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The Quo/Quod Fallacy in the Discussion of Realism (Part One)

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1. Setting the Stage

Philosophers of the Latin Age¹ distinguished between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, meaning what exists in our awareness also independently of it and what exists but only dependently upon and within our awareness. They took little interest in the latter except in what concerns logic as a subject matter and instrument of thought for the advancement of knowledge of reality as *ens reale*. When philosophy transitioned from Latin to the national languages of modern times, especially French, German, and English, a new terminology developed, but the modern development in the old terminology amounted to this: that *ens reale*, things in themselves, are unknowable, while what the mind itself fashions, *ens rationis*, this alone is directly given and knowable as such in our experience.

This doctrine that the mind from its beginnings in sensation forms mental representations or “ideas”, and that these representations precisely as products of the mind’s activity are alone the direct objects of

¹ “Latin Age” is a more proper name for the medieval era when Latin functioned as the mainstream language of thought, from Augustine (AD354–430) to Poinsett (1589–1644): see J. Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding. The first postmodern survey of philosophy from ancient times to the turn of the 20th century*, Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2001: Part II, and J. Deely, *A New Determination of the Middle Ages*, in J. P. Doyle (ed.), *The Conimbricenses. Some Questions on Signs*, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001.

awareness and judgment, came to be called “idealism”. Kant objected to the doctrine on the grounds that it is too subjective, to remedy which he distinguished ideas as subjective qualities from objects known on the basis of ideas. Thus ideas are the foundation of relations to objects and objects are the termini of idea-based relations, the formation of which is mediated by the a-priori forms of understanding which preserve necessity in the objective order, but without opening any way beyond the objective order to the world of things in themselves which Kant, along with Descartes and Locke, deemed unknowable directly or “in themselves”.

As a synthesis of the development of “rationalism” after Descartes and “empiricism” after Locke, a synthesis based on the assumption common to the rationalists and the empiricists that the whole of human knowledge is based on mental representation, Kant contrasted his view to the early modern development as an “objective idealism” supplanting the “subjective idealism” of the opening modern century; and there the debate settled with Hegel as a lone modern voice crying in the wilderness the message that an unknowable thing in itself is a *contradictio in adiectis*, is a claim that cannot hold.

Yet the moderns clung to their notion of “representationalism”, as many came to call it; which amounts to holding, on the older terminology, that *ens reale* is unknowable and only *ens rationis* can be truly and directly known. Thus the phenomena are a veil between the what the mind knows and things existing in themselves.

By the late 19th century, idealism as the modern mainstream position was well-established, as can be seen, for example, in the early editions of Lalande. When Pope Leo XIII issued his 1879 call for the restoration of the doctrine of St Thomas Aquinas in philosophy, it was with the concern above all to re-establish the knowability of *ens reale*, to bring it out from under the erasure that modern philosophy had place upon it, and in order to restore the notion of *praeambula fidei*, of truths naturally knowable which dispose the human mind to accept the existence of God and embrace religious faith.

So began the final phase of the modern struggle between realism and idealism, in terms that admitted of no middle way. Maritain saw the battle in just such terms, and he was hardly alone:

“Let us make this point once more: realism and idealism are not transcended. There is no higher position that goes beyond and reconciles them. A choice must be made between the two, as between the true and the false. Every realism that comes to terms with Descartes and Kant shall see one day that it belies its name”².

With the battle line thus and truly drawn, however, combatants on both sides failed to see that, once the choice had been made, the “yes or no” uttered, even in favor of realism, there was still another mountain to be climbed, a hill to be taken. This farther frontier had already been indicated by a Latin author Maritain regarded as his main teacher after Thomas himself, namely, John of St Thomas or John Poinset (as his family first knew him), when he advised that the study of signs requires a standpoint precisely that transcends the division of being into *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, for the sign as the universal instrument of knowledge, sensory and intellectual alike, works in both orders³. It was not a question of coming to terms with Descartes and Kant, but a question of coming to terms with the notion of being as the formal object distinguishing intellectual knowledge from the formal objects distinguishing the internal and the external senses, *ens primum cognitum*, or “being as first known”, which does not equate with *ens reale* precisely because the *first division* the intellect sees within *ens primum cognitum* is the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*. But of course, this could only be if being as first known already contained both in a confused way.

So we may say that the new Thomists, the “Neothomists” as history would come to call them, despite their own misgivings about this nomenclature⁴, were too single-minded in their concern to restore the knowability of *ens reale*. They accepted too readily the terms of the modern debate over the “problem of the external world” in allowing themselves to think of the external world as *ens reale*, in effect tacitly

² J. Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge*, New York: Scribner's, 100.

³ J. Poinset, *Tractatus de Signis*, 1632, Book I, Question 1, 117/18–118/18, esp118/6–9.

⁴ Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 342n200 and *passim*.

relegating *ens rationis* to the order of psychological subjectivity in the modern sense.

What was needed, however, was something more, not only a restoration of the knowability of the things in themselves or *ens reale*, but also a restoration of *ens rationis* to the order of objective being *alongside ens reale*, the difference being that, while both as cognized or known are necessarily *objective*, the latter is not *only* objective but subjective as well, that is, existing “in itself” as a world of substances or subjects of existence involved in real relationships prior to and independently of the mind’s working.

At the root of the modern problem was the doctrine of *Nominalism* reduced to its central tenet that the only relations there are that do not reduce to the subjectivity of particular things related are mind-dependent relations. Poinset alone among the Latins seems fully to have realized that the doctrine of relation is the key to the doctrine of signs as relations, in seeing that what makes a relation belong to the order of *ens reale* or *ens rationis* has nothing to do with the essence of relation as an entitative mode over and above subjectivity in every case (or “suprasubjective”), but rather depends on the *circumstances surrounding the relation*.

Thus, while there are indeed mind-dependent relations, as in grammar or logic and many other places, what makes these relations mind-dependent has nothing to do with the nature of relation as a suprasubjective mode and everything to do with the circumstances under which a given relation is formed or sustained. One and the same relation, say that of a dinosaur bone to the dinosaur whose bone it is or way, can belong to *ens reale* while the dinosaur lives and to the order of *ens rationis* when the paleontologist contemplates the bone and classifies it correctly: yet the *relation itself* is the same in both cases.

So, Poinset realized, signs as consisting in triadic relations necessarily participate in this indifference to the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* that defines the nature of relation in its singularity among the categories of *ens reale* (being the only nature verifiable according to its positive structure outside of as well as within the Aristotelian categorial list), so that objects as precisely what signs signify

too will be sometimes real things and sometimes not, again depending upon circumstances. But this subtle point in turn depends upon an insight best developed among the Scotists, namely, that *fundamentum* and *terminus* as parts of any relation depend for their being as such on the relation itself, not on the subjective status of that which is fundament or that which is terminus. The very same triangular shape of A which is foundation for its real relation of similarity to B when B exists continues unchanged as a subjective quality of A when B ceases to exist except in one particular: upon B's ceasing, A's "unchanged" subjective shape *is no longer a fundament*; and the same remarks apply to the shape of A and B as terminus in this mutual relation of similarity.

Thus the difference between objects and things lies in the fact that the former necessarily but the latter only contingently involve a relation to a knower; but the key to understanding how the former can exist as known and publicly known regardless of their status in the order of *ens reale* as things lies in the fact that the essential status of an object is to be the terminus of a cognitive relation, while this status may or may not attach to a thing in the order of *ens reale*. When a thing happens to be or become known, it acquires this further status of object, not as a phenomenon veiling the thing, but precisely as a phenomenon revealing the thing, a phenomenon wherein the thing as object *represents itself*. There is thus no conflict between being an object and being a thing, just as there is no necessity that every thing be known or every object be real. Whether the object belong to the order of *ens reale* or to the order of *ens rationis*, it stands as object in either case as the terminus of a relation by nature suprasubjective.

Now Maritain knew of these texts from Poinsot's *Treatise on Signs* upon which I draw, and he puzzled over them long and hard, though finally without quite getting to the bottom of them. He came close, as I have elsewhere⁵ had occasion to show; and it is to his credit that he stands virtually alone among the neothomists in realizing the importance of Poinsot's work to the enterprise of Thomism in laying

⁵ J. Deely, *Semiotic in the Thought of Jacques Maritain*, "Recherche Sémiotique/Semiotic Inquiry", 1986, 6.2, 1–30.

claim to being a *philosophia perennis*. So may I say that my aim in this essay is to close, if I can, what little distance was left at the time of his death in 1973 between his own writings on the subject of concepts as signs and the teaching Poinset had consigned to his Latin texts by the time of his own death in 1644.

It all turns on a simple but subtle and elusive point, which may be reduced to clarity thus: what the moderns called “ideas” and “images” the Latins called by a whole range of about thirteen synonyms⁶; but the principal term in the whole list was unquestionably, at least in the Thomist tradition, the term *species expressa*. I will discuss this terminology shortly, but here for these opening paragraphs let me make only the simple point that *species* as the underlying notion admitted of two varieties, the *species impressa* and the *species expressa*, only the latter of which — this point cannot be emphasized too strongly, and it is one that Maritain first missed completely (in 1924) and later corrected (by 1959), but not without some remaining confusion, confusion central to topic of this present essay, as we will see in Section 6 below — functions in the order of signs formally speaking. And this latter *species*, the *species expressa*, functions in knowledge not as *id quo* but as *id in quo*; only the *species impressa* is an *id quo* for knowing, and an *id quo* in this context is never a sign, while an *id in quo* always is; and a concept as such, whether perceptual or intellectual (the point on which Maritain slips), is *always* a *species expressa*.

