Theory and History of Ontology

by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: rc@ontology.co

Selected Bibliography of Jan A. Aertsen. Writings in English

Jan Adrianus Aertsen (Amsterdam, 1938 - 2016), formerly professor of Medieval Philosophy and Modern Catholic Philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam (since 1984), was the director of the Thomas Institute in Cologne (Germany) until 2003; his areas of interest were the history of transcendentals, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart.


I give an updated bibliography with the omission of the publications in Dutch and of some minor writings.

BOOKS AUTHORED

   Inaugural address on the occasion of his taking up the chair of Medieval philosophy of the Free University in Amsterdam on November 9, 1984.
   "There are certain basic words which form the undertone of our thinking and of the manner in which we experience things. These basic words are not unchangeable; they often receive a different content . . . One such basic word is 'truth'."
   This is the start of the report of the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, issued in 1981, "On the nature of the authority of Scripture".(1) How does it happen that the Bible is read so differently? In searching for an answer to this problem, the report adopts a course remarkable within the Reformed tradition. It poses a truly philosophical question: "What is truth?" That the Bible is read differently is related to the fact that not all people mean the same by what they call "truth". If I want to raise this same question today, then I am in good company - though I must add at once that it is the matter rather than the company that motivates me. From the outset, that is, as early as with the Greeks, philosophy and truth are seen in an intimate connection. Aristotle, for example, describes philosophy as the "theory" of truth.(2) It is in the Middle Ages, however, that for the first time treatises appear under the title of De veritate, where truth itself is explicitly made the object of reflection. I would like to draw your attention to medieval observations on the query about truth. 'Adaequatio rei et intellectus' as the medieval formula of truth and the criticism of it.
   Is an exposition on this theme worthwhile, though? Do we not already know what truth was in the Middle Ages? Probably there is no formulation in scholastic thought that has become more widely known. Even those who did not enjoy the privilege of a classical education are able to say that truth is adaequatio rei et intellectus. What is meant by that seems to be clear. The formula appears to express the "natural" idea of truth, i.e., the correspondence between thought and reality. The determination of truth as adaequatio has become so self-evident that, as the Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe states, it is the point of depart and reference for all contemporary discussions on truth.(3) It can be added that this occurs mostly in a critical sense. Two examples may suffice. In the above-mentioned synodal report the first chapter sketches the changes in the concept of truth over the course of time. The so-called subject/object relation underlies the entire exposition, apparently from the unquestioning presupposition that this relation is fundamental to the phenomenon of truth as such. The changes in the concept of truth, then, are described in three phases. Successively the report speaks of "objective truth", "subjective truth" (in systems of thought like idealism and existentialism), and finally,
of a newer conception called the "relational" concept of truth - the objective and the subjective in one. This means that "truth always occurs within a relation, within the 'relatedness' of man to something else."(4) As the report claims, moreover, this relational concept of truth links up with what the Bible calls truth.

The objective concept of truth - the most current idea of truth - is represented by the medieval formula, phrased "truth is the correspondence of the human way of picturing things with the matters themselves." The human way of imagining things, the human consciousness, is like a mirror able to reflect "the objective state of affairs." This conception of truth is not only ascribed to Thomas Aquinas, but to a great variety of people: "... Greek philosophers, ... the classical Reformed theologians, ... the logician Bertrand Russell, ... the Marxist Lenin". The drawback of this conception, in the assessment of the report, is that man is very passive. Does knowing the truth not demand man's activity, research; and wrestling? Without a human spirit there is no truth.

An entirely different criticism can be found in Heidegger, who dealt most thoroughly with the western conception of truth. The lectures he delivered at the University of Freiburg during the winter semester of 1942-43 appeared in 1982 in the Gesamtausgabe of his works under the title Parmenides.(5) Strictly speaking, the title is misleading for actually these lectures deal with the essence of truth, the identical subject that engaged Heidegger in writing Vom Wesen der Wahrheit, which dates from the same time. In the lectures, however, there is "a more direct confrontation with the history of western thought".(6) In his view a change in the essence and "locus" of truth has evolved in philosophy. Truth becomes "rightness" (Richtigkeit) of knowing and asserting; it is no longer "unconcealedness" (aletheia) of being, as it was for the early Greek thinkers. The medieval formulation fixes this essential transformation. "Veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem" Im Sinne dieser Umgrenzung des Wesens der Wahrheit als Richtigkeit denkt das gesamte abendländische Denken von Platon bis zu Nietzsche. "(7) Truth becomes a characteristic of a mental act within man. Inevitably the problem then arises how a psychical process in the inner man can be brought into agreement with things outside.(8) This traditional and current conception of truth, however, is derivative (abkünftig). Parmenides' thought reveals "the road of truth, far away from the beaten track of men". (Fragm. B 1, 27). It can give us a reminder of the forgotten "primordial" sense of truth, the unhiddenedness of being, which is the ground of the possibility of rightness. But when the proper function of philosophy is to "re-mind", we are also allowed to ask of this twofold criticism: do we recall the meaning of truth as adaequatio rei et intellectus at all? Does it have a merely derivative sense, i.e., the rightness of thought? On the other hand, does the formula imply that truth is "reflection" and leave the human mind out of account? These questions lead, me this afternoon to focus on medieval views of truth, in which the idea of the adaequatio plays a central role." (pp. 3-5)

Concluding observations.

Looking back over the course of this discussion, we may conclude that the criticism of the medieval adaequatio-formula, outlined at the beginning, did not grasp its original meaning. Neither is this conception concerned with truth in a merely derivative sense, nor does it ignore man's activity. For in the previous analysis we observed that Thomas's notion of true includes first, transcendentality, second, relationality, third, anthropocentrism, fourth, the fulfilment in an act of the intellect, fifth, the necessity of a norm and measure, sixth the intrinsic connection with the word, seventh, the relation to the divine Logos, and finally, the identity with God Himself. These moments are implicitly or explicitly expressed in the formula adaequatio rei et intellectus, in which every term is charged with meaning.

Compared to the breadth of this conception, modern theories appear to be a reduction of the integral process of truth. It is philosophically important to note that in the medieval approach what is fundamental to truth is not the duality of subjective and objective from which then their togetherness has to be conceived. Rather, it is the primordial conformity of being and intellect that is fundamental to truth. Indeed, as we have seen, being and thinking are the same in the Origin.

