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The Triumph of Renouncement Religious Signals, the Secrets of the Heart, Error, Deception and Happiness in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles**

I. INTRODUCTION

Although it has been appropriately characterized as the most accessible and the least scholastic work of Aquinas,¹ many scholars have considered the *Summa contra Gentiles* enigmatic for a strikingly simple reason: we do not fully understand why Aquinas wrote it.² This is not because he concealed his intention. Quite the

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¹ Gauthier 1993. 5.

² The title *Summa contra Gentiles* is most probably not authentic. It goes back to an early *exemplar* of the work that was presumably prepared between 1268 and 1272 and was put in use by a Parisian university stationer William of Sens (Laurent 1931–1937. 595; Rouse–Rouse 1988. 60–62; 64–66; Gauthier 1993, 27–28; 112). Furthermore, this title as a succinct summary of the author's intention is inaccurate. It suggests that Aquinas wrote the work against pagans, since he used the word “gentilis” in this sense throughout his works (Laurent 1931; Salman 1937; Gauthier 1993. 111–112). This manner of usage also precludes the interpretation suggested by Edward Synan that “gentiles” refers here – in agreement with the rabbinic and patristic tradition – to all those “peoples” who do not follow the true faith (Synan 1978. 20). Nonetheless, even though “gentiles” does not mean “goyim” in Aquinas's language, the non-authentic title could have been taken in this sense by his contemporaries and the subsequent tradition (see, e.g., I. T. Eschmann's remark: “this title brings to light the true nature of the work.” Eschmann 1956. 385). There is, however, an alternative title of the work that has been attested by the “incipit” of the manuscript tradition (“Incipit liber de veritate catholice fidei contra errores infidelium editus a fratre thoma de aquino ordinis fratrum predicatorum”; see *Praefatio*, Leonina 13, xii). The *Liber de veritate catholice fidei contra errores infidelium* title – that might well be authentic (see Van Steenberghen 1966. 321; Gauthier 1993. 109 and 147; Patfoort 1983. 104; Kretzmann 1997. 51; Tugwell 1998. 252; Davies 1996. 9) – seems to express Aquinas's intention more faithfully. First of all, Aquinas is quite clear that his work is primarily against errors that have to be “eliminated”. Compared to the errors themselves, the authors or representatives of errors seem to be of secondary significance for him. Secondly, this title is open ended. The wider scope allows for a relevant extension of the range of possible secondary targets. Most importantly, the term “infidel” refers – among others – to heretics whose errors take up an important place in the work, even though Aquinas

contrary. At the beginning of his work, Aquinas makes it clear that he set himself the twofold task of the wise man by seeking „to make manifest” the truth that the Catholic faith professes, „eliminating” thereby the errors that are contrary to it.³

Until recently, the tacit consensus among scholars had been that Aquinas’s brief declaration did not cover all his intentions.⁴ Who are the authors of the

mentions contemporary heretics rarely and usually refers to them with vague terms (Gauthier 1993. 134–140). On the downside, this long title is impractical and little known. Therefore, given the prevalence and the usability of *Summa contra Gentiles* and the conventional nature of linguistic signals, I will refer to the work with this title. I am going to apply the customary abbreviation (SCG) followed by the numbers of the book and the chapter respectively (e.g., SCG 1.6). The *Summa contra Gentiles* title became widespread early on. *Contra Gentiles*, with or without *Summa* is used in the earliest documents of the correctorium-controversy at the beginning of the 1280’s (see, e.g., Glorieux 1927. passim), in the catalogues of Aquinas’s works from the 13th–14th centuries (see Alarcón 2000–2019. <https://www.corpusthomicum.org/il-catope.html>), in the oldest biographies of Aquinas by William of Tocco, Bernard Gui, and Peter Calo (Le Brun Gouanvic 1996. 130; Ferrua 1968. 144; 159; 190) and in the documents of Aquinas’s canonization process (Ferrua 1968. 297; 300; 330). We have an extant autograph of a part of the work, from the 13th chapter of the first book to the 120th chapter of the third (MS Vat. lat. 9850. fol. 2ra-89vb). The autograph text had been seriously mutilated while being preserved in various Dominican convents over the centuries, presumably mainly during the Middle Ages. Due to negligence, or rather, as Gauthier puts it, “a misconceived piety” some friars probably handled the manuscript similarly to the corpse of a saint and used its parts as a relic (Gauthier 1993. 8).

³ SCG 1.2: “propositum nostrae intentionis est veritatem quam fides Catholica profitetur, pro nostro modulo manifestare, errores eliminando contrarios” (Leonina 13. 6; Marietti 2. 3. n. 9; ET 1. 62. n. 2). Sometimes, as in the present case, I deviate from the English text of the translation. I will indicate the most important differences. According to Aquinas, falsity is contrary to the truth. See ST 1a.17.4. Furthermore, the truth that the Catholic faith professes is one, whereas the errors contrary to it can be infinitely multiplied. See ST 2a2ae.10.5: “Si [...] distinguantur infidelitatis species secundum errorem in diversis quae ad fidem pertinent, sic non sunt determinatae infidelitatis species, possunt enim errores in infinitum multiplicari [...].” On the “twofold task” or “twofold profession” of the wise man with reference to Aristotle and Saint Paul, and on the double function of theology see Gauthier 1993. esp. 147–163. The twofold task of the wise man and the twofold function of theology do not seem to be specific to the *Summa contra gentiles*. Aquinas attributes the same objective to the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard in his commentary to the prologue of the work. In Aquinas’s interpretation, Petrus Lombardus refers to two benefits when he indicates the “final cause” of the work: the “destruction of errors” (*destructio erroris*) and “the manifestation of truth” (*manifestatio veritatis*). See the “Divisio textus Prologi cum ejus expositione” part in Aquinas’s *Commentary on the Sentences*: Thomas Aquinas 1929. 23.

⁴ See, e.g., Chenu’s claim that SCG is “an apologetic theology,” “a defense of the entire body of Christian thought, confronted with the scientific Greco–Arabic conception of the universe” (Chenu 1964. 292) or Murphy’s arguments on why – in his view – “the missionary and the anti-Averroist intentions” traditionally ascribed to the work cannot be excluded (Murphy 1969. 405). For the long history of the various attempts to ascribe ulterior intentions to Aquinas regarding SCG, see Torrell’s brief summary (Torrell 1996. 104–107) and Marc Jordan’s paper (Jordan 2006. above all pages 89–101). For a suggestion that – by writing the SCG – Aquinas might have responded to the “expressed desire” of the Master of the Dominican Order, Humbert of Roman, who considered one of the tasks of the Master “to ensure that there is always available in the Order a supply of treatises against the errors of unbelievers, heretics and schismatics”, see Tugwell 1998. 252–253. Brian Davies, however, argues that the

errors Aquinas is seeking to eliminate by elaborating his position? False claims are undoubtedly made by someone and represent theoretical positions of individuals or groups. If the work was written against a group or groups of adversaries – as suggested by the work’s titles – on what socio-cultural ground can we identify them? Did someone commission this work? And how can we identify the target audience whose members were supposed to be able to read this highly sophisticated philosophical-theological text?⁵ Also – in case it was intended to serve a further goal – who were supposed to use it? And then again: what were they supposed to use it for? In summary: what was the indirect aim he sought to achieve by writing this enormous, 325.000-word, four-part work over the course of six to seven years?⁶

Unfortunately, neither the external evidence nor the *Summa contra Gentiles* itself seems to be of much assistance if we would like to establish an ulterior intention of Aquinas – provided that he had one at all.

The well-known account of Peter Marsili that linked the composition of the work to the missionary activity of the Dominican Order in Hispania has been highly controversial.⁷ Similarly, connecting Aquinas’s book with the controver-

first nine chapters of the SCG provide a satisfactory answer of why Aquinas wrote the work: “his intention in writing the SCG is to provide an extended essay in natural theology (which will occupy him through books 1–3) and then to offer defenses of the articles of faith (which will occupy him in book 4)” (Davies 2016. 15).

⁵ Even at a fundamental level (Christian audience or non-Christian audience), this problem is not easy to solve. For the first alternative see, e.g., Van Steenberghen 1966. 322–323; Te Velde 1998. 181–182; Te Velde 2002. 123. and Jordan 2006. 104. For the second alternative see, e.g., Kenny 1993. 13. and Kretzmann 1997. 48.

⁶ Aquinas presumably started writing the *Summa contra Gentiles* not long before his journey to Italy in 1259, perhaps as early as in 1258. He finished the work before September 1265 in Orvieto. For the date of the work, see Torrell 1996. 101–104; Gauthier 1993. 10–18; 22; 122; 173. and 179. Pierre Marc took a radically different approach when he attempted to prove in the introduction to the Marietti edition of the SCG that Aquinas had written “at least most” of the work during his second Parisian regency from 1269 on, and finished it in Naples in 1273 (Marc 1967. 374). Marc’s observations and arguments to establish this chronology immediately provoked strong criticism. The consensus of the majority of researchers seems to be in agreement with Clemens Vansteenkiste’s early summary: although the vast volume of Marc’s introduction (including C. Pera’s and P. Caramello’s contributions) “contains an infinity of historical, critical, methodological and doctrinal information,” the chronology Marc determines “remains highly questionable” with regards to both the SCG and Aquinas’s other works (Vansteenkiste 1968. 354–355). In a similar manner: Van Steenberghen 1974a. 108. For a different assessment, however, see Murphy 1969.

⁷ According to the account of Peter Marsili (Petrus Marsilius) O. P., Aquinas was asked to write the *Summa contra Gentiles* in support of the Dominicans’ external mission on the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa by the former (1238–1240) master general of the Dominican Order, Raymond Penyafort. This account is part of Peter Marsili’s own addition to his translation of the *Llibre dels fets* by King James I of Aragon. Peter completed the text before the feast of Holy Trinity in 1314. The relevant passage runs as follows: „Conversionem etiam infidelium ardentius desiderans, rogavit eximium doctorem sacrae paginae, magistrum in theologia fratrem Thomam de Aquino ejusdem Ordinis, qui inter omnes hujus mundi clericos, post fratrem Albertum philosophum, maximus habebatur, ut opus aliquod faceret contra Infidelium

sies at the University of Paris proved to be hardly tenable.⁸ Moreover, it is a

errores; per quod et tenebrarum tolleretur caligo et veri solis doctrina credere nolentibus panderetur. Fecit magister ille quod tanti patris humilis deprecatio requirebat, et Summam, quae contra gentiles intitulatur, condidit, quae pro illa materia non habuisse parem creditur.” (See Balme–Paban 1898.12; for a somewhat different reading based on the text of Ms. Biblioteca de Catalunya 1018, fo. 184r see Gauthier 1993. 168. footnote 39; see further Vose 2009. 53.) In addition to the many arguments that make it highly unlikely that we could consider this story more than a piece of hagiographic imagination presumably fueled by political motives in connection with attempts to promote Raymond Penyafort’s canonization, we should even consider the possibility that the additions are dated later than the early fourteenth century (Vose 2009. 11–12). Furthermore, I think, there is an aspect of the text that – to my knowledge – has never been under consideration. It has generally been assumed that the term “infidelis” in the citation above refers only to the members of non-Christian populations, probably because in the following lines the author refers to the language schools in Tunis and Murcia established by Raymond Penyafort: “Studia linguarum pro fratribus sui Ordinis Tunicii et Murcige statuit [...]”. Now, if we look at the rhetorical structure of the text, “infidelis” might as well refer to the heretics mentioned by Peter Marsili in the previous paragraph which runs as follows: „Sentiens etiam fugitivos haereticos de Tholosanis, Bitterensibus et Carcassonsibus partibus ad partes Cathaloniae velut ad secreti sinus latibulum evolare, ac, more cancri, sermonem eorum serpere in plurium terrae partium ulcerosam corruptionem, tractavit, ut Rex, qui ejus adhaerebat consiliis et salutaribus favebat monitis, pro terris habitis et habendis a Romana curia peteret et obtineret inquisitiones hereticae pravitatis.” With “conversionem etiam infidelium ardentem desiderans” (“ardently desiring also the conversion of the infidels”) immediately following the “sentiens” paragraph, the author seems to suggest that Raymond Penyafort is not only characterized by the relentless effort to seek out and persecute heretics (depicted here with the help of a stock element of folk-iconography: the snake) who are fleeing from Languedoc, hiding and seeking refuge in Catalonia, and whose “speech” spreads in many parts of the kingdom as “ulcerative rot”. It is also a distinctive characteristic of Raymond Penyafort that he feels a burning desire to advance the conversion of the infidels, certainly including those heretics among them who are traditionally the most important subjects of the activities of the Dominican Order. Raymond Penyafort appears in the text both as a bad cop and a good cop: not only does he take care of the persecution of the heretics, but he also feels responsible for the conversion of the infidels. Remarkably, the relentlessly accurate philologist R.-A. Gauthier, when summarizing briefly the above mentioned sections of the text, (1) consistently refers to “infideles” as “pagans”, and (2) complements his summary of the “sentiens etiam” paragraph with what is not in the text at all regarding the inquisition. Raymond Penyafort persuaded the king, James of Aragon, says Gauthier, to ask the pope to establish the inquisition in his kingdom “with the task of leading back the heretics to the faith” (see Gauthier 1993. 170). Even if we accept that the purpose of the inquisition process was to “lead the heretics back to faith”, Peter Marsili does not mention this task here. He mentions it only in the next section (“Conversionem etiam ...”) in which he links Raymond’s insurmountable longing for the conversion of the infidels with his request for Aquinas to write the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Be all that as it may, it is really hard to say what we have learned from the tale of (the possibly pseudo) Peter Marsili. For the Dominican concept of mission, Raymond Penyafort’s relevant activities and the inconsistencies of the story see above all Cohen 1982. 103–169; Chazan 1989. 29–85; Daniel 1992. 9–12; Tugwell 1998. 252–254; Tolan 2002. 233–255; Vose 2009. 53–59; Douais 1899. 305–325; Smith 2010. esp. 188–209; Tolan 2017. 97–101; Gorce 1933. 242; Chenu 1964. 289–292; Van Steenberghe 1966. 319–323; Burns 1971. 1401–1403. and 1409–1410; Van Riet 1976. 159–160; Weisheipl 1983. 130–131; Gauthier 1993. 165–174; Torrell 1996. 104–107; Jordan 2006. 90–94; Davies 2016. 9–10. See further footnote 29 below.

⁸ M. M. Gorce identified “Gentiles” as “the averroists who infested Italy and France” in the 1260s (Gorce 1933. 249). He held, further, that the term “gentiles” had a “perfectly

striking feature of the work that the most important sources of the errors to be eliminated are not even the contemporaries of Aquinas: a significant portion of the authors who seem to be responsible for the typical errors mentioned in the book and the ones that can be identified at all, had long been dead by the time of the SCG's birth.⁹

As for the work itself, it seems to resist even attempts to determine its literary genre. Is it a polemical text at all? Is it an apologetic work?¹⁰ Does it serve persuasive, pedagogical or apostolic-missionary aims?¹¹ If the latter, does it express Aquinas's apostolic vocation only in a broad sense as a work of universal wisdom not bound by his historical context?¹² Or is it a work of personal reflexion as Aquinas's most personal work?¹³

In this paper I do not wish to come up with a fresh conjecture regarding Aquinas's ulterior intention.

Yet, I would not like to leave it at that either.

determined" meaning in the Parisian university milieu and suggested that Aquinas's work should be interpreted in the wider context of the Parisian controversies as an overwhelming attack against all those "Averroist" philosophers in the West who were the defenders of the doctrines condemned in 1270 and 1277 by the bishop of Paris, Stephanus Tempier (Gorce 1933. 242). This interpretation is based on an overly simplified view of what happened at the University of Paris in the 1260s and 70s, which is untenable for several reasons. First, the term "averroista" was invented by Aquinas himself years after he had finished the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the term referred only to those who were committed to specific claims regarding the nature of human intellect. (See DUI 1: "Sed quia ex quibusdam uerbis consequentibus Auerroyste accipere uolunt intentionem Aristotilis fuisse, quod intellectus non sit anima que est actus corporis, aut pars talis anime: ideo etiam diligentius eius uerba sequentia consideranda sunt." Leonina 43. 294b–295a.) In the second place, there wasn't any "heterodox" or "averroistic" "movement" at the University of Paris at that time (Gauthier 1984. 20–25). Thirdly, even Aquinas himself was affected by the condemnation of 1277. Finally, at least one of the condemned articles is certainly taken from the *Summa contra Gentiles* (Hissette 1977. 83). Indeed, there might have been more, since Étienne Bourret famously revoked his predecessor's condemnation in 1325 insofar as "it might touch the doctrine" of Aquinas (for the text of the document, see Laurent 1931–1937. 666–669). For further critical remarks on Gorce's claims, see Salman 1937. 488–509 and Van Steenberghe 1966. 318–319.

⁹ A list of authors explicitly or implicitly cited by Aquinas is found in Gauthier 1993. 183–204.

¹⁰ In the *Bibliographie thomiste* of Mandonnet and Destrez, SCG is found among the apologetic works (Mandonnet–Destrez 1921.19; Gauthier 1993. 147). See further Chenu in footnote 4 above; Weisheipl 1983. 133; Hibbs 1995. 179–185; Kretzmann 1997. 46–47 and Davies 2016. 9.

¹¹ For the SCG as a work of deliberative rhetoric, see Allard 1974. In a similar manner, but also highlighting the differences, Mark Jordan regards SCG as a protreptic exhortation to Christian wisdom (Jordan 1986. 93–101; Jordan 2006. 89–115). For an interpretation that focuses on what the author calls "dialectical segments" and "narrative continuity" of the work, see Hibbs 1995. However, see also Norman Kretzmann's review of Hibbs: Kretzmann 1997b. 300–301.

¹² Gauthier 1993. 145–156 and 180–181; Porro 2016. 123.

¹³ Gorce 1933. 263. Gauthier 1993. 150, 176, 180.

Instead, I aim to explore some of his basic assumptions that, I believe, his ambitious work greatly depends on. These assumptions seem to represent Aquinas's deep personal convictions that may have been apt to become the driving force behind Aquinas's endeavour. By revealing them, I expect that some aspects of his "odd project" that so stubbornly resists attempts at contextualization can be clarified.¹⁴

II. AQUINAS'S ASSUMPTIONS

Aquinas's first assumption concerns the reliability of religious signalling. In SCG 1.6 Aquinas deals with the issue of justifiability of religious commitment: on what grounds, if any, do we give our assent to propositions incomprehensible to us, such as the articles of faith?¹⁵ In Aquinas's view, the truth of the articles of faith cannot be demonstrated, yet can be confirmed by miracles. In SCG 1.6 he focuses on what he calls there "the greatest of miracles": early, untutored followers of the Catholic faith recognized the highest wisdom and – despite the dispositions of human nature and their natural inclinations – manifested commitment to an implausible, spiritual world. This was followed by the conversion of the world to Christianity in an exceedingly hostile environment; and this fact is, again, as Aquinas stresses, the „most wonderful of all.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Stump 2003. 26: "there is something odd about that project of his."