An *id in quo* in the sense we are considering is a subjective quality in the sense of a psychological state on the basis of which an organism organizes and interprets objectively the things of its surroundings that awaken its awareness in external sensation — that is to say, a quality unique in that it cannot be except as and by provenating a relation to what is other than itself.

External sensation prescissively considered (this is not the way sensation is experienced, of course, but only as it reveals itself under a logical analysis of factors involved) involves *species* only as *species*

⁶ In J. Deely, *Locke's Proposal for Semiotics and the Scholastic Doctrine of Species*, “The Modern Schoolman”, 1993, 3 (March), 165-188, I tried to identify the complete list of terms on this point. I would certainly welcome any additions to the list there that I may have missed in the wide-ranging Latin literature.

impressa, and *species* of this sort emphatically *are not* ideas, and are not even mental representations at all in this beginning stage of awareness. They are simply the specifications determined in causal interactions which make the animal selectively aware of this rather than that, or vice-versa.

With this much as preliminary, let us turn to the discussion of realism in philosophy, and especially in Thomistic philosophy, in order to clear the air of a pervading confusion that has resulted from the failure of the late modern Thomists to grasp this crucial difference between *species* as *impressa* or “quo”, on the one hand, and *species* as *expressa* or “in quo”, on the other hand. Once this clarification has been made, it becomes possible to understand that realism can accommodate reality as a social construction without losing the ability to show that the mind is open to knowing as well things as they are in themselves prior to and in part (though hardly entirely) independent of social constructions.

2. Specifying Forms, Impressed and Expressed: Terms without Equivalence in Modern Philosophy

This term “*species*” is in some ways unfortunate for late modern — or even postmodern — discussions, because for us today the term “species” is a biological term that has little directly to do with epistemology, but refers primarily to what Aristotle called the diversity of “natural kinds” such as the birds and fishes, camels, zebras, and monkeys. So let us be clear that *species* (the specifying forms of middle to late Latin thought), are not the “species” of biological and genetic investigation. This is a point that needs to be marked terminologically. I will mark it in this text visually by always placing the cognitive *species* in italic font. Aurally, I would suggest marking the point by always pronouncing the cognitive *species* as “spay-chee-ehs”⁷, and never as “spee-sees”. The point in summary is that the usual understanding of

⁷ As I suggested pronunciation-wise in J. Deely, *Introducing Semiotic. Its history and doctrine*, Bloomington, in Indiana University Press, 1982, 45.

the word “species” in English *today* concerns biology, while the Latin term “*species*” in the expressions *species impressa* and *species expressa* does not refer to entitatively natural kinds but to the specification of cognitive powers to become aware of this rather than that.

So what is a *species*? Quite simply, as Maritain and Poinsoot tell us, it is an *intentional form*, in contrast to, but *not* wholly independent of, a subjective modification or *entitative* or *physical form* as substructure. It is always accompanied in fact by a subjective modification, a physical change, but it *does not consist in that* accompanying physical change. Rather, what is distinctive about it is that the entitative modification with which it is correlated or from which it provenates *always* gives rise to and principally consists in a relation to some object, either actually (in the case of psychological states) or virtually (in the case of material objects which cannot exist otherwise than as involved in relations of interaction and, under the proper scrutiny, provide knowledge about what they have undergone). In other words, a *species* is a modification of subjectivity precisely inasmuch as the modification contains or codifies or *specifies* information. I do not think that this decisive and crucial point is particularly well conveyed when *species* is translated, accurately mayhap, but still obtusely, as an “intentional form”.

The best translation of “*species*”, in the case of cognition, is not as “intentional form” but as “specifying form”, “specification”, or “specifier”. It is ironic that the very etymology of the term in Latin suggested, all along the tortuous history of this concept in Thomism, especially Neothomism⁸ (since transition to the national languages

⁸ I don't know of a single important figure in the late modern Thomistic revival who accepted for himself the label “Neothomist”. Maritain and Gilson rejected it with particular vigor. But here it is not a question of how they thought of themselves, but of where they appear in history and how that place should be named. I doubt that Porphyry or Proclus thought of themselves as “Neoplatonists”, any more than Gilson or Maritain thought of themselves as “Neothomists”. Still, the “Neoplatonists” were the Platonists who belong to a definite historical epoch after Plato, with its distinctive preoccupations and problems. Just so, the “Neothomists” were the Thomists of the revival of Thomism called into being by Pope Leo XIII's 1879 encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*. This revival was distinctively concerned to vindicate, against the modern idealist doctrine that the mind knows only what the mind itself makes, the rights of the Thomistic doctrine that the mind is capable of a grasp of

of modernity was essential to its success), to say nothing of the late-modern development of “phenomenology”, the correct and best translation for the term in question. Yet this transparent rendering of *species* as ‘specifying form’ nonetheless eluded thinkers over the whole course of the neothomistic revival! Maritain felt “that the most suitable expression to render *species* would be presentative or objectifying form”, adding in a footnote:

“The expression ‘presentative form’ would be our preference, if the word ‘presentative’ evoked the idea of *making present* rather than the idea of *presenting*, a meaning that is rather ill suited to the intelligible *species impressa* (it is the concept that *presents* the object to the mind). The expression ‘objectifying form’ is better, but only on the condition that the thing itself is understood to be made object through that form (radically only, in the intelligible *species impressa*; expressly, in the concept). It is to be feared that the habits of modern language lead to misunderstanding on this score”⁹.

As is usual with Maritain, all of these musings bear on what is essential to understanding the point. Yet it still seems to me that, in the case before us, the most central function of the *species* is that it *specifies* an awareness to have for its content this rather than that objectivity, this rather than that feature known. For this is the one function (unlike ‘being presentative’) that transcends even the distinction between *species impressa* and *expressa*, and that has its origin not inside but outside the animal organism. For these *species* or intentional forms of medieval Latin thought were conceived of, correctly, as existing in the environment itself prior to the arising of animal awareness and

things as they exist in *ens reale*. This was the modern meaning of “realism”, as also of the post-Aquinian “scholastic realism” that Peirce identified as belonging to the distinctive essence of pragmatism in its difference from pragmatism and modern philosophy generally (C. S. Peirce, *What Pragmatism Is*, “The Monist”, 1905, 15 (April), CP 5.423; discussed at length in Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, Chap. 15, “Pragmatism is not Pragmatism”, p. 616ff.). The Thomists who were preoccupied with the claims of modern idealism, and especially who championed realism against that idealism, are, as a historical group and intellectual movement of the late 19th through the 20th century, the “Neo-Thomists” (from Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 342n200).

⁹ Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, 115.

as essential thereto (even if incorrectly conceived as free-floating, unaccompanied necessarily by any subtending and supporting entitative structures).

Maritain waxes eloquent on the point:

“Even when *esse intentionale* has nothing to do with the world of knowledge, it is already a way for forms to escape from this entombment in matter [which characterizes the subjectivity of material substance]. The scholastics often gave the name *esse spirituale* to this existence (which is not for itself), the tendency-existence whereby forms, other than their own, come upon things. We think it would be of great interest to philosophers to study the role that *esse intentionale* plays in the physical world itself, wherein there undoubtedly arises from such existing, that sort of universal animation whereby motion puts into bodies more than they are, and colours the whole of nature with a semblance of life and feeling undoubtedly derived from it”¹⁰.

He goes on, in a note to the text¹¹, to suggest that the physical action of a mover upon a moved “passes into the mobile thing *secundum esse intentionale*”, providing a point of view from which “it would become possible to hold Galileo’s principle of inertia to be valid” from the point of view of philosophy of nature as well as from the point of view of physico-mathematical science¹².

Yves Simon, who pushes the entitative/intentional distinction harder than perhaps anyone else on the late modern scene, insists¹³ that the term “‘idea’ alone can express with the needed vividness the meaning of the Aristotelian εἶδος and of the scholastic *species*”. This rendering enables him to claim that¹⁴, while “other philosophies know of ideas born in the soul, e.g., intellectual representations consequent upon images, images consequent upon sense impressions”, only “Aristote-

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 115n.

¹² I am simply reporting, not subscribing to, this remark by Maritain. I have no idea whether he was familiar or not with the contemporary work of Analiese Maier. But I am sure that Maier has written nothing on the prospect of physiosemosis, to which the remarks of Maritain have some pertinence.

¹³ *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, trans. Y. R. Simon et al., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955, 613–614n4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 615.

lianism knows of ideas that are initial in an absolute sense and are not born in the soul but in nature. The sensorial idea is the Aristotelian answer to the problem of the initial connection between physical nature and the soul. Those things are impossible to explain if we translate *species sensibilis* by sensible ‘species’ or ‘form’ or anything short of the thought-provoking power of the word ‘idea’.”