Another remarkable aspect in this medieval view is the attempt to integrate philosophical and religious truth. This endeavour runs parallel to the philosophical introduction of the synodal report of the Reformed Churches, with which I began this address. Its intention is that the "relational" concept of truth links up with what the Bible calls truth. Thomas's conception lies concretely in the notion of word, a good example of the way in which his understanding of truth is deepened by a theological reflection. But that which fundamentally enables the integration is the basic idea of the transcendentality of truth. This conception underlies his entire discussion.

The medieval doctrine of the transcendentals - being, one, true, good, and beautiful - forms "the heart of scholastic ontology and metaphysics."(93) This doctrine will be the subject of my research over the coming years. Today I wanted to present you with a sample of it.(94)
fenomenologisch waarheidsbegrip van Brentano tot Levinas, in: De eindige mens?, Bilthoven, 1975, 55 f.
(4) o.c., 10 (in the English translation).
(5) Frankfurt am Main, 1982 (Gesamtausgabe II. Abteilung, Bd. 54).

Translated by Herbert Donald Morton from the Dutch Dissertation Natura en Creatura. De denkweg van Thomas van Aquino (Amsterdam, 1982).

Contents: List of Abbreviations XI; Preface XIII; Introduction I; 1. From questioning towards knowing 7; 2. By the way of predication (Per via predicationis): Definition and participation 54; 3. By the way of causality (Per viam causalitatis) 92; 4. The way of truth (Via veritatis); 5. By the way of reason (Per viam rationis) 191; 6. Hodo-logy 230; 7. Principium 279; 8. Finis 337; Epilogue 391; Bibliography 397; Index Rerum 409-413.

"The study presented here is the revised version of a doctoral dissertation that was submitted to the Central Interfaculty (Faculty of Philosophy) of the Free University in Amsterdam in fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Philosophy and defended publicly on April 16, 1982. That this dissertation was originally published at a Protestant university may be considered a sign of common responsibility for a Doctor of the still undivided western Christendom." (from the Preface).

"Our aim was to develop an interpretation of the inner coherence and direction of Thomas's philosophizing. This objective was pursued by following his way of thought and by seeking to fathom the motives of his quest for intelligibility. Now that this inquiry has been brought to an end, it turns out that our investigation of Thomas's way of thought has proceeded according to the order of the transcendentals "being," "true," and "good." Their logical order, which Thomas sketches, is that "being" is the first and that "the true" and "good" come after it, in this order. For, so he argues in S. Th. I, 16, 4, "knowledge naturally precedes the appetite." "Being" is the first, "good" the ultimate.

From the triad "being", "true", and "good", their convertibility, and their conceptual nonidentity a number of coherences can be brought to light that were not always signalized or worked out by Thomas himself. They are nonetheless most illuminating for the movement of Thomas's thought, and also for the course of our investigation. These coherences show that in what has preceded, a multiplicity of themes has been traversed according to a definite pattern." (p. 391)

(7) The result of Aristotle's exposition in Metaph. II is the thesis: "There is the same disposition of things in being and in truth" (4.3.1.). On the analogy of this thesis Thomas himself frames the statement: "There is the same disposition of things in goodness and in being" (8.1.1.). A hierarchical order can be found in being, the true, and good. Whatever is in any way and is true and is good is to be reduced to the first Being, to the maximally True and to the ultimate Good, namely, God. The causal relation of God to the world is therefore threefold. He is 'causa efficientis', 'exemplaris', and 'finalis'. With this threefold causality Thomas connects the triad of transcendental determinations 'ens (or: unum) - verum - bonum'. This coherence of the transcendentals with the divine causality makes clear that the "anthropocentrism" in Thomas's doctrine is to be specified: man is marked by a transcendental openness, certainly, is "in a certain sense all things," but not in a constitutive sense. It is typical of the medieval approach to inquire into the origin of being, into the ground of the truth and goodness of things. This origin and ground is conceived as "creation." Every being is true and good because it is thought and willed by the Creator. The relational character of the transcendentals "true" and "good" is ultimately founded in the relation to the divine intellect and will.

The divine foundation of the transcendentals is connected by Thomas with the circulation in God Himself, the eternal coming forth of the Persons. "Being" (or: "one") is attributed by appropriation to the Father, "true" to the Son, and "good" to the Spirit. This connection with the divine Trinity provides the basis for developing a trinitarian interpretation of that which is creaturely. In the conceptual nonidentity of the transcendentals ' ens - verum - bonum' the threefold structure of that which is comes to expression. Viewed in the light of the Triune causality, the different components of that which is concur into a unity.
"Being," "true," and "good" are not only common names but also divine names. The relation of what is common to what is proper to the Transcendent is conceived by Thomas in terms of "participation." He subscribes to Aristotle's criticism of this Platonic idea by stating that there are no separate, self-subsisting Forms of natural things. But Thomas, in the prologue to his commentary to pseudo-Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus*, recognizes the legitimacy of this doctrine with regard to what is most common. Only in the case of transcendental forms can a first be posited which is the perfection essentially and as such subsistent. All else must consequently be understood as participation in this perfection. Against this background it becomes understandable that Thomas conceives "creation" preeminently as "participation."

The doctrine of the transcendentals is found to have an important, integrating function in Thomas's way of thought. In man's quest for intelligibility, the transcendentals present a comprehensive perspective on nature and creature. Their circular ways come to an end in the return to the Origin, in which "being," "true," and "good" are perfectly one. (pp. 395-396).


Contents: Preface IX-X; Introduction 1; One. The Beginnings of the Doctrine of the Transcendentals 25: Two. Thomas's General Account of the Transcendentals 71; Three. Metaphysics and the Transcendentals 113; Four. Being as the first Transcendental 159; Five. One as Transcendental 201; Six. True as Transcendental 243; Seven. Good as Transcendental 290; Eight. Beauty: A forgotten Transcendental? 335; Nine. Transcendentals and the Divine 360; Conclusions 416; Bibliography 439; Index Nominum 455; Index Rerum 459-467.