¹⁵ For some reason, Aquinas does not use the expression "articles of faith" in SCG. Instead, in the introduction of the work (the first nine chapters of the first book; see footnote 18), he is talking about two aspects or modes of the same truth with regard to God and claims that one of these modes represents those "truths about God" that "exceed all the ability of the human reason." (SCG 1.3; Leonina 13. 7b; Marietti 2. 4. n. 14; ET 1. 63. n. 2; similar phrasing can be found elsewhere in the introduction of the SCG.) Truths about God that exceed all the ability of the human reason, however, clearly refers to what he calls elsewhere "articles of faith." A neat example for an article of faith is that "God is one and three" (see, e.g., In Sent I.3.1.4: "Deum esse trinum et unum est articulus fidei"; SCG 1.3: "Quaedam namque vera sunt de Deo quae omnem facultatem humanae rationis excedunt, ut Deum esse trinum et unum." see Leonina 13, 7b; Marietti 2, 4, n. 14). For the sake of simplicity, I am always going to use "articles of faith" in this paper.

¹⁶ SCG 1.6: "Quibus inspectis, praedictae probationis efficacia, non armorum violentia, non voluptatum promissione, et, quod est mirabilissimum, inter persecutorum tyrannidem, innumerabilis turba non solum simplicium, sed sapientissimorum hominum, ad fidem Christianam convolvit, in qua omnem humanum intellectum excedentia praedicantur, voluptates carnis cohibentur et omnia quae in mundo sunt contemni docentur; quibus animos mortalium assentire et maximum miraculorum est, et manifestum divinae inspirationis opus, ut, contemptis visibilibus, sola invisibilia cupiantur." (Leonina 13. 17a; Marietti 2. 9. n. 37.) "When these arguments were examined, through the efficacy of the abovementioned proof, and not the violent assault of arms or the promise of pleasures, and (what is most wonderful of all) in the midst of the tyranny of the persecutors, an innumerable throng of people, both simple and most learned, flocked to the Christian faith. In this faith there are truths preached that surpass every human intellect; the pleasures of the flesh are curbed; it is taught that the things of the world should be spurned. Now, for the minds of mortal men to assent to these things is the

One of the striking features of SCG is that in this key chapter of the work Aquinas uses the very same insight for justifying the assent to articles of faith that – centuries later – led to the formulation of the handicap principle in evolutionary biology. This insight is what I consider to be Aquinas’s first assumption: handicapped signals provide reliable information about the quality they display, for only high-quality signallers can afford to send them, i.e., those who really possess the quality manifested and do not just fake it.¹⁷

greatest of miracles, just as it is a manifest work of divine inspiration that, spurning visible things, men should seek only what is invisible.” (ET 1. 72. n. 1.)

¹⁷ Under no circumstances would I claim that the content elements of Aquinas’s argument were original, much less would I suggest that he had been a forerunner of something he could not have the faintest idea about. In SCG 1.6 Aquinas seems to recycle arguments found in Patristic literature concerning the universal spread of Christianity. In particular, his argumentation in SCG 1.6 seems to rest on Augustine’s work. (See, e.g., Augustine’s *De civitate Dei* XXII. 5: “Iam ergo tria sunt incredibilia, quae tamen facta sunt. Incredibile est Christum resurrexisse in carne et in caelum ascendisse cum carne; incredibile est mundum rem tam incredibilem credidisse; incredibile est homines ignobiles, infimos, paucissimos, inperitos rem tam incredibilem tam efficaciter mundo et in illo etiam doctis persuadere potuisse.” “[...] si autem, ut verum est, paucis, obscuris, minimis, indoctis eam se vidisse dicentibus et scribentibus credit mundus, cur pauci obstinatissimi, qui remanserunt, ipsi mundo iam credenti adhuc usque non credunt? qui propterea numero exiguo ignobilium, infimorum, inperitorum hominum credidit, quia in tam contemptibilibus testibus multo mirabilium divinitas se ipsa persuasit. Eloquia namque persuadentium, quae dicebant, mira fuerint facta, non verba. Qui enim Christum in carne resurrexisse et cum illa in caelum ascendisse non viderant, id se vidisse narrantibus non loquentibus tantum, sed etiam mirifica facientibus signa credebant.” [...] “Si vero per apostolos Christi, ut eis crederetur resurrectionem atque ascensionem praedicantibus Christi, etiam ista miracula facta esse non credunt, hoc nobis unum grande miraculum sufficit, quod eam terrarum orbis sine ullis miraculis credidit.” XXII. 6: “Ligabantur includebantur, caedebantur torquebantur, urebantur laniabantur, trucidabantur – et multiplicabantur. Non erat eis pro salute pugnare nisi salutem pro Salvatore contemnere.” XXII. 7: “Legebantur enim praeconia praecedentia prophetarum, concurrebant ostenta virtutum, et persuadebatur veritas nova consuetudini, non contraria rationi, donec orbis terrae, qui persequeretur furore, sequeretur fide.” XXII. 8: “Cur, inquit, nunc illa miracula, quae praedicatis facta esse, non fiunt? Possem quidem dicere necessaria fuisse, priusquam crederet mundus, ad hoc ut crederet mundus. Quisquis adhuc prodigia ut credat inquit, magnum est ipse prodigium, qui mundo credente non credit. Verum hoc ideo dicunt, ut nec tunc illa miracula facta fuisse credantur. Unde ergo tanta fide Christus usquequaque cantatur in caelum cum carne sublatus? Unde temporibus eruditus et omne quod fieri non potest respicientibus sine ullis miraculis nimium mirabiliter incredibilia credidit mundus? An forte credibilia fuisse et ideo credita esse dicturi sunt? Cur ergo ipsi non credunt? Brevis est igitur nostra complexio: Aut incredibilis rei, quae non videbatur, alia incredibilia, quae tamen fiebant et videbantur, fecerunt fidem; aut certe res ita credibilis, ut nullis quibus persuaderetur miraculis indigeret, istorum nimiam redarguit infidelitatem.” [...] “Nam etiam nunc fiunt miracula in eius nomine [...]” (Augustinus 1993. 559–566). See further Augustine’s *De vera religione* III. 3: “[...] omnia contemnendo quae pravi homines cupiunt, et omnia perpetiundo quae horrescunt, et omnia faciendo quae mirantur, genus humanum ad tam salubrem fidem summo amore atque auctoritate converteret”: “[...] he should be able to despise all that wicked men desire, to suffer all that they dread, to do all that they marvel at, and so with the greatest love and authority to convert the human race to so sound a faith” (Augustinus 2007. 86; Augustine 1959. 5); III. 5: “Si haec per totum orbem iam populis leguntur et cum veneratione libentissime audiuntur; si post tantum sanguinem, tantos ignes, tot cruces martyrum tanto fertilius et uberius usque ad

I think it is not merely a historical curiosity that Aquinas bases his work – and to a considerable extent the whole edifice of his theology – on an insight that played an important role in the different context of evolutionary biology centuries later. Aquinas addresses problems in SCG that show up on different levels of biological organization and cultural complexity in signalling systems, especially when doubts arise about the reliability of the signals, i.e., when the possibility of error and deception appears. I think, therefore, that not only the handicap principle itself, but also the subsequent debates on the handicap principle in evolutionary biology are relevant if we try to understand Aquinas’s handling of the possibility of error and deception in the SCG.

The main issue to be addressed by Aquinas can be reformulated in a context-independent way. Under what conditions can honest communication be warranted if signallers with conflicting interests use conventional signals that – apart from the cost of production – can be arbitrarily cheap, therefore are prone to error and can be easily faked? As we shall see, even in this case – and this is an important result from contemporary debates on the handicap principle – the reliability of signalling can be maintained if the senders of erroneous or deceptive signals can expect a penalty imposed by the recipients for false signalling.

A further difficulty appears if we assume – as Aquinas does, and this is his second assumption I am investigating – that mental states and processes exist, yet they are principally hidden from fellow human beings and only the willing and thinking subject and God have full access to them. Evidently, it also follows that errors as misrepresentations of reality resulting from defective mental operations are principally hidden and – aside from the thinking subject – can only be known by God. Given their hiddenness, how can error and deceptive intent be identified and eliminated? What can human beings do to promote cautious and accurate communication that is in the best interest of cooperative signallers to reduce the chance of costly, occasionally even fatal mistakes?

This is both an epistemological and an ethico-theological problem for Aquinas, since he holds – and this is his third assumption I am going to investigate – that errors are responsible for most of the miseries in human life. In Aquinas’s

barbaras nationes ecclesiae pullularunt;”: “These things are read to the peoples throughout all the earth and are listened to most gladly and with veneration. After all the Christian blood shed, after all the burnings and crucifixions of the martyrs, fertilized by these things churches have sprung up as far afield as among barbarian nations.” (Augustinus 2007. 90; Augustine 1959. 7.) At the same time, Aquinas goes beyond the patristic content when he emphasizes that – in contrast to the characteristics of the signals given by different sects – wastefulness is an essential part of the signals of the apostles and it necessarily indicates a true underlying quality. Furthermore, as we shall see, his insight plays a substantial role in his justification of religious commitment and, as a consequence, in the architecture of the *Summa contra Gentiles*. For the similarities between SCG 1.6 and Raymond Martini’s *Capistrum Iudaeorum* see footnote 38 below.

view, only religion can unite people in a common form of life that, in turn, can lead them to ultimate happiness.

Uniting people in a common form of life by eliminating the errors that are principally hidden, but can give rise to sinful acts of choice and unhappiness: this is the SCG's agenda in which Aquinas's deep personal convictions about the opacity and deceitful nature of human social life and his vocation as a Dominican friar meets.

III. AQUINAS'S FIRST ASSUMPTION: HANDICAPPED SIGNALS PROVIDE RELIABLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE QUALITY THEY DISPLAY

1. *Double truth and assent*

The first nine chapters of the first book of the *Summa contra Gentiles* are usually regarded as a general introduction to the entire work.¹⁸ At the beginning, Aquinas discusses the office of the wise man and declares that the intention of the author is to manifest the truth the Catholic faith professes, eliminating thereby the errors that are opposed to it.¹⁹ The remaining chapters are mainly concerned with what Aquinas here calls "the double truth with regard to divine things," i.e. with the two ways – natural reason and faith – that are available for human beings to access the different aspects of one and the same truth concerning God.²⁰ Concluding the introduction, Aquinas shortly discusses the order and the manner he follows when proceeding with his work.²¹

¹⁸ See, e.g., Torrell 1996. 107. Torrell says that the first nine chapters of the work seem like a "discourse on method", with the ninth chapter as a summary; see further Corbin 1974. 491–642; Patfoort 1983. 119–124; Jordan 2006. 93–101; Davies 2016. 10. Leonina 16. also refers to SCG 1.1–9 as an introduction to the work: "Introductio et divisio totius operis in quatuor libros" (Leonina 16. 286a and 302).

¹⁹ SCG 1.2: "And so, in the name of the divine Mercy, I have the confidence to embark upon the work of a wise man, even though this may surpass my powers, and I have set myself the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it. To use the words of Hilary I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of Him." (ET 1. 62. n. 2.)

²⁰ SCG 1.3: "There is a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God. Some truths about God exceed all the ability of the human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that He is one, and the like. In fact, such truths about God have been proved demonstratively by the philosophers, guided by the light of the natural reason." (ET 1. 63. n. 2.) See further SCG 1.4, SCG 1.9 and footnote 23 below.

²¹ In the SCG, following a methodological principle often deployed in his works, Aquinas proceeds from what is more manifest to what is less manifest to us. Thus, in the first three books he brings forward "both demonstrative and probable arguments" to make manifest that aspect of "the double truth with regard to divine things," which is accessible to human reason. This is commonly referred to as "natural theology" in the literature. In the first book,

In clarifying the concept of wisdom and exploring the methodological and procedural issues relevant to the SCG, Aquinas uses the argumentative prose that is characteristic to the entire introduction and most of the work. In the sixth chapter, however, the discursive reasoning is intermitted, giving way to narrative argumentation and an unexpected and astounding display of contrast between some features of the Christian and Muslim religions. Compared to the rest of the introduction, the SCG 1.6 has not received much attention and, in my view, has not been interpreted in the appropriate way. This is even more surprising if we take into account that Aquinas discusses a problem here that may be regarded as the single most important question for the philosophy of religion from a Catholic point of view: is there any good reason to consider the assent to the articles of the Catholic faith well-grounded or it is to be regarded as a consequence of a foolish, aleatoric decision-making?²²

In Aquinas's view, the phrase "double truth with regard to the divine things" refers to two different ways in which human beings in the present state can have cognition of God.²³ We can acquire scientific knowledge through demonstrative

Aquinas deals solely with the attributes of God, in the second with the procession of creatures from God, and in the third with the ordering of creatures to God as to their end. In the fourth book, Aquinas proceeds to make manifest the second aspect of truth regarding divine things. As the propositions that represent this aspect of truth (the articles of faith) cannot be known by demonstration, Aquinas uses "probable arguments" and "authorities" to obtain some cognition of what "surpasses reason", as it were "by a kind of intellectual glimpse" (*intellectuali quodam quasi intuitu*) (see SCG 1.9 and SCG 4.1; Leonina 13. 22a-b; Leonina 15. 4a; Marietti 2. 12. n. 54–57; Marietti 3. 243. n. 3342; ET 1. 78. n. 3–4.; ET 4. 36. n. 4). In SCG 1.9, the Latin verb "convincere" occurs several times in relation to certain "adversaries" (*adversarii*) that are not further specified. Gauthier argues that "convincere" here does not have any modern connotation yet ("to persuade someone of something"). Aquinas uses it in the ancient sense ("refuting someone's error"), in connection with what he considers the double service of the wise man to be (*officium sapientis*): making manifest the truth and refute the errors (Gauthier 1993. 150–156; see further Gauthier's introduction to the critical edition of Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*: Leonina 45,1. 289*– 293*). The misunderstanding of the term, according to Gauthier, may have significantly contributed to the attribution of apologetic intent to Aquinas when writing the *Summa contra Gentiles*. Beyond a significant number of case-studies, detailed and in-depth analyses of Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* are provided by Norman Kretzmann and Brian Davies (Kretzmann 1997; Kretzmann 1999; Davies 2016). My present paper offers a short walk on the other side of Aquinas's work, thus making a contribution to the investigations on the outskirts of his metaphysics and theology that – to my knowledge – do not exist in great numbers yet. Still, I also attempt to achieve what many traditional inquiries do: contribute to the reconstruction of his metaphysics and theology, by revealing Aquinas's assumptions. After all, it is mindreading through the ages.

²² This can be reformulated in a generalized form as the fundamental problem of the philosophy of religion. There is an important caveat though. In Aquinas's view, propositions such as "God exists," "God is one" and the like do not properly belong to the religion as their truth can be demonstrated. Being scientific claims about God, they have special status: they constitute a body of propositions that are famously called *praeambula fidei* by Aquinas.

²³ SCG 1.9: "Dico autem duplicem veritatem divinarum, non ex parte ipsius Dei, qui est una et simplex veritas; sed ex parte cognitionis nostrae, quae ad divina cognoscenda diversimode se habet." "I am speaking of a twofold truth of divine things, not on the part of God

arguments about certain attributes of God such as “God exists, He is one and the like”²⁴ and we can have cognition – not knowledge in the proper sense – of other attributes of God through faith when we assent to indemonstrable claims such as God is triune.²⁵ According to Aquinas, giving assent to a proposition amounts to considering it to be true, i.e. accepting it and holding it without doubt and without any fear that the contradictory proposition is true.²⁶ In the case of demonstrative sciences, we acquire knowledge by natural reason and the object of science is a sufficient cause of the assent itself. We assent to the principles of

Himself, Who is truth one and simple, but from the point of view of our knowledge, which is variously related to the knowledge of divine things” (ET 1. 77. n. 1). Aquinas’s “duplex veritas divinatorum” (“the double truth with regard to divine things”) has nothing to do with the so-called “theory” of “double truth,” one of the most notorious chimaeras of the historical imagination (for the historiography of the “theory of double truth” that never existed, see: Van Steenberghe 1974b).

²⁴ See further SCG 3.39: “[...] demonstration shows that God is immutable, eternal, incorporeal, altogether simple, one, and other such things which we have shown about God in Book One” (ET 3/1. 127. n. 1). Yet, in Aquinas’s view, these and further demonstrable propositions about God are also “presented to men by way of faith.” Should this latter not be the case, inconveniences would follow. Firstly, only a few people could have knowledge of God (for many people, it is not or it cannot be a part of their daily routine to analyse propositions and arguments about God), secondly, even for these few people it would require “a great deal of time” to reach this knowledge, and, thirdly, theoretical discord would prevail even among those who are said to be wise, because sometimes falsity is mingled with the truth and probable or sophisticated arguments “has the credit of being a demonstration.” (SCG 1.4; ET 1. 66–68. n. 1–6.) For Aquinas’s concept of science and demonstration, see MacDonald 1993. For a detailed analysis of the first book of SCG, see Kretzmann 1997 and Davies 2016. 17–136.

²⁵ See footnotes 15 and 20 above.

²⁶ Although Aquinas talks about “perfect,” “certain” or “firm” assent that characterizes scientific knowledge and the non-discursive understanding of principles, he does not seem to regard “assent” as a spectrum concept that can be marked by different attitude intensities. In Aquinas’s view, we do not have assent at all when we have an opinion about something, because an opinion implies acceptance only with fear that the other member of a pair of contradictory propositions is true. Similarly, when we are in doubt about something, we do not have assent either, as we “fluctuate” between the members of a pair of propositions. See, e.g., his remarks in his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* and BDT below. Both works were written during Aquinas’s first regency in Paris (1256–1259), shortly before or perhaps – in part – at the same time as Aquinas embarked on writing the SCG. DV 14.1: “[...] non enim dicimur alicui assentire nisi quando inhaeremus ei quasi vero; similiter etiam dubitans non habet assensum, cum non inhaereat uni parti magis quam alteri; similiter etiam nec opinans, cum non firmetur eius acceptio circa alteram partem.” [...] Et haec est dispositio opinantis, qui accipit unam partem contradictionis ‘cum formidine alterius.’ [...] “ista est dubitantis dispositio qui fluctuat inter duas partes contradictionis” (Leonina 22, 437b and 436b). BDT 3.1: “Cum scientia siquidem et intellectu commune habet certum et fixum assensum; in quo ab opinione differt, quae accipit alterum contrarium cum formidine alterius, et a dubitatione, quae fluctuat inter duo contraria.” See, however, BDT 3.1, ad 4, where he is talking about assent in connection with opinion: “Ad quartum dicendum, quod quaecumque acceptis aliquo modo assentitur, oportet esse aliquid quod inclinet ad assensum, sicut lumen naturaliter inditum in hoc quod assentitur primis principiis per se notis, et ipsorum principiorum veritas in hoc quod assentitur conclusionibus scitis et aliquae verisimilitudines in hoc quod assentimus his quae opinamur [...]” (Leonina 50, 107a. and 109a). For the concept of assent in Aquinas see Stump 1991. 183–193 and Stump 2003. 361–366.

sciences as soon as we apprehend their truth by understanding the terms that make them up, and we assent to the conclusions when we have reduced them to their principles in a valid, demonstrative syllogism.²⁷ Since we have immediate knowledge of the self-evident principles and we are forced to assent to the conclusions by these principles, intellectual assent in demonstrative sciences is a result of cognitive processes alone and does not leave any room for our choices.²⁸ Consequently, a proposition that has been demonstrated about God cannot be denied reasonably by anyone, as it yields knowledge in the strict sense. This is what Aquinas indicates when he says in SCG 1.2 that “all men are forced to give their assent” to natural reason, i.e., everyone is forced to give their assent to the first, self-evident principles and to the conclusions of valid syllogisms.²⁹

²⁷ For the paradigmatic and non-paradigmatic forms of *scientia* in Aquinas see MacDonald 1993. 174–179.

