

From Intentionality to Immateriality The Mark of the Cognitive for Thomas Aquinas

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*“The angel is himself
a subsisting form in his
natural being; but his
species in the intellect of
another angel is not so,
for there it possesses only
an intelligible existence.”*
(Thomas Aquinas)

WHENEVER I cross the street I first look to the left and then to the right and if I throw an object it will drop down eventually. These are commonplaces on which we agree. But do we all agree on them? For the inhabitants of the British Isles, for example, a first look to the left when crossing the street can be a fatal experiment. If I throw an object into outer space, it will not fall, but will flow. Just as there are commonplaces in everyday life, such as the abovementioned ones, there are commonplaces in philosophy. One such instance finds its origin in 1874, when Franz Clemens Brentano, who was trying to get a job at Vienna University, was writing:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously,

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*reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves.*¹

Reading this often quoted passage one can extract at least two ideas: that intentionality is the mark of the mental, and that the historical source of this notion is medieval, and it can be traced as far back as Thomas Aquinas, whose name is indeed mentioned by Brentano in a footnote.² Despite the fact that the Brentanian reading of this aspect of medieval philosophy is not necessarily the correct one, the idea that for medieval philosophers in general, and for Thomas Aquinas in particular, intentionality is the mark of the cognitive³ has become a commonplace in philosophy. Generally, Franz Brentano's thesis is not questioned when it comes to its scholastic roots, and, even more, distinguished scholars such as John Haldane, Anthony Lisska, Anthony Kenny, or Dominik Perler, consider it to be justified. According to this classical line of reasoning, for Aquinas, *esse intentionale* is the mark of the cognitive. Usually the Thomist scholars ground their definition of the cognitive criteria on Aquinas's distinction between *esse naturale* and *esse intentionale*. In this article I intend to challenge this classical reading of Aquinas by stressing the importance of *esse immateriale* for defining a knower as opposed to a non-knower.

Before going into detail about what Aquinas states related to the mark of the cognitive, I shall briefly return to Brentano's words. When he speaks of mental or psychical phenomena, he has in mind three classes of phenomena: representations, judgments and emotions. The last two classes are derived from the first class, meaning that judgments and emotions are based on representations. In other words, for forming a judgment a subject and a predicate are first needed. Let us take the case of the judgment "'S is P' is true," where S is *Socrates* and P is *white*. In order for someone to utter the sentence "Socrates is white," he or she needs to know first who and what *Socrates* and *whiteness* are, and that *white* really corresponds to *Socrates*. All these pieces of information are found with the help of representations. In Aquinas's terminology, the predicative level (judgments) is always grounded on the categorial one (representations). Before uttering any sentences, regardless of their form, their parts need to be cognized, and this can be achieved at the first cognitive level, the categorial one. The

categorial level of being is nothing but the level of the ten Aristotelian categories. Brentano's third class of phenomena is that of emotions, which are intentional because are about something which is firstly perceived with the help of a representation. As a matter of fact, the reduction of the three classes of phenomena to one is what helps Brentano solve the difficulties related to the non-intentional feature of some mental states such as pains, itches or elation. The Brentanian answer is that all mental states are intentional on account of their being grounded on representations, which are always intentional. The difference between psychical and physical phenomena is not only the fact that psychical phenomena have an intentional existence, but also the fact that psychical phenomena have a content which is always given in someone's consciousness.

From the often quoted passage of intentionality it would seem that Brentano has acquired his idea about the importance of intentionality for the domain of the mental from Aquinas: "Thomas von Aquin lehrt, das Gedachte sei intentional in dem Denkenden, der Gegenstand der Liebe in dem Liebenden, das Begehrte in dem Begehrenden . . ." ²⁴ If things are like that, one should be able to find in Thomas Aquinas' texts some evidence in favor of the idea that intentionality is the mark of the cognitive. And this evidence can indeed be found, at least according to some interpreters. But before giving all the details about this topic, let us see what Aquinas understands by mental, physical or cognitive phenomena. If someone takes into account all three classes of phenomena mentioned by Franz Brentano, representations, judgments and emotions, their Thomist equivalent would be the acts involved in sensorial, intellective cognition, and, respectively, emotions. For the purposes of this article an analysis of the first two types of phenomena, sensorial and intellective cognition, would suffice.