"The title of this book speaks of "Medieval Philosophy" and "the Transcendentals." It can be read as affirming that there is a philosophy in the Middle Ages and that this philosophy encompasses a doctrine of the transcendentals alongside many others.

But our aims in this work are more ambitious. Our title means to suggest a more intrinsic relation between the terms "Philosophy" and "Transcendentals" than mere juxtaposition. We want to show that philosophy in the Middle Ages expresses itself as a way of thought which can be called "transcendental." The present book may therefore be seen as a contribution to the discussion of the question: what is philosophy in the Middle Ages? A recent review of literature offers a telling example of the relevance of this question: "Unmistakably philosophical research about the Middle Ages has fallen into a crisis ( ...) It is even impossible to reach agreement on the premise what philosophy means in the Middle Ages." (1)


(1) In this introductory chapter I want first to analyze three different answers to the question "Is there a medieval philosophy?" that are (or were) important for the place of the Middle Ages in the history of philosophy. This analysis affords me an opportunity to take stock of the current study of medieval philosophy (0.1-0.3.), I will then explain how I myself approach the period, indicating what, in my view, is constitutive for the thought of the Medium Aevum (0.4.). This final section will clarify the intention of this book." (pp. 1-2).

(1) "Is there a medieval philosophy? Thus far I have discussed three significant conceptions, those of Gilson, of the Cambridge History and of De Libera. They have made substantial contributions to the study of medieval philosophy, but I have formulated objections to all three because they do not provide sufficient insight into the philosophical dimension of medieval thought. Now in order to make some progress in this question, I am interested in statements by medieval writers in which they personally indicate what they consider to be fundamental to their thought or what they regard as decisive for the possibility of philosophy. Such "ego" statements are relatively rare among Scholastic authors, but they are not altogether absent. I mention four examples, all taken from *theologi*. [The authors discussed are Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Meister Eckhart.] (p. 17)

"The transcendental way of thought is neglected in the conceptions of medieval philosophy discussed above. Although the doctrine of the transcendentals is the core of medieval metaphysics, the doctrine is not considered at all in Gilson's *The Spirit*. In the Cambridge History it receives only one brief reference (p. 493), and it remains outside of consideration in De Libera's determination of the place of medieval philosophy. One of the objectives of the present study is to show not only that the "forgotten" doctrine is important for our understanding of medieval philosophy, but also that the idea of medieval philosophy as a transcendental way of thought does not exclude the other conceptions, but incorporates them. The conception of medieval philosophy as transcendental thought expresses already in its terminology a moment of continuity with modern philosophy, for the term 'transcendental' is generally reserved for the way of thought inaugurated by Kant.

Kant brings the project of his three Critiques together under the title of "Transcendental Philosophy," but
he himself recognizes that this notion has a long tradition. In the Critique of Pure Reason (B 113) he points to the "transcendental Philosophy of the Ancients" and quotes the proposition "so famous among the Schoolmen: quodlibet ens est unum, verum, bonum." At the same moment, however, he distances himself from the traditional conception. 'These supposed transcendental predicates of things are nothing else but logical requirements and criteria of all knowledge of things in general' (B 114). 'Transcendental' in the Kantian sense is concerned with the mode of our cognition of objects, insofar as this mode of cognition is possible a priori.

The Kantian perspective has strongly affected the study of medieval transcendental thought. An example of the connection of medieval thought with "modernity" is to be found in Kurt Flasch's important study on Nicholas of Cusa which contains a chapter, entitled "Metaphysics and Transcendental Thought in the Middle Ages. (56) Flasch does not refer here to the doctrine of the transcendentals, for he wants to take the term 'transcendental' exclusively in a Kantian sense, that is, as transcendental-logical. (57) Every transcendental philosophy, in his view, is based on the idea that the world of objects is constituted by the human mind. Transcendental thought in the Middle Ages is therefore related to those thinkers who acknowledge a constitutive function of the human mind, such as the German Dominican Dietrich of Freiberg (d. after 1310)

They show "a much more modern Middle Ages than it is generally supposed." (58)

Yet this transcendental-logical approach seems questionable from a historical point of view. It makes the Kantian position the exclusive criterion for determining what transcendental thought is in the Middle Ages. Medieval philosophers, however developed their own concept of transcendentality, and it is this way of thought that Kant called the 'Transcendental Philosophy of the Ancients'.

It would be more appropriate historically and philosophically to consider the medieval doctrine as a distinctive form within the tradition of transcendental philosophy.

The French scholar S. Breton wrote in 1963 that the doctrine of the Transcendentals is "classic and yet poorly known." (59) His observation still holds. We only possess two general studies on this subject, the first by H. Knittermeyer, the other by G. Schulemann.

Both studies go back to the 1920's and must be regarded as out of date. Their main shortcomings are that they do not pay sufficient attention to the historical and doctrinal background of the formation of the doctrine in the thirteenth century and fail to give an explicit analysis of the notion of transcendentality. A new history of transcendental thought in the Middle Ages is required.

(60) H. Knittermeyer, Der Terminus Transzendental in seiner historischen Entwicklung bis Kant, Marburg 1920; G. Schulemann, Die Lehre der Transzendentalen in der scholatischen Philosophie (Forschungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie lind der Pädagogik, vol. IV.2), Leipzig 1929.


———. 2012. Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought. From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez. Leiden: Brill.