Thus, when the scholastics distinguish between the initial stimulus to external sense as a *species impressa* and the perceptual response of internal sense a *species expressa* or “phantasm”, Simon would have us say that we are dealing with impressed ideas initially and ones developed by the animal organism itself in response as expressed ideas! This way of speaking is not only vivid, but sounds at least as much like Locke as it does Aristotle and Aquinas. What differentiates Aristotle and Thomas from Locke and Hume in the matter of sensations, however, is that the stimulus specifying what the sense will objectify in its interaction with the physical surroundings (for *sensatio est actio sensibilis in sensu*, after all) is precisely *not* an idea or representative form at all but quite simply the effect of a stimulus here and now active upon a sense organ and placing it in relation with the here and now active source existing on the same material level as the sense organ itself being transactionally stimulated and “specified” toward the source of the stimulation. The “form” carried by the stimulus *specifies* the response of the organ to objectify this rather than that aspect of the surrounding environment, nothing more. It is not an ‘idea’. Only *species expressae* fit that notion.

Thus the word *species* not only has no equivalent in the languages of modern philosophy, as Maritain noted, but also:

“For the philosophers, the notion of *species* is not, any more than the notion of *esse intentionale*, an explanatory factor already known and already clarified by some other means. ***Species are, as it were, the abutments upon which an analysis of the given leans for support, the reality of which the mind, by that very analysis, is compelled to recognize — with certainty***, if the analysis itself has proceeded correctly and under the constant pressure of intelligible necessities. Some determination must, of necessity, actually supervene upon the knower, thanks to which a thing that is not the knower will

exist in the knower *secundum esse intentionale* (not as an accident in a substance) and by which the thing will be able to exist with the very same active superexistence which is the existence of the knower that has become the thing known. The *species* is nothing but that internal determination”¹⁵.

And he refers us to St Thomas on this point¹⁶. The intentionality, however, comes from the relation which has as its terminus whatever is known, while the “internal determination” is a subjective qualitative modification or state that provenates the relation in question as fundament thereof.

2.1. Why the Modern Notion of Intentionality Is Crippled

So we see the profound difference between the *esse intentionale* of the Thomistic development and the intentionality proposed by Husserl. For the Husserlian intentionality *begins with* the consciousness as being directed toward or related to its object, whereas, on the contrary¹⁷, the Thomistic intentionality “brings *the other* into me ‘beginning with’ its own otherness and makes me be the other”. Intentionality transcends the difference between physical and psychological subjectivity, between the “inner” and “outer” of consciousness. Husserl has missed the distinction that Simon blurred between intentional forms or *species impressae* originating in the environment and conveyed to the knower in sensation prior to any active involvement of the soul in forming ideas, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the intentional forms or *species expressae* thanks to which the subjectivity of the knower enters into the higher processes of structuring the world of objects. This process Husserl well sees is according to the knower’s own constitution of needs and desires, but his approach is unable to take account of how and why the process is as well according to the demands of the physical constitution of the environment acting upon the physical organism of some animal to make that animal perforce

¹⁵ Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, 115, bold face added.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in Busa ed. by vol. 2, 98.

¹⁷ Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, 104.

aware of some aspects of the environment rather than others. Only then is the animal faced with the need of interpreting that initial awareness by turning it to the organism's advantage in the struggle for existence here and now.

Indeed it is in interpreting, first perceptually, later (for semiotic animals) intellectually as well, that intentionality realizes its function in consciousness. But the process is two-sided, not one-sided. The intentionality as recognized by phenomenology can be compared to the situation of a soldier who has lost a leg in the modern philosophical war between realism and idealism (and Sokolowski has proven that a one-legged man can still hop, even if walking is beyond him without prosthesis¹⁸). Husserlian intentionality knows only the *species expressa*, without articulating or even realizing its dependency in formation upon a *species impressa*, first one formed by the physical environment in sensation, then one formed by the understanding's own activity in transcending perception.

Hence "it so often seems to happen to E. Husserl," opines Maritain, that "he seems to be brushing the skirts of the true nature of knowledge," yet "in the final reckoning he always misses the great secret":

"He does not see that knowledge has no need to get outside of itself to attain the thing that exists or can exist outside knowledge. ... For the very glory of the immateriality of thought is to be a higher life which perfects itself by that which is not it, itself, even without going outside itself, by an intelligible reality whose fertile substance the mind grasps through the senses, that fertile substance drawn by the senses from actual, existing (material) things. The way to make the proper mystery of knowledge vanish is precisely to get rid of extramental being, to suppress those ontological (metalogical) "for themselves",

¹⁸ See Sokolowski's remarks on "realism" (*Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 21, 216), which he does not seem to realize are fully compatible with the Kantian sense of 'realism' according to which we know only *that* there are 'things in themselves' without being able to penetrate to an awareness of *what* they are in their own constitution as obtaining subjectively prior to or independently of consciousness. Cf. Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 559–565.

fully independent of my thought¹⁹, and which my thought makes its own by making itself them”²⁰.

There is thus no room to doubt that the very notion of intentionality, in passing from the hands of the medieval scholastic realists to the hands of phenomenologists and analysts via Brentano has, from a Thomistic point of view, “lost its effectiveness and value”, exactly as Maritain says, for the reason that the whole meaning of *esse intentionale* was originally conceived through an opposition to and contrast with the *esse entitativum* of material substances:

“Intentionality is not only that property of my consciousness of being directed transparency, of aiming at objects in the depths of itself. Above all, **intentionality is a property of thought**, a prerogative of its immateriality, **whereby** being in itself, posited “outside thought”, i.e., **being which is fully independent of the act of thought, becomes a thing existing within thought**, set up for thought and integrated into its own act through which, from that moment, they both exist in thought with a single, self-same suprasubjective existence”²¹.

2.2. Toward a Postmodern Context for Understanding Intentionality

When Maritain says, after all this²², that “the problem of thing and object” is the heart of the matter, he cannot be accused of exaggeration. “Every realism”, he warns²³, “that comes to terms with Descartes and Kant” — esteemed by Husserl as the “two great pioneers” of his new approach, remember — “shall one day see that it belies its name.” Yet, like Husserl dealing with the nature of intentionality, Maritain himself, in dealing with the relation of thing and object, “in the final reckoning misses the great secret”. For he casts the matter in terms of an either/or choice between realism and idealism in the post-Cartesian

¹⁹ So we have from Maritain a whole series of synonyms for *esse entitativum*.

²⁰ Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 103.

²² *Ibid.*, 107.

²³ *Ibid.*, 100.

context, without ever realizing that the “problem of thing and object” transcends the terms of that *context* of choice.

Yet his very admonition should have alerted him to a fuller dimension of the problem²⁴: “It is a serious matter for a philosopher not to be able to distinguish between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*.” Indeed it is. One might almost call it that part of the human condition which philosophy was born to remedy, the very difference *in potentia* or *virtualiter* between the brute and the rational animal, the animal capable of knowing that there are signs and not only of using signs (the semiotic animal). And yet the remedy cannot be effective if the terms of the distinction are not fully understood. And the terms of this distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis* cannot be understood with sufficient fullness if the animal contribution to rationality is minimized, denigrated, or marginalized (as it typically is among all the moderns, not merely the neothomists) in the theoretical analysis of “ideogenesis”, the formation of species-specifically human concepts.

3. The Problem of Thing and Object

We can agree with Maritain that “the proper task of a straightforward philosophy” is “to assign the reasons for what is given to it and to gain an understanding of that datum.” Yet “what is given” to the human intellect in its first, its species-specific, awakening and difference from animal sense-perception is precisely *being* or *ens*, yet this *ens primum cognitum* is not simply *ens reale*. It is that which *first divides* into *ens reale* and *ens rationis*: that is the “datum” that is given to be understood, and the needed understanding cannot be arrived at by any analysis that begins by omitting or waving to the side half the datum.

St Thomas was clear on this point, without thematically pursuing it: *ens primum cognitum, id quod primum cadit in intellectu*, is what provides human understanding with its formal object, the means of distinguishing understanding as a cognitive power distinct from and

²⁴ Ibid., 106.

superordinate to the estimative power of sense perceptions, as also from the internal sense of memory and of imagination. These three cognitive powers of internal sense — estimation, memory, imagination²⁵ — share with the understanding, *intellectus*, the need for a specifying stimulus or *species impressa* in order to initiate the proper activity which results in the formation of a ‘concept’ or *species expressa*, the “intentional or presentative form” which, as a quality of the soul, has for its defining distinctiveness precisely the directedness upon an object²⁶ which alone the phenomenologists emphasize.

3.1. Heidegger on Aquinas

There are not many points, perhaps only one, on which Martin Heidegger is a better guide to understanding St Thomas Aquinas than is Jacques Maritain, but if there is one such point, this is it. The point is put in a fundamental statement, occurring at various points in Aquinas’ writings, but specifically in the *Prima Secundae* of his *Summa theologiae*, Q. 94, art. 2c: “illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione [hominum], est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus, quaecumque quis apprehendit” — “That which occurs first to human awareness and which distinguishes that awareness in everything whatsoever it bears upon is the awareness of being”.