²⁸ DV 22.6: “[...] in scientiis demonstrativis conclusiones hoc modo se habent ad principia quod remota conclusione removetur principium: et sic propter hanc determinationem conclusionum respectu principiorum, ex ipsis principiis intellectus cogitur ad consentiendum conclusionibus. (Leonina 22, 629a). BDT 3.1, ad 4: “Set illud quod inclinatur ad assentiendum principiis intellectis aut conclusionibus scitis, est sufficiens inductivum, et ideo etiam cogit ad assensum et est sufficiens ad iudicandum de illis quibus assentitur” (Leonina 50, 109a). The possibility of error is the consequence of composition, division and reasoning; see section V.4 below. SCG 1.61: “Intellectus in primis principiis non errat, sed in conclusionibus interdum, ad quas ex principiis primis ratiocinando procedit”, “[...] the intellect does not err in the case of first principles; it errs at times in the case of conclusions at which it arrives by reasoning from first principles” (Leonina 13. 174b; Marietti 2. 72. n. 509; ET 1. 205. n. 4).

²⁹ SCG 1.2: “Unde necesse est ad naturalem rationem recurrere, cui omnes assentire coguntur” (Leonina 13. 6b; Marietti 2. 4. n. 11; ET 1. 62. n. 3). For the same reason, it is not surprising that Aquinas accepts or rejects philosophical and theological claims in the first three books of SCG solely on the basis of whether they are based on true premises and valid reasoning or not. Consequently, Aquinas’s assessment of a claim or an argument in the first three books has nothing to do with the religious affiliation of its author. This is the case even if religious affiliation regularly appears as a marker in Aquinas’s often vague references to the authors of errors, usually only at the end of the individual chapters (he famously refers to the difficulty to proceed “against the errors of particular persons”; see footnote 180 below). A striking example of this substantial decoupling of theoretical position and religious affiliation is given by the first two chapters of the work after the introductory part (SCG 1.10–11), where Aquinas argues against the “opinion” of “some people” who say that the existence of God – being self-evident – cannot be demonstrated (Leonina 13. 23–25; Marietti 2. 13–14. nn. 59–71; ET 1. 79–83). Now, we know that one of these people is certainly identical with Anselm of Canterbury who had been canonized almost a century before Aquinas was attempting to refute his error in SCG 1.10–11. (For Aquinas’s rejection of Anselm’s argument see Klima 2000; above all pages 79–83). As for Aquinas’s natural theology and the supposed missionary intent of SCG, see Stump 2003. 27: “But nobody, and certainly not Aquinas, could have supposed that Muslims or Jews needed to be argued into perfect-being monotheism of the sort developed in those first three books, which contain nothing that he would have taken to be contrary to Judaism or Islam. If Aquinas had intended *Summa contra Gentiles* as a manual for missionaries to educated Muslims, Jews or Christian heretics, he would have wasted the enormous effort represented in the 366 copiously argued chapters of Books I–III [...]” See further Kretzmann 1997. 50: “The appropriate audience for the teaching attempted in all the arguments of all those chapters in the first three books would be made up of intelligent,

With regard to the second aspect of truth, however, God's greatest perfection can only be represented by "a most imperfect operation of the intellect", for the intellect is not able to grasp the content of faith in its entirety. The object of faith itself, being incomprehensible, is not sufficient to move the intellect to assent.³⁰

2 The cause of assent: will

What is then the cause of the assent in this case? What moves us when we give our assent to incomprehensible propositions that are supposed to represent God's true nature? In the absence of cognitive constraints or, what is more, in the presence of counterintuitive features that even seem to support many people's inclination towards dissent, our assent can be caused by the will alone.³¹

educated atheists, and I don't believe Aquinas ever met an avowed atheist." See also footnote 7 above.

³⁰ See SCG 3.40: "In cognitione autem fidei invenitur operatio intellectus imperfectissima quantum ad id quod est ex parte intellectus, quamvis maxima perfectio inveniatur ex parte obiecti: non enim intellectus capit illud cui assentit credendo." "But, in the knowledge of faith, there is found a most imperfect operation of the intellect, having regard to what is on the side of the intellect, though the greatest perfection is discovered on the side of the object. For the intellect does not grasp the object to which it gives assent in the act of believing." (Leonina 14. 99a; Marietti 3. 46. n. 2175; ET 3/1. 131. n. 2.)

³¹ Since "that which is above the human reason we believe only because God has revealed it" (SCG 1.9; ET 1. 77. n. 2), the articles of faith cannot possibly be proved by demonstrative arguments. In Aquinas's view, arguments intended as demonstrations for any of these articles are "frivolous". They provide unbelievers an opportunity to ridicule the believers, for unbelievers think that believers give their assent to the articles of faith for such absurd reasons (see, e.g., ST 1a.32.1: "For when people want to support faith by unconvincing arguments, they become a laughing stock for the unbelievers, who think that we rely on such arguments and believe because of them." For the translation see Davies 1992. 190. It is Aquinas's permanent concern to find and deactivate pseudo-demonstrations in defence of the Catholic faith. See, e.g., his admonitions regarding the attempts to prove demonstratively that the world is not eternal. SCG 2.38: "Hae autem rationes quia non usquequaque de necessitate concludunt, licet probabilitatem habeant, sufficit tangere solum, ne videatur fides Catholica in vanis rationibus constituta, et non potius in solidissima Dei doctrina." "Now, these arguments, though not devoid of probability, lack absolute and necessary conclusiveness. Hence, it is sufficient to deal with them quite briefly, lest the Catholic faith might appear to be founded on ineffectual reasonings, and not, as it is, on the most solid teaching of God." (Leonina 13. 355a; Marietti 2. 154. n. 1142; ET 2. 113. n. 8.) See further QQ III.14.2 co.: "Respondeo. Dicendum, quod ea quae simplici voluntati divinae subsunt, demonstrative probari non possunt, quia, ut dicitur I ad Cor. II, 11, quae sunt Dei, nemo novit nisi spiritus Dei. Creatio autem mundi non dependet ex alia causa nisi ex sola Dei voluntate; unde ea quae ad principium mundi pertinent, demonstrative probari non possunt, sed sola fide tenentur prophetice per spiritum sanctum revelata, sicut apostolus post praemissa verba subiungit: nobis autem revelavit Deus per spiritum sanctum. Est autem valde cavendum ne quis ad ea quae fidei sunt, aliquas demonstrationes adducere praesumat, propter duo. Primo quidem, quia in hoc derogat excellentiae fidei, cuius veritas omnem rationem humanam excedit, secundum illud Eccli. III, v. 25: plurima [...] super sensum hominis ostensa sunt tibi; quae autem de-

Aquinas uses a highly metaphorical language of dominion in his various works when he describes the process of committing ourselves to the incomprehensible and indemonstrable articles of the Catholic faith. This language lays emphasis on the fact that our commitment is a result of a purely voluntary act and not a termination of natural cognitive processes.³² Talking about the assent to the articles of faith, the human will is depicted by Aquinas as an independent, extrinsic power³³ that “takes a leading role”³⁴ as it “exercises imperium over” the intellect which is being “taken captive” by the faith of by means of the will.³⁵

monstrative probari possunt, rationi humanae subduntur. Secundo, quia cum plerumque tales rationes frivola sint, dant occasionem irrisionis infidelibus, dum putant quod propter rationes huiusmodi, his quae sunt fidei assentiamus.” “Answer. Things that are up to God’s sheer will are impossible to prove demonstratively, since no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God, as 1 Corinthians 2 says. Yet the creation of the world depends on no other cause than God’s will alone. Hence, things about the beginning of the world are impossible to prove demonstratively. Instead, such things are held by faith alone, as they have been revealed prophetically by the Holy Spirit. [...] Moreover, we should be extremely wary of anyone presuming to offer demonstrations of matters of faith, for two reasons. First, because doing so detracts from the excellence of the faith, whose truth surpasses all human reasoning. As Ecclesiasticus 3 says: Many things beyond human understanding have been shown to you. Whereas things that can be proven demonstratively do not surpass human reasoning. Second, because many of the arguments offered for them are silly, which gives nonbelievers cause to laugh at us, thinking that we believe the matters of faith for such reasons.” (Translated by Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies. Thomas Aquinas 2020. 309–310.) For the role of the will in faith see Stump 1991. 183–193 and Stump 2003. 361–367. For the articles of faith that might support people’s inclination to dissent see Stump 1991. 188, footnote 18.

³² In Aquinas’s view, will and nature are two active principles. See SCG 3.56: “[...] voluntas non tendit in sua volita omnino naturaliter; propter quod voluntas et natura duo principia activa ponuntur.” “[...] the will does not incline to its object in a purely natural way; this is why the will and nature are said to be two active principles.” ET 3/1. 190. See further DP 2.6, ad arg. 1: “Sicut intellectus noster ad credendum inclinatur a voluntate, ad intelligendum prima principia ducitur ex natura.”

³³ See, e.g., In Sent III.23.2.2 qc. 1 co.: “credens [...] habet assensum simul et cogitationem; quia intellectus ad principia per se nota non perducitur: unde, quantum est in se, adhuc habet motum ad diversa, sed ab extrinseco determinatur ad unum, scilicet ex voluntate.”

³⁴ SCG 3.40: “In cognitione autem fidei principalitatem habet voluntas: intellectus enim assentit per fidem his quae sibi proponuntur, quia vult, non autem ex ipsa veritatis evidentia necessario tractus.” “But in the knowledge of faith the will takes a leading role; indeed, the intellect assents through faith to things presented to it, because of an act of will and not because it is necessarily moved by the very evidence of the truth.” (I modified the translation.) (Leonina 14. 99a; Marietti 3. 46. n. 2176; ET 3/1. 131. n. 3.)

³⁵ See, e.g., In Sent III.23.2.2 qc. 1 co.: “Unde et fides captivare dicitur intellectum, in quantum non secundum proprium motum ad aliquid determinatur, sed secundum imperium voluntatis et sic in credente ratio per se intellectum non terminat, sed mediante voluntate.” The intellect as being held captive to obey Christ is a well-known metaphor that comes from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. See 2 Cor 10:5: “[...] in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi [...]” “[...] we take every thought captive to obey Christ.” According to Aquinas’s interpretation, in the case of the assent to the incomprehensible and indemonstrable propositions of the Catholic faith, it is the will, an external power that terminates the intellect’s actions, not the intellect itself. See further DV 14.1: “intellectus [...] terminatur tantum ex extrinseco. Et inde est quod intellectus credentis dicitur esse cap-

However, while these metaphors emphasize the dramatic nature of the choice of faith and the moral weight of the act of the will, they do not accurately represent the principles Aquinas relies on when analyzing the interplay between the different powers of the human soul. Aquinas argues that even though the human will take a leading role when it comes to religious commitment, it is not a self-determining force in an absolute sense. The human will has a natural inclination towards something only because “it has the rational character of a good” which is the will’s proper object.³⁶ If a voluntary act does not prove to be right, it is not because the will is evil in itself (in Aquinas’s view no will can naturally be evil), but because the will’s object – albeit apprehended as something good – is not in accord with reason.³⁷

We can now rephrase the problem: can we ever be certain that assenting to a proposition which is supposed to represent the incomprehensible aspect of God’s nature is in accord with reason, if it is obvious that our assent to the articles of Catholic faith cannot be determined by cognitive constraints as in the case of science?

3. SCG 1. 6

This unraised, nevertheless fundamental question lurks behind the argumentation of SCG 1. 6.³⁸ If our assent is not in accord with reason, then – as the text

tivatus quia tenetur terminis alienis et non propriis. II Cor. X, 5 ‘in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum’ etc.;” (Leonina 22. 437b–438a).

³⁶ SCG 3.16: “[...] voluntas, quae est appetitus finis praecogniti, non tendit in aliquid nisi sub ratione boni, quod est eius obiectum,” “the will, which is the appetite for a foreknown end, inclines toward something only if it has the rational character of a good, which is its object” (Leonina 14. 38b; Marietti 2. 18. n. 1988; ET 3/1. 70. n. 4). For faith and goodness in Aquinas see Stump 1991. 179–207 and Stump 2003. 363–370.

³⁷ SCG 3.107: “In unoquoque habente intellectum, naturali ordine intellectus movet appetitum: proprium enim obiectum voluntatis est bonum intellectum. Bonum autem voluntatis est in eo quod sequitur intellectum: sicut in nobis bonum est quod est secundum rationem, quod autem est praeter hoc, malum est. Naturali igitur ordine substantia intellectualis vult bonum.” “[...] in each thing that possesses understanding the intellect moves the appetite according to the natural order, for the proper object of the will is the good that is understood. But the good of the will consists in the fact that it follows the understanding; in our case, for instance, the good is what is in accord with reason, but what is apart from reason is evil. So, in the natural order, an intellectual substance wills the good.” (Leonina 14. 336b; Marietti, 2. 162. n. 2827; ET 3/1. 102. n. 8.)

³⁸ On the obvious similarities of SCG 1.6 and a part of the Catalan Dominican Raymond Martini’s *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (1267) see Marc 1967. 65–72. For the publication of the parallel passages see pages 65–69. Marc’s arguments for the dependence of SCG 1.6 from the *Capistrum Iudaeorum* found a favourable reception in Murphy 1969. 408–409 and 412, Burns 1971. 1409, Tolan 2002. 242 and Tolan 2012. 524. Marc is undoubtedly right when saying that “inter duos supradictos passus tam multae sententiae et etiam verba utriusque communia adsunt ut certum sit unum auctorem alterius opus prae oculis habuisse dum proprium librum componeret. Quaestio igitur est, quis alterius opus usurpaverit, ex intrinsicis indicis utriusque

implies – Catholic believers commit themselves to the truth of the articles of faith lightly (*leviter*) as if they were “following artificial fables”, i.e. following what is “apart from reason” (*praeter rationem*).³⁹ Aquinas uses the adverbial form

textus determinanda.” (Marc 1967. 69.) However, we can be basically certain now that SCG had been written before 1267 (see footnote 6 above). For that reason alone, it seems unlikely that Aquinas borrowed from Raymond Martini’s work (provided that Raymond’s work was really completed in 1267 as he himself says; see Marc 1967. 55). In addition to his apparently misguided chronology, Marc’s arguments for the dependence of Aquinas from Raymond Martini do not seem convincing. Firstly, although Marc is right that “ista communia elementa uterque scriptor ad proprium propositum assumpsit”, this obviously does not imply that it is Aquinas who borrows from Raymond (Marc 1967. 69). Secondly, neither the different order of periods of time in the texts, nor the less clear and abbreviated references of Aquinas prove his dependence on Raymond’s work (Marc 1967. 69–71). As a matter of fact, both observations are consistent with the assumption that Raymond was paraphrasing Aquinas’s text. Thirdly, what Marc sees as a lapsus from Aquinas’s part is a simple misunderstanding of Aquinas’s “et” from Marc’s part in the following passage: “quibus inspectis, praedictae probationis efficacia, non armorum violentia, non voluptatum promissione, et, quod est mirabilissimum, inter persecutorum tyrannidem, innumerabilis turba non solum simplicium, sed sapientissimorum hominum, ad fidem Christianam convolvit.” “Et” in this passage is clearly reinforces and enhances what is being said and its meaning is: “and, what is more” (Marc 1967. 71–72). But, in addition to the chronology, the most obvious indicator of Raymond Martini paraphrasing Aquinas is what Raymond says at the beginning of the parallel passages found in the *Capistrum*: “ars autem ratiocinandi obtime ex suis effectibus causas concludere docet.” Now, the same sentence with some seemingly minor differences can be found in SCG 1.12: “huius autem sententiae falsitas nobis ostenditur, tum ex demonstrationis arte, quae ex effectibus causas concludere docet.” Why would Aquinas, an erudite and sophisticated philosopher and logician (he refers twice to the *Posterior Analytics* in SCG 1.12 alone) borrow such a sentence from Raymond Martini? Why would he use this sentence in SCG if it so clearly needs an improvement by a substitution of “ars ratiocinandi” with “ars demonstrationis” and by an omission of “optime”? Why would Aquinas apply this particular principle borrowed from Raymond in a chapter where he argues against those who say that God’s existence cannot be demonstrated, but is held by faith alone? It does not make sense at all. However, the occurrence of this sentence in the *Capistrum* makes perfect sense if we suppose that it is Raymond Martini – paraphrasing Aquinas – who tries to support his argument with what he thinks is a useful principle borrowed from Aquinas’s work. And the same is certainly true for the rest of his paraphrase. On Raymond Martini’s life and activities see Berthier 1936. 267–311; Cohen 1982. 129–169; Chazan 1989. 115–136; Tolan 2002. 234–242; Vose 2009. 105–106. 112–115. and 223–225; Burman 2012. 381–390; Bobichon 2013. 405–414; Tischler 2015. 25–28. Aquinas and Raymond Martini might have been together at St. Jacques in Paris sometime between 1245–1248 (Vose 2009. 113; Bobichon 2013. 407). For an edition of the passages from the *Capistrum* which concern the Prophet Muhammad see Di Cesare 2012. 301–305. On the possible dependence of the *Capistrum* from the *Summa contra Gentiles*, see Jordan 2006. 92, footnote 13; Huerga 1974. 542–545.

³⁹ SCG 1.6: “Huiusmodi autem veritati, cui ratio humana experimentum non praebet, fidem adhibentes non leviter credunt, quasi indoctas fabulas secuti, ut 2 Petr. 1–16, dicitur.” “Those who place their faith in this truth, however, for which the human reason offers no experimental evidence, do not believe foolishly (*leviter*), as though following artificial fables (2 Peter 1:16).” (Leonina 13. 17a. Marietti 2. 8. n. 35. ET 1. 71. n. 1.) For Aquinas’s references see Gregorius Magnus: *Homiliae in evangelia* lib. 2, homilia 26: “Sed sciendum nobis est quod divina operatio, si ratione comprehenditur, non est admirabilis; nec fides habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebet experimentum” (Gregorius Magnus 1999. 218) and 2 Pt 1:16 “[...] non enim doctas fabulas secuti notam fecimus vobis Domini nostri Iesu Christi virtutem et praesentiam [...]” According to Aquinas, “imagination” (*phantasia*) can metaphorically refer to

of the term “levity” (*levitas*) in his various works with reference to commitments based on insufficient reasoning and in connection with error and deception.⁴⁰

Now, as we have seen, arguments intended as demonstrations for the articles of faith are “frivolous” and give “nonbelievers cause to laugh at us, thinking that we believe the matters of faith for such reasons.”⁴¹ Besides, demonstrative arguments for the propositions that represent the hidden aspect of God’s true nature – if such arguments could be constructed at all – would deprive faith of its meritorious character.⁴²

the erroneous choice of the intellect: see DP 6.6 ad 3: “Utitur autem metaphorice” (i.e., Dionysius) “nomine phantasiae pro intellectu errante in eligendo.” In contrast to human reason which “is always correct either in that it is disposed toward first principles about which it does not err, or in that error results from defective reasoning rather than the properties of reason,” it is an essential property of imagination that it apprehends the images or likenesses of absent (including non-existent) things. As a consequence, its operation leads to error. See DM 7.5 ad 6: “Ad sextum dicendum, quod ratio semper dicitur recta vel secundum quod se habet ad prima principia, circa quae non errat, vel quia error non evenit ex proprietate rationis, sed magis ex eius defectu. Ex proprietate vero phantasiae consequitur error, in quantum apprehendit similitudines rerum absentium.” (For the English translation see Thomas Aquinas 2003. 291). For “praeter rationem” see SCG 3.107 in footnote 37.