"The present work represents the completion of a research project that has engaged me intensively throughout my scholarly life. Its origins reach back to my inaugural address on the occasion of taking up the Chair of Medieval Philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam (1984). At the end of this lecture, Medieval Reflections on Truth, 'Adaequatio rei et intellectus', I concluded that the idea of the transcendentality of truth underlies these reflections and announced that the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals "will be the subject of my research over the coming years". This programmatic statement, typical of an ambitious new professor, turned out to be a fortunate choice. The choice had been motivated by a twofold interest. Historically, the doctrine of the transcendentals is an innovative contribution of the Middle Ages to the history of philosophy; the origin of transcendental thought is not to be sought in modern philosophy but is medieval. Systematically, the transcendental terms "being", "one", "true" and "good" concern what is first in a cognitive respect and what is fundamental; they express "basic" words of philosophy. The project resulted in a large number of studies, including the monograph Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals. The Case of Thomas Aquinas (1996). In the Introduction, I advanced the provocative thesis of an intrinsic connection between medieval philosophy and transcendental thought, already suggested by the main title of the book. My argument was that the theory of the transcendentals is essential for insight into the property philosophical dimension of medieval thought, which is often developed in a theological context; medieval philosophy can be regarded as a way of transcendental thought. The thesis provoked critical comments and questions: does it not presuppose an "essentialist" conception of medieval philosophy and ignore its real diversity? In my view, the critique was based on a misunderstanding, which could only be removed by providing a complete history of the doctrine of the transcendentals that shows the multiplicity of transcendental thought in the Middle Ages. In 2003, on the occasion of my retirement as Director of the Thomas Institute at the University of Cologne, thirty-five colleagues, friends and students offered me an impressive Festschrift with the title Die Logik des Transzendentalen. The editor of the volume expressed the hope (p. XXI) that the various contributions would stimulate the realisation of the planned history of the doctrine of the transcendentals in a not too remote future. The Festschrift was indeed both a tribute and a stimulus." (from the Preface)

BOOKS EDITED


ESSAYS IN ENGLISH

Abbreviations: DT = Doctrine of the Transcendentals


"In many medieval thinkers, e.g. Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, the statement can be found: "being and good are convertible" (ens et Comm convertuntur).(1) That is to say, "being" and "good" are interchangeable terms in predication (converti enim est conversim praedicari).(2) Wherever "being" is predicated of something, the predicate "good" is involved as well. That must imply that "good" is here not a concept that adds a real content or a new quality to "being", as a result of which "being" is restricted. For in that case there would be no question of convertibility.(3) "Good" is an attribute which pertains to every being, it is a property of being as such, a "mode that is common, and consequent upon every being." In other words, "good" is coextensive with "being", it is one of the so-called transcendentae which, since Suarez, are usually referred to as "transcendentals".

(1) Alexander of Hales, Summa I, Inq. 1, Tract. 3, q. 3, membro 1, c. 1, a. 1, "An idem sit bonum et ens "; Bonaventure, In II Sent., d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, fundam. 5, "Ens et bonum convertuntur, sicut volt Dionysius ", d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, fundam. 4; Albert the Great, De Bono q. 1, a. 6; Summa Theol. tract. 6, q. 28; Thom. Aquinas, In I Sent. 8, 1, 3; De Ver. XXI, 2; In De Hebdomadibus, lect. 3; Summa Theol. I, 18, 3.

(2) Thomas Aquinas, De Ver. I, 2 obj. 2.

(3) De Pot. IX, 7 ad 5: Bonum quod est in genre qualitatis, non est bonum quod convertitur cum ante, quod nullam rem supra ens addit.

(4) De Ver. I, 1: modus generaliter consequens omne ens.
Jan Aertsen. Annotated Bibliography of His English Writings


"Little attention is usually paid to this divine circular motion in the interpretation of Thomas' work, even though Thomas himself says in the prologue to the first book of his Commentary on the Sententiae that this bringing forth is the «reason» (ratio) of every subsequent process. The circulatio within God is the archetype of the work of creation. A trinitarian interpretation of Thomas' thought, albeit unusual, finds support in this idea. And his reflections on the originating order of the Trinity could also open up fruitful perspectives for further thought about (the problematics of) his thought.

In his explanation of the Trinity, Thomas gives a new elaboration of the concept of relation. In the divine circulatio there are relation of primordiality which are subsistent: «In God relation and essence do differ in being from each other, but are one and the same» (S. Th., I 28, 2). Relation is not an accidental category of substance; being and relation belong «originally» together.

This idea has remained outside of Thomas' metaphysics of creation. But it is this model of relation, which is philosophically important for a renewed reflection on created being. The relation of the creature to God is not accidental as Thomas claimed (18), but for the creature to be is to be in relation. At precisely this point a more comprehensive notion of finite being can be developed. There is the three-foldness in the creature: of subsistent-being, what-being, and act-being. These components agree in esse, which is a being from, through, and to God. In relationship to the Triune-Origin there is unity.

In man the Trinity is represented in a distinctive way, viz., according to the identical character of activity (secundum eadem rationem rationis, De potentia, 9, 9). The processes of intellect and volition are found in man. Man, who is a person, is therefore imago Trinitatis. It is in this idea that the «anthropocentrism» of medieval thought most clearly comes to the fore.

The manner, however, in which man's movement to God is worked out by Thomas, formed a second «crux» in his thinking. Here again we find in his elaboration of the idea of relation, possibilities for giving his penetrating intuition of the circular motion of egress and return a more integral meaning. Man is destined to one purpose, viz., communion with God. His drama consists not so much in the natural inability to close the circle through knowing, as in the aversion from his own essentially relational mode of existence. The circular motion thereby comes to stand in a concrete salvation history. This moreover offers the possibility of doing justice to the internal coherence of the structure of the Summa Theologiae. In the prologue to bk. 1, 2, Thomas indicates this design: the first part deals with God, and «the procession of all creatures from Him»; the second with the movement of the rational creature toward Him; and the third with Christ who as man is the way (via) of our tending to God. The second person of the Trinity, the Word, became flesh in order to show mankind the way (back) to its Origin. True human-being is possible only by God's grace.

In summary: the new perspective which Thomas' reflection on the faith mystery of the divine process opens up, is philosophizing oriented to the perfection of being-itself in being toward something else." (pp. 438-439)

(18) De potentia, 3,3 ad 3.


Reply to the essay by Arvin Vos: As the Philosopher Says: Thomas Aquinas and the Classical Heritage, same volume, pp. 69-82.

"Arvin Vos has written an excellent paper on Thomas Aquinas and the classical heritage. His paper shows admiration for and affinity with Aquinas' achievement. I share this admiration; Aquinas is a great thinker. Now it is a mark of great thinkers that the content of their thought is so full and rich that one can put emphasis on different aspects. And this is what I intend to do in my response by making some comments and raising some questions. My reflections, stressing a number of underlying ideas, are primarily meant as a supplement to what has been said.