Cognition is a complex mechanism for Thomas Aquinas, one that is put into motion by the species (forms) of the hylomorphic extra-mental objects, which are nothing more than the bearers of the informational content of objects, which help the informational content of objects to travel from the object to the cognitive subject. The species carrying the informational content has to stop in several locations before converting its load from potentially intelligible (knowable) to actually intelligible, and this before its load is shaped by the intellective cognitive faculties, the active and the passive intellect. Only after stopping in all locations and after being shaped by each of the intermediary faculties (external and internal senses, intellectual faculties) a subject can be said to cognize the essence of the object by forming in itself a mental word, the definition of the object, which will later be uttered by a spoken word. Thus, for Thomas Aquinas mental or cognitive phenomena range from sensorial phenomena, such as the act of smelling, touching, seeing, etc., to intellectual phenomena. Though we can, in a certain manner, speak of a superimposition of terms, the Thomist intellective cognition is broader than Franz Brentano's class of judgments in which some-

thing is affirmed or denied. For Thomas Aquinas the intellective cognition has two operations:

(a) the formation of the mental words or concepts and the actual understanding of the essences of the hylomorphic extra-mental objects (the categorial sense and level of being);

(b) the use of concepts in spoken language for forming judgments (the predicative sense and level of being).

Now that the general framework has been introduced, I shall commence my demonstration of the thesis that for Thomas Aquinas intentionality is not the mark of the cognitive, by presenting the classical reading of this problem and the passages on which is built. According to this line of reasoning, the difference between a knower and a non-knower lies in the capability of the first to possess, apart from its form, the form of another, in an *intentional* way. Let us see, for the beginning, how some of the defenders of the classical reading interpret intentionality as the mark of the cognitive.

According to Aquinas, when I think of redness, what makes my thought be a thought of redness is the form of redness. When I think of a horse, similarly, it is the form of horse which makes the thought be a thought of a horse and not of a cow. What makes the thought of a horse the thought of a horse is the same thing as makes a real horse a horse: namely, the form of horse. The form exists, individualized and enmattered, in the real horse; it exists, immaterial and universal, in my mind. In the one case it has esse naturale, existence in nature; in the mind it has a different kind of existence, esse intentionale.⁵

Aquinas's view was that what makes your thought of a goat a thought of a goat was the very same thing that makes a goat a goat: namely, the occurrence of the form of a goat. But the form of goat is instantiated in your mind in a different way from the way it is instantiated in an actual goat: in an actual goat, the form has esse naturale (natural existence), while in the thought of a goat, the form has esse intentionale (intentional existence).⁶

Thus a cat and the idea of a cat differ not in nature, that is catness in both cases, but in modes of the exemplification of this nature. Felix instantiates (or better, from the point of view of avoiding Platonism, actualises a case of) felinity in esse naturale, and in my thinking of him actualises the very same form (qua universal) in esse intentionale.⁷

What these scholars seem to suggest is that while a horse, a goat or a cat are instantiated in nature with *esse naturale*, in the mind of a knower they have *esse intentionale*. From this differentiation, one can easily draw the conclusion that

esse intentionale is the mark of the cognitive. What are the grounds on which this reading is based? What are the steps someone needs to take in order to reach the same conclusion as the aforementioned one? Just as the intentionality passage from Brentano is largely known, so is a certain passage from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* when it comes to the definition of a cognizer: "To prove this, we must note that knowers are distinguished from non-knowers in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the knower is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing; for the species of the thing known is in the knower. Hence it is manifest that the nature of a non-knower is more contracted and limited; whereas the nature of a knower has a greater amplitude and extension."⁸

The passage clearly shows that a knower has the ability to possess the form of another, and it has a greater amplitude and extension than a non-knower. But by saying this we do not say much, because not only a man can have, apart from his or her form, the form of another, but also material objects can have the form of another. Let us take an example. Suppose I have in front of me a sheet of paper. When I write something on it with a pen, it acquires the form of the ink which is transferred from the pen to the paper. But surely there must be a difference between the written paper and the mind of a knower, despite the fact that they both have the form of another and they both seem to have expanded their initial state. And indeed there is one difference, the fact that the paper receives the form of the ink in a *material* manner, with its *esse materiale*, while the mind of the knower receives the form of the known object in an *immaterial* way. In order to avoid such counterintuitive instances, where a piece of paper can be mistaken for a knower, Thomas Aquinas introduces the distinction between different types of existence a form can have, according to its different recipients.