⁴⁰ The term “levitas” appears in the title and in the chapter itself. Although only a part of the autograph is extant (see footnote 2 above), the manuscript tradition seems to be reliable with regard to the titles: see Leonina 15. XXVI–XXXVIII, where a list of the titles of the chapters is to be found. The title of SCG 1.6 has only two marginal, less intelligible versions. Following Augustine, Aquinas says that a “light-minded consideration” (*existimatio levis*) is always present when it comes to error and deception: “quidam dixerunt quod in nomine deceptionis duo possunt intelligi, scilicet qualicumque existimatio levis, qua aliquis adhaeret falso tanquam vero, sine assensu credulitatis; et iterum firma credulitas” (ST 1a.94.4 co). For the description of error included in this passage see Augustine: *Enchiridion* V, 17: “pro uero quippe approbat falsum, quod est erroris proprium” (Augustinus 1969. 57). See further footnote 42 below.

⁴¹ See footnote 31 above.

⁴² In ST 2a2ae.2.9 (“Whether it is meritorious to believe”) Aquinas raises an objection that revolves around the same dilemma: “Praeterea, ille qui assentit alicui rei credendo aut habet causam sufficienter inducentem ipsum ad credendum, aut non. Si habet sufficiens inductivum ad credendum, non videtur hoc ei esse meritorium, quia non est ei iam liberum credere et non credere. Si autem non habet sufficiens inductivum ad credendum, levitatis est credere, secundum illud Eccli. XIX, qui cito credit levis est corde, et sic non videtur esse meritorium. Ergo credere nullo modo est meritorium.” “Furthermore, he who assents to something in believing either has a cause sufficiently inducing him to believe or [he does] not. If he does have something sufficient inducing him to believe, this does not seem to be meritorious for him, because he is no longer free to believe or not to believe. If he does not have something sufficient inducing him to believe, believing is frivolous (*levitatis est credere*), according to Sirach 19, ‘He who believes quickly is not serious in heart (*levis est in corde*).’ And so it does not seem to be meritorious. Therefore to believe is in no way meritorious.” (translated by Mark D. Jordan, see Thomas Aquinas 1990. 88–89). In his answer Aquinas denies the consequence: we do not believe lightly as we have something sufficient that induces us to believe, i.e., the authority of divine teaching confirmed by miracles and “an inward impulse towards God, who invites” us (translated by Mark D. Jordan, see Thomas Aquinas 1990. 90).

What else could we rely on in an attempt to justify the assent to the articles of faith? And how could we avoid destroying thereby the moral weight we attribute to faith?

Drawing on the classical division of the two parts of logic, judicative and inventive, Aquinas distinguishes between “one process of reasoning that brings on necessity, in which no failure of truth is possible, and through the process of this sort of reasoning the certainty of knowledge scientia is produced” (judicative part, analytics) and “another process of reasoning which in most cases results in truth, without, however, carrying necessity” (inventive part, dialectics).⁴³ Although this latter process of reasoning “does not produce knowledge” and “absolute certitude”, it produces “belief or opinion on account of the probability of the propositions from which it proceeds” and a “certain degree” of certitude “is reached accordingly as the process more or less approaches perfect certitude.”⁴⁴

Now, as Aquinas clarifies in the last, methodological and procedural chapter of his introduction to the SCG, we are able to “make manifest” the second aspect of truth with regard to divine things that we cannot demonstrate by deploying “probable reasonings” based on “the authority of Scripture” which is “divinely confirmed by miracles.” And, even though such arguments cannot force our “adversaries” to accept our claims and arguments, they can only be used – as Aquinas puts it – “for the training and consolation of the faithful.”⁴⁵ Still, these arguments might be apt to approach perfect certitude to such an extent that believers cannot regard their faith as unjustified. Apparently, Aquinas does

⁴³ See Cicero, *Topica* 2. 6: “[...] omnis ratio diligens disserendi duas habeat partis, unam inveniendi alteram iudicandi [...]” (Cicero 1891. 426) or “[...] omnis ratio diligens disserendi duas habeat artes, unam inveniendi alteram iudicandi [...]” (Cicero 2003. 118). See further Boëthius’s *In Isagogen Porphyrii* 1. 2 (Boëthius 1906. 139: “omnis ratio diligens disserendi duas habeat partes, unam inveniendi, alteram iudicandi”) and Boëthius *De topicis differentiis* I. (PL 64. 1173C; Boëthius 1978. 29 tr. by Eleonore Stump): “The whole science of discourse (*ratio disserendi*), which the ancient Peripatetics called ‘logiké,’ is divided into two parts: one of discovering, the other of judging.”

⁴⁴ See In LP 1.1 (*Proemium*) (Leonina I. 2 5b–6b). For the English translation of Aquinas’s preface to his commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* see: Copeland–Sluiter 2012. 790–791. See further MacDonald 1993. 180.

⁴⁵ SCG 1.9: “Singularis vero modus convincendi adversarium contra huiusmodi veritatem est ex auctoritate Scripturae divinitus confirmata miraculis: quae enim supra rationem humanam sunt, non credimus nisi Deo revelante. Sunt tamen ad huiusmodi veritatem manifestandam rationes aliquae verisimiles inducendae, ad fidelium quidem exercitium et solatium, non autem ad adversarios convincendos: quia ipsa rationum insufficientia eos magis in suo errore confirmaret, dum aestimarent nos propter tam debiles rationes veritati fidei consentire.” “The sole way to overcome an adversary of divine truth is from the authority of Scripture – an authority divinely confirmed by miracles. For that which is above the human reason we believe only because God has revealed it. Nevertheless, there are certain likely arguments that should be brought forth in order to make divine truth known. This should be done for the training and consolation of the faithful, and not with any idea of refuting those who are adversaries. For the very inadequacy of the arguments would rather strengthen them in their error, since they would imagine that our acceptance of the truth of faith was based on such weak arguments.” (Leonina 13. 22a; Marietti 2. 12. n. 53–54; ET 1. 77–78. n. 2.)

not consider any kind of fideistic salvo here: Catholic religion is either based on some kind of guarantee or confirmation concerning the truth of the contents that exceed natural cognition, or it is based on deception, as Aquinas thinks is the case in other religions. If the articles of faith are “confirmed in a way that is so clearly divine”, says he after laying down the argument in SCG 1.6, then it is “not permissible to believe as false that which we hold by faith.”⁴⁶

Given these points, Aquinas’s rhetoric significantly changes in SCG 1.6.

Firstly, the discursive prose that characterizes the methodological introduction gives way in SCG 1.6 to an argumentation that is based on a historical narrative.

Secondly, compared to the epistemological, methodological and procedural issues of the introduction, a different type of problem is raised by Aquinas in SCG 1.6: under what conditions can we trust the testimonies of those who verbally transmitted the second aspect of truth? What makes the testimony given by the first disciples and the apostles reliable who claimed to have been directly inspired by God to teach the mysteries of Christian faith?

Thirdly, as a consequence, from the last lines of SCG 1.5 that introduces the narrative argumentation of SCG 1.6, Aquinas shifts the focus on God’s representation as an intelligent and voluntary agent – however mighty – who communicates with human beings by giving signs to them.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ SCG 1.7: “Ea enim quae naturaliter rationi sunt insita, verissima esse constat: in tantum ut nec esse falsa sit possibile cogitare. Nec id quod fide tenetur, cum tam evidenter divinitus confirmatum sit, fas est credere esse falsum.” “For that with which the human reason is naturally endowed is clearly most true; so much so, that it is impossible for us to think of such truths as false. Nor is it permissible to believe as false that which we hold by faith, since this is confirmed in a way that is so clearly divine.” (Leonina 13. 19a; Marietti 2. 11. n. 43; ET 1. 74. n. 1.)

⁴⁷ For God as an intelligent and voluntary agent see above all SCG 1.44–71, SCG 1.72–88. (For the expression “voluntate agens et intelligens” see SCG 2.35; Leonina 13. 349b; Marietti 2. 151. n. 1118; ET 2. 106. n. 8.) Being an “agent through His very self” (*agens per se*), God acts through his essence (*per suam essentiam agit*) and – as a consequence – acts “through His will and intellect” with regards to created things and not by a necessity of His nature (SCG 2.8 and SCG 3.75). This is obviously true also if we consider God’s communication with human beings. In SCG 1.6 Aquinas claims that the divine wisdom “reveals its own presence, as well as the truth of its teaching and inspiration, by fitting arguments; and in order to confirm those truths that exceed natural knowledge, it gives visible manifestation to works that surpass the ability of all nature.” These works that “surpass the ability of all nature” are miracles. Now, miracles are generally regarded in the Middle Ages as signs and it is certainly true of God what Aquinas says about intelligent beings: “we do not use signs except in regard to other intelligent beings” (SCG 3.105; for miracles as signs in the Middle Ages see Ward 1987 passim and Ward 2011; for the term “signum” in medieval culture see: Maierú 1981). By performing miracles, God signals his intention to confirm the truth of his teaching, i.e., the “truths that exceed natural knowledge.” Accordingly, Aquinas characterizes the method of theological inquiry in his Sentence-commentary as “a way of talking about those signs that are being brought about to confirm faith” (*modus istius scientiae sit narrativus signorum, quae ad confirmationem fidei faciunt*; In Sent I. Prologus 1.5 corpus) with reference to Mark 16:20 (see below). The methodology of theology as described in this work is clearly consistent

4. *Miracles*

In Aquinas's view, the only way to justify our assent to the second aspect of divine truth is to make sure that the author of the articles of faith – even if these articles are transmitted as the oral teaching of men – is God whose existence, simplicity and certain other attributes such as his veracity and reliability can be known to us by natural reason.⁴⁸

The identification of God, however, as the author of the articles of faith is possible only if God unmistakably signals His authorship. Now, God can unmistakably signal his authorship if and only if it is impossible that natural processes alone or other agents alone produce the signs that are meant to signify God's intentions.⁴⁹ The signs that only God can produce or, if further agents are involved, that cannot be produced without the contribution of God, are miracles.

Although, as we saw before, miracles cannot prove that the articles of faith are true propositions, they still can confirm that the oral teaching of the disciples and apostles is of divine origin.⁵⁰ According to Aquinas's narrative, given the

with what Aquinas says in SCG and elsewhere about the differences between the investigations concerning the two aspects of divine truth. The object of inquiry, however, cannot be, without further ado, considered the same: there seems to be a conflict between God as a perfect being and God as a person represented by the biblical narratives (for this point and for the defence of Aquinas's claims on divine simplicity and immutability, see Davies 2016. 62–71). Now, Aquinas says that the term “persona” – under the definition given by Boëthius: “persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia” – applies to God, because “person” in this sense refers to what is “the most perfect” thing in the whole nature (*perfectissimum in tota natura*) and we have to attribute to God everything that is perfect (see ST 1a.29.3 co.; Boëthius 2000. 214). For the purposes of the present study it is not relevant to examine in what sense exactly and under what conditions the term “person” can or cannot be attributed to the one and three God (for this see Davies 2016. who, for some reason, claims that “God is a person” is a relatively recent mantra”; Davies 2016. 65 and 300–351). It is sufficient that Aquinas holds – clearly in line with the Biblical narrative – that God cooperates and communicates with human beings. See, e.g., SCG 1.6: “The manner of this confirmation is touched on by St. Paul: ‘Which,’ that is, ‘human salvation, having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that hear Him: God also bearing them witness of signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost (Heb. 2: 3–4)’” and SCG 3.154: “And it is said at the end of Mark (16:20): ‘But they going forth preached everywhere: the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with signs that followed.’” (ET 1. 72. n. 2 and ET 3/2. 242. n. 8.)

⁴⁸ See SCG 1.60–62. In Aquinas's view, in God “there is pure truth, with which no falsity or deception can be mingled” and – as a consequence – “no falsity can be proposed to man by God” (SCG 1.61; ET 1. 205. n. 1; SCG 3.118. ET 3/2. 129. n. 3).

⁴⁹ SCG 1.6: “[...] operatio visibilis quae non potest esse nisi divina, ostendit doctorem veritatis invisibiliter inspiratum [...]”; “[...] a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth [...]” (Leonina 13, 17b; Marietti 2, 10. n. 41; ET 1. 73. n. 4).

⁵⁰ As it is used in this context, the term “confirmatio” is of Scriptural origin. Aquinas often refers to Mark 16:20: “illi autem profecti praedicaverunt ubique Domino cooperante et sermonem confirmante sequentibus signis”, and Heb 2: 3–4: “quomodo nos effugiemus si tantam neglexerimus salutem quae cum initium accepisset enarrari per Dominum ab eis qui audierunt in nos confirmata est contestante Deo signis et portentis et variis virtutibus et Spir-

order of providence, the second aspect of divine truth was evident only to those who were being directly instructed by God. They were then verbally passing on their knowledge.⁵¹ They could not prove, however, the truth of their claims, because faith refers to something which is beyond human understanding and, as we saw, cannot “be confirmed by any rational principles in the way of demonstration.”⁵² So God confirmed their oral teachings with miracles, making clear thereby that their teaching comes from God.

Miracles, in this respect, can be regarded as signs that certify the authorship of the message sent by the author with the assistance of further agents.

In a sermon from 1273, that clearly runs parallel with the SCG 1.6, Aquinas compares the reception of the articles of faith to receiving a letter from a king who had sent it “with his own seal”, thus signalling that it proceeds from his will. Similarly, what has been handed down to us about the faith by the apostles and the saints is “marked with the seal of God,” i.e., the miracles, “those deeds which no creature would be able to do, but only God.”⁵³

itus Sancti distributionibus secundum suam voluntatem” (for the English translation see also footnote 47 above). Confirmation of the “truths that exceed natural knowledge” by miracles is seen as an *ipso facto* key for justifying the assent to these truths by Aquinas. See Aquinas’s answer to the objection mentioned in footnote 42: “Ad tertium dicendum quod ille qui credit habet sufficiens inductivum ad credendum, inducitur enim auctoritate divinae doctrinae miraculis confirmatae, et, quod plus est, interiori instinctu Dei invitantis. Unde non leviter credit. Tamen non habet sufficiens inductivum ad sciendum.” “To the third it should be said that he who believes does have something sufficient inducing him to believe. He is induced by the authority of divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by an inward impulse towards God, who invites him. So he does not believe lightly. But he does not have something sufficient inducing to knowledge.” (ST 2a2ae.2.9 ad 3; translated by Mark D. Jordan, see Thomas Aquinas 1990. 90.)

⁵¹ SCG 3.154: “Since man can only know the things that he does not see himself by taking them from another who does see them, and since faith is among the things we do not see, the knowledge of the objects of faith must be handed on by one who sees them himself. Now, this one is God, Who perfectly comprehends Himself, and naturally sees His essence. Indeed, we get faith from God. So, the things that we hold by faith must come to us from God. But, since the things that come from God are enacted in a definite order, [...], a certain order had to be observed in the manifestation of the objects of faith. That is to say, some persons had to receive them directly from God, then others from them, and so on in an orderly way down to the lowest persons.” (ET 3/2. 239–240. n. 1.)

⁵² SCG 3.154: “But because oral teaching that is offered requires confirmation so that it may be accepted, unless it be evident in itself, and because things that are of faith are not evident to human reason, it was necessary for some means to be provided whereby the words of the preachers of the faith might be confirmed. Now, they could not be confirmed by any rational principles in the way of demonstration, since the objects of faith surpass reason. So, it was necessary for the oral teaching of the preachers to be confirmed by certain signs, whereby it might be plainly shown that this oral teaching came from God; so, the preachers did such things as healing the sick, and the performance of other difficult deeds, which only God could do.” (ET 3/2. 242. n. 8.)

⁵³ In Symb I. See Ayo 2005. 23. Aquinas’s sermon-conferences on the Apostles Creed are known as *Expositio super Symbolum Apostolorum* or as *Collationes Credo in Deum*. The Latin text Nicholas Ayo uses for his translation is a Leonine Commission version (Leonina 44. 2, not published yet). The sermon-conferences were probably given by Aquinas in a parish church

Aquinas's narrative in SCG 1.6 gives a short overview of a series of miracles that confirms the second aspect of divine truth, with an emphasis on what he calls "the greatest of miracles."⁵⁴ There is an ascending order in the narrative. First, Aquinas refers to the miracles that he calls later in the SCG "the bodily miracles" ("wonderful cures of illnesses, there is the raising of the dead, and the wonderful immutation in the heavenly bodies") and continues with "the much greater" spiritual ones referring to the disciples and apostles' miraculous spiritual transformation: "what is more wonderful, there is the inspiration given to human minds, so that simple and untutored persons, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, come to possess instantaneously the highest wisdom and the readiest eloquence."⁵⁵

In addition, Aquinas calls "the greatest of miracles" and "a manifest work of divine inspiration" the assent itself to the truths of Catholic faith.⁵⁶ A necessary

of Naples, in the Lent of 1273. The extant text is a *reportatio*, written down and translated from the vernacular into Latin by Reginald of Piperno. See Ayo 2005. 1–6; Eschmann 1956. 425–426; Torrell 1996. 358.

⁵⁴ See footnote 56 below.

⁵⁵ SCG 1.6: "et, quod est mirabilis, humanarum mentium inspiratione, ut idiotae et simplices, dono spiritus sancti repleti, summam sapientiam et facundiam in instanti consequentur" (Leonina 13, 17a; Marietti 2, 9. n. 36; ET 1. 72. n. 1). The spiritual miracles of Christ are referred to SCG 4.55 again where Aquinas answers objections against the suitability (*convenientia*) of God's incarnation, with reference to Hebrew 2:3-4 again: "And not merely bodily miracles were worked through Christ, but spiritual ones as well, and these are much greater namely, by Christ and at the invocation of His name the Holy Spirit is received, and so hearts are inflamed by the affection of divine charity; and minds suddenly are instructed in the knowledge of things divine; and the tongues of the unlettered are rendered skilled for setting divine truth forth to men. But works of this sort are express indications of the divinity of Christ; they are things so pare man was able to do. Hence, the Apostle says that the salvation of men 'which, having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him, God also bearing them witness by signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Spirit' (Heb. 2: 3-4)." (ET 4. 237. n. 11.)