In order to present my remarks in a systematic and coherent way, I take as a starting point a statement of Aristotle which I will develop in four steps, more or less related to the main parts of Vos's paper: (1) the background of the thirteenth century; (2) Thomas's attitude towards Aristotle; (3) the relationship between faith and reason; and (4) the conclusion concerning the question whether the classical heritage can be integrated in the Christian position." (p. 83)
significance of explaining what it is for a thing to be good by referring to the nature of the thing. "The historical Aristotle's view, in contrast, exemplifies what might be called the nature approach. This approach to MacDonald, (29), is the creation approach to explaining the relation between being and goodness. Fourth, Thomas effects a synthesis in still another respect. Characteristic of Boethius's position, according the good, on the other hand -- the Form of the Good is "separate" from particular goods. Essential forms of things are inherent in them -- and the Platonic way of thought and Plato's conception of thought and Aristotle's conception of the good, on the one hand -- the good is something common and the their dependence on that which is the good itself. The observation, made by the French scholar S. Breton ["L'idée de transcendental et la genèse des transcendentaux chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin" in Saint Thomas d'Aquin aujourd'hui. Paris 1963, pp. 45-74] p. 45) in 1963, that DT is "classic and poorly known," still holds. An example of its neglect is the Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy (ed. N. Kretzmann, 1982) that contains only one brief reference (p. 493, to Ockham). In this contribution I want to take stock of the current state of research on DT, to assemble and discuss the relevant literature, to indicate certain lacunas, and to make some suggestions for further research." (p. 130).

1991. "The Medieval Doctrine of the Transcendentals. The Current State of Research." Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale no. 33:130-147. "An important, new development in medieval philosophy was the constitution of the doctrine of the transcendentals (DT) in the thirteenth century. The term "transcendental" - the medievals themselves speak of transcendenz -- suggests a kind of surpassing. What is transcended are the special modes of being that Aristotle called the "categories," in the sense that the transcendentals are not restricted to one determinate category. "Being" and its "concomitant conditions," such as "one," "true" and "good," "go through (circumvent) all the categories" (to use an expression of Thomas Aquinas). DT is thus concerned with those fundamental philosophical concepts which express universal features of reality. The doctrine played a prominent role in later medieval thought. The study of it is essential for our understanding of philosophy in this period, since, according to J.B. Lotz, ["Zur Konstitution der transzendentalen Bestimmungen des Seins nach Thomas von Aquin"], in P. Wilpert(ed.), Die Metaphysik im Mittelalter (Miscellanea Mediaevalia, Vol. 2). Berlin 1963, pp. 334-340] p. 334), DT is "the core of Scholastic ontology and metaphysics." Remarkably, however, research on this doctrine has hitherto been rather limited. The observation, made by the French scholar S. Breton ["L'idée de transcendental et la genèse des transcendentaux chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin" in Saint Thomas d'Aquin aujourd'hui. Paris 1963, pp. 45-74] p. 45) in 1963, that DT is "classic and poorly known," still holds. An example of its neglect is the Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy (ed. N. Kretzmann, 1982) that contains only one brief reference (p. 493, to Ockham). In this contribution I want to take stock of the current state of research on DT, to assemble and discuss the relevant literature, to indicate certain lacunas, and to make some suggestions for further research." (p. 130).


medieval philosophers found in Aristotle." Thomas's reflection on the claim that all things are good and on question how they are good can be regarded as a philosophically original synthesis of the nature approach and the creation approach."

(30) The nature approach explains the intrinsic goodness of things, for 'nature' says what beings are in themselves; it always refers to an intrinsic principle. Now, it is Thomas's transcendentality claim that everything is good, insofar as it is. Things are good (in a certain respect) in virtue of their own being. So all things owe their being good to their nature. The creation approach explains that everything is called 'good' through an external cause, for 'creature' says being-related to the Origin of things. Creation expresses that things received their being and goodness from another. Their goodness consists in their relation to the transcendent good, that is, in their participation in what is goodness itself." (pp. 72-73)

(29) MacDonald "Boethius's Claim That All Substances Are Good." Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 70:345-79, 1988. (See also the Introduction in this volume.)

(30) The relation between nature an creature in Thomas is the central theme of Aertsen 1988a [Nature and Creature]

5. Conclusion

(...)

5. Conclusion

In my paper I first presented a medieval version of the question: "Metaphysics of Being or philosophy of the One?" - namely, the interpretation of Berthold of Moosburg. In his commentary on Proclus [*] he traces the opposition between ontology and henology to the different structures of thought associated with Aristotelianism and Platonism, which we have indicated with the keywords "transcendentalia" and "transcendence" of the first. I then proceeded to use Berthold's model to elucidate the thought of Thomas Aquinas and Master Eckhart. To this analysis I would add three concluding observations.

First, we can ascertain that for Thomas and Eckhart the transcendental and transcendent approaches do not form an absolute opposition. Thomas posits a causal relation between God and the maxime communia. Transcendentals are to be traced to God as their cause. Eckhart identifies. God and the transcententia. That which is most general is God.
Secondly, both in Thomas and in Eckhart the doctrine of transcendentals is found to have an integrating function. That is notable, because Berthold regards this doctrine as typical of the Aristotelian position. Now this theory certainly contains anti-Platonic elements, as we observed in Thomas, such as the emphasis on predicative generality. But transcendentals have yet another aspect, which Berthold does not mention, an aspect which played an essential role in the development of the doctrine. Generally, the Summa de bono of Philip the Chancellor, written about 1230, is regarded as the first treatise on transcendentals. In the prologue of this work Philip observes that "being," "one," "true" and "good" are not only that which is most common but are sometimes also "appropriated," that is, treated as "proper" to something. For in Scripture these names are attributed pre-eminently to God, they are also divine names. (90) The attention given this second kind of naming is undoubtedly influenced by pseudo-Dionysius, who functions in Berthold as an eminent witness for the Platonic view. Thus we see that in the context of the doctrine of transcendentalia themselves the question must arise concerning the relation between the most general which goes through all categories, and the divine which surpasses all categories.

