comprehendit” (5P6). The reason this became a *topos* a Medieval philosophy is that the Medieval episteme held reality is not something external to the mind, but a fusion of mind and matter. What is implied by that claim, I contend, is a fundamental rejection of the representationalist conception of truth and knowledge. For it implies that what is known cannot be represented as something to which knowledge must be conformed, because knowledge involves a co-production, of “the object” (or better, the object-emerging-in-the-process-of-being-in-thrown-against-knowing-being); so the object, as known-being, does not pre-exist the act of knowing—it comes into being in the act of knowing. The basis for Dante’s (and Augustine’s) complaint that there can be no image of the thing known, an aspect of the ineffability *topos*, is the understanding that known-being emerges in the act of knowing (whose content can be represented in language), and when the act of cognition has ended, that known-being, *strictu sensu*, has escaped. For example, that belief explains Augustine’s complaint that the known-being swiftly takes flight.

Knowing depends on some type of connaturality between subject and object in comprehending an object, the subject is, in some sense, conformed to the object. I would like to be able to provide a thorough description of the Aquinas’ theory of knowledge, for it has many points of contact with Dante’s metaphysics. Unfortunately I have not the space. I will present a bald, summary statement of what I believe the

Doctor Communis' theory of knowledge was. Cartoonish though the summary be, I hope that I can provide sufficient detail, first, to convince readers that, though my reading of Aquinas diverges from the received view, it might have enough plausibility to warrant further investigation and, second, indicate how much the great poet drew from the great philosopher.

Aquinas, I shall argue maintained that knowledge was a co-production, with the knower participating with the external world in bringing forth the object of knowledge. To the objection that "intellectum est in intellectu intelligente" (the thing understood is in the intellect which understands)," Aquinas responded

lapis enim [an example Aristotle had used] non est in anima, sed species lapidis, ut dicitur in III de anima. Et tamen lapis est id quod intelligitur, non autem species lapidis, nisi per reflexionem intellectus supra seipsum, alioquin scientiae non essent de rebus, sed de speciebus intelligibilibus.
(*S.T.* I q. 76 a. 3 ad 4)

In a passage that appears just slightly later in the *Summa Theologica*, the *Doctor Angelicus* notes that, "dicendum quod quidam posuerunt quod vires cognoscitivae quae sunt in nobis, nihil cognoscunt nisi proprias passiones," which claim Thomas refutes thus:

Et ideo dicendum est quod species intelligibilis se habet ad intellectum ut quo intelligit intellectus. Quod sic patet. Cum enim sit duplex actio, sicut dicitur IX Metaphys., una quae manet in agente, ut videre et intelligere, altera quae transit in rem externam, ut calefacere et secare; utraque fit secundum aliquam formam. Et sicut forma secundum quam provenit actio tendens in rem externam, est similitudo obiecti actionis, ut calor calefacientis est similitudo calefacti; similiter forma secundum quam provenit actio manens in agente, est similitudo obiecti. Unde similitudo rei visibilis est secundum quam visus videt; et similitudo rei intellectae, quae est species intelligibilis, est forma secundum quam intellectus intelligit. Sed quia intellectus supra seipsum reflectitur, secundum eandem reflexionem intelligit et suum intelligere, et speciem qua intelligit. Et sic species intellectiva secundo est id quod intelligitur. Sed id quod intelligitur primo, est res cuius species intelligibilis est similitudo. (*S.T.*, I q. 85 a. 2)

Likewise, "Sed species sensibilis non est illud quod sentitur, sed magis id quo sensus sentit. Ergo species intelligibilis non est quod intelligitur actu, sed id quo intelligit intellectus." (*Loc. cit.*)

Even with the lower grades of speculative knowledge, knowledge that more than of other sort takes its measure not from the soul but from the object known, the object's measure must be accommodated by the soul. To that extent its form is determined by the soul's intrinsic capacities. Aquinas specifically rejects the Lockean view. In treating knowledge as dynamic, as bringing about a change in the knower, Aquinas writes

Est autem duplex immutatio, una naturalis, et alia spiritualis. Naturalis quidem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato

secundum esse naturale, sicut calor in calefacto. Spiritualis autem, secundum quod forma immutantis recipitur in immutato secundum esse spirituale; ut forma coloris in pupilla, quae non fit per hoc colorata. Ad operationem autem sensus requiritur immutatio spiritualis, per quam intentio formae sensibilis fiat in organo sensus. Alioquin, si sola immutatio naturalis sufficeret ad sentiendum, omnia corpora naturalia sentirent dum alterantur. (*S. T. I ques 78 a. 3*).

Accordingly, truth in Aquinas, is an event, not a static relation, between a phenomenal and an external object. Aquinas also relates truth—intellectual truth, which he deems higher than sensory truth—to self-reflection.

quod veritas est in intellectu et in sensu, sed non eodem modo. In intellectu enim est sicut consequens actum intellectus, et sicut cognita per intellectum. Consequitur namque intellectus operationem, secundum quod iudicium intellectus est de re secundum quod est. Cognoscitur autem ab intellectu secundum quod intellectus reflectitur supra actum suum, non solum secundum quod cognoscit actum suum, sed secundum quod cognoscit proportionem eius ad rem: quae quidem cognosci non potest nisi cognita natura ipsius actus; quae cognosci non potest, nisi natura principii activi cognoscatur, quod est ipse intellectus, in cuius natura est ut rebus conformetur; unde secundum hoc cognoscit veritatem intellectus quod supra seipsum reflectitur. (*De Verit. q. i a. 9*)

Aquinas argued, as Plato did, that the intellect corrects the senses. The intellect not only knows but, generally, knows that it knows: it knows that what is before it is true.