⁵⁶ SCG 1.6: "Quibus inspectis, praedictae probationis efficacia, non armorum violentia, non voluptatum promissione, et, quod est mirabilissimum, inter persecutorum tyrannidem, innumerabilis turba non solum simplicium, sed sapientissimorum hominum, ad fidem Christianam convolvit, in qua omnem humanum intellectum excedentia praedicantur, voluptates carnis cohibentur et omnia quae in mundo sunt contemni docentur; quibus animos mortaliū assentire et maximum miraculorum est, et manifestum divinae inspirationis opus, ut, contemptis visibilibus, sola invisibilia cupiantur." "When these arguments were examined, through the efficacy of the abovementioned proof, and not the violent assault of arms or the promise of pleasure, and (what is most wonderful of all) in the midst of the tyranny of the persecutors, an innumerable throng of people, both simple and most learned, flocked to the Christian faith. In this faith there are truths preached that surpass every human intellect; the pleasures of the flesh are curbed; it is taught that the things of the world should be spurned. Now, for the minds of mortal men to assent to these things is the greatest of miracles, just as it is a manifest work of divine inspiration that, spurning visible things, men should seek only what is invisible." (Leonina 13, 17a; Marietti 2, 9. n. 37; ET 1. 72. n. 1.) This state of affairs (i.e., that the minds of mortal men assent, first, to the truths that surpass every human intellect, second, to the suppression of the pleasures of the flesh and, third, to spurning of the whole world) is regarded by Aquinas as a spiritual miracle itself and – as "the greatest of

concomitant of this assent was, in Aquinas's view, the loosening or even breaking of the bonds that bound the apostles and disciples to their physical and social environment.⁵⁷

Aquinas's characterization of the behaviour of the apostles and disciples (rejection of the sensual pleasures, spurning of the world and seeking only what is invisible by assenting to the second aspect of divine truth) satisfies an important requirement proposed by Aquinas himself in his analysis of the concept of miracle later in SCG. For only those things can "properly be called miraculous", writes Aquinas, "which are done by divine power apart from the order generally followed in things." Furthermore, Aquinas's account seems to entail that for anything to be "the greatest of the miracles" the miracle in question must be the most "removed from the capacity of nature."⁵⁸

The very same narrative, however, raises a serious problem with regard to the success of Christianity. How can a religion be successful in human history if its followers spurn the world, turn away from it and seek only what is invisible?⁵⁹

miracles" – he seems to place it on the same level as incarnation. Aquinas calls incarnation the greatest of the miracles in the fourth book of SCG. See SCG 4.27 on the mystery of incarnation: "[...] nunc incarnationis mysterio restat dicendum. Quod quidem inter divina opera maxime rationem excedit: nihil enim mirabilius excogitari potest divinitus factum quam quod verus Deus, Dei filius, fieret homo verus. Et quia inter omnia mirabilissimum est, consequitur quod ad huius maxime mirabilis fidem omnia alia miracula ordinentur: cum id quod est in unoquoque genere maximum, causa aliorum esse videatur." [...] it now remains to speak of the mystery of the Incarnation itself. Indeed, among divine works, this most especially exceeds the reason: for nothing can be thought of which is more marvelous than this divine accomplishment: that the true God, the Son of God, should become true man. And because among them all it is most marvelous, it follows that toward faith in this particular marvel all other miracles are ordered, since 'that which is greatest in any genus seems to be the cause of the others'." (Leonina 15. 108a; Marietti 3. 301. n. 3635; ET 4. 147. n. 1.)

⁵⁷ See footnote 56 above: "In this faith there are truths preached that surpass every human intellect; the pleasures of the flesh are curbed; it is taught that the things of the world should be spurned."

⁵⁸ In SCG 3.101 Aquinas gives the following definition of miracle: "those things must properly be called miraculous which are done by divine power apart from the order generally followed in things." He adds that "there are various degrees and orders of [...] miracles." "The highest rank among miracles," continues Aquinas, "is held by those events in which something is done by God which nature never could do" and even among these miracles "an order may be observed," in so far as "the greater the things that God does are, and the more they are removed from the capacity of nature, the greater the miracle is" (ET 3/2. 82. n. 1–2). According to Aquinas "miracles are divinely accomplished, when something is done in a thing, which is not within the potency of that thing" (SCG 3.102; ET 3/2. 84. n. 4). For miracles in SCG 3.98–102 and SCG 4, see Davies 2016. 259–262; 267–269; 361–362. For an even more detailed discussion of miracles by Aquinas himself see his *Quaestiones disputatae de potentiali*, Quaestio 6 (De miraculis) (for an English translation see Thomas Aquinas 2012. 161–193). See further ST 3a.43–44, and Davies 2014. 318–319.

⁵⁹ Aquinas clearly thinks that Christianity is the only religion with these characteristics, as it is clear from the introductory remark to what he says about Muhammad and his followers in SCG 1.6: "On the other hand, those who founded sects committed to erroneous doctrines proceeded in a way that is opposite to this" (ET 1. 73. n. 4). See further SCG 1.5 which contrasts Christianity with Judaism: "That is why it was necessary for the human mind to be

This characterization of the faith of the apostles and disciples places a double burden on Aquinas, since the very same features that make their assent and consequent behaviour the “greatest of the miracles” constitutes a serious handicap when it comes to their efficiency to fulfill their mission. Their total renouncement, from a naturalistic point of view, implies a serious waste of capacities that could otherwise contribute to the strengthening of their worldly community and to the successful spread of Christianity.

How can this double burden be resolved? On what condition is it possible for the apostles and disciples to thrive if their wasteful behaviour – again, from a naturalistic point of view – makes them more exposed to the attempts of suppression in a context where conflict of interest prevails?

The only way this would be possible was if this waste made sense, i.e. if the waste was a part of a signal that indicates a true underlying quality. This is Aquinas’s insight on which his narrative argumentation rests in SCG 1.6: the waste which is a substantial part of the signals given by the early followers of Christ provides reliable information about the religious quality they display, for only those can afford wasting their natural reserves and capabilities who really possess the quality indicated by the signals. The gist of the argument can be reformulated as a counterfactual claim: had not total renouncement been a reliable signal of the religious quality of Christianity, Christianity would not be able to thrive in a hostile environment, in spite of the persecutions and in spite of early Christians’ turning away from natural desires.⁶⁰

I would like to briefly highlight two further aspects of the narrative of SCG 1.6.

Firstly, the greatest miracle is not subject to disagreement.⁶¹ Aquinas considers “the wonderful conversion of the world to Christianity” an effect that is “the

called to something higher than the human reason here and now can reach, so that it would thus learn to desire something and with zeal tend towards something that surpasses the whole state of the present life. This belongs especially to the Christian religion, which in a unique way promises spiritual and eternal goods. And so there are many things proposed to men in it that transcend human sense. The Old Law, on the other hand, whose promises were of a temporal character, contained very few proposals that transcended the inquiry of the human reason.” (ET 1. 69. n. 2.)

⁶⁰ The “most miraculous” conversion of the world to Christianity took place not only without the support of worldly forces (“violent assault of arms” and the “promise of pleasure” are mentioned by Aquinas) but despite of it, “in the midst of the tyranny of persecutors.” See footnote 17 and the text in footnote 56 above. At the same time, Aquinas clearly notices that the reliability of the signals of the apostles and disciples was increased by the fact that signalling their total renouncement made them less efficient, i.e., “less well-adapted” to their environment. To this latter point see the next section of this paper and Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. 91.

⁶¹ Aquinas argues that miracles – even if they are directly perceived – cannot be a sufficient cause of the assent to the articles of faith, since they do not necessarily lead to assent. See ST 2a2ae.6.1 co: “As regards the second, namely man’s assent to the things that are of faith, the cause can be considered in two ways. In one way, as an outward inducement, such as a miracle seen or a human persuasion inducing one to faith. Neither of which is a sufficient cause.

most certain indicator” of the reliability of the “signs” given by God “in the past.” This effect is undeniable and so obvious that, he says, “it is not necessary” that the underlying past “signs” given by God “should be further repeated.”⁶²

The structure of Aquinas’s narrative argumentation is reminiscent of his *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God, for he seems to build in SCG 1.6 an inference from an effect accessible to everyone (the conversion of the world to Christianity) to its cause (the divine authorship of the articles of faith). Nevertheless, it cannot be called a proper *a posteriori* argument since, as we saw earlier, Aquinas does not intend to, could not and would not *prove* – in the proper sense, by means of a demonstrative argument – that the articles of faith are true. Aquinas would only like to show us with the help of “a process of reasoning which in most cases results in truth” that the author of the articles of faith is the same God whose certain attributes can be known to us by natural reason.⁶³ Furthermore, Aquinas argues that our assent to these propositions cannot be considered light or foolish (*levis*), as the conversion of the world to Christianity in spite of the hostile environment and the conterintuitive features of the Christian religion is a miracle itself.⁶⁴

Secondly, Aquinas’s unexpected detour into the realm of Christian-Muslim apologetic in the last paragraphs of SCG 1.6 cannot be regarded as a theological reasoning against the main tenets of Muslim religion.⁶⁵ Instead, it is an attempt to compare features that represent true religious quality (the signals of the apos-

Among those seeing one and the same miracle, and those hearing the same preaching, some believe and some do not believe.” (Translated by Mark D. Jordan, see Thomas Aquinas 1990. 138.) See further ST 2a2ae.2.9 in footnotes 42 and 50 above.

⁶² SCG 1.6: “Haec autem tam mirabilis mundi conversio ad fidem Christianam indicium certissimum est praeteritorum signorum: ut ea ulterius iterari necesse non sit, cum in suo effectu appareant evidenter.” Nonetheless God, Aquinas notes, “even in our own time” [...] “does not cease to work miracles through His saints for the confirmation of the faith” (Leoni-na 13. 17a-b; Marietti 2. 9. n. 40; ET 1. 72–73. n. 3).

⁶³ For the probabilistic reasoning see section III.3 above.

⁶⁴ Aquinas’s narrative is extraordinarily strong, because it grounds the effect of those miracles in our common experience that, in Aquinas’s view; confirm the authorship of the articles of faith. This is why he could transform later (in his 1273 Lent sermo mentioned earlier in footnote 53) his narrative into an argument whose compelling power seems to be close to that of a demonstrative argument. “That seal is indeed those deeds which no creature would be able to do, but only God. They are the miracles whereby Christ confirmed the sayings of the apostles and the saints. If you say that no one sees a miracle happen, I would reply thus. It is a fact that the entire world cultivated idols, as the very history of the pagans’ shows. But how were all of them converted to Christ, both the wise and the rich, both the powerful and the multitude, by the preaching of simple men who were poor and few in number, preaching poverty and flight from delights? Either this fact is miraculous or not. If it is miraculous, I have made my point. If it is not miraculous, I say that there cannot be a greater miracle than the world should be converted without miracles. No need to search any further. So therefore no one ought to doubt about faith, but ought to believe those things of faith more surely than those which one sees, because human sight can be deceived, but the knowledge of God is never mistaken.” (Ayo 2005. 23–25.)

⁶⁵ For this point see footnote 29 above.

ties and disciples) with those that indicate error and deception (the misleading signals of the founder of a false religion).⁶⁶ This explains why Aquinas enumerates the Prophet Muhammad's promises, precepts and deeds as opposed to the first Christians' faith and behaviour instead of talking about the doctrines of *Saraceni* or *Mahumetistae*. Aquinas uses Muhammad's person only as an example – however suitable he thinks it is – that illustrates the seductive way of the many founders of “false sects” (*sectae errorum*).⁶⁷

The contraposition of the seduction and the promises of carnal pleasures on the one hand, and the pursuit of the invisible, on the other, unveils a deeper and broader divide that leads us back to the main objective of the work, i.e., to eliminate all errors by manifesting the truth of faith. For to get seduced by a founder of a false sect is only possible if those who are seduced follow an order in the false belief that it will lead them to happiness. Only those, says Aquinas, who are deceived, i.e. who are in error voluntarily enter into a worse state.⁶⁸

Now, the followers of false sects cannot avoid being in error as long as they are being deceived in regard to the proper good of men, i.e., the end to which

⁶⁶ Following the order Aquinas presents his point: Muhammad seduces his followers with the promises of carnal pleasure, whereas the first Christians curb carnal pleasures, spurn visible things and seek only what is invisible; Mohammad's “proofs of the truths of his doctrine can be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom” and in his teaching even truths are mingled with fables and falsity, whereas the first Christians possess the highest wisdom and preach truths “that surpass every human intellect”; Muhammad does not bring forth any supernatural signs, whereas the first Christian's teachings are confirmed by miracles, including the greatest of the miracles; the only signs Muhammad gives are the signs of violence which is characteristic to robbers and tyrants and Muhammad forces others to become his followers “by the violence of his arms”, whereas the first Christians find followers through the efficacy of the miracles that accompany their operations and not by means of the “violent assault of arms or the promise of pleasure”, what is more, “in the midst of the tyranny of the persecutors”; Muhammad's actions are not offered any witness by the preceding prophets, he perverts “almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments” and bans their reading, whereas the first Christians' actions come as a result of the disposition of God and is being foretold by the ancient prophets whose books are held in veneration among Christians. See ET 1. 73–74. n. 4.

⁶⁷ SCG 1.6: “Hi vero qui sectas errorum introduxerunt processerunt via contraria: ut patet in Mahumeto qui carnalium voluptatum promissis, ad quorum desiderium carnalis concupiscentia instigat, populus illexit.” “On the other hand, those who founded sects committed to erroneous doctrines preceded in a way that is opposite to this. The point is clear in the case of Mohammed. He seduced (*illexit*) the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us.” (Leonina 13, 17b. Marietti 2, 9. n. 41. ET 1. 73. n. 4.) In his characterization of Muhammad's activity Aquinas mainly draws upon the “Apology” of Pseudo Al-Kindi, known to him probably through Vincent of Bauvais's *Speculum historiae* (see Van Riet 1976. 150–160; Gauthier 1993. 119–127; for Pseudo Al-Kindi on Muhammad see “The Letter of the Saracen and the Response of the Christian” in Di Cesare 2012. 122–139; see further Tischler 2015. 3–62, esp. 32–33; Bottini 2009. 585–594; Tolan 2002. 242–245; for Vincent of Bauvais see Frunzeanu 2012. 405–415).

⁶⁸ See SCG 2.83: “Nullus enim vult in statum peiorem venire nisi deceptus.” “For no one voluntarily enters into a state worse than the previous one, unless he be deceived.” (Leonina 13. 521b.; Marietti 2, 242. n. 1665. ET 2. 277. n. 17.)

human beings are directed.⁶⁹ Aquinas thinks that the true character of this end was manifested in the teachings of the apostles and disciples whose wasteful signals along with the miraculous spread of Christianity provide a guarantee that these teachings are from God. The ultimate source of error and sin in the case of a member of a false sect is the light assent to those views that pervert the right order of the goods of men making those goods primary and a higher end that should be subordinated.⁷⁰ When they turn away from what is truly good they act slavishly.⁷¹

⁶⁹ In Aquinas's view, the proper good and the end of man as a being of intellectual nature consists exclusively in the contemplation of God. This is the ultimate felicity of man, this is an end that is above human nature and it belongs to the whole species. See SCG 3.37: "[...] ultima felicitas hominis non consistit nisi in contemplatione Dei." "Our ultimate felicity consists only in the contemplation of God" and SCG 3.150 (speaking of Grace): "Unumquodque ordinatur in finem sibi convenientem secundum rationem suae formae: diversarum enim specierum diversi sunt fines. Sed finis in quem homo dirigitur per auxilium divinae gratiae, est supra naturam humanam." "Besides, everything is ordered to an end suitable to it by the rational character of its form, for there are different ends for different species. But the end to which man is directed by the help of divine grace is above human nature." (See Leonina 14. 93b. and 442b; Marietti 3. 43. n. 2160. and 225. n. 3229; ET 3/1. 125. n. 9. and ET 3/2. 232. n. 5). On what ultimate human felicity is and what it is not according to Aquinas (SCG 3.26–63) see Davies 2016. 227–243.

⁷⁰ For the right order of the goods and the choice of a volitional agent to order his own perfection to a higher end see, e.g., SCG 3.108 (a part of an objection to the view that sin can occur in demons; it, nonetheless, represents Aquinas's position): "[...] sin does occur in our act of appetite, because, since our nature is composed of the spiritual and the corporeal, there are several goods for us. Our good in regard to understanding is indeed different from what it is according to sensation, or even according to the body. Now, there is a certain order of these various things that are man's goods, based on the fact that what is less primary is subordinated to what is more primary. Hence, a sin occurs in our will when, failing to observe this order, we desire what is only relatively good for us, in opposition to what is absolutely good" and Aquinas's answer in SCG 3.109: "[...] this kind of volitional agent is God, Whose being is the highest goodness, which is the ultimate end. Hence, in God there can be no sin of the will. But in any other kind of volitional agent, whose proper good must be included under the order of another good, it is possible for sin of the will to occur, if it be considered in its own nature. Indeed, although natural inclination of the will is present in every volitional agent to will and to love its own perfection so that it cannot will the contrary of this, yet it is not so naturally implanted in the agent to so order its perfection to another end, that it cannot fail in regard to it, for the higher end is not proper to its nature, but to a higher nature. It is left, then, to the agent's choice, to order his own proper perfection to a higher end." (ET 3/2. 106. n. 6. and ET 3/2. 109. n. 6–7.)

⁷¹ See, e.g., SCG 4.22: "The will, of course, is ordered to that which is truly good. But if, by reason of passion or of bad habit or disposition, a man be turned away from that which is truly good, he acts slavishly, in that he is diverted by some extraneous thing, if consideration be given the will's natural order itself. But if one considers the act of the will as inclined to an apparent good, one acts freely when he follows passion or a corrupt habit he acts slavishly, of course, if while his will remains such he – for fear of a law to the contrary – refrains from that which he wills. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit inclines the will by love toward the true good, to which the will is naturally ordered, He removes both that servitude in which the slave of passion infected by sin acts against the *order* of the will, and that servitude in which, against the movement of his will, a man acts according to the law; its slave, so to say, not its friend.

It is of the utmost importance, however, to emphasize that – in Aquinas’s view – anyone can be in error, not only the misled followers of the false sects. Aquinas thinks that the “frailty of reason” (“debilitas rationis”) is the greatest “spiritual penalty” for the whole of humankind, alongside with death, which is the greatest bodily penalty.⁷² As error and sin are inextricably connected according to Aquinas, an error with regard to the proper good of men unavoidably leads to sin if the will’s choice is determined by it.⁷³

How can we avoid this? What can a “well-disposed intellect” do to help those whose intellect is improperly disposed?⁷⁴

IV. THE HANDICAP PRINCIPLE

In SCG 1.6, Aquinas’s solution had drawn on an insight that – centuries later – led to the formulation of the handicap principle in evolutionary biology: “waste can make sense.”⁷⁵ Handicapped signals provide reliable information about the quality they display, for only high-quality signallers can afford them, i.e. those

This is why the Apostle says ‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty’ (2 Cor. 3:17); and ‘If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law’ (Gal. 5:18).” (ET 4. 127. n. 6.)

⁷² SCG 4.52: “Patitur autem communiter humanum genus diversas poenas, et corporales et spirituales. Inter corporales potissima est mors, ad quam omnes aliae ordinantur: scilicet fames, sitis, et alia huiusmodi. Inter spirituales autem est potissima debilitas rationis, ex qua contingit quod homo difficulter pervenit ad veri cognitionem, et de facili labitur in errorem; et appetitus bestiales omnino superare non potest, sed multoties obnubilatur ab eis.” “Now, the human race commonly suffers various penalties, both bodily and spiritual. Greatest among the bodily ones is death, and to this all the others are ordered: namely, hunger, thirst, and others of this sort. Greatest of course, among the spiritual penalties is the frailty of reason: from this it happens that man with difficulty arrives at knowledge of the truth; that with ease he falls into error, and that he cannot entirely overcome his beastly appetites, but is over and over again beclouded by them.” (Leonina 15. 163a; Marietti 3. 343. n. 3875; ET 4. 217–218. n. 1.)