I answer that, while it is true that every recipient receives a form from an agent, there are different ways of receiving form. Form received in a patient from an agent sometimes has the same mode of existence in the recipient as in the agent; which occurs when the patient is disposed to the form in the same way as the agent. For whatever is received is received into the being of the recipient; so that, if the recipient is disposed as the agent is, the form comes to be in the recipient in the manner in which it exists in the agent. And in this case the form is not imparted without the matter. For although the numerically one and the same division of matter that is in the agent does not become the recipient's, the latter becomes, in a way, the same as the material agent, inasmuch as it acquires a material disposition like that which was in the agent. And it is in this way that air receives the influence of fire, and any other passive thing in Nature the action that alters its natural quality. Sometimes, however, the recipient receives the form into a mode of existence other than that which the form has in the agent; when, that

*is, the recipient's material disposition to receive form does not resemble the material disposition in the agent. In these cases the form is taken into the recipient 'without matter,' the recipient being assimilated to the agent in respect of form and not in respect of matter. And it is thus that a sense receives form without matter, the form having, in the sense, a different mode of being from that which it has in the object sensed. In the latter it has a natural mode of being, but in the sense, an intentional and spiritual mode.*⁹

Sometimes a form has the same way of existence in the receiver and in the agent, and some other times it has a different mode of existence. In the latter case, the form is taken without matter, in an intentional and spiritual (immaterial) way. Aquinas ends this passage with the same distinction between *esse naturale* and *esse intentionale* that Kenny, Haldane or Crane were talking about. A knower seems to differ from a non-knower not only in that a knower has besides his or her form the form of another, but also in that the taking of a form is intentional. This is why a piece of paper can never be considered a good candidate for a knower, because it can only receive the form of another in a material, non-intentional way. About "taking the form of another without matter," Anthony Lisska, another proponent of the classical reading, says that it is "the cash value of *esse intentionale* in Thomas."¹⁰ In other words, the distinction between *esse intentionale* and *esse naturale* marks the boundary between mental or cognitive and physical or non-cognitive. Lisska sees in this distinction, just as one might expect, an agreement with Brentano's distinction between mental or intentional states and physical states. For Lisska, the *esse intentionale* is, in Aquinas's theory of cognition, "the cognitive content of an act of awareness . . . which depends on an ontological ability of a knower to attain knowledge states."¹¹ Let us take one more look at how the definition of a cognizer is described by Dominik Perler, a defender of the same reading: "Eine Entität X ist genau dann kognitiv, (i) wenn sie imstande ist, die Form einer Entität Y ohne die Materie mit intentionalem Sein aufzunehmen und in sich zu haben, und (ii) wenn sie ein natürliches Vermögen hat, die Form zu erfassen."¹² Again, the cognitive criterion seems to be the natural ability of a receiver to take on the form of another in an intentional way.

AQUINAS WOULD probably agree with Brentano that intentionality is the mark of the cognitive, if understood in terms of a form carrying an informational content, but would he agree with the fact that intentionality is the decisive criterion which marks the boundary between cognitive and non-cognitive? Maybe we can find help in a passage where Aquinas describes the manner in which an angel cognizes another angel. It is worth mentioning that this passage is of importance for the advocates of the classical reading, being considered the key passage on which the *esse naturale*–*esse intentionale* distinction is

grounded: “One angel knows another by the species of such angel existing in his intellect, which differs from the angel whose image it is, not according to material and immaterial nature, but according to natural and intentional existence. The angel is himself a subsisting form in his natural being; but his species in the intellect of another angel is not so, for there it possesses only an intelligible existence. As the form of color on the wall has a natural existence; but, in the deferent medium, it has only intentional existence.”¹³

What is Aquinas stating here? That it is in the nature of an angel (*esse naturale*) to be immaterial (*esse immateriale*), and when an angel knows another angel the species (informational content) of the known angel is in the knower in an intentional way (*esse intentionale*). For a better grasp of the difference between the various modes of existence, natural, material, immaterial and intentional, allow me to take an example. A tree cannot but exist in a material way in nature, therefore its natural existence (*esse naturale*) is a material one (*esse materiale*), but the essence of the tree exists in the mind of a human cognizer, according to the classical reading, in an intentional way (*esse intentionale*). Therefore, even if the mind itself has an immaterial way of being (*esse immateriale*), when it knows the form of the tree, it takes on its form in an intentional way (*esse intentionale*). Angels are by nature immaterial, just as our intellects, and therefore their natural way of being (*esse naturale*) is immaterial. When an angel knows another angel, the form of the known angel is in the knower in an immaterial and intentional way (*esse immateriale* and *esse intentionale*). Thus, in a way, the distinction between non-cognitive and cognitive seems to be, from the point of view of the classical reading, the *esse intentionale*, since immateriality is only circumstantial if we take into account the fact that the passage speaks about angelic cognition. The proponents of the classical reading appear to be right. If one wants to identify something as a knower, as a subject endowed with cognitive faculties, all it has to do is look for the presence of *esse intentionale*.