Here, Heidegger correctly tells us, “the term ‘Being’ does not define that realm of entities which is uppermost when these are articulated conceptually according to genus and species”, which would

²⁵ See J. Deely, *Animal Intelligence and Concept-Formation*, “The Thomist”, 1971, 1 (January), 43–93, for a textual analysis of St Thomas on the number and function of internal senses.

²⁶ Cf. J. Poinsot, *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, Alcalá, Spain, 1632, 290b45–4 (*Tractatus de Signis*, First Preamble, Article 2, 58/13–20: “Et sumitur intentio in praesenti, non prout dicit actum voluntatis, qui distinguitur ab electione et respicit finem, sed pro actu seu conceptus intellectus, qui dicitur intentio generali modo, quia tendit in aliud, scilicet in obiectum”. — “And we are using the term ‘intention’ in the present context not as bespeaking the act of the will distinguished by choice and respecting a goal, but for the act or rather the concept formed by the understanding which is called an ‘intention’ in a general way by reason of the fact that it tends toward something, namely, toward an object”.

have to be the case if the being here were determinately *ens reale*. No. The problem is rather the prior “unity of Being as over against the multiplicity of ‘categories’ applicable to things”, the grasp of being prior to its division into *ens reale* vs. *ens rationis*, let alone the further contraction of *ens reale* into the categories. “In medieval ontology this problem was widely discussed, especially in the Thomist and Scotist schools, without reaching clarity as to principles”²⁷. For the principles which bring clarity to this problem of ‘fundamental ontology’ (notice that I do not say *epistemology*²⁸) are precisely the principles of the doctrine of signs, as I try elsewhere²⁹ to show in full.

In the Latin Age, the focus of discussion of this question of the *primum cognitum* was as a preamble to discussion of the Aristotelian physics, wherein the focus would be on the knowability of categorial being, *ens reale*, from which all socially constructed reality as such is in principle excluded. In hindsight, it seems clear that this placement was a kind of misplacement resulting from the tendency to see *ens reale* as all that really counts in the complex of experience and problem of objectivity.

3.2. The Neothomist Approach

But the Neothomist treatment of this problem-area has been neither phenomenological nor particularly semiotic. It can be given a summary statement as follows. Objects are presented to the human mind by concepts. But for the realist true objects must be things. So we arrive at the famous quo/quod distinction of American Neothomism:

²⁷ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by J. Macquarrie, E. Robinson, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 3. For an actual list of the Latin scholastics who disputed this question between Aquinas and Poinsot, see J. Poinsot, *Philosophiae naturalis prima pars*, 1633, esp. 22a35–b29, 24b7–13.

²⁸ I consider “epistemology” mainly to be one of the misbegotten notions of modern philosophy, because the semiotic relations which actually sustain knowledge are not originally in any contrast with “ontology”, as the reader of J. Poinsot, *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, Alcaláá, Spain, 1632, can see for him or her self.

²⁹ J. Deely, *Evolution, semiosis, and ethics: rethinking the context of natural law*, in *Contemporary Perspectives on Natural Law*, ed. by A. M. González, Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007, volume in preparation.

concepts are not *that which* (id quod) we know, but that *by which* (id quo) we know. And, they imagine³⁰, at a stroke idealism is overcome and realism vindicated.

But there is a problem here. Not so fast. For the “realist”, objects must *sometimes* be things, or at least *be able to include* things, where is meant by “thing” what exists whether or not it is known, and by “object” is meant precisely something known. For not even the staunchest “realist” could soberly maintain that *all* objects are things. And even when they are also things, they are not quite “things” in just the same sense that they exist as objects. The president of Johns Hopkins University, assuming that the post is filled just now and that the one assigned to that post is not dead, is, as a biological organism, a thing indeed, a veritable *ens reale*; but as president of the university he is something more, indeed an *ens rationis* as well, a reality *socially constructed*, a reality which *could not be as such* outside the context of cognitive social relations, *entia rationis*³¹ intermingled with *ens reale*.

³⁰ Into this simplistic trap even Maritain stumbles in his exposition of “The Concept”, Appendix I to Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or The Degrees of Knowledge*, 390.

³¹ Poinsot, *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, 291b22–46 (*Tractatus de Signis*, First Preamble: On Mind-Dependent Being, Article 2, 60/26–44): “Ubi discerne, quod licet cognitio sit causa, ex qua resultat relatio rationis (quod omni enti rationis commune est), et ita ut conveniat et denominet relatio rationis aliquod subiectum, necessario exigit cognitionem, non tamen semper cognitio reddit ipsum obiectum aptum et congruum susceptivum talis denominationis, ita ut solum conveniat illi in esse cognito, sed solum hoc contingit in intentionibus secundis. Et ita relatio Creatoris et Domini, iudicis et doctoris, ut denominet subiectum, requirit cognitionem, quae talem relationem causet, sed non quae constituat subiectum in esse cognito capax, ut denominationem illam suscipiat. At vero esse genus vel speciem non solum supponit cognitionem causantem tales relationes, sed etiam supponit cognitionem, quae reddat subiectum abstractum ab inferioribus, et super rem sic abstractam cadit illa denominatio”. — “Here note this difference: even though cognition is the cause from which a mind-dependent relation results (as it is the cause of all mind-dependent being), and thus, as the mind-dependent relation belongs to and denominates some subject, it necessarily requires cognition, yet cognition does not always render the object itself apt and congruous for the reception of such a denomination, so that the denomination belongs to that object only in cognized being, for this happens only in second intentions. And thus the relations of Creator and Lord, judge and doctor, as they denominate a subject, require cognition, which causes such relations, but does not render the subject capable in cognized or known being of receiving

3.3. Reality and Social Construction

We are at the beginning of a great problematic here, solidly rooted in the philosophy of being, yet one of which the great masters of that tradition in the high middle ages barely did more than enucleate. The social construction of reality was not one of their themes. Today, a woman cannot be burned for being a witch, but it was not always so (and may not always be so). Today, a man cannot be imprisoned for life for being suspected of undermining the revealed truth that the sun revolves around the earth, which is stationary and at the center of the universe; but it was not always so. Today, at least in many states, a woman cannot be forced to wear a scarlet letter in order that she be publicly known as an adulteress, or put to death for the deed of adultery; but it remains an uphill climb. Today, there are persons in positions of legal responsibility who are unable to understand why marriage should necessarily involve more than one gender.

You can see from these dramatic examples, and others of your own experience I am sure, how true it is that³² “it is a serious matter for a philosopher not to be able to distinguish between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*”. No less serious is the matter when a judge and jury fail to tell the difference, and wrongly sentence an innocent man or woman. On the other hand, the successful lie depends upon the same confusion, so we are dealing with something truly fundamental. The datum given us to understand is that the particulars of the *ens reale/ens rationis* difference often elude us, and that as far as socialization is concerned *ens rationis* can be in some ways more fundamental than *ens reale*. We have to assign reasons for this fundamental feature of experience, and dismissing *entia rationis* as subjective phenomena will hardly do, for the president of Johns Hopkins University is not a state of my mind, even though a state within my mind is essential for that president to appear to me and be recognized as such.

that denomination. But indeed the being of a genus or species not only supposes cognition causing such relations, but also supposes a cognition which renders the subject abstracted from individuals, and upon the object so abstracted falls that denomination [i.e., the denomination by a second intention]”.

³² Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, 106.

4. Specifying Forms, Objects, and Things

Let us go back to the problem of the *species*, the word which “has no equivalent in our modern languages”, the “specifying form”, as we said above, which exists in nature before it exists as a quality within the soul as *species expressa*. We have seen that this notion is intimately bound up with the notion of *esse intentionale*, a notion which, in its own turn, depends for its original sense on a contrast with *esse entitativum*, the being proper to things in their contrast to *known* things, objects. Known things presuppose intentional forms by which they exist within the soul as qualities on the basis of which the knower is cognitively related to what *also* exists “extramentally”, that is to say, in the physical environment surrounding the organism. Of this complexus Maritain says (but here I substitute for his translation as “presentative form” the translated original term *species*, otherwise leaving alone his text and use of italics):

“it seems that St Thomas was much more concerned with the relation between the *extramental thing* and the *species* thanks to which it [the extramental thing] is made object than with the relation between the *species* and the *object* itself taken as such. That is why ... it often happens that he deals with the concept not by distinguishing between *mental concept* and *objective concept*³³, but rather by speaking of it,

³³ Here let me enter my protest to the later medieval resort — already in Scotus and Cajetan after — to the expression “conceptus objectivus” to express the difference between the terminus of the intentional relation of cognition and its fundament or subjective ground, the “conceptus subjectivus” or idea in the knower. This was a terminological marker along the way of the developing Latin appreciation of the difference in principle between object and thing, but one so pregnant with a prospect of misunderstanding that what it principally came to mark was the fork in the road where the moderns took their leave of the semiotic consciousness so hard-won among the later Latin Iberians (after d’Ailly, I think especially of Soto, the Conimbricenses, Araújo, and Poinset) in order to follow rather the Way of Ideas than the Way of Signs, and to develop the modern idealist doctrine of objectivity in the place of a semiotic objectivity permeable to the order of environmentally existing things. Gilson, in his *Index Scolastico-Cartésien* (Paris, 49, text #80), identifies this expression in Suarez 1597, an author certainly read by Descartes; but Suarez repeats it as a “vulgaris distinctio” — a manner of speaking already widespread toward the close of the 16th century.

at one time, in the sense of mental concept (*intentio intellecta* could then be translated as “the mental aim”) and, at another time, in the sense of objective concept (*intentio intellecta* could then be translated as “the object aimed at mentally”). This is to say, he speaks of the concept by thinking of the mental concept not precisely as *species* but from the point of view of the *object* it presents to the mind³⁴.