Thirdly, the medieval doctrine of transcendentals is pluriform. The solutions of Thomas and Eckhart diverge. Philosophically more important, however, is that in which they agree. Characteristic of philosophy is a transcending movement. It surpasses the concrete things of experience in quest of a first, from which reality can be understood. The answer to the question of what this first is can be sought in different directions. Berthold sketches two options: the first is the most general, which is the precondition for man's intellectual knowledge; or the first is the cause of the being of things but is not itself of the nature of the caused. Thomas and Eckhart represent a type of philosophical thought in which the two options in question are connected. That is their contribution to the debate about what philosophy should be: ontology or henology." (pp. 139-140)


"In this chapter Aquinas's attitude towards philosophy, his leading sources, and the aims of his philosophical interest are clarified in two complementary ways. First, his writings, which are very voluminous in spite of his relatively early death, will be placed within the historical context of the thirteenth century. An overview of his work and its philosophical relevance will be provided in connection with the most important intellectual developments in this period -- the rise of the university, the reception of Aristotle, and the conflict between the faculties (sections II-IV). Subsequently, Aquinas's view of philosophy and of its relationship to theology will be elaborated in a more systematic way (sections V-X)." (p. 14)


A revised version of this study form the Chapter Three of Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought. From Philip the Chancellors (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez (2012), pp. 109-133.

"Our comparative inquiry does not allow any other conclusion than that Philip the Chancellors, in the introductory questions of his Summa de bono, really presents something new. His intention of going back into the "ground of thought" by reducing our understanding of questions to the "being", "one", "true", and "good", and investigates their mutual relations. But his account bears the marks of a first draft; it is rather terse and sometimes little explicit. Viewed from a historical perspective, his doctrine has an atypical aspect, insofar as it is centered in a metaphysics of the good. The context of the doctrine generally is a conception of metaphysics, in which "being" is the proper subject of this science. Philip recognizes that ens is the first concept, but he does not say much about it. His interest concerns "the good", a notion that is richer than (habundat) "being". Two elements of Philip's doctrine were especially directive for subsequent discussions of the transcendentals. The first is his view of the twofold relation between the communissima: there exists a real identity between them -- they are convertible according to their suppositus --, but they differ according to their..."
concepts. The other element concerns the order of the most common notions, which is based on the notion of "indivision". It is somewhat paradoxical that Philip does not deal separately with unum, whereas the ratio of "one" determines his understanding of bonum and verum. The Summa de bono was attentively read and frequently used, especially in the Franciscan milieu. The influence of Philip's account of the communissima is manifest in two works that were composed about twenty years after his Summa, namely, in the Franciscan Summa theologica attributed to Alexander of Hales, and in De bono, an early writing of the Dominican Albert the Great. (pp. 132-133)


"From the account of the relation between res and ens it is possible to draw a number of conclusions pertinent to Henry's way of thought and his point of departure.

1. The first conclusion is that it is incorrect to say that in his thought there is an insoluble tension between the primacy of being and that of thing. Henry describes the relation between the first concept, that of "thing" in the most general sense, and the second concept, that of "being," as a relation of foundation. "Something cannot have the character of being unless it first has the ratio of thing in the sense of reor, reris, in which the ratio of that being is founded (fundatur)."

2. The firstness of res is not an a priori condition of knowledge, that is, a "transcendental form" in the Kantian sense. It can be an idle concept, such as an imaginary thing. The firstness is related, as appeared from the discussion of the seventh Quodlibet, to the way in which the human intellect is "moved" by reality. The relation of foundation between res and ens is worked out by Henry in two respects, from the angle of the theory of science and ontologically.

3. From the angle of the theory of science, the relation is that between the precognition of a quiddity and intellectual knowledge of it. At the first level, res in the sense of reor, reris is the most general concept, the communissimum of the seventh Quodlibet. At the second level, "being" is the first and most general concept. Henry's statement that ens is the first that is scientifically known (scita) must be understood in this precise sense.

In ontological respect, the relation between the first and the second concept is the relation between the still undetermined thing and the thing that is determined by its essence. The quidditative being however is not determined to this or that thing, to creator or creature, to substance or accident. It is understood, Henry states, under the aspect of being that is the subject of metaphysics. (47) Not the first mode of "thing" but the second mode is the point of departure of metaphysics. The level of quidditative being is the level of the transcendentals. Henry's identification of res, ratitudo with ens is the answer to the question (see section 3, above) why res is not named in Henry's account of the transcendentals. It is the concept that lies at the basis of his doctrine of being and of the most general intentiones. In comparison to his predecessors, the novelty of Henry's doctrine is the central place he attributes to Avicenna's notion of "thing." That res, ratitudo lies at the basis of Henry's doctrine explains the fact that he, otherwise than in the tradition, understands truth as a real relation to the exemplar.

Another distinctive feature of Henry's doctrine of the transcendentals is its being preceded by a more general concept, the cognition of "thing" in the broadest sense. For the clarification of this relation one may utilize a distinction that emerged in post-medieval philosophy. In a study of the concept of res, Ludger Oeing-Hanhoff has called attention to the fact that in the seventeenth century transcendental concepts were opposed to "super-transcendental" concepts, which are said not only of real but also of fictitious beings. Examples of these super-transcendental concepts are cogitabile and opinabile.(48) Henry's notion of res may be regarded as an anticipation of such concepts. (pp. 17-18).

(46) Summa 34.2 (ed. R. Macken, p. 175): "Et tamen rationem esse nihil potest habere, nisi prius habendo rationem rei dictae a reor, in qua fudnatur ratio esse illius."


In the prologue of his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Duns Scotus explains the name 'metaphysics' as *transcendens scientia*, that is, the science that is concerned with the *transcendentia*.(1) This explanation is indicative of the prominent place Scotus ascribes to the doctrine of the transcendentals, which was formulated for the first time in the *Summa de bono* of Philip the Chancellor that is datable about 1225. The connection between the object of first philosophy and the transcendentals is not in itself new, although the identity posed by Scotus is more radical than in his predecessors.(2) Yet it is no exaggeration to say that Scotus's philosophy marks a new phase in the history of the doctrine of the *transcendentia*. Scotus understands the concept 'transcendental' differently than his predecessors did. To thinkers of the thirteenth century, transcendentals properties are *communissima*. 'Being, 'one,'true' and 'good' 'transcend' the Aristotelian categories because they are not limited to one of them but are common to all things. According to Scotus, however, it is not necessary that a transcendental as transcendental be predicated of every being; it is not essential to the concept *transcendens* that it has many inferiors. In his *Ordinatio* he determines the concept negatively: 'what is not contained under any genus' or 'what remains indifferent to finite and infinite'. (3) This definition makes possible a vast extension of the transcendental domain; the most important innovation is formed by the so-called disjunctive transcendentals, which are convertible with being, not separately but as pairs.