To continue with my bald outline of what I believe Thomas offered in the way of theory of truth: humans long to understand the Whole, to grasp the connections amongst things and their causes. This wonder ultimately leads us to God. There is still a lingering Platonism in Aquinas, and the Platonic tradition in metaphysics (like Scotist tradition in theology) maintains that Beauty colludes with Truth, the Good with Understanding, and Love with Knowledge, to draw the mind onward. The desire of God (I am using that expression both to refer to God's desire for us and to ours for God) in which it might be taken) is the active element in knowledge. Aquinas understood that conceptual thinking, which is allied with reflection, is not an act of mind severed from a body, from the senses and from emotions. Knowing is a full human act and is animated by love and the desire to be united with object of knowledge. In its ultimate form it is united with ultimate object of knowledge, that is to say, with God. The search for truth leads towards God and culminates in an apprehension of the Divine.

Every judgment is an affirmation that draws us towards the end of Truth, which is the knowledge of everything. It is to the end of attaining union that soul engages in reflection and abstracts a common nature the sensuous particular. "Etsi enim cognoscat res habentes formam in materia, tamen resolvit compositum in utrumque, et considerat ipsam formam per se (*S. T. I q. 12 a 4 ad 3*). What Aquinas says next is remarkable: "Et ideo, cum intellectus creatus per suam naturam natus sit apprehendere formam concretam et esse concretum in abstractione, per modum resolutionis cuiusdam, potest per gratiam elevari ut cognoscat substantiam separatam subsistentem, et esse separatum subsistens."

These universals, these forms or common natures, are real. Why are they real?

First, because Aquinas' ontology proposes a hierarchy, according to which spirit is higher than matter; hence, the immaterial nature of these common forms does not disqualify them from being real. On the contrary, the form (the *species*, the common nature), insofar as it is divorced from matter, resembles the Divine, the end of all knowledge, more than particular things do. Matter represents the limiting factor in those composite beings that are known by the senses. But knowledge strives to become knowledge of what is freed from determining limitation. Abstracting the common nature from objects allows one to know a spiritual being that lacks the determining limitations of matter. Thus, knowledge of common natures puts one on the "ascensus mentis in Deum." "Omnia cognoscuntia cognoscunt implicite Deum in quolibet cognito," St. Thomas writes (*De Verit.* q. 22. a. 2. ad 1). Every act of knowing discloses something of God's being, since the human act by which spiritual things are known (and even perception involve the separation of a spiritual entity from matter) resembles somewhat God's knowing.

The mind participates with particulars to realize these common natures. What is more, the mind, because it operates according to the principles of the intellect, of which the Divine Intellect is the exemplar, forms particulars in a manner that is consistent with God's understanding, and so with the ordinances of being. The object that is thrown against the mind in coming to knowledge is the idea in the mind of God. Things, then, in Aquinas, are no different than thought. The adequation of the intellect to things is the conformity of the human intellect to ideas in the divine intellect, the similitudo of human thought and divine creativity, whose very emblem is the Word.

Thus, each affirmation leads to a higher question, and apprehending the answer to that question leads to a yet higher question. In the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas refers to "plenam participationem divinitatis, quae vere est hominis beatitudo, et finis humanae vitae (*S. T.* 3. q. 1 a. 2). This spiritual *itinerarium* is actually conceived by Aquinas as an ascent toward deiformity. Thomas maintained a version of idea that now is known only in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, of theosis or 'divinization'—the *Doctor Angelicus'* way of describing that result is to say that one becomes 'deiform.'

But the idea was not always restricted to the countries of Byzantine imperium. Patristic writings testify to a vigorous soteriological tradition which taught that the destiny of man was to become like God, and even to become deified. Later theologians felt the need to soften the early Church's divinization theology. (Likewise Aquinas: "Videtur quod aliquis intellectus creatus per sua naturalia divinam essentiam videre possit." *S. T.* q. 12 a. 4), his energies, grace, life and power were interpreted to fill the whole universe. These energies are the active expression of God's being, his self-manifestation. When a person knows or participates in the divine energies, he knows or participates in God. This what the Greek fathers referred to as the theosis of human being, human's deification. Though one with the divine, the human knower remains human. They are not annihilated or swallowed up in God. Thus, we participate in the energies of god, which he transmits to mankind, but we do not participate in, or know, God's essence. "Quod de Deo non possumus scribere quid est." Aquinas compared this process to a poker being held in a fire. The poker becomes a fire, in that it takes every attribute of the fire. It burns, radiates heat and light, emits energy as it is transformed by the fire's energy. And yet, it though it has 'become fire', it is unquestionably iron as well. So, too, when we participate in God's energy (i.e., in his spiritual being), we become deiform.

I am aware this doesn't sound much like the familiar Aquinas. But I believe Aquinas himself doesn't sound much like the familiar Aquinas.

Facultas autem videndi Deum non competit intellectui creato secundum

suam naturam, sed per lumen gloriae, quod intellectum in quadam deiformitate constituit . . . Unde intellectus plus participans de lumine gloriae, perfectius Deum videbit. Plus autem participabit de lumine gloriae, qui plus habet de caritate, quia ubi est maior caritas, ibi est maius desiderium; et desiderium quodammodo facit desiderantem aptum et paratum ad susceptionem desiderati. Unde qui plus habebit de caritate, perfectius Deum videbit, et beator erit.

We ascend the ladder of understanding, from discursive understanding (Aquinas understand ratio, reasoning, as “dis-currere,” or the mind running around, from premise to conclusion to next conclusion) to the simple act of intellectual vision as the mind conforming itself to (i.e., according to the Neo-Platonic strand in his thinking, participating in) thinking that is closer to deiform: “Unde, quamvis cognitio humanae animae proprie sit per viam rationis, est tamen in ea aliqua participatio illius simplicis cognitionis quae in superioribus substantiis invenitur, ex quo etiam intellectivam vim habere dicuntur” (*Quaes. disp. de Veritate*, Q. XV, a.1. resp). And since things are, in essence, objects of divine intellect, in conforming itself to (or taking on attributes of) the divine intellect, it comes to apprehend the truth of being.