In other words, in St Thomas’ own context (where the misshapen term “conceptus obiectivus” as such never rears its ugly head), the emphasis was on the ordering of sensation to objectify or make known aspects of things physically existing in the organism’s immediate surroundings, and on showing that it is in the becoming aware of these things external to us that all knowledge of animals, including the rational animals, begins and finds its normal terminus.

But St Thomas also had much to say, not wholly unified thematically, it is true, but nonetheless rich (indeed, much as was the case with his reflections on *signum*³⁵), about the necessity of *entia rationis* for the knowledge we acquire of *entia realia*. Principally, but not exclusively, the necessity for *entia rationis* in developing knowledge even of *ens reale* is rooted not only in the finitude of our knowledge³⁶, but in its perceptual animal origins, and especially in its discursive

³⁴ Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite*, 389n4.

³⁵ See J. Deely, *The Role of Thomas Aquinas in the Development of Semiotic Consciousness*, “Semiotica”, 2004, 152–1/4, 75–139; Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*.

³⁶ Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*, Art. 5, “Utrum Deus Formet Entia Rationis” — “Whether God forms mind-dependent beings”, 308a17–32: “aliquas relationes rationis et intentiones logicas fundari super cognitionem imperfectam manifeste constat, quia istae relationes fundantur in rebus cognitis per abstractionem, per praedicationem seu compositionem aut discursum; sunt enim relationes universalis abstracti ab inferioribus, praedicati ad subiectum, antecedentis ad consequens. Ergo intellectus carens abstractione [scilicet, intellectus angelicus seu divinus, sed non humanus!], compositione et discursu non poterit per se immediate talia entia rationis formare, sicut neque sensus externus ea format, quia caret isto modo cognoscendi”. — “that some mind-dependent relations and logical intentions are founded or based upon an imperfect cognition is fairly plain to see, because the relations in question are founded upon objects known through abstraction, through predication or composition or discourse; for they are universal relations of predicate to subject, antecedent to consequent, abstracted from instances. Therefore an intellect without need for abstraction [such as an angelic intellect or the divine intellect, in contrast to the human intellect!] will not itself be immediately able to form such mind-de-

character. Human understanding, Poinsot remarks³⁷, develops only over time (“mensuratur tempore”) “on account of its dependency upon the phantasms”, the *species expressae* of sense perception, as we have seen, “from which we receive the *species*” as intellectual stimuli (*species impressae*) to the formation by the understanding of its own proper concepts or *species expressae*. This is indeed the root of the *fallibilism* of human knowledge so emphasized by Peirce.

4.1. The World in the Soul

Consider the order of the primitive concepts³⁸ necessarily acquired by the human mind in order to reach a grasp of the difference between an objective world of experienced objects as something common to all animals and the species-specifically human idea of a physical environment of things existing independently of their relation to us as objects experienced.

“Being as first known” is not so unlike the “blooming buzzing confusion” that William James (1842–1910) reflected upon³⁹. For

pendent beings by composition and discourse, as neither can external sense form them, by reason of lacking the requisite manner of fashioning awareness”.

³⁷ J. Poinsot, *Tomus Secundus Cursus Theologici*, Lyons, France, 1643, disp. 40, art. 5, par. 37, pp. 542–43: “Intellectio non mensuratur tempore per se et ex natura sua, quia indivisibilis actio est, sed per accidens, ut in nobis, propter dependentiam a phantasmatis a quibus accipimus species. Et in tali intellectione philosophandum est sicut de aliis motibus tempore mensuratis: quod non est possibile quod intellectus tempore praecedenti quiescat, non accipiendo species, et in ultimo instanti terminativo illius temporis sine alio motu phantasmatum illas habeat”. — “Because its action is indivisible intellection is not of its proper nature and essentially measured by time, but it is so measured accidentally in our case on account of our understanding’s dependence upon the phantasms from which we derive the intelligible specifying forms. And in such circumstances of intellection the act of philosophizing is measured by time just as are other movements: for there is no way that the human understanding can remain in a time prior to the accepting of impressed forms of specification and in a final instant terminative of that prior time possess those specifications without any other movement of the phantasms”.

³⁸ See also Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 347–357, esp. 355ff.

³⁹ James attributes the expression to “someone”.

Aquinas, and in his school after him⁴⁰, the Latins saw quite well that the *primum cognitum* was not an abstract genus of logic, but an initial apprehension of the intelligibly knowable as such within the objective world of sense-perception, apprehended in a confused and indistinct or quasi-potential manner, according to the everywhere accepted maxim, *anima est quodammodo omnia*: “the soul” — the human soul — “is in a certain way all things”, to wit, as able to know being in its transcendental amplitude. Understanding, they divined, proceeds naturally from potency to act, from the imperfect to the (relatively) perfect. The proportionate object of such a progression must likewise be something confused and imperfect but admitting of development. And, inasmuch as the more distinct as such is comparatively more perfect than the confused, the notion of being as manifested in any particular object of awareness has a more confused — a more “potential” — intelligibility as indistinctly mingling or portending every character actually found or findable in that object (*including aspects there as a consequence of that object’s involvement in the realm of concern of another animal*, of our own or some other species — *entia rationis*, in a word, objectively given in the world of things objectified⁴¹).

⁴⁰ The most extended discussion of being-as-first-known, *De Primo Cognito*, in the school that developed out of the writings of Aquinas seems to be that of Poinset (*Philosophiae naturalis prima pars*). But, in Thomist terms, Cajetan (1493) also treats of the matter; and the postmodern development of semiotics has made unmistakable the limited purview of the earlier discussions, hampered as they were by being located in the context of aiming primarily and virtually exclusively at expounding the doctrine of substance and accident as *ens reale*. Cf. V. Guagliardo: *Hermeneutics: Deconstruction or Semiotics?*, in *Symposium on Hermeneutics*, ed. by E. F. Bales, private circulation; Conception, MO: Conception Seminary College, 1992, 63–74, followed by a Discussion, 75–78; *Being and Anthroposemiotics*, in *Semiotics 1993*, ed. by R. Corrington, J. Deely, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994, 50–56; *Being-as-First-Known in Poinset: A-Priori or Aporia?*, “American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly”, *Special Issue on John Poinset* (Summer, 1994), pp. 363–393.

⁴¹ Poinset, *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, Art. 5, “Utrum Deus Formet Entia Rationis” — “Whether God forms mind-dependent beings”, 307b21–36: “id, quod cognoscitur ut existens extra propriam potentiam, non potest habere esse ex vi talis cognitionis; nam ens rationis non potest esse extra potentiam formatem illud. Quando autem cognoscitur ens rationis ut formatum ab alio, cognoscitur extra potentiam, scilicet in cognitione alterius. Ergo ex vi talis cognitionis non accipit esse et formationem tale ens rationis, atque adeo illa cognitio non est formativa entis

This “being”, as the most primitive of intellectual apprehensions⁴², *ens primum cognitum*, is given to understanding by the senses, to be sure, but especially by the *internal* senses, where the *species impressae* of external sense have already been cognitively responded to and elaborated by the higher internal senses of memory, imagination, and estimation to produce yet a further, higher level of cognitive specification, namely, a “concept” or *species expressa*. ***And this ‘species’ is not that by which (“id quo”) but that on the basis of which (“id in quo”) an object is presented as known — that is to say, as object in what differentiates object as such from thing as such, namely, the relation to the knower on the basis of which every object as such, whether also a thing of nature or not, exists as presented in awareness and known.***

Nor is this all. The *species expressae* of the three higher internal sense powers — “phantasms” or the *species expressae* of perception, of *phantasiari*, as we may follow the Latins in saying⁴³ — do not of

rationis, sed cognoscitiva formati; unde cognoscit illud ut pendens a meo intellectu, non a suo” – vel e converso ex suo intellectu, non a meo! — “that which is cognized as existing independently of one’s own mind cannot have its existence by virtue of the very cognition in question; for a mind-dependent being cannot exist independently of the power forming it. But when a mind-dependent being is cognized as formed by another, it is known independently of the cognitive power of the one knowing it, to wit, as existing in the cognition of the other. Therefore the mind-dependent being in question does not receive its existence and formation by virtue of the cognition recognizing it, and therefore neither is that cognition formative of the mind-dependent being, but rather the becoming aware of something already and elsewhere formed; whence it cognizes that being a depending upon my understanding, not upon yours” – or conversely upon your understanding, not upon mine!

And, of course, when it is a question not of *intellectus* but of *vis aestimativa* in the case of brute animals, the *ens rationis* is grasped objectively but only materially rather than formally (“phantasiandi, non intelligendi”, as we might put it), that is to say, it is apprehended as structuring the objects apprehended but is never formally recognized as *non ens* comparatively to what those objects have of *ens reale*.