But should this really suffice? We have noticed thus far that a form can have an intentional existence in the senses and in the intellect, and this alone can be read as an agreement between Brentano and Aquinas. However, for a form to pass from one extreme, the material compound, to the other, the intentional form in the mind of the knower, it needs to pass through a medium.¹⁴ Let us see in what terms Aquinas talks about the medium of cognition:

Now because of the different nature (ratio) of the transparent in a transparent medium, the medium receives the form of a color in a mode that is different from the mode in which it exists in the colored body, where there is a bounded transparent, as will be said below; for actualities are in receivers according to the mode of the latter. Thus color is in a colored body as a quality complete

*in its natural being, but it is in the medium incompletely, according to an intentional being. Otherwise something black and something white could not be seen through the same medium. For whiteness and blackness cannot simultaneously be in the same thing as forms complete in their natural being, but with respect to the above-mentioned incomplete being they do exist in the same thing: for this mode of being, because of its imperfection, approaches the mode by which something exists in something else in potentiality, and opposites are simultaneously in potentiality in the same thing.*¹⁵

*As the form of color on the wall has a natural existence; but, in the deferent medium, it has only intentional existence.*¹⁶

It follows that a form exists completely in a natural way, and incompletely in an intentional way. As one may notice, a form can exist intentionally not only in the senses or in the intellect, but also in the medium between the object and the senses. According to the classical reading, what manifests *esse intentionale* bears the mark of the cognitive. But, in this case is the air a cognitive subject? What and how does the air know? Even if Thomas Aquinas agrees with understanding intentionality as the bearer of an informational content, as the representation of a piece of information, he most certainly disagrees with the limitation of the domain of intentionality to the realm of the cognitive. Otherwise he would not talk about forms having an intentional mode of existence in the medium.

But what is the mark of the cognitive, if it is not intentionality? Before going any further, allow me to sum up the different types of existence a form can have, with the help of a table:

	A	B	C	D
	<i>Esse naturale</i>	<i>Esse materiale</i>	<i>Esse intentionale</i>	<i>Esse immateriale (spirituale)</i>
1. The form of redness on a wall	(x)x	(x)x		
2. The form of redness in the air	(x)	(x)	x	x
3. The form of redness in the eyes of a knower	(x)	(x)	x	x
4. The form of redness in the mind of a knower	(x)		x	(x)x
5. The form of an angel as such	(x)			(x)
6. The form of an angel in an angel knower	(x)		x	(x)x

In the above table (X) represents the form of the receiver, be it knower or non-knower, and X stands for the mode of existence a form has in the receiver. With the help of this table we can effortlessly notice that the natural existence of a form refers to the way in which the form of an object exists as such in the object: a wall is material, therefore its *esse naturale* will be a material one, but the *esse naturale* of the human or angelic mind, since they have an immaterial disposition, will be immaterial. The case of air, or any medium for that matter, is controversial, as we have observed before, because it can lead to some strange conclusions about the cognitive realm. Thus, some answers are required at this point. How is it possible for something immaterial to exist in something material? How come a color can exist immaterially in the air, which is material? To understand this we can take an example. When we send a message from a telephone the message exists in an immaterial manner, as coded information, in the device which is obviously a material object. It is in the same manner that the form of redness can exist immaterially in something material. Immateriality is very important though, despite what the defenders of the classical reading might consider, because whenever a form exists materially it makes that thing change in a material way: the form of redness in the wall makes the wall red, the form of warmth in the hand makes the hand warm; but if someone applies some yellow paint on the red wall, it will become orange. If the change in the air were to be material, the same thing would happen to the air: it would change its color according to the number of colored forms transmitted through it. And, as we all know, if all the colors are combined, the result is black. How would sight be possible, if the air were to be pitch-black? In *Summa contra Gentiles* Thomas Aquinas introduces another distinction between forms, one which seems to imply grades of perfection, and which might help us make things clearer:

The forms of sensible things have a more perfect mode of existence in the intellect than in sensible things, for in the intellect they are simpler and extend to more things; thus, through the one intelligible form of man, the intellect knows all men. Now, a form existing perfectly in matter makes a thing to be actually such, such as to be fire, or colored: if, however, the form does not have that effect, then the form is in that thing imperfectly, as the form of color in the air carrying it.¹⁷

If we put together the information gathered thus far about forms and their mode of existence, we find out that forms existing in hylomorphic objects make them be as such, due to their existence as a complete quality in the natural being; in the medium forms exist incompletely, as incomplete qualities, according to an intentional being; it is in this aspect that they resemble the mode of being in

which something exists in something else potentially. If something exists actually in something else, it makes that thing be what it is, and when it exists potentially it makes possible for opposite forms to exist, in the same potential manner, in the same receiver: different colors, even opposed ones such as black and white, can simultaneously exist in the air, without affecting its visibility. But after travelling through the air, the form can be received by a human intellect and changed from potentially intelligible to actually intelligible. This change triggers in turn another change: it makes the form able to exist in a perfect way because it now has a greater extension, it can be applied to many things, not only to one. For example, by cognizing the form of an apple I know not only this particular apple that is on my table, but also all the possible apples in the world. It is from this perspective that a form has a perfect way of existence in the mind of a knower, as opposed to its restricted way of existence in the natural object. These different types of existences can be visualized with the help of the following scheme:

Hylomorphic object	Medium	Intellect
The form makes the object be as such. <i>Esse naturale</i> and <i>esse materiale</i>	The form exists imperfectly and is potentially intelligible, therefore not yet applicable to many. <i>Esse intentionale</i> and <i>esse materiale</i> (due to the fact that the medium has a material constitution in the case of external senses).	The form exists perfectly, actually intelligible and applicable to many. <i>Esse intentionale</i> and <i>esse immateriale</i> (due to the fact that the intellect has a purely immaterial way of being).

Esse intentionale is not restricted to the realm of the cognitive, as it can also exist in the medium, and this should come as no surprise for a Thomist scholar, because it is something Aquinas states in many places. In fact, *esse intentionale* is used by Aquinas in a variety of contexts where it is connected with the imperfect way of existence a quality has in the medium, the mode of existence a form has in the senses where, very importantly, it is accompanied by *esse immateriale* or *spirituale*, and in the famous angel text. *Esse intentionale* seems to come in degrees: in the air forms exist imperfectly, while in the senses they exist in an intermediary way, because the information is not yet abstract enough to be applicable to many, and, finally, in the intellect the form gains its perfect existence extended to many. In the medium the form only has a potentially intelligible being, in the senses it is on its way to becoming actually intelligible, while in the intellect it has an actually intelligible being. Between the degrees of perfection a form can have and the degrees of immateriality there seems to be a proportionate relationship: the higher the immateriality, the more intelligible a form is, thus the more cognitive and perfect. In *Quaestiones disputatae de*

Veritate (q. 23 a. 1 co.) Aquinas says that “gradum immaterialitatis est gradus cognitionis,” and in *Summa Theologiae* (I, q. 14, a. 1, co.) “Patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicuius rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva; et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis.” If immateriality is the mode of cognition, than how come Aquinas stresses the distinction between *esse intentionale* and *esse naturale* in the angel text? Why isn’t he speaking about the *esse immateriale* as the mark of the cognitive? The key to answering this question is the notion of *degrees*.

SINCE THE aim of this paper is to challenge the view that intentionality is the mark of the cognitive, I shall return once more to the key passage quoted in favor of the classical reading, in the hope that, if I read it in the light of all the information gathered thus far about ways of existence a form can have in different receivers, and about the degrees of immateriality and cognitive, it would lead to a different manner of understanding the mark of the cognitive: “One angel knows another by the species of such angel existing in his intellect, which differs from the angel whose image it is, not according to material and immaterial nature, but according to natural and intentional existence. The angel is himself a subsisting form in his natural being; but his species in the intellect of another angel is not so, for there it possesses only an intelligible existence. As the form of colour on the wall has a natural existence; but, in the deferent medium, it has only intentional existence.”¹⁸