The Doctor Angelicus’ epistemology (and soteriology) dispenses with the distinction between the realms of nature and grace, as with that between natural reason and revealed truth. The light of any thing is the radiance and clarity that comes from its intelligibility, which follows from its being a *creatura*, brought forth first in the mind of God: “Ipsa actualitas rei est quoddam lumen ipsius.” Grace attends to our knowledge, for only grace permits the even most ordinary activities of human reasoning. Dante, I suggest (and will go on to argue) embraced this notion— indeed, he took its implications to the extreme.

Dante, too, maintained that all knowledge requires divine illumination and all knowledge is akin to the experience of light flooding the intellect with love; indeed, Dante radicalized this belief by connecting the idea of knowledge of co-production with another, that of the creative word, founded in the comparison between the Creator’s making and the inspired poet’s making. The strong poet, truly inspired, knows intimately the higher truths he writes about, because he knows them as their co-maker. He participates with the divine *energeia*, which, at every moment of its existence, maintains each existent in being being—that same belief that had allowed Aquinas to state, “res naturalis inter duos intellectus constituata [est]” (*Q. d De Veritate*, q.1 a. 2). His many expressions about the doubt about his capacity to convey the experiences he wishes to tell the reader about are really invocation to the creator spirit to come and fill his mind with love. He calls out for the *incendium amoris* to bring him knowledge.

Dante had Aquinas’ example as a model for his ideas on truth and human understanding. Aquinas had asserted that truth exists in the Mind of God in the same way that idea exists in a craftsman’s mind. The *exemplum* of human making is the work of the poet. In *De Veritate*, Aquinas described the external speech act as the external expression of a *verbum cordis*, that serves as both its efficient and its final cause. In this way, the *verbum cordis* (Aquinas also used the terms ‘*verbum mentis*’ and ‘*verbum interioris*’; he also uses the ‘*conceptum cordis*’ in much the same way). The *verbum cordis* (or *species expressa*—cf. *species impressa*) possesses excogitative dynamic (and here I am thinking of ‘*dynamus*’), so its serves as a *forma exemplaris*. The inner word virtually emanates into external speech acts.

In *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Dante argued that humans could never of been without

language, so intimate language and reason. Even Adam cannot ever have been without language. That left Dante with the task of explaining how Adam, all alone in the world (he must have possessed language even before Eve appeared) came to possess language. Dante explained his acquisition of language by saying that it came to him through divine *afflatus*, and by response to the word of God, which He caused to sound using the winds as his organ of speech. Medieval thinkers' tendency to connect language, imagination and divine grace, and to affirm the creative power of the word produced a rich insight: that language engenders reality in conformity with ideas in God's mind. Language is genuinely poetic, that is, its use is genuinely an act of *poiesis*, of making. Augustine pays tribute to the creative power of the word in *Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* :

Noli ergo credere factum, per quod facta sunt omnia: ne non reficiaris per Verbum, per quod reficiuntur omnia. Iam enim factus es per Verbum, sed oportet te refici per Verbum: si autem mala fuerit fides tua de Verbo, non poteris refici per Verbum. Et si tibi contigit fieri per Verbum, ut per illud factus sis, per te deficis: si per te deficis, ille te reficiat qui te fecit: si per te deterior efficeris, ille te recreet qui te creavit. Quomodo te autem recreet per Verbum, si male aliquid sentias de Verbo? (*In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 1. 12.)

Let's explore this position. I commented above, in referring to the *Malbolge canti*, that the *Commedia* is a remarkably self-referential work, one that comments frequently on, or otherwise highlights, its methods. The *Commedia* reflects on its language. For Dante, as for Augustine, the consideration of language is deeply connected to other aspects of the system of knowledge. Time and again, Dante demonstrates that the divinely charged word can serve as adequate symbol—it can do so because its task is not simply to mediate between consciousness and reality, but includes giving reality form. Knowing is a synthesis of mind and matter, or, better, an act of *poiesis* through which the mind brings forth what it knows even as what is known gives form to the mind: the thing made guides the act of making even as the act of making brings to pass what is made.

Analogous, too, I argue, is the work of language. It is an act of *poiesis*, which brings its reality into being even as it is guided by reality. When we think about the creating word, it is important to remember what reading was for Medievals. Pierre Hadot's work on the role meditation played in the Ancient schools of philosophy to bring about an adherent's interior transformation. Throughout the Medieval era, the practice of *lectio divina*, which involved a prayerful meditation on the several layers of meaning in the Scriptures, brought Medieval readers to an altered state: Medieval readers expected a philosophical or theological text to have this transformative effect, and Medieval writers consciously crafted their work to provide it. Augustine, Boethius and Anselm intended their writings to be more than expository treatises; they were to provoke spiritual exercises. The reader who reflected upon the patterns of meaning embedded in these works would rise to a deeper understanding of divine truths, and so to a heightened awareness of God's presence.

But how should we understand the three-termed analogy of language, creativity and truth, on which this conception is based? Truth is harmony and coherence (in the sense of an integrated pattern); knowing the truth brings the mind to a harmony regulated by the same principles as though to which beings owe their being. This harmony suffuses the mind with joy. So we experience joy in apprehending the creative

principle to which all that exists owes its being.

The universal good people seek in life is joy: the joy the happy life universally seeks must be joy in the truth. Thus, the true and greatest joy (Augustine, *inter alia*, argues) is joy in God. Even those who do not seek God nonetheless “remain drawn toward some image of [this] true joy.” The obstacle realizing this goal of experiencing joy is lack of will: we know how to seek the happy life not because we remember any particular joys, but because we remember (recall that, according to the Platonic conception of *anamnesis*, memory can stretch beyond the limit of a single human life) the nature of truth itself.