⁴² The “prima ratio cognoscibilis seu primum cognitum formale respectu nostri intellectus” (“primary rationale of knowability or first formal known in respect of human understanding”), as Poinset formulated it (*Naturalis Philosophiae Prima Pars*, Madrid, Spain, 1633, Q. 1, Art. 3, 20a2–33b38).

⁴³ “Phantasiari”, the activity of producing ‘phantasms’ or ‘mental representations’, is the richest Latin term for the combined cognitive activity and production of the internal sense, distinct on the one side from (but incorporative of) the activ-

themselves present their objects as intelligible, not even in what they contain directly from external sensation of the surrounding physical environment of existing things. They present their objects as interpretively constructed, that is to say, as sense-perceptible, not as intelligible. As St Thomas puts it, “things are per se sensible, but they have to be *made* intelligible”⁴⁴. Aquinas assigns this task — of making actually intelligible the actually sensible but only potentially intelligible objects of experience — to the preconscious activity of the intellect as *agens*. The obscurely and (in hindsight⁴⁵) perhaps poorly named “process of abstraction” associated with this transformation should not and cannot properly be (though it usually is!) presented as a simple process of *extraction* or “drawing out” from the sensible; or — worse yet — as an “*intus legere*” like an x-ray machine⁴⁶ revealing the intelligible skeleton maintaining and underlying the sensible appearances. If anything like that were the case, the “intelligibility” would already have to actually be there in the sensible things as such. To the contrary, however, Aquinas is quite clear that what is “there” per se is something sensible that has to be *made* intelligible. Per se, there is no actual intelligibility in material substances as such, only the *possibility* of *being made* intelligible by a discursive intellect.

In what then does this “making intelligible”, this “abstraction” so-called, consist?

ity of external sense, and on the other side from the activity of the intellect and linguistic modeling which renders the phantasms intelligible by adding to them the *ens rationis* of self-identity which severs the otherwise exclusive link of the ‘phantasized’ to the biological self. See Poinso’s use of this term in his *Tractatus de Signis*, Book II, Question 2, 240–253, esp. the extended discussion of this term in note 2, pp. 240–41.

⁴⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, Q. 79, art. 3, corpus and ad 3 (reply to objection 3).

⁴⁵ See the fuller discussion of “Abstraction” in Deely, *Evolution, semiosis, and ethics*.

⁴⁶ Maritain actually resorts to this desperate image (unsustainable by reason of the synchrony of perspective in which alone it makes sense) in his early *Introduction Générale à la Philosophie*, Paris: Librairie Pierre Téqui, 1920, 171.

4.2. The Leap from Sensible to Intelligible in Objects

There are at least two reasons why the intentional passage of the form of the thing entitatively independent of awareness into the soul of the knower (where it is received formally and without the attendant matter necessary for entitative existence) is not sufficient to explain this *saltus* wherein the perceived world of objects becomes a world of things able to be understood.

First, and again Thomas is quite clear, it is **never** the *substantial form* as such and directly that is presented to sense, internal or external, but only the accidents of environmental things⁴⁷. The *esse intentionale* of the *species impressa* of external sensation, wherein alone that “thing” is purely (if only aspectually and accidentally) presented objectively, is not a migration of a *substantial* “form without matter” across the boundary of “inner/outer” separating cognitive organism from its environment. Yet it is only the substantial form that, together with the matter, enters into and constitutes the *actual essence* of material substances. So, if the *species* are never substantial forms, how do they “identify the knower with the known” in such a way as to yield knowledge of the essence of the known? How does intentional identification of concept as fundament with object as terminus yield a knowledge of essence, if essence is substantial form and *species* is never substantial form⁴⁸?

Second — and this is the point respecting which the Neothomists in particular, along with religious fundamentalists generally, were the most recalcitrant to recognize — the essences of material substances are not in detail⁴⁹ fixed and unchanging, as could still be thought in the

⁴⁷ See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 77.1 ad 7.

⁴⁸ The question raised here requires many preliminaries, so the reader may want to consult further Deely, *Evolution, semiosis, and ethics*, Chap. 14, among other relevant *loci*.

⁴⁹ Thus, the apparent “natural kinds” of the birds and the fishes, for example, do not as such represent essential kinds, even though to be alive simply or to be alive as an animal, or again to be alive as a brute or as a ‘rational’ animal, do represent saltational levels or types of being in nature, types as incompatible with intermediary states as is being pregnant. See M. J. Adler, *Problems for Thomists. The Problem of Species*, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1940; *Solution of the Problem of Species*, “The Thomist”, 1941, 2 (April), 279–379; and *The Hierarchy of Essences*, “The Review of

time of Aquinas, when it was believed that the world today consisted of the same “natural kinds” as the world indefinitely past from the beginning or indefinitely future until the end⁵⁰. Hence (in Aquinas’ day) once the “form without matter”, *one and the same form*, the *species*, the “intentional form”, had “spiritually” migrated into the soul of the knower and been grasped there conceptually, supposing that it could somehow reveal an essence or make the essence of its source known, not only would the essence be known, however imperfectly, but the essence would be known once and for all. For that same form revealing the essence in the knower would exist *secundum esse entitativum* in the thing (constituting the thing as an individual of a natural kind) and *secundum esse intentionale* in the knower (constituting the knower as “quidditatively aware” of the thing), and *secundum esse divinum* in the creative idea of God; whence human wisdom, in grasping the essences of things, would also participate however feebly in the timeless wisdom of God himself, albeit externally.

It is a nice picture, but it cannot work. Where it cannot work, ironically, is in the *real* world of physical nature as scientifically known; only in the ideal world of a pre-Galilean dreamland perpetuated by self-styled would-be “realists” can it work.

For the picture to be a true picture, first, it would have to be the substantial forms, not the accidents, that intentionally penetrate the senses and work their way up through the internal senses to the possible intellect, and this St Thomas expressly rules out⁵¹. Second,

Metaphysics”, 1952, 1 (September), 3–30; together with J. Deely, *The Philosophical Dimensions of the Origin of Species*, “The Thomist”, 1969, January and April, Part I, 75–149, Part II, 251–342.

⁵⁰ The case is comparable to the model of a geocentric universe in the time of Eudoxus, Plato, and Aristotle: the *prima facie* true theory which most or all thinkers accepted as such and which conformed the most readily to the best available evidence simply proved over time to be in fact false and not compatible at all with the weight of evidence that would accumulate over time. Astronomy and biology, thus, as modernity has established them, are outstanding examples of understanding as *discursus*.

⁵¹ The point could hardly be more clearly stated (Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 77.1 ad 7): “quia tamen formae substantiales, quae secundum se sunt nobis ignotae, innotescunt per accidentia; nihil prohibet interdum accidentia loco differentiarum substantialium poni”. — “because, however, substantial forms are in their own being

and decisively, it would have to be the case — as both Aristotle and Aquinas had good but wrong reason to believe⁵² — that the natural kinds found now would be the natural kinds that would always be found in the past or in the future of our planet for however long the earth might last — an imaginary possibility which we have learned, slowly, beginning in the 17th century, to be definitively false.

5. The Problem of Actual Intelligibility

So how does intelligibility enter the horizon of human knowledge of material substances? How is it the case that it is the “quiddity” of material things that is the formal object of human understanding in its difference from sense perception?

To appreciate the true proportions of Thomas’ remarkable doctrine about what distinguishes human understanding (as well as the brilliance of Kant’s insistence that *reinen Vernunft* itself is obliged to provide the element of necessity in the objects as sense provides them, once the mistaken assumption common to rationalists and empiricists — that even sensation terminates in ‘ideas’ — was in place, however), it is necessary at once to get clear about the basics concerning essences.

5.1. The Essence of Essences in *Ens Reale*

When it is said that a thing has an “essence”, what is basically meant is not at all that every individual instantiates an unchanging

unknown to us, they become known through individual characteristics or accidents; in the interim there is nothing to stop us from taking congeries of characteristics or accidents as standing for differences of substance”.

⁵² In the natural collections of Albertus Magnus, the principal teacher of Aquinas and sponsor of his first appointment to the University of Paris Faculty of Arts, there were fossils; but no one, including Albert, recognized them as such. What we now call fossils they then had neither idea nor name. What we now see as the key to the former existence and constitution of the great reptiles as they were in themselves, they then saw as anomalies, experimental data defying explanation on the basis of what was known or thought to be known about the natural world. Stones that are not carvings yet resemble living things? Come on!

form across generations and corruptions. What is meant, rather, is threefold.

First, that every individual existent has an internal constitution by which the individual tends toward stability and regularity between its generation and corruption. *Second*, that this internal constitution at root is a substantial form, and not a mere complex of accidental forms, *if* the individual in question is truly a natural unit, an *unum per se* (which is not readily determined by “common sense” or cónoscopic knowledge alone when it comes to investigating the details of nature, by reason of what my old teacher and friend Ralph Austin Powell used to call “the diminishing illuminative power of the humanesque analogy”, wherein we judge of individuality from our experience of our own selves together with what appear to us as “unities” in common experience — a not altogether reliable guide in the question of which unities are “natural”, i.e., the unities of substance, that is). And *third*, that there must indeed be such natural units or “substances” if the world is not simply one, because every many by definition presupposes ones.