⁷³ See, e.g., SCG 3.108: “unless there is an error in the apprehension of the good, there cannot be a sin in the will” (ET 3/2. 104. n. 2).

⁷⁴ For the “well-disposed intellect” (*intellectus bene dispositus*) that “takes pleasure in truth” but “not in lies” see, e.g., SCG 3.106: “Intellectus bene dispositi est reducere homines in ea quae sunt hominum propria bona, quae sunt bona rationis. Abducere igitur ab istis, pertrahendo ad aliqua minima bona, est intellectus indecenter dispositi.” “[...] it pertains to a well-disposed intellect to bring men back to things that are proper goods for men, namely, the goods of reason. Consequently, to lead them away from these goods, by diverting them to the least important goods, is the mark of an improperly disposed intellect.” Similarly: “cum igitur boni sit bonum adducere, cuiuslibet intellectus bene dispositi esse videtur alios perducere ad veritatem.” “since to attract to the good is proper to a good being, it seems to be the function of every well-disposed intellect to bring others to the truth.” Furthermore: “Intellectus bene dispositus veritate allicitur, in qua delectatur, non autem mendaciis.” “Besides, a well-disposed intellect is attracted by truth, takes pleasure in it and not in lies.” (Leonina 14. 334a-b; Marietti 3. 160. n. 2814, n. 2817 and n. 2818; ET 3/2. 98–99. n.4 n. 7 and n. 8.)

⁷⁵ “The Handicap Principle is a very simple idea: waste can make sense, because by wasting one proves conclusively that one has enough assets to waste and more” (Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. 229).

who really possess the quality manifested and do not just fake it. Aquinas uses this insight to propose an argument for the well-foundedness of the assent to the articles of Catholic faith.

What happens if handicapped signals are not available anymore to indicate the true religious quality of the signallers? What if their intentions and thoughts are principally hidden and they mostly communicate with conventional signals that are not difficult to fake? Is there anything that can ensure the reliability of the signals under such conditions? Aquinas addresses problems with regard to reliable signalling in SCG that show up on different levels of biological organization and cultural complexity. I think therefore that the debates on the handicap principle in evolutionary biology can shed some fresh light on the work that has remained a mystery for scholars for so long.

1. The Handicap principle in evolutionary biology

The handicap principle was first formulated in the 1970s in evolutionary biology.⁷⁶ It is based on the intuition that, roughly, the reliability and the cost of a signal is positively correlated in animal communication. If the delivery of a signal is sufficiently expensive, this signal is *ipso facto* reliable, since faking it would require resources that are no longer mobilized by fraudsters.

The principle was formulated as a proposal for solving the puzzle of honest signalling. How is honest signalling possible if individuals who are successful at giving deceptive signals to increase their fitness seem to have an advantage in differential reproduction over honest communicators in competitive interactions?⁷⁷ If dishonest signallers are effective enough, receivers take the deceptive signals at face value and respond accordingly, contributing thus to the increase

⁷⁶ Zahavi 1975; Zahavi 1987; Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. For the precursors of the idea see Getty 2006, 83: “The handicapping analogy is often traced back to Veblin’s concept of conspicuous consumption: the idea that rich people who ‘waste’ a lot of money on luxury goods (the signals) should have more money left in the bank (the unobservable quality) than do poor people who spend little on utilitarian goods. However, there is a more striking and immediate precursor in Vonnegut’s 1961 short story *Harrison Bergeron*, about a fantasy dystopia where human performance is equalized by the Handicapper General. Vonnegut appreciated the signalling possibilities of a handicapping system: ‘it was easy to see that she was the strongest and most graceful of all the dancers, for her handicap bags were as big as those worn by two-hundred-pound men.’” On the honest signalling in economy and the “poor” and sometimes not that poor methodology “employed by many human scientists when using what is typically referred to as ‘costly signalling theory’,” see Grose 2011, esp. 689–693.

⁷⁷ We need not define deception with reference to mental (intentional) states. See, e.g., the following definition of functional deception: “1. A receiver registers something Y from a signaller; 2. The receiver responds in a way that *a.* benefits the signaller and *b.* is appropriate if Y means X; and 3. It is not true here that X is the case.” (Searcy–Nowicki 2005, 5.) For “functional deception” see further Hauser 1996, 569–572, who coined the term. Similarly, “honesty” should not refer to the mental state of a signaller, either: “Honesty is when the

of fitness of the manipulator, while they do not benefit from the interaction. This process should result in a multiplication of deceptively communicating individuals within a given population, which, in turn, would lead to the loss of reliable communication. Nonetheless, reliable signals are produced regularly in animal interactions; what is more, their existence is what makes deception possible. What is it that ensures the survival of reliable signals?

The handicap principle claims that faking reliable signals would cost more to the cheaters than they are willing to bear.⁷⁸ It is important to stress that what cheaters are not willing to pay is not the efficacy cost of the signal (i.e. the cost of its production), but the “waste” or “strategic cost” on top of it.⁷⁹ According to the representatives of the principle, the strategic cost of honest signalling is paid only by the individuals who actually possesses the hidden (unobservable) quality they advertise, that is, they are actually fit enough to bear the strategic cost of the wasteful signal without their fitness being thereby threatened.

One frequently quoted example is the stotting of Thomson gazelles in response to coursing predators.⁸⁰ Their apparently pointless and potentially self-destructive behaviour has long intrigued scholars and the puzzle has just been increased by observations suggesting that wild dogs are less likely to select and chase gazelles with higher stotting rate. In addition, gazelles that escape the attack of the predator are more likely to be stotting during the chase than the ones who eventually fall prey to the predators.⁸¹ So it seems that – surprisingly and somewhat counterintuitively – it is likely that those individuals that sacrifice the most of their resources will most likely survive.

How can we explain this? According to one hypothesis, stotting is an honest signal sent to inform the predators about the ability of the gazelles to outrun them.⁸² The effectiveness of this signal is based on its reliability and its reliability, in turn, on its costliness. For gazelles that are not strong enough, too young or too old, they cannot afford sending as many wasteful signals as the physically more able individuals, as the waste of time and the depletion of available energy reserves would seriously jeopardize them when attacked by predators. Since

sender provides all relevant information to the receiver. Doing so allows the receiver to infer the signaller's state from the signal chosen without ambiguity.” (Hurd–Enquist 2005. 1168.)

⁷⁸ “Willingness,” again, refers here to the presence of physical ability that makes it possible for the individual to give a reliable signal. For another class of signals (index signal), the signal is constrained by the physical or physiological structure of the individual. Consequently, there is no cost for signalling. A small tiger cannot scratch the trunk as high as a larger one. For the distinction between index signals and handicaps see Maynard Smith – Harper 2003. esp. 1–67.

⁷⁹ See Számadó 2012. 280. For the distinction between “efficacy cost” and “strategic cost” see Maynard Smith – Harper 1995. 306–307.

⁸⁰ Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. XIII–XV and 6–7; Fitzgibbon–Fanshawe 1988; see further Walther 1969. 192–196; Caro 1986a; Caro 1986b.

⁸¹ Fitzgibbon–Fanshawe 1988. 71–73.

⁸² Caro 1986a. 654–655; Caro 1986b. 672–674; Fitzgibbon–Fanshawe 1988.

stotting actually wastes the individual's resources, this signal cannot be faked: it is an *ipso facto* confirmation that the individual possesses the hidden unobservable quality indicated.

2. *Honest signalling without handicaps*

After its early formulation in theoretical biology, the handicap principle – in spite of its simplicity and apparent plausibility – was rejected by many as a “laughable nonsense.” Over time, however, it became “the central explanation underlying all forms of animal communication.”⁸³ This wider acceptance was largely due to the works of Alan Grafen and John Maynard Smith.⁸⁴ The conclusion of Grafen's evolutionary game theory model and its confirmation by John Maynard Smith was considered as a proof that in contexts characterized by conflict of interest, the reliability of the signal is ensured by the strategic cost paid: “persuasive signalling necessarily involves waste as only cost can enforce honesty”.⁸⁵

Corroborated by the success of game theory models, Amotz Zahavi, who introduced the handicap principle in the 1970's, started to regard it as the basis for a general theory of reliable signalling. Zahavi thought that all reliable signals should be costly regardless of the context (i.e. the status of recipient: potential partner, rival, enemy, etc.) and reliable signals are selected by a selection algorithm.⁸⁶ The handicap principle or the theory of “costly signalling,” which is often considered equivalent in the literature,⁸⁷ has increasingly been applied in a wide range of social sciences⁸⁸ to such an extent that, according to some, it

⁸³ Pomiankowski–Iwasa 1998. 928. For the initial rejection of the idea see further Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. 229: “The Handicap Principle is a very simple idea: waste can make sense, because by wasting one proves conclusively that one has enough assets to waste and more. The investment – the waste itself – is just what makes the advertisement reliable. This idea seemed so obvious to us that we assumed at first that it must already be widely accepted, and so we searched the existing literature for discussions of it. [...] to our great surprise, this idea, which struck us as self-evident, was bitterly resisted by the scientific establishment.” What seems obvious to one, however, might well seem counterintuitive to others: “Zahavi's initially counterintuitive idea is now generally thought workable by theorists, who at first resisted it” (LaPorte 2002. 88; see further LaPorte 2001).

⁸⁴ Grafen 1990; Maynard Smith 1991.

⁸⁵ Grafen 1990. 532.

⁸⁶ Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. XIV: “in order to be reliable, signals have to be costly”; Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. 58: “all signals have a cost – they impose a handicap – and that is what guarantees that they are reliable”; for the context-independence and signal selection see Zahavi–Zahavi 1997. 40. See further Zahavi 2008. 2: „The handicap principle is an essential component in all signals and shows why signals take the form they do.”

⁸⁷ Grose 2011. 684.

⁸⁸ With regard to the costliness of religious signals and on the explanations of certain characteristics associated with religion as adaptive traits vs. evolutionary byproducts – above all and among many others – see: Alcorta–Sosis 2003; Bulbulia 2004; and Powell–Clarke 2012.

lead to a kind of handicapitis and the proliferation of panglossic pseudo-explanations.⁸⁹

Critics of the uncritical application of the handicap principle drew attention to the fact that to determine whether or not a particular signal is “costly,” i.e., to determine the cost of a given signal, we need to clarify the concept of different cost types, we should be able to properly measure costs and we need an appropriate currency to avoid the currency ambiguity in the cost-benefit profile of the signal.⁹⁰

Furthermore, and this is what leads us back to the SCG of Aquinas, speculations with regard to the scope of the handicap principle should take into account the context in which the signalling takes place.⁹¹ For if there is no conflict of interest between the signaller and receiver, and, consequently, no inclination to mislead each other, signals can be cost-free and honest at the same time, since each participant’s fitness is fostered by the other’s survival.⁹² Therefore wastefulness, in a context without conflicting interest, is not a necessary condition of the reliability of the signal.

What about contexts where conflict of interest prevails or at least plays some role in social interactions?⁹³ Should signals contain strategic cost to maintain honesty if there is a tendency in conflicting individuals to deceive each other?

It appears that they should not.⁹⁴ For the necessary condition of honest communication is not that the signal itself be costly, but that the recipients of the signal be able to verify that the signaller actually has the unobservable quality

⁸⁹ Pomiankowski–Iwasa 1998. 930. As Jonathan Grose pointed out, the theory of costly signalling has been developed parallel in economics and biology. Somewhat surprisingly, human sciences have principally been influenced by biology and not economics. See Grose 2011. 689–690.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Grose 2011. 682–694.

⁹¹ It seems that the representatives of the handicap principle have worked with different concepts of the “signal” when they sought to apply the principle to different contexts. Szabolcs Számadó points out that Alan Grafen has distinguished between “informative” signals and indexes (revealing handicaps) on the one hand and “persuasive” signals on the other. These latter are used by animals in the event of a conflict of interest, and the Grafen model sought only to demonstrate the validity of the handicap principle in relation to persuasive signals. Grafen therefore uses a different concept of “signal” than Zahavi, who extended his theory by reference to the Grafen model (Számadó 2012. 282).

⁹² Maynard Smith 1991. 1035: “Thus it has been shown, for a simple model, that honest signals must be costly if there is a conflict of interest between signaller and receiver, but that cost-free signals can be honest if there is no such conflict.”

⁹³ If Zahavi is right when claiming that “it is difficult to imagine any social interaction in which there is no potential for conflict at some time or another,” then all honest signals must be costly in one way or other (see Zahavi 1993. 227). Nonetheless, possible contexts where all cost-free signals are honest can be imagined as it is certainly the case with Aquinas when he talks about a context where “the uniformity of life,” which means a “uniformity in charity’s way” “preserves us from error” (In DDN 4.11; see footnotes 119 and 175 below).

⁹⁴ Even if conflicting individuals are communicating, some signals will be cost-free and honest, because they will have no or minimal incentive to deceive each other with regard to certain information. What is more, if we suppose that all signalling happens in a social inter-

indicated. Honest communication can be warranted even if signallers use conventional signals which – apart from the cost of production – can be arbitrarily cheap.⁹⁵ Strategic cost appears in these contexts as a potential cost, in so far as dishonest signallers have to expect a penalty imposed by the recipients of the signal. It is therefore not the actual, unbearable cost that keeps cheaters from giving misleading signals, but rather the potential cost of cheating that is higher than the potential gains expected to be realized through deception.⁹⁶

Since the strategic cost of the signal in this case is paid by the signaller as a result of punishment, cautious and accurate communication is in the best interest of an honest signaller to reduce the chance of costly, and possibly even fatal mistakes.⁹⁷

V. AQUINAS'S SECOND ASSUMPTION: MENTAL PROCESSES ARE PRINCIPALLY HIDDEN FROM FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS AND CAN ONLY BE ACCESSED BY GOD.

1. A Great Chain of Degradation

Returning to Aquinas's narrative, the reason we can consider the signals of the apostles and disciples reliable is that their counterintuitive doctrines and counterproductive behaviour imposed a cost that made them less efficient and less well-adapted to their environment.⁹⁸ Their wasteful signals and the successful spread of Christianity, in Aquinas's view, clearly indicate that the early Christians possessed the hidden qualities characteristic to the one true religion.

According to Aquinas, however, the only tool that was available for the early propagators of the doctrines of Christianity – the human language – proved to be ineffective in itself when it came to the second aspect of truth. This is the reason oral utterances representing the hidden aspect of divine truth needed confirmation when early Christians began to preach.⁹⁹ Furthermore, this is why Aquinas

action in which there are potential or actual conflicts, there will still be “guarantee-free” false signals. See LaPorte 2002. 92–94.

⁹⁵ “Conventional signal” refers here to a signal whose meaning is not in any way implied by its form. For this definition see, e.g., Maynard Smith – Harper 2003. 11, 15 and Hurd–Enquist 2005. 1168.

⁹⁶ Lachmann–Számádó–Bergstrom 2001. 13189–13194; Számádó 2011. 3–10; Fraser 2012. 263–278; Higham 2014. 8–11.

⁹⁷ Lachmann–Számádó–Bergstrom 2001. 13191.

⁹⁸ See footnote 60 above.

⁹⁹ See footnote 52 above.

thinks that the role model of the God-man can be a more effective motivating force than words: *facta magis provocant ad agendum quam verba*.¹⁰⁰

Still, in the absence of self-certifying religious signals that cannot permanently be produced on a wider social scale to indicate the possession of true religious qualities, the most accessible tool to present divine teaching is human language.¹⁰¹

Let us see how Aquinas characterized the historical process that had led to a situation where religious quality was not any more as obvious as – in Aquinas’s view – it once had been.

In Aquinas’s narrative, the transmission of the second aspect of the truth concerning God’s true nature took place gradually, following a certain order. God first reveals “invisible things whose vision is beatifying, and to which faith applies” to the angels “through open vision,” then – “by the intermediary ministry

¹⁰⁰ See SCG 4.55: “Et licet homines ad humilitatem informari potuerint divinis sermonibus instructi [...], ut decima octava ratio proponebat: tamen ad agendum magis provocant facta quam verba et tanto efficacius facta movent, quanto certior opinio bonitatis habetur de eo qui huiusmodi operatur. Unde, licet aliorum hominum multa humilitatis exempla invenirentur, tamen expedientissimum fuit ut ad hoc hominis Dei provocarentur exemplo, quem constat errare non potuisse; et cuius humilitas tanto est mirabilior quanto maiestas sublimior.” “One grants also that men instructed by the divine lessons were able to be informed about humility [...] for all that, deeds are more provocative of action than words; and deeds move the more effectively, the more certain is the opinion of the goodness of him who performs such deeds. Hence, although many examples of humility of other men are discoverable, it was most expeditious to arouse men to humility by the example of the God-man. He clearly could not make a mistake, and His humility is the more wondrous as His majesty is the more sublime.” (Leonina 15. 181b; Marietti 3. 356. n. 3951. ET 4. 243. n. 21.)

¹⁰¹ Aquinas thinks that there are and there will be people able to imitate the way of life that is attributed to the role model and his immediate followers. He was certainly convinced that – among others – the members of the Dominican order belong to this group. Their renouncement, in Aquinas’s view, is highly functional, but – as a pattern of behaviour – cannot be extended beyond a reasonable limit. See SCG 3.135: “As a matter of fact, those who adopt voluntary poverty in order to follow Christ renounce all things so that they may serve the common welfare, enlightening the people by their wisdom, learning, and examples, or strengthening them by prayer and intercession.” (“Qui autem voluntariam paupertatem assumunt ut Christum sequantur, ad hoc utique omnia dimittunt ut communi utilitati deserviant, sapientia et eruditione et exemplis populum illustrantes, vel oratione et intercessione sustentantes.”) (Leonina 14. 408a; Marietti 3, 204. n. 3090; ET 3/2. 186. n. 15.) As for the possibilities and limits of action for those people who “renounce all things” see SCG 3.136: “in the case of things that are necessary for the group, it is not necessary for the assignment to be given to each person in the group; indeed, this is not even possible. For it is clear that many things are needed by a group of men, such as food, drink, clothing, housing and the like, which cannot all be procured by one man. And so, different tasks must be given to different persons, just as different organs of the body are directed to different functions.” With regard to sexual activities as a precondition for procreation: “since procreation is not a matter of the need of the individual but of the need of the whole species, it is not necessary for all men to devote themselves to acts of generation; instead, certain men, refraining from these acts, undertake other functions, such as the military life or contemplation” (ET 3/2. 192. n. 9). On how and why, according to Aquinas, “relativity” is “an essential characteristic of poverty” in SCG, see Horst 1992. 46–54.

of the angels” – these invisible things are “manifested to certain men,” not as a vision, but “through a kind of certitude resulting from divine revelation.” However, because those “things that man knows” cannot properly be conveyed “to the knowledge of another man, except by speech,” in order to be able to instruct others these men were “given the grace of speech, in keeping with what the benefit of those who were to be instructed demanded.”¹⁰² The oral teachings of the disciples and apostles, as we saw earlier, was confirmed by miracles and by the ability of prophecy whereby they were able to see some future events and “things generally concealed from men.” A further grade in the process of transmission appears when those things that are revealed are not only “recounted orally to their contemporaries,” but also are “written down for the instruction of men to come.” It follows, in Aquinas’s view, that there should be some people who “would interpret this kind of writings” for those who – and this is “the last degree” – “faithfully believe the things that are revealed to others, and interpreted by still others.”¹⁰³

Although in the relevant passages of the SCG Aquinas presents the transmission of divine revelation as a historical process, it is clear that his narrative fits into a more general metaphysical framework where a being’s perfection and power is a function of its position relative to the first principle. Introducing his narrative in SCG 3.154, Aquinas stresses that “wherever there is an order among things, it is necessary that, the nearer one thing is to the first principle, the stronger (*virtuosius*) it must be.”¹⁰⁴ “Virtuositas” refers here to the strength in a metaphysical sense that follows the natures or essences of things.¹⁰⁵ By the same token, if we apply the same principle inversely, we will get a great chain of degradation: as we move away from the first principle, the metaphysical strength

¹⁰² SCG 3.154: “So, since those who receive a revelation from God, according to the divinely established order, should instruct others, it was necessary for them also to be given the grace of speech, in keeping with what the benefit of those who were to be instructed demanded. Hence, it is said in Isaias (50:4): ‘The Lord hath given me a learned tongue, that I should know how to uphold by word him that is weary.’ And the Lord says to the disciples, in Luke (21:15): ‘I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to resist and gainsay.’ And also for this reason, when it was necessary for the truth of the faith to be preached by a few men to different peoples, some were divinely instructed to speak with divers tongues, as is said in Acts (2:4): ‘They were all filled with the Holy Ghost: and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak.’ (ET 3/2. 241. n. 7.) For this see Augustinus: *Epistula* 137 (CCSL 31, B. p. 270): “Impleti autem sancto spiritu loquuntur repente linguis omnium gentium, arguunt fidenter errores, praedicant saluberrimam ueritatem [...]”