Hence, the soul, in some sense, participates in God’s creative acts of self-knowing. That was basis of Aquinas’ epistemology. That luminous insight was swept away with the Enlightenment. Descartes lays down the fundamental principle that produced that effect: ideas are true precisely to the extent that they can be derived from reason itself. The clarity and distinctness of ideas that Descartes takes to be the criteria of their truth derive from the immediacy with which they are related to the pure thought of the ego. That is the difference between the Medieval world and the modern world of Nicholas of Cusa or René Descartes.

Kant too affirms the principle that ideas are true precisely to the extent that they can be derived from reason itself. Admittedly, he pronounces the idea with a slightly different inflection, one that has been differentiated through an encounter with Humean empiricism, which refined into the most rigorous and most comprehensive Europe has ever been given. For Kant, there is no innate knowledge *per se*: concepts without experience are empty. Regarding the question of revelation, Kant’s integration of empiricism does not bring him in any significant sense beyond Descartes: critical philosophy determines the subject’s conditions of possibility prior to any encounter whatsoever with what lies outside of the subject. Where the soul had once aspired to take wing and fly to the realm of the forms, it has become a Procrustean bed to which all knowledge must be conformed..

Only that which can be received within the understanding’s *a priori* conditions is intelligible. What lies beyond these conditions simply cannot be received. For Kant, the mind is constitutionally lonely. We see this loneliness specifically in two ways: first of all, everything that is ordered in one’s experience, which means everything accessible to the soul’s perceptive and cognitive powers, is simply the product of the soul’s spontaneous formal and categorial activity; what comes from outside the soul is nothing but the matter to be shaped by this activity. The world is not ultimately what one understands; rather, it occasions acts of understanding. Second, even the material contribution from outside the subject disappears at the supersensible level. The soul can encounter only what is physical, not spiritual entities (principles of order); but beyond the physical there is nothing but the pure spontaneity of reason. Indeed, the experience of the sublime—which is the moment in Kant’s philosophy wherein the supersensible seems to impose itself most insistently—is, strictly speaking, not an experience at all, insofar as experience entails a moment of receptivity. The world turns out to be, as Kant puts it in the Third Critique, reason’s encounter with itself: “die wahre Erhabenheit nur im Gemüte des Urteilenden, nicht in der Naturobjekte, dessen Beurteilung diese Stimmung desselben veranlaßt, müsse gesucht werden.”

The Medieval world, by way of contrast, understood the highest form of knowledge as inbreaking of the radically Other. The reflections I have offered on the meaning of “*adequatio*” in Thomas’ saying regarding truth I believe have a deeper and greater implication than others have discerned in his statement: to say that truth arises

as co-production between the knowing agent and being itself, and to say that truth as known-being must be fitted to constitution of the intellect, is to assert that consciousness is the world manifesting itself in the known agent. The intellect is fitted for transcendence (in the phenomenological sense of the word). The self is fitted to make contact with the world and in fact arises (insofar as the self can be identified with consciousness) only through the contact with the world.

The distinguished theologian Hans Balthasar recognized that two great truths are contained in that insight:

1) that an *otherness* abides in every act of knowing, even though every act of known is an fusion of the knower and the known.

2) that the other engenders us. The model, as Balthasar again pointed out, is the “The little child awaken[ing] to self-consciousness through being addressed by the love of his mother.”

Knowledge was no longer understood this way after Kant: what looks like the inbreaking of the radically Other is, in fact, the moment of the purest introspection. For Kant, reason, by its very nature, cannot be moved by its other. The infinite, which would seem to challenge the soul’s *a priori* conditions of possibility, in the end reinforces them all the more decisively, albeit at a different level. Kant explicitly declares that genuine supernatural revelation is impossible: it sounds questionable, he says in *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, but it is in no way reprehensible to say that everyone makes his own God. Kant makes the claim because, he argues, we would not be able to recognize the revealed God as God unless he corresponded to our *a priori* notion of what it means to be God. Rather as Socrates argues in the *Meno*, revelation can be true only if it reveals to us what we already know. For Kant, revealed religion has value only insofar as it aids in the understanding of natural religion, which is religion determined by reason’s *a priori*, and thus immanent, horizon.

How, indeed, can reason have a capacity for what lies beyond its capacity? Dante had an answer. People living in the Classical and Medieval period had an answer. We have none. That is the crux of the issue. The poetic language of *Paradiso*, taken as a whole, is exultant rather than diffident about its own claims to mean, refer, and express; and it founds those claims on a self-confident estimation of its own authority that derives directly from its author’s literary practice and theological beliefs. When the Christian poet speaks in the name of God, drawing fully on all the resources with which his fallen human language is endowed, the result is a truly sacred eloquence, charged to the highest possible degree with expressive, truth-bearing power, that functions as an exemplary principle for both poet and reader.

Language and thought are on intimate terms with one another—like thinking, the word is world-creating/world-disclosing. Heidegger was a great student of Medieval philosophy, and he discerned the intimacy of language and world-disclosure, for near the end of “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” he asserts that language, through its nominative power, *Indem die Sprache erstmals das Seiende nennt, bringt solches Nennen das Seiende erst zum Wort und zum Erscheinen.*” Poetry, Heidegger knew, as Dante knew, was language’s most primordial, world-creating, instance.

What about cinema? The cinematic apparatus, I contend, has built into it the suppositions of the modern era, that understands truth as a representation. Digital imagery, however, is different in that respect. Christian Roy was certainly correct to suggest that I turned to the digital image to attempt to “write Paradise.” The attraction of

the digital image, for me, was the seemed close the image in which engendering and perception were at one.

Of course, that belief was simply false. As Heidegger notes: “Zu dem, was die Technik ist, gehört das Verfertigen und Benützen von Zeug, Gerät und Maschinen, gehört dieses Verfertigte und Benützte selbst, gehören die Bedürfnisse und Zwecke, denen sie dienen.