So we come to “what is essential in the idea of essence” as the objective formality distinctive of human apprehension. When it is said that the human mind is capable of grasping the essences of material things, all that is being said is that the human mind *is ordered to knowing and can come to know the internal constitution of its environmental world*, but only by observation and patient analysis, trial and error, as it were (experimental interaction with the surroundings), and not by intuition of form alone, as so many “realists” have for so long imaginatively (not to say wistfully) postulated.

So, when the intellect grasps as its formal object being, *ens primum cognitum* as the species-specifically distinctive element of intellectual awareness in contrast with the purely perceptual awareness of brute animals, what it grasps is the world of perceived objects according to a possibility of conceiving those objects as existing in themselves. Once given as existing more than in relation to the animal’s classification of +, -, 0, the objects of experience over the course of experience soon manifest a great difference, namely, the difference between aspects of the world of objects that simply reduce to our experience of the

objects (such as a flag signifying Napoleonic France; and this is the dimension of *ens rationis* already given in the perceptual experience of brute animals⁵³, although not there recognizable as such) and other

⁵³ Poinsot, *Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*: “Per quam potentiam et per quos actus fiant entia rationis” — “By what powers and through which acts do mind-dependent beings come about”, 301b33–302b4 (*Tractatus de Signis*, First Preamble, Article 3, 66/46–68/31): “Sensus interni formant entia rationis materialiter sed non discernendo differentiam inter ens reale et ens rationis, seu ens et non ens, et inde non formaliter. ‘Dicimus ‘formaliter loquendo’ non formare illa, id est discernendo inter ens rationis et ens reale, et concipiendo id, quod non est ens, ad instar entis realis. Materialiter autem cognoscere ens rationis est ipsam apparentiam realis entis attingere, sed non discernere inter id, quod rationis et realitatis est. ... Sed in istis solum attingit id, quod sensibile seu quoad sensum repraesentabile est. Quod autem habeant habitudinem ad non ens et ex ista habitudine entia ficta seu rationis dicantur, quod est formaliter discernere inter ens et non ens, sensus internus non attingit.

“Ratio videtur manifesta, quia sensus internus non potest ferri in aliquid nisi sub ratione sensibilis; quod autem id, quod sibi repraesentatur ut sensibile, opponatur enti reali, ad ipsum non pertinet iudicare, quia non concipit ens sub ratione entis. Quod autem aliquid accipiatur tamquam ens fictum, formaliter consistit in hoc, quod cognoscatur nihil entitatis habere in re, et tamen ad instar entis attingi; alioquin non discernitur inter ens reale et ens fictum, sed solum attingitur illud, ad cuius instar formatur ens rationis. Quod quando est aliquid sensibile, non repugnat a sensu cognosci, sed ad sensum solum pertinet id, quod in illo de sensibilitate est attingere, habitudinem vero ad non ens, cuius loco subrogatur et unde ficte habet esse, ad sensum non pertinet, et ideo ens fictum sub formali ratione ficti ab ente vero non discernit.

“Quod vero ens fictum *materialiter* possit cognoscere sensus, constat manifeste. Non quidem, quia sensus etiam externus potest v. g. cognoscere colorem fictum seu apparentem, quia iste color, licet apparenter sit color, non tamen est ens fictum, sed verum et reale, scilicet aliquid ex luce resultans. Sed ex eo probatur, quia sensus internus multa ad invicem componit, quae extra se nullo modo sunt aut esse possunt. Cognoscit ergo aliquid, quod in se est ens fictum, licet ipsam fictionem non apprehendat, sed solum id, quod in illo ente ficto tamquam sensibile se offert”. — “Internal senses form mind-dependent beings materially but without discerning the difference between a mind-independent being and a mind-dependent being, the difference, that is to say, between being and nonbeing, and for this reason internal sense is not said to fashion mind-dependent beings ‘formally speaking’. “We say that the internal senses ‘formally speaking’ do not form mind-dependent beings, that is, they do not form them by discriminating between mind-dependent being and physical being, and by conceiving that which is not a being after the pattern of physical being. Materially, however, to cognize a mind-dependent being is to attain the very appearance of a being physically real, but not to discriminate between that which is of the mind and that which is of the physical world. For example,

aspects of objects which do not reduce to but seem to antecede and transcend the objectivity of experience (such as milk in a woman's breasts signifying child-birth, or smoke signifying something burning; and this is the dimension of *ens reale* in the categorial sense concentrated on by Aristotle and the Latin scholastics).

5.2. The Importance of *Ens Rationis* in Objectivity

So this initial grasp of *ens* — *ens primum cognitum*, that is, 'equidistant', as it were, from the subsequent polarization of awareness

the imaginative power can form a gold mountain, and similarly it can construct an animal composed of a she-goat, a lion, and a serpent, which is the Chimera [of Greek mythology]. But in these constructions the imagination itself attains only that which is sensible or representable to sense. Yet internal sense does not attain the fact that objects so known have a condition relative to non-being, and from this relative condition are said to be constructed, fictive, or mind-dependent — which is formally to discriminate between being and non-being.

"The reason seems clear: internal sense cannot refer to anything except under a sensible rationale; but the fact that that which is represented to it as sensible happens to be opposed to physical being, does not pertain to internal sense to judge, because internal sense does not conceive of being under the rationale of being. The fact, however, of anything's being regarded as a constructed or fictive being formally consists in this, that it is known to have nothing of entitative reality in the physical world, and yet is attained or grasped on the pattern of a physical entity; otherwise, no discrimination is made between mind-independent being and constructed or fictive being, but only that is attained on whose pattern a mind-dependent being is formed. When this object is something sensible, there is no reason why it cannot be known by sense. But sense attains only that which is sensible in an object, whereas the condition relative to the non-being in whose place the object is surrogated and whence it fictively has being, does not pertain to sense. For this reason, sense does not differentiate a constructed being, under the formal rationale of being a construct, from a true being.

"But that sense is able to know fictive being materially is manifestly the case. Not, indeed, from the fact that even external sense can, for example, cognize a fictive color or appearance, because this color, even though it is the color [of a given object] only apparently, is nevertheless not a fictive being, but one true and physical, that is to say, it is something resulting from light. But that sense grasps mind-dependent beings is proved by this fact, that internal sense synthesizes many things which outside itself in no way are or can be. Sense therefore knows something which is in itself a constructed or fictive being, although the fiction itself sense does not apprehend, but only that which, in the fictive being, offers itself as sensible".

between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, “being” (*ens*) and “nonbeing” (*nonens*), as St Thomas also expresses the contrast — can hardly be identified with the concrete physical object insofar as that object is a physically individual existent, or complex of individual existents, an *ens reale*. For “being as first known” is also the richest of all objectifications, embracing every particular intelligible object in the amplitude of analogy, albeit according to confused and largely undifferentiated or undistinguished awareness (such as the much *later* formation and critical establishment of a notion of “*ens commune*” or *ens inquantum ens* extending intelligibility beyond the order of material substances helps to dispel). Thus material entities as particular beings are experienced “factually” only because being has been previously grasped in a way that is very different from conceptualizations of the logical order. This is the meaning of the saying of Aquinas, “being is what first falls under human understanding” (“*primo in intellectu cadit ens*”).

This is also the resolution of Heidegger’s perplexity⁵⁴ as to “Why does Being get ‘conceived’ ‘proximally’ in terms of the present-at-hand *and not* in terms of the ready-to-hand, which indeed lies *closer* to us?” Environmental beings as ready-to-hand are precisely the objects of sense-perception structured and presented through *phantasiari*, the *species expressae* of internal sense according to the classification or ‘categories’ of what is to be sought (+), what is to be avoided (–), and what can be safely ignored (0). So the objective world of sense-perception is already a *fabric of relations* whose pattern is apprehended as being but whose texture is an interweave of *ens rationis* with *ens reale*. This interweave needs to be taken into account in the so-called epistemology of “ideogenesis” or “concept formation”, the “abstraction” by which properly intellectual concepts are formed on the basis of the *species expressae* or “phantasms” of internal sense being transformed, by the intellect’s own and proper activity, into *species impressae* for the formation this time (*species intelligibiles*) of properly *intellectual* concepts (*species expressae intellectae*).

Nor must the essential phases of this “abstraction” be elided or glided over. Let us enumerate the irreducibly distinct phases that

⁵⁴ Heidegger, 437.

must be recognized if the accustomed misleading truncations of the process are to be overcome:

1. The *species impressae* of external sense are formed in the sense organs of the animal by the action of the physical surroundings on the body of the animal.

2. These sensory stimuli specifying sensation are co-ordinated or synthesized by the *sensus communis* function of the nervous system, stimulating now the higher level or “interior senses” actively to form, in conformity with the needs and desires of the animal organism (i.e., according to its biological heritage and individual experience), the *species expressae* of *phantasiari*. These are the *species*, the “phantasms”, the mental representations of otherness (not at all the ‘self-representations’ which objects involve) that organize and present the environment under the categories of animal interaction (attraction +, repulsion –, or indifference 0, as we have seen).