Robbie Moser¹⁹ suggests that in this text Aquinas highlights “the role of *esse intentionale* as operating within the domain of *esse immateriale*, while ruling it out as the criterion of the cognitive as such.” Keeping in mind this suggestion, let us proceed in unlocking the meaning of this passage. First of all, Aquinas is clear on one respect: that cognition is done with the help of the species. It is the species’ way of existence that leads to the divergent readings of this text, because, on the one hand, the species has a natural existence in the known angel, a fairly uncontroversial statement, and, on the other, it has an intentional and intelligible way of existence in the knowing angel. If Aquinas were to make no reference to the intelligibility of the species, the classical reading would seem to be perfectly coherent, but the fact that intelligibility comes into play affects the solidity of this reading. Notice that the species of color exists in the wall in a natural way, just as the species of the angel exists in the angel, making it be as such, but in the medium the species of color exists only intentionally, not intelligibly. The problem can be made clearer by a passage from *Sentencia libri de Anima*. Aquinas wrote:

But in the lower terrestrial natures there are two degrees of immateriality. There is the perfect immateriality of intelligible being; for in the intellect things exist

*not only without matter, but even without their individuating material conditions, and also apart from any material organ. Then there is the half-way state of sensible being. For as things exist in sensation they are free indeed from matter, but are not without their individuating material conditions, nor apart from a bodily organ. For sensation is of objects in the particular, but intellection of objects universally. It is with reference to these two modes of existence that the philosopher will say, in Book III, that the soul is somehow all things.*²⁰

When the species is totally (*penitus*) immaterial it is intelligible, therefore for a species to be cognitive it needs to be immaterial, not just intentional, because the intentional way of being of a color in the medium alone does not make it be cognitive, it only conveys the fact that it has a representational content. The more immaterial a species is, the more intelligible it becomes. By its very nature an angel is an immaterial being, just as the species existing in an intellect, whether it is a human or an angelic intellect, has an immaterial way of being. At this point the picture becomes clear: for something to be intelligible it needs not only intentional, but also immaterial, therefore any intelligible species existing in an intellect has to be immaterial. According to my reading of the angel text things are as follows:

1. In the first part, Aquinas states that the species does not differ according to a material and immaterial way of existence, and this statement has nothing controversial about it. Of course, the species of an angel existing in the angel as such and the species of a known angel existing in the mind of the knower do not differ in this way because (a) any species in the mind of a knower cannot but have an immaterial way of existence, therefore any materiality is excluded, and (b) immateriality is common to both, the angel as such and the species of the known angel in the knower.

2. In the second part, the species are said to differ according to a natural and intentional way of existence; (a) when the species exists in an object in a natural way, it makes the object be as such, as it has been stated above. Therefore, in this case the difference lies in the fact that a thing can exist as such or it can exist as the object of an intellect, be it human or angelic. (b) The intentional way of existence does not belong to a thing as such: the domain of things as such stretches from materiality to immateriality, it permits degrees, but it excludes the domain of intentionality. Intentionality is the representational character an entity can have, it is its ability to convey informational content, which can be either potentially or actually intelligible, depending on the nature of its bearer.

By combining 1 and 2 we reach the conclusion suggested by Robbie Moser, that Aquinas only intended to point out in what aspect an angel and the species of an angel in another angel differ, and not what the mark of the cognitive

consists of. The mark of the cognitive is immateriality, and this is something Aquinas states even in one text which is often quoted by the proponents of the classical reading: “Therefore it is clear that the immateriality of a thing is the reason why it is cognitive; and according to the mode of immateriality is the mode of knowledge.”²¹ By saying that immateriality is the mark of the cognitive, I am not denying the role of intentionality: without it, there would be no content conveyed, no object, and cognition would be empty. My point is that for intentionality to be cognitive it needs to be connected with immateriality, but neither immateriality, nor intentionality alone is sufficient for cognition.

In the end allow me to return to the commonplace that triggered this paper: intentionality is the mark of the cognitive and this mark can be traced as far back as medieval philosophy and Thomas Aquinas. It would seem that, despite having become common knowledge, the fact that Aquinas believes that intentionality is the mark of the cognitive should not be taken at face value, but should be treated with prudence. Of course, the consequences of embracing it are not as hazardous as looking left when crossing the street in London, but it still obscures the real meaning and depth of Thomas Aquinas’ thoughts on cognition.²²

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Notes

1. Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 68.
2. See Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* (Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1874), 116, n. 3. The English translation omits this note, hence the reference to the German edition.
3. Note that I am paralleling the domain of the cognitive with the domain of the mental. I do so because although Brentano was speaking of the *mark of the mental*, most of the Thomist scholars use, for the same thing, the expression *the mark of the cognitive*. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I shall use henceforth only the expression *mark of the cognitive*.
4. Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*, 116, n. 3.
5. Anthony Kenny, “Intentionality: Aquinas and Wittgenstein,” in *Thomas Aquinas Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 243.
6. Tim Crane, *Elements of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9.
7. John Haldane, “Mind-World Identity Theory and the Anti-Realist Challenge,” in *Reality Representation & Projection*, eds. John Haldane and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 21.