What is more damning still, Heidegger is right in saying that Being can no longer be discerned because of the triumph of metaphysics—that is to say, the positing of static and unitary conceptions of Being over those of Being as co-production. Conceiving of the digital as *poiesis* was bound to fail. Heidegger distinguished four ways beings are indebted for their being: *causa materialis*, *causa formalis*, *causa finalis* and *causa efficiens*. In the digital realm, the *causa materialis* has been all but eliminated, there material has replaced by the virtual (for what is new about the digital realm is that what is virtual no longer belongs to the category of illusory form; rather the virtual has come to supplant the material itself). The *causa formalis* no longer is any gathering together to be a whole, but rather is an appearance imposed by the technological system. The *causa finalis* derives from “wheels revolving with and even motion, turning with the love that moves the sun and all the other stars,” for the inventor mind is no longer drawn by Love to the Whole. As for the *causa efficiens*, that is the worst of it: a great poet once wrote, “Usura rusteth the chisel/It rusteth the craft and the craftsman.” Here, at least, he spoke the truth. Substitute the technical system for “usura”—it’s not such a far-fetched substitution, since usury concerns the phantasmal production of money—and you know what you need to know about how craft (and the craftperson) have been remade.

It was all predictable: the effort to rewrite the end of the *Commedia* into film is bound to fail. And fail I did. That’s the bitter truth. Dante know about that sort of co-production that the ancients called “*poiesis*,” We, moderns, do not. No *poesis*, no poetry.

Biographical Note

R. Bruce Elder, FRSC, is a film-maker whose works have been presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Centre Pompidou, Paris, Kino Arsensal, Berlin and in retrospectives presented at Anthology Film Archives, the Art Gallery of Ontario, La Cinémathèque Québécoise, Il Festival Senzatitolo (Trento), Festival des Cinémas Différents, Images '97 (Toronto) and by Cinémathèque Ontario, who proclaimed in their program note for their Nov. 2008 tribute: “R. Bruce Elder is not only one of Canada's foremost experimental filmmakers, he's one of our greatest artists, thinkers, critics, and filmmakers, period.” In 2007, Bruce Elder was awarded the Governor General’s Award in Media Arts and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada that same year.

Elder has published numerous articles and three books, *Image and Identity: Reflections on Canadian Film Culture* (1989), which includes extensive treatments of the films of Michael Snow and Jack Chambers; *A Body of Vision: Representations of the Body in Recent Film and Poetry* (1997); and *The Films of Stan Brakhage in the American Tradition of Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Charles Olson* (1998). His most recent book, *Harmony and Dissent: Film and Avant-garde Art Movements in the Early Twentieth Century* was awarded the prestigious Robert Motherwell Book Award in 2009

. Who, even with untrammelled words and many
attempts at telling, ever could recount
in full the blood and wounds that I now saw?

All language, certainly, would be in vain,
our speech and memories have little room,
so much to comprehend or to contain.

Inferno XXVIII 1-6

. To soar beyond the human cannot be described
In words. Let the example be enough to one
for whom grace holds this experience in store.

To soar beyond the human cannot be described
In words. Let the example be enough to one
for whom grace holds this experience in store.
That then I saw is more than tongue can say.
Our human speech is dark before the vision.
The ravished memory swoons and falls away.

As one who sees in dreams and wakes to find
the emotional impression of his vision
still powerful while its parts fade from his mind—

just such am I, having lost nearly all
the vision itself, while in my heart I feel
the sweetness of it yet distill and fall.

So, in the sun, the footprints fade from snow.
On the wild wind that bore the tumbling leaves
the Sybil's oracles were scattered so.

Paradiso: XXXIII 55-66

O Light, exalted beyond mortal thought,
grant that in memory I see again
but one small part of how you then appeared

and grant my tongue sufficient power
that it may leave behind a single spark
of glory for the people yet to come,

since, if you return be briefly to my mind
and then resound but softly in these lines,
the better will your victory be conceived.

Paradiso XXXIII 67-75

O splendour of God by which I saw the high triumph of the true kingdom, give me
power to tell what I saw there *Paradiso*, XXX:99-101.

Dante went so far as argue for the intrinsic superiority of a living, mutable language
over Latin, whose forms were set. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante gives clear evidence
that he understands the mutability of vital languages. For there he contrasts the
unstable and corruptible nature of the vernacular with the stable and incorruptible
nature of Latin and gives instances of the many changes that have occurred in the
Tuscan vernacular in the short space of 50 years. He even maintained (quite rightly)
that if the dead were to return to their home town in 1000 years, they would find that
people there speaking a language unintelligible to them. *De vulgari eloquentia*, I v. And
the work sets out to show that the *vulgare illustre* is poetically able. Dante even
understood that neighbouring dialectics were affecting the dialects of Bologna (I, xv, 15
ff.).

Dante is often taken as saying something very similar. Obviously, I do not concur.

From *The Mystical Theology* in *The Complete Works of Pseudo-Dionysius*, trans Colin
Luibheid, p. 141.

. And this may be tried in the case of any words or songs, the due order of which we are rendering by memory; for we certainly should not utter each in succession, unless we foresaw in thought what came next. And yet it is not foresight, but memory, that enables us to foresee it; for up to the very end of the words or the song, nothing is uttered except as foreseen and looked forward to.

. We know, and are absolutely certain, that all this takes place in our mind or by our mind; but how it takes place, the more attentively we desire to scrutinize, the more do both our very words break down, and our purpose itself fails, when by our understanding, if not our tongue, we would reach to something of clearness. And do such as we are, think, that in so great infirmity of mind we can comprehend whether the foresight of God is the same as His memory and His understanding, who does not regard in thought each several thing, but embraces all that He knows in one eternal and unchangeable and ineffable vision? In this difficulty, then, and strait, we may well cry out to the living God, Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot attain unto it. For I understand by myself how wonderful and incomprehensible is Your knowledge, by which You made me, when I cannot even comprehend myself whom You have made! And yet, while I was musing, the fire burned, so that I seek Your face evermore.