¹⁰³ See SCG 3.154. ET 3/2. 242. n. 9 and ET 3/2. 248. n. 19–20.

¹⁰⁴ SCG 3.154: “In quibuscumque autem est aliquis ordo, oportet quod, quanto aliquid est propinquius primo principio, tanto virtuosius inueniatur” (Leonina 14. 449a. Marietti 3. 228–229. n. 3256. ET 3/2. 240. n. 2).

¹⁰⁵ See SCG 3.105: “Cum enim virtus essentiam consequatur, virtutis diversitas essentialium principiorum diversitatem ostendit. “Indeed, since power results from essence, a diversity of power manifests a diversity of essential principles” (Leonina 14. 330a; Marietti 3. 158. n. 2800; ET 3/2. 94. n. 2).

that characterizes the existence and operation of things is fading away on the lower grades of being with their ever growing weakness and imperfection.¹⁰⁶

Now, if we have a look at some of Aquinas's rare digressions into the characterizing features of the social world of common people in SCG, we can see that he tends to use concept pairs constitutive of this framework: entity vs. non-entity, unity vs. plurality/division/ diversity/multiplicity, good vs. evil, perfection vs. imperfection, order vs. disorder/inordinateness, truth vs. falsity/error/deception, infallibility vs. fallibility, virtue vs. sin, perfection vs. imperfection/defectability, immutability vs. mutability, constancy vs. inconstancy, stability vs. instability/variability, virtuosity/power vs. infirmity/weakness.¹⁰⁷

We have to stress that Aquinas did not regard non-entity, disorder, defect, error, evil and the like as characteristic of nature.¹⁰⁸ In Aquinas's view, nature itself is – in the broadest metaphysical sense – without any qualification: good.¹⁰⁹ “Being” and “good” are co-extensive, convertible, and transcendental terms that can be predicated about anything that falls under any of the ten Aristotelian categories.¹¹⁰

Nonetheless, there is a significant difference in the way the two terms are used. Whereas the word “being” is used in an “absolute sense,” “good” is a relative term, since something is called “good” only if it is ordered to an end, whether or

¹⁰⁶ For the principle as used conversely by Aquinas see, e.g., SCG 4.1: “Et quia in summo rerum vertice Deo perfectissima unitas invenitur; et unumquodque, quanto est magis unum, tanto est magis virtuosum et dignius consequens est ut quantum a primo principio receditur, tanto maior diversitas et variatio inveniatur in rebus.” “And because in the highest summit of things, God, one finds the most perfect unity – and because everything, the more it is one, is the more powerful and more worthy – it follows that the farther one gets from the first principle, the greater is the diversity and variation one finds in things.” (Leonina 15. 3b; Marietti 3. 242. n. 3339; ET 4. 35–36. n. 2.)

¹⁰⁷ When listing these pairs of opposition, I am neither striving for completeness, nor dealing with the logical relations between the pairs I sorted here. I also disregard the possible problems of synonymy. For “Platonism” and “Neoplatonism” in Aquinas's metaphysics see among many others: Henle 1970; O'Rourke 1992; Aertsen 1992; Hankey 2002; Wippel 1987; Wippel 2007b.

¹⁰⁸ See, e.g., SCG 3.107: “Omnis [...] defectus et corruptio est praeter naturam: quia natura intendit esse et perfectionem rei.” “[...] all defect and corruption are apart from nature, because nature intends the being and perfection of the thing” (Leonina 14, 336b; Marietti 3, 162. n. 2829; ET 3/2. 102. n. 10).

¹⁰⁹ For “natura” in this sense see: “primo enim modo dicitur natura, secundum quod communiter ad omnia entia se habet, prout natura definitur omne id, quod intellectu quoquo modo capi potest” (In Sent II.37.1.1 co.); “alio modo dicitur natura quaelibet substantia vel etiam quodlibet ens” (ST 1a2ae.10.1 co).

¹¹⁰ SCG 3.7: “Omne igitur quod est, quocumque modo sit, in quantum est ens, bonum est” (Leonina 14. 19b; Marietti 3. 9. n. 1917). SCG 3.10: “Malum autem non potest esse neque materia neque forma: ostensum est enim supra quod tam ens actu, quam ens in potentia, est bonum” (Leonina 14. 25a; Marietti 3. 12. n. 1938). SCG 3.11: “Nam bonum communiter dicitur sicut et ens: cum omne ens, in quantum huiusmodi, sit bonum, ut probatum est” (Leonina 14. 31b; Marietti 3. 15. n. 1957).

not this end is accomplished.¹¹¹ Goodness therefore, although it refers to the same things as “being,” has a different meaning as it expresses desirability.¹¹²

In the case of human beings, as already noted, the major obstacle to achieving their end is the misrepresentation of what good is.¹¹³ Epistemological malfunctioning regularly happens on account of the metaphysical position of the species that defines its capabilities and – through the determination of the mode of reception if there is anything to be received – the possible ways of its members’ communication with its environment.¹¹⁴ At the same time, although disorder, defect, error, evil and the like are not characteristic of nature, we cannot say that the effects of the activities implied in human being’s social communication are *simpliciter* nothing. Therefore, in Aquinas’s view, we cannot consider relevant human features, such as error or sin, *simpliciter* nothing.¹¹⁵ They arise from and are results of basic and permanent human activities and can have a considerable effect not only on our social life but even on our biological constitution.¹¹⁶

Let’s see a few examples of how Aquinas sees multiplicity, imperfection, disorder and the like in the texture of everyday human world.

¹¹¹ SCG 3.20: “Ens enim absolute dicitur, bonum autem etiam in ordine consistit: non enim solum aliquid bonum dicitur quia est finis, vel quia est obtinens finem; sed, etiam si nondum ad finem pervenerit, dummodo sit ordinatum in finem, ex hoc ipso dicitur bonum.” “For being is a term used absolutely, while good also includes a relation. In fact, a thing is not called good simply because it is an end, or because it has achieved the end; provided it be ordered to the end, it may be called good because of this relation.” As Aquinas himself draws attention to it, this characteristic of “good” seems to modify – albeit in a non-substantial sense – the coextensivity of “being” and “good.” SCG 3.20: “In quo apparet quod bonum quodammodo amplioris est ambitus quam ens: propter quod Dionysius dicit, iv cap. de div. nom., quod bonum se extendit ad existentia et non existentia.” “It is apparent in this conclusion that good is, in a way, of wider scope than being. For this reason, Dionysius says, in the fourth chapter of *On the Divine Names*: ‘the good extends to existent beings and also to non-existent ones.’” For both passages see Leonina 14. 46b–47a; Marietti 3. 24. n. 2013; ET 3/1. 79. n. 5.

¹¹² For the convertibility of “being” and “good” see Stump 2003. 62–65; Stump–Kretzmann 1991. 98–128; MacDonald 1991. 31–55; MacDonald 1992. 176; Aertsen 1991. 56–73; Aertsen 1996. 290–334. esp. 303–319.

¹¹³ See III.4. and the footnotes 68–73 above.

¹¹⁴ For the principle “what is received is received according to the mode of the receiver” in Aquinas, see Wippel 2007a. As for Aquinas himself see, e.g., SCG 2.50: “Omne quod est in aliquo est in eo per modum recipientis.” SCG 2.74: “Quod recipitur in aliquo, est in eo per modum recipientis.”

¹¹⁵ See, e.g., QQ I.9.1 co: “Respondeo. Dicendum, quod peccatum, maxime transgressionis, est actus inordinatus. Ex parte ergo actus, peccatum est natura aliqua; sed inordinatio est privatio, et secundum hanc peccatum dicitur nihil.” “Answer: Sin, especially that of transgression, is a disordered act. As an act, therefore, sin is some sort of entity, but its disorder is a privation, which is why sin is called nothing.” (Translated by Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies. Thomas Aquinas 2020. 209.)

¹¹⁶ Sin – as Aquinas notices – can even affect bodily constitution. SCG 4.73: “Ex infirmitate igitur animae, quae est peccatum, interdum infirmitas derivatur ad corpus, hoc divino iudicio dispensante”; „from the infirmity of the soul which is sin infirmity sometimes flows into the body, when the divine judgment so disposes” (Leonina 15. 233a; Marietti 3. 380. n. 4081; ET IV 282. n. 1).

2. *How can we characterize a world that is as far from the first principle as our social world?*

In Aquinas's view, it belongs to the human condition that „all things that are within our power are found to be multiple, variable, and defectable,” and these features are characterizing our choices and intellectual operations. Aquinas says that „our acts of choice have the character of multiplicity, since choices are made of different things, by different people, in different ways”. In addition, human choices are also mutable, partly because of the inconstancy of the human soul (*animi levitas*) that „is not firmly fixed on the ultimate end,” partly because of „the fluctuating character of the things which provide our circumstantial environment (*res quae nos extra circumstant*).” Lastly, our sins (*peccata*) also show that human choices are defectable.¹¹⁷

His characterization of human intellectual operations (*intelligentia*) runs parallel with that of the human choices. Human cognition „has the quality of multiplicity”, for we are relied upon the objects of the senses from which „we gather, as it were,” the truth that we can grasp by our intellect. It owes its mutability to „the discursive movement from one thing to another, proceeding from known things to unknown ones.” The equivalent of sin in the field of human intellectual operations is error that displays the defectability of human cognition: our intellectual operations are „defectable, because of the admixture of imagination with sensation,” as the errors of human beings show.¹¹⁸

In Aquinas's view, our moral choices and our cognition are in a dependence relation to the social and natural environment to which these decisions and our intellectual operations are directed. All this makes us vulnerable and prone to moral and intellectual corruption. As Aquinas stresses: „what depends on many can be destroyed in many ways.”¹¹⁹

All this seems to be true when it comes to human signalling systems, first and foremost the language we use. When discussing the problem in his Sentence-commentary whether or not taking an oath is desirable, Aquinas argues that – even if oath can be necessary under certain circumstances – it is not de-

¹¹⁷ See SCG 3.91. ET 3/2. 40. n. 3–4; Leonina 14, 277a–278a; Marietti 3. 132. n. 2663–2664.

¹¹⁸ See SCG 3.91. ET 3/2. 41. n. 5; Leonina 14, 278a; Marietti 3. 132. n. 2665.

¹¹⁹ SCG 3.31: “cum quod a multis dependet, destrui multipliciter possit” (Leonina 14. 87b; Marietti 3. 41. n. 2128; ET 3/1. 118. n. 5). Nevertheless, what depends on many can be preserved as well and ordered to one goal according to Aquinas. In his Commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus* Aquinas contrasts the “tortuous and deformed ways” that are “the cause of error” with the “way of uniformity” that “preserves us from error.” See In DDN 4.11: “Viae enim tortuosae et difformes sunt causa erroris; uniformitas viae praeservat ab errore [...]” (Thomas Aquinas 1950. 148. n. 450). This is a general principle, even though it is placed in the context of love (a divine name in Pseudo-Dionysius) in this commentary. For a different context, but still with reference to Pseudo-Dionysius see, e.g., DV 14.8 co: “Et sic fidelis ‘per simplicem et semper eodem modo se habentem veritatem liberatur ab instabili erroris varietate’, ut dicit Dionysius VII cap. De divinis nominibus” (Leonina 22. 460a).

sirable for its own sake (*per se*). According to Aquinas, a part of the reason is that the utterances of human beings are “the least truthful” (*veritas autem humanorum verborum est minimae firmitatis*), both because human reason easily falls in error, and because human language is prone to be defective.¹²⁰

As Aquinas’s scattered remarks on the social world of common people show, the many ways of defectability and disorder pervade the whole of human society.

Human power, for example, is “imperfect to the highest degree” (*imperfectissima*), says Aquinas when arguing against the claim that worldly power is the highest good for men, “since it is rooted in the wills and the opinions of men, in which there is the greatest inconstancy.”¹²¹ The possession of riches which is desired by many cannot be the highest good for many reasons. One of these reasons is that riches are “unstable” (*instabiles sunt*).¹²² An object of desire in civic life is celebrity (*famae celebritas*). People, however, “can deceive and be deceived” (*et decipi et decipere possunt*), therefore it is not human opinion that can make renown the blessed.¹²³

¹²⁰ See In Sent III.39.1.2 quaestiuncula 1. co: “Veritas autem humanorum verborum est minimae firmitatis, tum ex hoc quod error facile rationi accidit, tum ex hoc quod lingua pro-na est ad defectum; et ideo divinam veritatem, quae est omnino infallibilis, ad dicta nostra confirmanda assumere non multum convenit, nisi necessitas incumbat.” Although Aquinas does not explicitly say this, the defectability of the human language seems to be linked to the diversity of things and the diversity of the modes of representations. See, e.g., SCG 3.97: “Quia vero omnem creatam substantiam a perfectione divinae bonitatis deficere necesse est, ut perfectius divinae bonitatis similitudo rebus communicaretur, oportuit esse diversitatem in rebus, ut quod perfecte ab uno aliquo repraesentari non potest, per diversa diversimode perfectiori modo repraesentaretur nam et homo, cum mentis conceptionem uno vocali verbo videt sufficienter exprimi non posse, verba diversimode multiplicat ad exprimendam per diversa suae mentis conceptionem.” “However, since every created substance must fall short of the perfection of divine goodness, in order that the likeness of divine goodness might be more perfectly communicated to things, it was necessary for there to be a diversity of things, so that what could not be perfectly represented by one thing might be, in more perfect fashion, represented by a variety of things in different ways. For instance, when a man sees that his mental conception cannot be expressed adequately by one spoken word, he multiplies his words in various ways, to express his mental conception through a variety of means.” (ET 3/2. 66. n. 2; Leonina 14, 299a; Marietti 3. 146. n. 2724.)

¹²¹ SCG 3.31: “Si aliqua potestas est summum bonum, oportet illam esse perfectissimam. Potestas autem humana est imperfectissima: radicatur enim in hominum voluntatibus et opinionibus, in quibus est maxima inconstantia. Et quanto maior reputatur potestas, tanto a pluribus dependet: quod etiam ad eius debilitatem pertinet; cum quod a multis dependet, destrui multipliciter possit.” (Leonina 14, 87b; Marietti 3. 41. n. 2128; ET 3/1. 118. n. 5.) See also footnote 119 above.

¹²² SCG 3.30. Leonina 14, 86b; Marietti 3. 40. n. 2123; ET 3/1. 117. n. 7.

¹²³ SCG 3.63: “Consequitur etiam civilem vitam aliud appetibile, quod est famae celebritas: per cuius inordinatum appetitum homines inanis gloriae cupidi dicuntur. Beati autem per illam visionem redduntur celebres, non secundum hominum, qui et decipi et decipere possunt, opinionem sed secundum verissimam cognitionem et Dei et omnium beatorum.” “Another object of desire associated with civic life is popular renown; by an inordinate desire for this men are deemed lovers of vainglory. Now, the blessed are made men of renown by

The consequences of multiplicity, disorder and the like (inconstancy, instability, proneness to error, deceiving and being deceived etc.) also seem to be a major issue when it comes to the transmission of divine revelation.

3. Before SCG

Aquinas seems to have been well aware of the problem before he embarked on writing the *Summa contra gentiles*. In an article of the fourteenth question of *De veritate*, written shortly before SCG, he is treating a problem („is it necessary for man to have faith?”) that returns again in SCG 1.5 just before he begins to talk about the assent to the revealed propositions in 1.6.¹²⁴ But even more important is that one of the objections raised in this article can be seen as a prequel to SCG 1.6 that, in turn, can be regarded as an extended reflection on a problem he had already raised in *De veritate* but never comprehensively treated.¹²⁵

The objection refers to the possibility that the content of the propositions representing God’s true nature (the articles of faith) might have been corrupted through the long transmission process down to the present (i.e., the 1250’s). As it is the case with a chain of syllogisms, where one of the many intermediary propositions is false or dubious and it makes the whole argument invalid (*inefficax*), the divine truth also can be corrupted if the chain of tradition contains only one false or dubious claim with regard to God’s true nature. We cannot be certain, however – so the objection continues – that the long transmission process of the divine revelation which has taken place through a diversity of intermediaries (*per media diversa*) was always free of errors, as this is a tradition based on oral transmission and those people who handed down the divine truth „were human

this vision, not according to the opinion of men, who can deceive and be deceived, but in accord with the truest knowledge, both of God and of all the blessed.” (Leonina 14, 176b; Marietti 3. 83. n. 2379; ET 3/1. 207. n. 5.)

¹²⁴ DV 14.10; see Leonina 22. Vol 2. 464–468. The group of disputed questions (253 articles arranged in 29 questions) that we know today under the title “*Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*” dates from Aquinas’s first magisterium at the University of Paris (1256–1259). Question 14 probably dates from 1257–1258. See Eschmann 1956. 389–391; Weisheipl 1983. 123–126; Torrell 1996. 59–67, and 334–335. For a comparison of certain parts of the DV and the introduction of SCG see Synave 1930. who compares DV 14.10 and SCG 1.4.