8. “Ad cuius evidentiam, considerandum est quod cognoscentia a non cognoscentibus in hoc distinguuntur, quia non cognoscentia nihil habent nisi formam suam tantum; sed cognoscentia natum est habere formam etiam rei alterius, nam species cogniti est in cognoscente. Unde manifestum est quod natura rei non cognoscentis est magis coarctata et limitata: natura autem rerum cognoscentium habet maiorem amplitudinem et extensionem.” In this article I shall make use of the following Latin editions and notations: *Quaestiones disputatae de Veritate (De Ver.)*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Dondaine, vol. XXII (Rome–Paris: Commissio Leonina & Cerf, 1970–1976); *Sententia libri de Anima (Sent. de An.)*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. R.-A. Gauthier, vol. XLV, 1 (Rome–Paris: Commissio Leonina & Vrin, 1984); *Sententia libri de Sensu et Sensato (De Sensu et Sensato)*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. XLV, 2 (Rome–Paris: Commissio Leonina/Vrin, 1985); *Summa contra Gentiles (S. c. G.)*, ed. C. Pera (Turin–Rome: Marietti, 1961); *Summa Theologiae (S. Th.)*, ed. P. Caramello (Turin–Rome: Marietti, 1952). For the translations I use the following editions: *S. Th.*—Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benziger Bros. edition, 1947; *S. c. G.*—Joseph Rickaby (London: Burns and Oates, 1905); *Sent. de An.*—K. Forster and S. Humphries (New Haven: Yale University, 1951); *De Ver.*—Robert W. Mulligan, in *Truth*, 3 vols. (Hackett: Library of Living Catholic Thought, 1994). Note that sometimes I made some adjustments to the translations.
9. “Dicendum igitur, quod licet hoc sit omni patienti, quod recipiat formam ab agente, differentia tamen est in modo recipiendi. Nam forma, quae in patiente recipitur ab agente, quandoque quidem habet eundem modum essendi in patiente, quem habet in agente: et hoc quidem contingit, quando patiens habet eandem dispositionem ad formam, quam habet agens: quodcumque enim recipitur in altero secundum modum recipientis recipitur. Unde si eodem modo disponatur patiens sicut agens, eodem modo recipitur forma in patiente sicut erat in agente; et tunc non recipitur forma sine materia. Licet enim illa et eadem materia numero quae est agentis, non fiat patientis, fit tamen quodammodo eadem, in quantum similem dispositionem materialem ad formam acquirit ei quae erat in agente. Et hoc modo aer patitur ab igne, et quicquid patitur passione naturali. Quandoque vero forma recipitur in patiente secundum alium modum essendi, quam sit in agente; quia dispositio materialis patientis ad recipiendum, non est similis dispositioni materiali, quae est in agente. Et ideo forma recipitur in patiente sine materia, in quantum patiens assimilatur agenti secundum formam, et non secundum materiam. Et per hunc modum, sensus recipit formam sine materia, quia alterius modi esse habet forma in sensu, et in re sensibili. Nam in re sensibili habet esse naturale, in sensu autem habet esse intentionale et spirituale.” (*Sent. de An.*, lib. 2, l. 24, n. 2–4)
10. Anthony Lisska, “Medieval Intentionality,” in *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue*, eds. Craig Paterson and Matthew S. Pugh (Farnham–Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 161.
11. *Ibid.*, 156.
12. Dominik Perler, *Theorien der Intentionalität im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2002), 41.