. Where is the short syllable by which I measure? Where is the long one that I am measuring? Both have sounded, have flown away, have passed on, and are no longer. . . Therefore I do not measure them, for they do not exist any more. But I measure something in my memory which remains fixed.

. And when this power of reason within found that it was changeable, it raised itself itself up to its own intellectual principle, and withdrew its thoughts from experience, abstracted itself from the contradictory throng of phantasms in order to seek for that light in which it is bathed. Then, without any doubting, it cried out that the unchangeable is better than the changeable. From this it follows that the mind somehow knew the unchangeable, for, unless it had known it in some fashion, it could have had no sure ground for preferring it to the changeable. And thus with the flash of a trembling glance, it arrived at that which is.

. Below I argue that the common view that the saying "*adequatio intellectus et rei*" always implies a correspondence theory of truth I take to be wrong.

. Aquinas, *In libros De anima expositio* 3.2.121

. And Dante, I think, agrees. Dante's description of Heaven of Sun has the circle of Bonaventure balances that of Aquinas, who is seated next to the same Siger of Brabant whose Arab Aristotelianism he had opposed so fiercely in the Parisian Faculty of Arts. Dante portrays Aquinas as reconciled in heaven with Siger—but the arrangement also tells us that the thought of Aquinas as being between Bonaventure and Siger.

.
Now I will start on another subject, closely
connected with it: the existence of images
which are like membranes from the surface of things;
once torn off they flutter here and there in the air,
and it is they which alarm us when they encounter our waking
minds, as they do in dreams, when we often see strange shapes
and the images of those who have lost the light

rouse us in horror as we lie powerless in sleep.
We should not think they are souls escaped from Acheron
or ghosts which are wandering around among living men,

nor that any part of us can be left after death
when the body and mind have been destroyed together
and both resolved once more into their elements.

What I am saying is that representations, filmy shapes
are sent off all the time from the surface of things
—something like membranes or you might call it a rind
since it has the appearance and form of the thing itself—
these things wander away from the body they come from. (*De rerum
natura*, book iv)

- . Quoted in David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from al-Kindi to Kepler.*, p. 9.
- . The light metaphysics Plato expounded here influenced the thirteenth-century Neoplatonics and Frampton seems to have been stirred by their writings.
- . Aristotle rejected Plato's assertion that any light (fire) issued from the eye to bring the seen object into visibility. But, Aristotle agreed that a third term had to mediate between the eye and the object seen. Aristotle identified this mediating agent as the "diaphana"; this diaphanous matter was unlike the Pythagorean's fire or the Stoics *pneuma*, insofar as this medium does not emanate from the eye but has independent existence. When it is actualized by light, the diaphanous propagates the visible form from the object to the eye (*De anima*, 2.7.418-9) The senses receive the visible form of the object, without its matter, just as the wax receives the impression of the signet ring without its gold or silver (2.12.424). For Aristotle, then, seeing involves the imposition of form without matter on the passive viewer; nonetheless, the visible form has an existence independent of mind
- . "Thou spakest and they were made" and "in Thy Word Thou madest them"; both from *Confessiones* 11.5.7
- . "Quoniam ille loquitur nobis, qui docet nos," Augustine writes: "Because he speaketh us, who teacheth us." This quote also from *Confessiones* 11.5.7.
- . "And who is our teacher except the steadfast truth? For even when we learn something by means of a changing creature it is to this steadfast truth that we are led, and then we truly learn while we stand and hear Him, and rejoice greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice."
- . This is Thy Word, which is also 'the Beginning,' because also It speaketh unto us.
- . There have been many articles and many books on this topic since L.-B. Geiger's *La Participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d'Aquin.* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1942) was first published. In my opinion, it is still the best.
- . Now, all knowing is brought to perfection [*perficitur*] through the making like [*per assimilationem*] of the one knowing to the thing known [*cognoscentis ad rem cognitam*], in such fashion that the said assimilation is the cause of the knowing: for example, sight, by the fact that it is given a determination [*disponitur*] by the form of the colour [*per speciem coloris*], knows the colour.
- . Hence, the primary comparison of that which is to intellect [*entis ad intellectum*] is that the being is concordant with the intellect: this concord is called the adequation of thing and intellect [*adaequatio rei et intellectus*]; and in this, formally, the intelligible nature of the true is brought to perfection.
- . Therefore, this is what true adds to a being, viz. the conformity, or adequation, of the thing and the intellect; upon this conformity, as was said, knowledge of the thing

follows. Thus, therefore, the entity of the thing precedes the nature of truth [*rationem veritatis*], but knowledge is an effect of truth.

. What strength this position has derives from Thomas' distinction between the practical and the speculative intellect. But even this is answerable. God's intellect is said to know no distinction between these two types of knowing. As the mind ascends higher, it comes more and more to participate in the divine intellect, for which making and knowing are identical. We come to know things through reasons for their coming to being. Thus, Thomas: . . . every being is adequate relative to the divine intellect and is able to render the human intellect adequate to itself. . *De Veritate* 1.2, ad 1

Or again, Thomas notes:

Furthermore, the truth of the thing relative to the divine intellect is present in the thing by priority to that relative to the human [intellect], since it is compared to the divine intellect as to a cause, to the human intellect in some measure as to an effect [*quodammodo quasi ad effectum*], inasmuch as the intellect receives from things.

But that sounds to me like knowledge through mirror representation is of a lower sort, and as we ascend to divine knowledge, we leave that sort of knowledge behind

This notion that what the mind contains likenesses of things (as does a mirror) admittedly occurs in Nicholas of Cusa's writing (but that, it seems to me, is part of what makes Nicholas a modern. See Cusa, *Compendium* 10 (32): "Knowledge occurs by means of a likeness" Cusa, *De Visione Dei* 20 (90): "For a thing is understood by a man only by means of a likeness." Cusa, *De Venatione Sapientiae* 17 (50): "Hence since knowledge is assimilation, the intellect finds all things to be within itself as in a mirror that is alive with an intellectual life." Cusa, *De Mente* 3 (73:1-3): "All things are present in God, but in God they are exemplars of things; all things are present in our mind, but in our mind they are likenesses of things." (When Nicholas states that all things are present in our mind, he means that they are present in the mind's power, they are present in the mind potentially, since the mind has the power to make concepts of whatsoever real things.)