3. The phantasms or *species expressae sensuum internorum*, in turn, further stimulate the ‘rational animal’ to add to the phantasms by its own activity (*intellectus agens*) the formal relation of self-identity, something which *phantasiari* on its own is incapable of doing⁵⁵.

4. The phantasms, presenting and organizing the objective world in relation to the organism, through the addition to themselves of the relation of self-identity, are thereby transformed from *species expressae phantasiandi* into rather *species impressae intelligibilis*.

5. In response to this now *species intelligibilis* as stimulus (the *species expressae phantasiandi* transformed by the intellect adding to the phantasm a *relatio formaliter rationis* of self-identity into a *species impressae intelligibilis*), the understanding itself (*intellectus possibilis*) now in first act responds by actively forming further the *species expressae intellectae*, and these are the *species* which present the objective world now (for the first time in biological evolution) under the guise of being, *ens primum cognitum*, whence arises through experience the formal contrast between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, making possible the first intellectual judgment yielding the principle of contradiction,

⁵⁵ Cf. Poinset, *Tractatus de Signis*, First Preamble, Article 3, 64–76 (*Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, 301a1–306b35).

etc.⁵⁶, to say nothing of the first forms of cultural as superordinate to merely social organization of the animal group.

We are presented here with nothing less than the ontological framework for the scientific researches by which Jakob von Uexküll arrived at his breakthrough *Umweltstheorie*⁵⁷, a fundamental contribution to ‘epistemology’ (if you like), both cónoscopically and ideoscopically considered, which Sebeok had placed on the center-stage of semiotic development by the 20th century’s end⁵⁸, but which has been noticed among Thomists so far only by Josef Pieper⁵⁹ — a situation which I for one⁶⁰ am working to change. But at this point let us allow Poinset to frame the fundamental issue in his own words:

“that an object be real or fictive makes a difference only in the rationale of being, not in the rationale of object and something knowable. Whence it can well happen that something is an object simply speaking, and is simply not a real being. For the differences of things in physical existence and being are one thing, the differences of things as objects and knowable something else again — a point well made by Cajetan⁶¹. Whence it is that many things are the same in the ra-

⁵⁶ On the order of the primitive intellectual concepts, see Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding*, 355–357; and the further discussion below.

⁵⁷ Cf. J. von Uexküll, *Kompositionslehre der Natur. Biologie als undogmatische Naturwissenschaft*, ed. by T. von Uexküll, Frankfurt a. M.: Ullstein, 1899–1940; *A Stroll through the Worlds of Animals and Men*, trans. C. H. Schiller, in *Instinctive Behavior: The Development of a Modern Concept*, ed. by Claire H. Schiller, New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1957, 5-80; *The Theory of Meaning*, trans. by B. Stone, H. Weiner, in “Semiotica”, 1982, 1, 25-82.

⁵⁸ See esp. K. Kull, *Jakob von Uexküll: A Paradigm for Biology and Semiotics*, a Special Issue of “Semiotica”, 2001, 134–1/4; and note well Sebeok’s *caveat* (*Semiotics in the United States*, Bloomington, in Indiana University Press, 1991, 2) that ‘epistemology’ constitutes for semiotics no more than a “mid-most target”, precisely because study of the action of signs uncovers the path beyond the representative contents of consciousness to the objects represented as such — that is, as here mind-independent, there mind-dependent, and so on, in the unending spiral of semiosis.

⁵⁹ J. Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, London: Faber & Faber, 1952, 80–90.

⁶⁰ J. Deely, *The Thomistic Import of the Neo-Kantian Concept of Umwelt in Jakob von Uexküll*, “Angelicum”, 2005, forthcoming.

⁶¹ Cajetan (1507), *Commentarium in summam theologicam*, 1. p. q. 1. art. 3.

tionale of knowable which are not the same in the rationale of being, and similarly can many things coincide specifically in the rationale of knowable and not in the rationale of being, or conversely, as is discussed more fully in the last question of my treatment of the books of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*⁶².

Now notice that the *species expressae* of internal sense are formed by the animals themselves through memory, through imagination, and through estimation⁶³. By these *species* the environment objectified is presented in perception organized otherwise than it exists *either* in sensation *or* independently of awareness altogether. There is no *ens rationis* in sensation prescissively distinguished from perception, as we will further see⁶⁴. For *entia rationis* arise only as added into sense perception to make the leap from, to elevate, mere environmental features impinging on organs of external sense and naturally organized as an incipient web of relations obtaining between proper and common sensibles (and so, as we will see, already sign-relations, already a semiotic web, in Sebeok's phrase) to the level of objects experienced as desirable, threatening, or neutral.

⁶² Poinsoot, *Tractatus de Signis*, Book I, Question 4, 187/28–43 (*Artis Logicae Secunda Pars*, 678b15–27): “quod obiectum esse reale vel rationis solum facit differentiam in ratione entis, non in ratione obiecti et cognoscibilis. Et stat bene, quod aliquid sit simpliciter obiectum, et simpliciter non sit ens. Aliae enim sunt differentiae rerum in esse rei et entis, aliae in ratione obiecti et cognoscibilis, ut bene advertit Caietanus 1. p. q. 1. art. 3. Et sic univoce conveniunt plura in ratione scibilis et non in ratione entis, vel e contra. Et similiter possunt convenire specificae in ratione scibilis et non in ratione entis, vel e converso, ut plenius dicitur quaest. ult. in libros Posteriorum”.

How fundamental this point is for semiotics can be gleaned from its constant recurrence in Poinsoot's *Treatise on Signs*. See, for example, the discussions in Question 4, 187/26–190/23 (*Artis*, 678b–679a29), and note 33 thereto, p. 187–190 (*Artis*, 818b24–820a10); in Book II, Question 1, 235/36–236/46 (*Artis*, 700a43–701a17), and Question 5, 270/37–271/21 (*Artis*, 715b37–716a26); etc.

⁶³ The textual analysis of St Thomas on this point can be found in J. Deely, *Animal Intelligence and Concept-Formation*, “The Thomist”, 1971, 1 (January), 43–93.

⁶⁴ See further discussion below; but the main reason for this, in summary is the absence of actively formed compositions (*species expressae*) on the side of the organism in external sense data, proper and common sensibles being mutually determinative under the environmental influences here and now playing upon the animal body.

The *species expressae* of internal sense organize and present the objective world of every higher animal, but they do not contain any actual intelligibility. They do not present and organize the objects of human understanding in what is species-specifically proper to them. They present a world of objects actually perceived but only potentially intelligible. "Abstraction" is the not entirely fortunate term chosen in the medieval milieu of (supposed) timeless essences to designate the process whereby human understanding actively manipulates the phantasms to transform them from sensible into intelligible forms⁶⁵.

Błędne rozumienie terminów *quo* i *quod* w dyskusjach o realizmie (cz. I)

Streszczenie

John Deely podejmuje analizę filozoficznych dyskusji nad realizmem, prowadzonych zwłaszcza na gruncie tomistycznym, w celu zażegnania nieporozumień powstałych na skutek nieudanych prób uchwycenia, przez tomistów okresu późnej nowożytności, decydującej różnicy między *gatunkiem* jako *impressa* albo *quo*, z jednej strony, i *gatunkiem* jako *expressa* albo *in quo*, z drugiej. Przeprowadzone refleksje, zdaniem autora, umożliwiają zrozumienie tego, że realizm może dostosować się do rzeczywistości jako społecznej konstrukcji bez utraty zdolności do wykazania, iż ludzki umysł jest otwarty na poznanie rzeczy samych w sobie przed i po części (choć nie do końca) niezależnie od społecznych konstrukcji.

Pierwszą część swoich rozważań autor poświęca następującym zagadnieniom. Rozpoczyna od namysłu nad specyficznymi formami impresyjnymi i ekspresyjnymi, czyli terminami, które nie posiadały swoich odpowiedników w filozofii nowożytnej. Koncentruje się tutaj na analizie nowożytnych i postmodernistycznych pojęciach *intencjonalności*. Następnie autor podejmuje problematykę związaną z rozumieniem *rzeczy* i *przedmiotu*, oraz z pojmowaniem

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 84.4 ad 2: "**ad secundum** dicendum quod res materiales, secundum esse quod habent extra animam, possunt esse sensibles actu; non autem actu intelligibiles. unde non est simile de sensu et intellectu". — "the answer to the second objection is that material things, according to the existence they exercise independently of our minds, can be sensibles in act; yet they cannot be intelligibles in act. Whence intelligible objects do not stand in the same relation to the power of understanding as sensible things stand to the powers of sense".

specyficznych form przedmiotów i rzeczy. W zakresie jego analiz znajdują się tutaj: stanowisko Heideggera wobec św. Tomasza z Akwinu, wypowiedzi neotomistów, relacja rzeczywistości do konstrukcji społecznej, obraz świata w ludzkiej duszy, problem przejścia od tego, co zmysłowe, do tego, co inteligibilne w przedmiocie. Na zakończenie tej części autor zajmuje się kwestą aktualnej inteligibilności, skupiając się na problemach istoty istot w *ens reale* i znaczenia *ens rationis* w zakresie obiektywności.