13. “Ad tertium dicendum quod unus Angelus cognoscit alium per speciem eius in intellectu suo existentem, quae differt ab Angelo cuius similitudo est, non secundum esse materiale et immateriale, sed secundum esse naturale et intentionale. Nam ipse Angelus est forma subsistens in esse naturali, non autem species eius quae est in intellectu alterius Angeli, sed habet ibi esse intelligibile tantum. Sicut etiam et forma coloris in pariete habet esse naturale, in medio autem deferente habet esse intentionale tantum.” (*S. Th.*, I, q. 56, a. 2, ad 3)
14. See for example *ibid.*, q. 55, a. 2, ad 2.
15. “Sed propter aliam rationem diaphaneitatis in medio perspicuo, sequitur quod medium recipiat alio modo speciem coloris quam sit in corpore colorato, in quo est diaphanum terminatum, ut infra dicitur. Actus enim sunt in susceptivis secundum modum ipsorum: et ideo color est quidem in corpore colorato sicut qualitas completa in suo esse naturali; in medio autem incompleta secundum quoddam esse intentionale; alioquin non posset secundum idem medium videri album et nigrum. Albedo autem et nigredo, prout sunt formae completae in esse naturali, non possunt simul esse in eodem: sed secundum praedictum esse incompletum sunt in eodem, quia iste modus essendi propter suam imperfectionem appropinquat ad modum quo aliquid est in aliquo in potentia. Sunt autem in potentia opposita simul in eodem.” (*De Sensu et Sensato*, tr. 1, l. 5, n. 4)
16. “Sicut etiam et forma coloris in pariete habet esse naturale, in medio autem deferente habet esse intentionale tantum.” (*S. Th.*, I, q. 56, a. 2, ad 3)
17. “Formae rerum sensibilium perfectius esse habent in intellectu quam in rebus sensibilibus: sunt enim simpliciores et ad plura se extendentes; per unam enim formam hominis intelligibilem omnes hominis intellectus cognoscit. Forma autem perfecte in materia existens facit esse actu tale, scilicet vel ignem, vel coloratum: si autem non faciat aliquid esse tale, est imperfecte in illo, sicut forma coloris in aere ut in deferente.” (*S. c. G.*, II, 50)
18. “Ad tertium dicendum quod unus Angelus cognoscit alium per speciem eius in intellectu suo existentem, quae differt ab Angelo cuius similitudo est, non secundum esse materiale et immateriale, sed secundum esse naturale et intentionale. Nam ipse Angelus est forma subsistens in esse naturali, non autem species eius quae est in intellectu alterius Angeli, sed habet ibi esse intelligibile tantum. Sicut etiam et forma coloris in pariete habet esse naturale, in medio autem deferente habet esse intentionale tantum.” (*S. Th.*, I, q. 56, a. 2, ad 3)
19. Robbie Moser, “Thomas Aquinas, esse intentionale, and the cognitive as such,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 64 (June 2011): 763–788.
20. “Huiusmodi autem immateriale esse, habet duos gradus in istis inferioribus. Nam quoddam est penitus immateriale, scilicet esse intelligibile. In intellectu enim res habent esse, et sine materia, et sine conditionibus materialibus individuandis, et etiam absque organo corporali. Esse autem sensibile est medium inter utrumque. Nam in sensu res habet esse sine materia, non tamen absque conditionibus materialibus individuandis, neque absque organo corporali. Est enim sensus particularium, intellectus vero universalium. Et quantum ad hoc duplex esse, dicit philosophus in tertio huius, quod anima est quodammodo omnia.” (*Sent. de An.*, l. 2, l. 5, n. 6)

21. “Patet igitur quod immaterialitas alicuius rei est ratio quod sit cognoscitiva; et secundum modum immaterialitatis est modus cognitionis.” (*S. Th.*, I, q. 14, a.1, co.)
22. My goal in this paper was only to challenge the classical reading, but still, many problems, such as a complete definition of the cognitive criteria and a thorough analysis of the implications of the Brentanian thesis, to name only two, remain open for further investigations.

Abstract

From Intentionality to Immateriality: The Mark of the Cognitive for Thomas Aquinas

The idea that for medieval philosophers in general, and for Thomas Aquinas in particular, intentionality is the mark of the cognitive has become a commonplace in philosophy. According to this classical line of reasoning, for Aquinas, *esse intentionale* is the mark of the cognitive. The present paper challenges this classical reading of Aquinas, by stressing the importance of *esse immateriale* for defining a knower as opposed to a non-knower. In other words, it endeavours to demonstrate that for Thomas Aquinas intentionality is not the mark of the cognitive. While for intentionality to be cognitive it needs to be connected with immateriality, neither immateriality, nor intentionality alone is sufficient for cognition.

Keywords

Thomas Aquinas, intentionality, immateriality, *esse naturale*, *esse intentionale*, *esse immateriale*, intellectual cognition, sensorial cognition