. Now, the fulfillment of any motion is found in the term of the motion; and, since the term of the motion of a cognitive power is, the soul, the known must be in the knower after the manner of the knower. (*De Veritate*, q. 1 a. 2 r.)

. For every subject, that which is known, is comprehended not according to its own force, but rather according to the nature of those who know it.

. All judgment apprehends the subjects of its thought according to its own nature.

. To claim that the object as known-being does not pre-exist the act of known does not contradict such claims that of Thomas that the intellect "receives from things." I argue that what is ultimately known is pattern or form (for some Medieval philosophers, "form" in the Platonic sense, for others, form in the Aristotelian sense.) What I am claiming is that many Medieval philosophers held one or another version of the doctrine that the known-being arises from the interaction of intelligible pattern (which is timeless, and objective, since it belongs to the mind of God) and knowing agent.

. And what remains? The pattern that can bring another productive act (analogous to the pattern that shapes a speech act) into being.

.When we know something we penetrate it and assimilate it or intellectually incorporate

it. The process of natural knowing, in which an object is grasped and assimilated into the mind, is reversed in mystical knowing— while in natural knowing the intellect grasps its object, in mystical knowing one finds oneself grasped.

. For that which is understood is in the intellect not in its own right, but in respect of its likeness. For as it is said in [Aristotle's] *De anima III* [431b29], "it is not the stone that is in the soul, but the *species* [roughly, form]" of the stone. Still it is the stone that is understood, not the *species* of the stone, except when the intellect reflects on itself. Otherwise our knowledge would not be about things in the world, but about intelligible *species*.

. Thus rather should we say that the intelligible structures are the means by which we understand. For as [Aristotle's] *Metaphysics Book 9* [actually 8.8 1051a23] states, there are two types of action, *intransitive*, such as seeing and understanding, and *transitive*, like heating or curing. And each type occurs according to its own nature and structure. And just as the structure involved in transitive action includes a certain similarity between actor and object (i.e., the heat in the agent that causes the heat is the same as that received by the object), so too in intransitive action there is a similarity between actor and object. Hence we see via a likeness of the visible object., and our mind understands via an intelligible structure. Now since our minds are capable of self-reflection, we can, via such reflection, we can both understand and understand the means [Aquinas actually uses the word "species] by which we understand. Thus in a secondary sense these intelligible structures become objects of understanding. But the primary object of understanding remains the [external] objects to which the intelligible structures are similar.

. But a sensible species is that by which (*id quo*) the sensory power senses and not that which (*illud quod*) is sensed. Therefore, the intelligible species is that by which the intellect understands intellectually and not that which (*quod*) is understood.

. Now, change is of two sorts, one natural, the other spiritual. Natural change takes place by the form of the changing object received according to its natural mode of being, into the thing changed, as heat is received into the thing heated. Whereas spiritual change takes place by the form of the source of change being received, according to a spiritual mode of existence, into the object of change, as the form of color is received into the pupil which does not thereby become colored. Now, for the operation of the senses, a spiritual change is required, whereby an intention of the sensible form is effected in the sensible organ. Otherwise, if a natural change alone sufficed for the sense's action, all natural bodies would feel when they undergo alteration..

. Truth is both in intellect and in sense, but not in the same way. It is in intellect as a consequence of the act of the intellect and as known by the intellect. Truth follows the operation of the intellect inasmuch as it belongs to the intellect to judge about a thing as it is. And truth is known by the intellect in view of the fact that the intellect reflects upon its own act—not merely as knowing its own act, but as knowing the proportion of its act to the thing. Now, this proportion cannot be known without knowing the nature of the act; and the nature of the act cannot be known without knowing the nature of the active principle, that is, the intellect itself, to whose nature it belongs to be conformed to things. Consequently, it is because the intellect reflects upon itself that it knows truth.

. Aquinas' conviction that when one knows, one knows that one knows testifies to the act he understood that knowledge of the highest sort is what the mind is fitted for. This is testimony to the fact that Aquinas wrote before the great collapse, with brought understanding to the ruin that is the contemporary epistemology, that of pragmatism.

The *Doctor Universalis* wrote in time when it was the belief still prevailed that there is design, purpose, or finality in the world. Knowledge has truth as its end—and not simply a particular truth, but truth as a whole. Truth draws knowledge on.

. Now although it knows things which have a form residing in matter, still it resolves the composite into both of these elements; and it considers the form separately by itself.

. Since therefore the created intellect is naturally capable of apprehending the concrete form, and the concrete being abstractedly, by way of a kind of resolution of parts; it can by grace be raised up to know separate subsisting substance, and separate subsisting existence.

For readers who are as inclined as I to subject all writing, but especially premodern writing, to psychoanalytic scrutiny, I point out that this comment of Aquinas follows a sentence in which the Angelic Doctor commented on angels' intellect separating form from (concrete) existence.

. *Forma vero finitur per materiam, in quantum forma, in se considerata, communis est ad multa, sed per hoc quod recipitur in materia, fit forma determinate huius rei.* (Form is made finite by matter, inasmuch as form, considered in itself, is common to many; but when received in matter, the form is determined to this one particular thing.) *S.T. I q.7 a 1.*

Also: *quod formae quae sunt receptibiles in materia individuuntur per materiam, quae non potest esse in alio, cum sit primum subiectum substans, forma vero, quantum est de se, nisi aliquid aliud impediatur, recipi potest a pluribus.* (Forms which can be received in matter are individualized by matter, which cannot be in another as in a subject since it is the first underlying subject; although form of itself, unless something else prevents it, can be received by many) *S.T. I q. 3 a.2 ad 3.*

. All cognitive beings also know God implicitly in any object of knowledge.”