The fact that the transcendental properties are not necessarily identical with the *communissima* is, I suspect, the reason why the expression *transcendentia*, which occurs only sporadically in thinkers like Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, gains the upperhand in Scotism and becomes the usual term. About Scotus's doctrine of the transcendentals, in contrast to that of other medieval thinkers, we are well informed by Allan B. Wolter's pioneering study, *The Transcendentals and Their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (1946). Yet there are aspects of his doctrine that have thus far received little attention in scholarly literature. One of them is Scotus's treatment of the transcendentals 'one,' 'true' and 'good,' which as such are convertible with being. In my contribution I want to show that with respect to the traditional transcendentals, too, Scotus breaks new ground and approaches critically the views of his thirteenth-century predecessors. Because he discusses more extensively the relation between being and one, I foals on this discussion." (pp. 13-14)

(1) Quaestiones subtilissimae super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis, prol., n. 18: Et hanc scientiam vocamus metaphysicam, quae dictur a 'meta', quod est 'trans', et 'ycos', 'scientia', quasi transcendentia.


(3) *Ordinatio* I, dist. 8, part t, q. 3, nn. 113-114 (ed. Vaticana IV, 206).


"In 1597 Francisco Suarez published his *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, a work that had an incredible influence on seventeenth century philosophy. The most salient feature of his metaphysics is the central position of the *transcendentia* or *transcendentalia* (Suarez uses these terms as synonyms) : Disp. 2-11 deal with being, unity, truth and goodness. In comparison with Aristotle's conception of a science of being, metaphysics had acquired a «transcendental» character. As Suarez knew very well, this transformation had taken place in the Middle Ages. In the *Bulletin 33* (1991), pp. 130-147, I analyzed the current state of research on the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals (= DT), which is essential for our understanding of philosophy in this period. In the present article I will assemble and discuss the relevant literature of the last decade, adding some older publications that were not mentioned in the first report." (p. 107)


"In the study of medieval philosophy it is customary to speak of the doctrine of the « transcendentals » (1). We have to realize, however, that this term comes from the vocabulary of modern philosophy. The medieval authors themselves speak of transcendenta. What is the significance of this fact? What is in those names? By way of introduction, we consider the two terms, « transcendent » and « transcendental », more closely in order to make clear that the interference of the conceptual language of modern philosophy with that of medieval philosophy is not coincidental. The difference in terminology points to a doctrinal evolution. (p. 241)

(…)

"By way of conclusion, let me sum up the main results of our inquiry into the genealogy of the term transcendenta (in the sense of transcendentals »).

(i) The first philosophical account of a doctrine of the transcendentals is presented in Philip the Chancellor's Summa de bono. This work did not use the term transcendenta, but later in the thirteenth century Roland of Cremona, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas applied the term to a systematic doctrine of the communissima. The origin of the doctrine is not the Platonic-Augustinian idea of « transcensus », but rather the Avicennian tradition of primary notions.

(ii) The term transcendenta already existed before the emergence of a systematic doctrine. Albert the Great's commentaries and some texts from the Logica modernorum strongly suggest that the term originates in logical discussions, focussing on the distinctive nature of certain (« transcendental ») terms." (p. 255)


"The history of res as a transcendental term is an intriguing one: it could be described in terms of a success-story: from "nothing" to "king". In the first account of a doctrine of the transcendentals, the Summa de bono written by Philip the Chancellor ca. 1225-28, res is not mentioned at all. In the prologue Philip states that « most common (communissima) are these : ens, unum, verum, bonum », whose mutual relations he investigates in the next questions (1). Res is also absent in the expositions by Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure and Albert the Great: they restrict the number of transcendentals to the four that Philip had listed in his Summa (2).

Thirty years after Philip, however, the picture changes. In his account of the transcendentals in De veritate q. 1, a. 1 -- the most extensive one in the thirteenth century --, Thomas Aquinas incorporated res into the doctrine. He distinguishes six transcendenta, in the order ens, res, unum, aliquid, verum and bonum (3). Yet the role of the new transcendental res in Thomas and the Thomistic tradition in general remains somewhat marginal. A good illustration offers a treatise from the 14th century, the Tractatus de sex transcendentibus, composed by Franciscus de Prato (who was lector in Perugia from 1343-45). The treatise is an attempt to systematize the doctrine on the basis of Thomas's teachings. Contrary to the order in De veritate, res holds the last place in this work, and its treatment is substantially briefer than those of the traditional transcendentals (4).

But in the generation after Thomas Aquinas, res started, as we shall see a splendid career. A notable reaction against Thomas's doctrine is Lorenzo Valla's philosophical mainwork Dialecticae disputationes (first version 1439) (5) In these disputations, Valla critically inquires into the basic notions of traditional philosophy, starting with the six primordial prin ciples (primordia) which the Aristotelians called transcendenta. They regarded these principles as the "princes of princes" or the "kings", but according to Valla a plurality of firsts is impossible ; only the monarchy is good. He will therefore investigate which among the six is the true res imperator, that is, the most comprehensive (capacissima) notion (6).

Valla's conclusion is that only res can claim this title. It is evident unum is to be understood as "one res", aliquid as "another res", etc. But how about the notion ens, to which the Aristotelians give a place honour? In Valla's view, the term does not have a universal force of its own, but its force is wholly borrowed from another, namely from res (7) His arguments are marked by the (humanistic) linguistic turn; they are mainly philological. Ens is a participle that is to be resolved into a relative pronoun and a verb : id quod est. Id is to be resolved into ea res, so that finally ens can be reduced to ea res que est (8).