. that the goal of life is “full participation in divinity which is humankind’s true beatitude and the destiny of human life”

. We cannot know in what the essence of God consists..

. The faculty of seeing God, however, does not belong to the created intellect naturally, but is given to it by the light of glory, which establishes the intellect in a kind of “deiformity” . . . Hence the intellect which has more of the light of glory will see God the more perfectly; and he will have a fuller participation of the light of glory who has more charity; because where there is the greater charity, there is the more desire; and desire in a certain degree makes the one desiring apt and prepared to receive the object desired. Hence he who possesses the more charity, will see God the more perfectly, and will be the more beatified

. Consequently, although the knowledge proper to the human soul takes place through the process of reasoning, nevertheless, it participates to some extent in that simple knowledge which exists in higher substances, and because of which they are said to have intellectual power.

. *Expositio in librum De causis.* prop. 6, n. 168. “The reality of things is itself their light.”

. On the concept of *energeia* in Dante’s thought and writing, v. R. Bruce Elder, “Moving Visual Thinking’: Dante, Brakhage, and the Works of *Energeia*” in James Miller, ed., *Dante and the Unorthodox: The Aesthetics of Transgression.* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), pp394-449.

. The relation of the *species impressa* to the *species expressa* has relevance to our topic, as it helps account for the transition from sensitive and particular knowledge to

intellectual knowledge. Father F. Coplestone explained the relation well. (*History of Philosophy* Vol 2, pp 390-2). Aquinas takes it as tautological that the rational or spiritual soul cannot be affected by the material object (or its phantasmata). Activity on the soul's part is required. The active intellect, Aquinas states, 'illuminates' the phantasm and from it forms the intelligible species (that is, the universal). By 'illuminates' Aquinas means that the active intellect renders the intelligible or universal aspect of phantasm visible. That is, it reveals the formal, and so universal, element implicit in the phantasm. The active intellect, by abstracting this universal element, produces in the passive intellect the *species impressa*. In response, the passive intellect produces the *species expressa* or *verbum mentis*, which is the fully developed universal concept.

The universal, however, is not the object of cognition, but the means of cognition. The concept is a modification of the intellect. (This of course supports my argument that knowledge is a co-production of the self and the extramental object, a co-production that perhaps can be understood through the notion of *poiesis*). What we know is the extramental object; the *species expressa* or *verbum mentis* is the modification of the passive intellect through which we know the extramental object. Minds know individual things by abstracting the universal, intelligible species from particular matter. But recall that the passive intellective was also that in which the material object first affected us. The *species expressa* returns the universal to that in which phantasm first affected us.

This is the more technical side of the description of role of *verbum mentis* in Aquinas philosophy. It does not capture the affective dimension of the idea, implicit in Aquinas choice to use terms such as "*verbum cordis*" or "*species expressa*" to refer the modification of the passive through which we know. Hans Urs von Balthasar offers splendid commentary on this topic as well. Writing of the personal spirit that arises in response to the *verbum mentis* (or *verbum caro*), he states

the personal spirit is the *universal* or *necessary* element, which means that from the outset it goes beyond subjectivity and reaches out to other persons (in principle, every other person), its existence always implying a relationship to them. It means communication and mutual intercourse right from the beginning. Speech therefore is no mere epiphenomenon of man but an integral part of his very being; and the most recent philosophies, those that set out directly from the phenomenon of speech, are the philosophies going to the heart of the matter. According to them the *verbum mentis* that has its source in inmost being, and the love that causes and accompanies it, do not turn the person in on himself . . . , but rather reveal the mystery of being through the mutuality of knowledge in love. The word of man reveals, if it is true, the very constituents of his being. It is a participation, given from the outset, in being ever irradiated by Spirit, and so also in the word ever uttered in the heart of being by eternal love. In this word everything was made, everything subsists, and everything was made with it in view.

Originally published in *Verbum Caro: (Skizzen zur Theologie I)* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1960), in translation in *Explorations in Theology, Vol 1: The Word Made Flesh*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989),

. For you have been made through the Word, but it is incumbent upon you to be remade through the Word; and yet if your belief about the Word is amiss, you cannot be remade through the Word. Although it has fallen to your lot to be made through the Word, so

that through him you have been made, it is through yourself that you are unmade. If through yourself you are unmade, he who made you will remake you; if through yourself you have been made worse, he who created you will recreate you. But how will he recreate you through the Word if your belief about the Word is somehow amiss?

. See part IV of the *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason*, in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*. Trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), Vol. 1 100–106 and the second and third meditations in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *ibid.*, 149–171

. Note the difference with Hans Urs von Balthasar. For Balthasar, consciousness emerges in the other's calling forth the self (and the first other is the mother's love). The idea of consciousness emerging in the interaction with the other—a higher other—differs fundamentally from Kant's. For Kant, the conditions of experience are fixed prior to and independent of the anthropogenetic encounter with what is other than consciousness; for Balthasar, the conditions are experience are forged in that encounter. as a gift, as from above, which creates, in the one below who receives the gift, the capacity to receive it.

This epistemology of mutuality, I think, is key that unlocks many riddles. Few agree with me.

. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*: Mit einer Einleitung und Bibliographie herausgegeben von Heiner F.Klemme. Mit Sachanmerkungen von Pietro Giordanetti. I § 26 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2001), p.121 “True sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging person, not in the natural object the judging of which prompts this mental attunement.” *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 113.

. V. Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Movement Toward God,” in *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3, *Creator Spirit* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 15–55.

. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Trans. Greene and Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 157, n.

. Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” in *Holzwege* hrg. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2003) “language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance.”

. Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. (Pfullingen: Verlag Günter Neske, 1954, 4th edition 1978), p. 14. “The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends they serve, all belong to what technology is.” *The Question Concerning Technology*. p. 4