When we say, for instance "the stone is being" (lapis est ens), the expression means "the stone is thing (res) which is". But does such a formula make any sense, when simpler and clearer to say "the stone is a res"? The words "that which is" cannot mean that the stone is "the thing that is", because only God "is" in the proper sense (Exodus 3,14). When therefore it is said of something else than God that it is "being" (ens), one uses an inappropriate way of expression (9).

The dignity of a transcendental was given only to res (10). To illustrate its position, Valla alludes to a story, reported by Herodotus in his Historiae (III, 86), a work that Valla translated into Latin. Six Persians contested the empire, but when Darius managed to become the king of the Persians, the other five descended from their horses and rendered hommage to the king. Similarly the other five transcendentals descend in order to honor res (11).

With respect to the remarkable history of "thing" I want to raise three questions: How did res come into philosophy, why did it enter philosophy and what did it bring about in philosophy, for our understanding of "reality" (12)? (pp. 139-141 notes renumbered)

(3) Thomas Aquinas, De veritate q. 1, a. 1 (ed. Leonina t. XXII, 1, Roma, 1970, p. 3-8).


(6) Lorenzo Valla, Retractatio I, cap. 1, n. 9 (ed. Zippel I, p. 11) : « Ea numero sex dicuntur : "ens", "aliquid", "res", "unum", "verum", "bonum". Que quoniam sunt altiora principia et velut principum principes et quasi (ut ipsis videtur) quidam imperatores et reges (...), de his prius ordine ipso dicendum est 0. Cap. 2, n. 1 : « Iam primum non plures esse debere imperatores ac reges, sed unum (...). Ergo quod ex his vocabulum, sive que vocabuli significatio sit imperator et rex, idest omnium capacissima (...), inquiramus ».
(9) Lorenzo Valla, Retractatio I, cap. 2, n. 12 (ed. Zippel I, p. 14-15) : Quid enim sibi vult verbi causa "lapis est ens", id est "ea res, quae est"? Quid faciunt ille voces "ea que est", cum sit et apertius et expeditius et satius, "lapis est res"? (...) cum presertim absurda videatur oratio: "lapis est ea res que est", sive "lapis est res que est", quasi nihil sit proprie nisi solus lapis, aut quicquis erit illud, de quo dicemus ipsum esse "rem, que est": "que oratio de solo Deo propria est (...). Itaque cum de alia re quam de Deo dicitur quod sit "ens", inepte dicitur ». (10) Lorenzo Valla, Retractatio I, cap. 2, n. 12 (ed. Zippel II, p. 370) : Quo fit ut solum sit "res", quod transcendentis dignitatem denuerat.

"When I was invited to comment upon the theme of the section -'Truth in Thomas Aquinas' - I pondered
on the best way of meeting the request. I asked myself: What is most important in his conception of truth? The following comments are designed to be an answer to that question and are based on Thomas's remarks in De veritate. As such, my answer does not pretend to be definitive, but is based on personal reflections that are indebted to on-going discussions in the German academic world to which I belong. That said, I would hope that my comments possess some general relevance to other students of Thomas.

It is my view, that the salience of Thomas's view of truth can be appreciated by means of highlighting four substantive points.

1. First and foremost we should attend to Thomas's approach to the question quid sit veritas.

(...) 

2. Having considered the transcendentality of the truth, Thomas then solicits an answer to the question as to what it is.

(...) 

3. There is truth in things; 'truth' is also predicated of the intellect.

What, then, is the primary 'locus' of truth: the thing or the intellect?

In his reply to this question (De veritate q. 1, a. 2) Thomas advances the idea of the analogy of the true; this predicate is said of many things according to an order of priority and posteriority, that is, in relation to one (thing) that possesses the ratio of the predicate primarily. The classical application of the doctrine of analogy concerns the term 'being'. The novelty of Thomas's thinking here is to be seen in his application of the analogy to the predicate 'true', in order to determine the relation between the truth of being and the truth of the intellect.

(...) 

4. At De veritate 1,4 Thomas poses the question that dominates the first systematic account of truth in the history of philosophy. Anselm of Canterbury's work De veritate: 'Is there only one truth by which all things are true?' Anselm had answered this question affirmatively; there is only one truth in the proper sense (proprie), the divine truth. Thomas's reply is more differentiated: truth is properly found in the human or divine intellect; primarily in the divine intellect; secondarily in the human intellect. A human truth, too, is truth in the proper sense.

The power of truth manifests itself in its claim of having absolute force; it holds without respect of persons. Thomas gives a remarkable example of that in his Commentary on the Book Job. He interprets the dispute between Job and God after the model of a medieval disputation. But Thomas wonders whether such a disputation is appropriate, since God is far superior to any human being. Truth does not change because of the difference of persons.

When somebody speaks the truth, he cannot therefore be defeated, irrespective of the person, with whom he disputes (cum aliquis veritatem loquitur, non potest cum quocumque disputat). (8)

In summary, four ideas are most important in Thomas's conception of truth: the transcendent character of truth; its relationality (truth as adequation); the primary 'locus' of truth is the mind; and a human truth also is a truth in the proper sense. Seen together, they reflect the novelty of his philosophical thought and its relevance." (pp. 50-54)


"This essay examines Aquinas's analysis of the human desire to know, which plays a central role in his thought. (I) This analysis confronts him with the Aristotelian tradition: thus, the desire for knowledge is a "natural" desire. (II) It also confronts him with the Augustinian tradition, which depletes a non-virtuous desire in human beings that is called "curiosity." (III) Aquinas connects the natural desire with the Neoplatonic circle motif: principle and end are identical. The final end of the desire to know is the knowledge of God. (IV) Aquinas also connects the end of the natural desire to know with Christian eschatology, teaching that man's ultimate end is the visio Dei. This end, however, is "supernatural." (V) Duns Scotus severely criticizes central aspects of Aquinas's account. (VI) As a rejoinder to Scotus's objections, we finally consider Aquinas's view on the proper object of the human intellect."


PAPERS IN ITALIAN

RELATED PAGES

On the website "Theory and History of Ontology"

Bibliographie von Jan Aertsen. Aufsätze in deutscher Sprache

Metaphysics or Ontology? The Subject Matter of First Philosophy

Index of the Pages with Annotated Bibliographies of Contemporary Historians of Philosophy