¹²⁵ Aquinas’s short answer in his *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* does not seem to take into account the possibility that divine revelation as transmitted and interpreted on lower degrees can be corrupted by errors. See DV 14.10 ad 11: “Ad undecimum dicendum, quod omnia media per quae ad nos fides venit, suspicione carent. Prophetis enim et apostolis credimus ex hoc quod Deus eis testimonium perhibuit miracula faciendo, ut dicitur Marc., cap. XVI, 20 sermonem confirmante sequentibus signis. Successoribus autem apostolorum et prophetarum non credimus nisi in quantum nobis ea annuntiant quae illi in scriptis reliquerunt.” (Leonina 22. Vol 2. 468b.)

beings who can be deceived and can deceive others, too” (*cum homines fuerint et decipi et decipere potuerunt*).¹²⁶

It is remarkable that the transmission process this objection describes is completely in line with what Aquinas says about the transmission of divine revelation later in SCG. In addition, it is also in line with his claims on the general principles of degradation of a being’s perfection and virtuosity as a function of its position relative to the first principle. We could even characterize the transmission process described by the objection as one of those tortuous and deformed routes (*viae tortuosae et difformes*) that – as Aquinas elsewhere says – are the causes of error.¹²⁷

Aquinas’s short answer in *De veritate* is somewhat perplexing as he does not seem to take into account the possibility that divine revelation as transmitted and interpreted on lower degrees can be corrupted by errors. Consequently, he does not seem to answer the problem the objection raises.¹²⁸

Nevertheless, we can make a distinction between two different approaches to the issue the objection introduces. We can consider the objection either a *quaestio facti* or a *quaestio iuris*. In his short answer, Aquinas treats the objection as a *quaestio facti*, but not as a *quaestio iuris*. Accordingly, he simply states that there has been no deterioration in the content of the message God revealed to the apostles and prophets, but does not say anything about the reason it could not happen or about what ensured it would not happen.

In SCG 1.6, by asking whether it is foolish to assent to the articles of faith, Aquinas continues exactly where the aforementioned objection ended: „stultum videtur his assentire quae sunt fidei.”¹²⁹ As we saw earlier, SCG 1.6 contains an even stronger argument for the trustworthiness of the testimonies of those people who were supposed to transmit the divine revelation than just the routine references to New Testament miracles. However, the possibility of errors

¹²⁶ DV 14.10 obj. 11: “Praeterea, quando aliquid confirmatur per plura media, si unum illorum non habet firmitatem, tota confirmatio efficacia caret; ut patet in deductionibus syllogismorum, in quibus una de multis propositionibus falsa vel dubia existente, probatio inefficax est. Sed ea quae sunt fidei, in nos per multa media devenerunt. A Deo enim dicta sunt apostolis vel prophetis, a quibus in successores eorum, et deinceps in alios et sic usque ad nos pervenerunt per media diversa. Non autem in omnibus istis mediis certum est esse infallibilem veritatem quia cum homines fuerint et decipi et decipere potuerunt. Ergo nullam certitudinem habere possumus de his quae sunt fidei; et ita stultum videtur his assentire.” (Leonina 22. Vol 2. 466a.)

¹²⁷ See footnote 119 above.

¹²⁸ “Ad undecimum dicendum, quod omnia media per quae ad nos fides venit, suspicione carent. Prophetis enim et apostolis credimus ex hoc quod Deus eis testimonium perhibuit miracula faciendo, ut dicitur Marc., cap. XVI, 20 sermonem confirmante sequentibus signis. Successoribus autem apostolorum et prophetarum non credimus nisi in quantum nobis ea annuntiant quae illi in scriptis reliquerunt.” (Leonina 22. Vol 2. 468b.)

¹²⁹ See footnote 126, with some modification of the word order from the original Latin text.

along the transmission process of divine truth in connection with the human condition that makes us all prone to error and deception is a further issue left untreated in *De veritate*.

4. *Occulta cordis: errors, and their whereabouts*

The basic problem Aquinas seems to be facing when writing the *Summa contra Gentiles* is how to ensure that the religious quality of Christianity be preserved in a context where, on a wider social scale, the signalling of cooperative intent – as it is based on the conventional signals of human language – is not costly but cheap, consequently errors are common and signals – including religious signals – can be easily faked.

There is, however, a fundamental problem with errors. According to Aquinas, the errors of people and their intention to deceive others are – in principle – inaccessible to other minds, except for God.¹³⁰

But prior to discussing this matter, let us briefly consider what error is and why it matters beyond its epistemological significance.

Aquinas considers the natural process of human cognition from perception to intellectual apprehension principally reliable. This reliability is based on the fact that neither the senses nor the intellect is mistaken regarding their proper object.¹³¹ The possibility of error arises when it comes to judgment and reasoning.

¹³⁰ See the references below from footnote 147 on.

¹³¹ It is well known that Aquinas follows Aristotle in this matter. See, e.g. – among many other similar references – SCG 1.59: “[...] intellectus apprehendens quod quid est dicitur quidem per se semper esse verus, ut patet in iii de anima”, “the intellect that apprehends what a thing is is always said to be through itself true, as appears in *De anima* III” (ET 1. 202. n. 3; Leonina 13. 167b; Marietti 2. 71. n. 496). For the relevant passages in Aristotle’s *De anima* see the twelfth century translation of James of Venice as revised by Guillelmus de Moerbeke, used by Aquinas and edited by René-A. Gauthier in Leonina 45,1: “Est autem dictio quidem aliquid de aliquo, sicut affirmatio, uera aut falsa omnis; intellectus autem non omnis set qui est ipsius quid est secundum hoc quod aliquid erat esse uerus est, et non aliquid de aliquo, set sicut uidere proprii uerum est, si autem homo album aut non, non uerum semper. Sic autem se habent quaecunque sine materia sunt.” (*De anima* III, 5: 430b26–31; Leonina 45,1. 224b.) See further *De anima* III, 10 (433a 26): “Intellectus quidem igitur omnis rectus est” (Leonina 45,1. 244a) and – for the proper object of the senses – see *De anima* II, 6 (418a11): “Dico autem proprium quidem quod non contingit altero sensu sentiri, et circa quod non contingat errare, ut visus coloris et auditus soni et gustus humoris” (Leonina 45,1. 118a). For Aquinas on the proper object and truth of intellect and the senses see ST 1a.58.5 co.: „Intellectus autem circa quod quid est semper uerus est, sicut et sensus circa proprium obiectum, ut dicitur in III De anima.”

From a metaphysical perspective, error as an opposite of truth pairs with defectus, disorder and the like when it comes to the great chain of degradation that – as we saw above – serves as a fundamental framework in Aquinas’s thinking. Intellect, one of the cognitive powers (*potentia cognoscitiva*) of humans, cannot be in error when it understands its object: „in eo [...] quod quis intelligit, non errat.” Error is a defect that results from an imperfect operation of the intellect: „ex defectu enim intelligendi provenit omnis error.”¹³²

Aquinas attributes three different kinds of operation to the reason.¹³³ The first is what he calls the understanding of indivisibles (*indivisibilium intelligentia*). It is a single act of the intellect, whereby we capture the essence of things. As a simple, uncomplex apprehension the “understanding of indivisibles” can neither

¹³² SCG 3.108: “In eo autem quod quis intelligit, non errat: ex defectu enim intelligendi provenit omnis error.” “Now, one does not err in regard to the object which one understands, since all error arises from a failure to understand” (Leonina 14. 339-a Marietti 3. 163. n. 2833; ET 3/2. 104. n. 2). Aquinas is talking – in general – about intellectual substances in this passage.

¹³³ Sometimes, with reference to Aristotle’s *De anima*, Aquinas only mentions two operations of the intellect. See, e.g., DV 14.1: “Intellectus enim nostri, secundum philosophum in Lib. de anima, duplex est operatio. Una qua format simplices rerum quidditates; ut quid est homo, vel quid est animal: in qua quidem operatione non invenitur verum per se et falsum, sicut nec in vocibus incomplexis. Alia operatio intellectus est secundum quam composit et dividit, affirmando vel negando: et in hac iam invenitur verum et falsum, sicut et in voce complexa, quae est eius signum.” See Aristotle, *De anima* III, 5 (430a 26–28): “Est autem dictio quidem aliquid de aliquo, sicut affirmatio, vera aut falsa omnis; intellectus autem non omnis set qui est ipsius quid est secundum hoc quod aliquid erat esse verus est, et non aliquid de aliquo, set sicut videre proprii verum est, si autem homo album aut non, non verum semper” (Leonina 45.1. 224b). For the third kind of operation see, e.g., Aquinas’s preface to his commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*: “Sunt autem rationis tres actus: quorum primi duo sunt rationis, secundum quod est intellectus quidam. Una enim actio intellectus est intelligentia indivisibilium sive incomplexorum, secundum quam concipit quid est res. Et haec operatio a quibusdam dicitur informatio intellectus sive imaginatio per intellectum. [...] Secunda vero operatio intellectus est compositio vel divisio intellectus, in qua est iam verum vel falsum. [...] Tertius vero actus rationis est secundum id quod est proprium rationis, scilicet discurrere ab uno in aliud, ut per id quod est notum deveniat in cognitionem ignoti.” (Leonina 1,2. 4a–5a.) “Therefore one should understand the parts of logic in terms of the diversity of acts of reason. There are three acts of the reason. The first two of these are of reason understood as intellect. The first act of intellect is understanding of indivisible or noncompounded things, according to which it conceives what a thing is. Some call this operation the informing of the intellect or representation through the intellect. [...] The second operation of intellect is the combining or dividing of powers of understanding, in which true and false are now introduced; [...] The third act of reason is of reasoning understood in its proper sense, that is, to reason back and forth from one thing to another, so that by what is known one may arrive at a knowledge of what is unknown [...]” For the English translation see Copeland–Sluiter 2012. 790. For Aquinas’s terminology and his distinction between two and three kinds of operations see Schmidt 1966. 50–1. For the three different kinds of operation in detail see Schmidt 1966. 175–301.

be true nor false.¹³⁴ It is unclear what exactly Aquinas means by the infallibility of the intellect with regard to the essence of things.¹³⁵

Be that as it may, the notions of falsity and truth imply the connection and separation of different things, therefore error is made possible only by the second and third act of the intellect, i.e., composition and division, on the one hand, and discursive reasoning (*ratiocinatio*) on the other.¹³⁶ Composition and division are acts whereby the intellect combines and separates simple concepts that make up a mental complex. A mental complex (*propositio, oratio, enuntiabile*) as a result of affirmation or negation either correctly represents the relation between certain things and their properties or not. If it does, the proposition is true, if it does not, it is false. The same conformity requirement applies to discursive reasoning. Discursive reasoning makes possible to get knowledge of things we cannot apprehend, either because they are not present or because they are not available to us due to our sense-bound cognition.¹³⁷

In Aquinas's view, what is formed by our different mental acts, i.e., the intention conceived (*intentio intellecta*) or the concept of the intellect (*conceptio intellectus*) is different from both the thing understood (even if it is the intellect itself) and the intelligible form which is the principle of the intellect's operation. Furthermore, it is different from this operation itself, as it is regarded as the terminus of the intellect's operation and a quasi-something constituted by this operation (*quasi quoddam per ipsam constitutum*).¹³⁸ It is crucial that Aquinas considers

¹³⁴ See the Latin translation of Aristotle's *De anima* III, 5 (430a26): "Indivisibilem quidem igitur intelligentiam in hiis est circa que non est falsum, in quibus autem et falsum iam et verum est, compositio quedam iam intellectuum est, sicut eorum que unum sunt." See, further, Aquinas's commentary: "et haec intelligentia est in hiis circa que non est falsum, tum quia incomplexa neque sunt vera neque falsa, tum quia intellectus non decipitur in eo quod quid est" (Leonina 45,1. 224b).

¹³⁵ For the issues raised by Aquinas's claim see Kretzmann 1992. 169–189. For the infallibility of the senses see further Pasnau 2004. 188–189.

¹³⁶ For the delicate task of distinguishing between the simplex and complex apprehensions see SCG 3.108: "falsity occurs in our case in the intellectual operation of composing and dividing, as a result of the fact that it does not apprehend the quiddity of a thing simply, but, rather, combines something with the thing that is apprehended. Of course, in the operation of the intellect, whereby it apprehends that which is, no falsity occurs except accidentally, by virtue of mixing, even in this operation, some part of the operation of the intellect composing and dividing. Indeed, this happens because our intellect does not immediately attain the knowledge of the quiddity of a thing, but with a certain order in the process of inquiry. For example, we first apprehend animal, then we divide it into the opposed differences, and, leaving one aside, we put the other with the genus, until we come to the definition of the species. Now, falsity may occur in this process if something is taken as a difference in the genus which is not a difference in the genus. Of course, to proceed in this way to the quidditative knowledge of something pertains to an intellect reasoning discursively from one thing to another." (ET 3/2. 105–106. n. 5.)

¹³⁷ For truth in judgement and for conformity see Schmidt 1966. 215–221 and 237–238. On discursive reasoning see Schmidt 1966. 242f.

¹³⁸ DP 8.1: "Quae quidem conceptio a tribus praedictis differt. A re quidem intellecta, quia res intellecta est interdum extra intellectum, conceptio autem intellectus non est nisi

the intention or concept of the intellect the likeness of the thing represented. The intention is a quasi-something that comes about by a natural process of causation when the intellect comprehends a multitude of forms, stands in a similarity relation with the form of the thing conceived, but it is not a sign of it.¹³⁹

Now, this intention or concept can „properly” be called a „word”, says Aquinas, since it is the immediate significatum of the „exterior” word we use, i.e., the immediate significatum of a vocal or written word or a string of vocal or written words in a language.¹⁴⁰ Hence the exterior word is only related to anything else

in intellectu; et iterum conceptio intellectus ordinatur ad rem intellectam sicut ad finem: propter hoc enim intellectus conceptionem rei in se format ut rem intellectam cognoscat. Differt autem a specie intelligibili: nam species intelligibilis, qua fit intellectus in actu, consideratur ut principium actionis intellectus, cum omne agens agat secundum quod est in actu; actu autem fit per aliquam formam, quam oportet esse actionis principium. Differt autem ab actione intellectus: quia praedicta conceptio consideratur ut terminus actionis, et quasi quoddam per ipsam constitutum. Intellectus enim sua actione format rei definitionem, vel etiam propositionem affirmativam seu negativam.” “The concept differs from the other three aforementioned things. It differs from the thing understood in that the thing understood is sometimes outside the intellect, but the intellect’s concept is only in the intellect. Also, the intellect’s concept is ordered to the thing understood as its end, since the intellect forms within itself the concept of a thing in order to know the thing known. The concept differs from the intelligible form, since we consider the intelligible form that makes the intellect actual as the source of the intellect’s action, inasmuch as every active thing acts insofar as it is actual, and a form, which needs to be the source of action, makes the active thing actual. And the concept differs from the intellect’s action in that we consider the aforementioned concept as the terminus of an action and as if something constituted by it, since the intellect by its action forms the definition of a thing or an affirmative or negative proposition.” (Translated by Richard J. Regan, see Thomas Aquinas 2012. 228.) The concept of the intellect is only “as it were” something (*quasi quoddam*), since it is an “ens rationis” whose existence consists only in being conceived by the intellect. For this latter see, e.g., SCG 4.11: “esse intentionis intellectae in ipso intelligi consistit” (Leonina 15. 32b; Marietti 3. 265. n. 3466). For the concept of “ens rationis” in Aquinas see Klima 1996. 91–97 and Klima 1993. 25–36.

¹³⁹ See, e.g., Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Hermeneutics* (16a3–9): “Ubi attendendum est quod litteras dixit esse notas, idest signa uocum, et uoces passionum animae similiter; passiones autem animae dicit esse similitudines rerum. Et hoc ideo, quia res non cognoscitur ab anima nisi per aliquam sui similitudinem existentem uel in sensu uel in intellectu; littere autem ita sunt signa uocum, et uoces passionum quod non attenditur ibi aliqua ratio similitudinis, set sola ratio institutionis, sicut et in multis aliis signis, ut tuba est signum belli; in passionibus autem animae oportet attendi rationem similitudinis ad exprimendas res, quia eas naturaliter designant, non ex institutione.” “Notice he says here that letters are signs, i.e., signs of vocal sounds, and similarly vocal sounds are signs of passions of the soul, but that passions of the soul are likenesses of things. This is because a thing is not known by the soul unless there is some likeness of the thing existing either in the sense or in the intellect. Now letters are signs of vocal sounds and vocal sounds of passions in such a way that we do not attend to any idea of likeness in regard to them but only one of institution, as is the case in regard to many other signs, for example, the trumpet as a sign of war. But in the passions of the soul we have to take into account the idea of a likeness to the things represented, since passions of the soul designate things naturally, not by institution.” (Leonina 1,1 12a–b; translated by Jean T. Oesterle, see Thomas Aquinas 1962. 27.)

¹⁴⁰ SCG 4.11: “Dico autem intentionem intellectam id quod intellectus in seipso concipit de re intellecta. Quae quidem in nobis neque est ipsa res quae intelligitur; neque est ipsa substantia intellectus; sed est quaedam similitudo concepta in intellectu de re intellecta,

in the world, including the intellect itself, by means of the interior word.¹⁴¹ This word, which is also called the „word of the heart” by Aquinas,¹⁴² can be both

quam voces exteriores significant; unde et ipsa intentio verbum interius nominatur, quod est exteriori verbo significatum.” “Now, I mean by the intention understood what the intellect conceives in itself of the thing understood. To be sure, in us this is neither the thing which is understood nor is it the very substance of the intellect. But it is a certain likeness of the thing understood conceived in the intellect, and which the exterior words signify. So, the intention itself is named the interior word which is signified by the exterior word.” (ET 4. 81. n. 6.) DP 8.1 co.: „Haec autem conceptio intellectus in nobis proprie verbum dicitur: hoc enim est quod verbo exteriori significatur: vox enim exterior neque significat ipsum intellectum, neque speciem intelligibilem, neque actum intellectus, sed intellectus conceptionem qua mediante refertur ad rem. Huiusmodi ergo conceptio, sive verbum, qua intellectus noster intelligit rem aliam a se, ab alio exoritur, et aliud repraesentat. Oritur quidem ab intellectu per suum actum; est vero similitudo rei intellectae.” “We properly call this intellectual concept in us a word, since it is what an external word signifies, inasmuch as an external word signifies the intellect’s concept, by means of which an external word is related to a thing, and does not signify the very thing understood, the intelligible form, or the act of the intellect. Therefore, such a concept, or word, whereby our intellect understands something different from itself, arises from, and represents, something else.” (Translated by Richard J. Regan, see Thomas Aquinas 2012. 228–229). Aquinas’s *De potentia* dates probably from 1265–1266 and the passage above represents Aquinas’s definitive usage of the word “verbum” in his epistemology and theology. Aquinas’s usage of the term took its final form at the time of writing the *Summa contra Gentiles* as shown by the subsequent redactions of SCG I.53. For the development of Aquinas’s usage of “verbum” see Goris 2007. 62–78; Porro 2016. 140–146. For the different redactions of SCG I.53 see Leonina 13. Appendix 20*a–21*a; Marietti 2. Appendix II. 8. 322–324 and Geiger 1963. 221–240.

¹⁴¹ See, e.g., Aquinas’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Hermeneutics* (16a3–9): “But here Aristotle is speaking of vocal sounds that are significant by human institution. Therefore passions in the soul must be understood here as conceptions of the intellect, and names, verbs, and speech, signify these conceptions of the intellect immediately according to the teaching of Aristotle. They cannot immediately signify things, as is clear from the mode of signifying, for the name man signifies human nature in abstraction from singulars; hence it is impossible that it immediately signify a singular man. The Platonists for this reason held that it signified the separated idea of man. But because in Aristotle’s teaching man in the abstract does not really subsist, but is only in the mind, it was necessary for Aristotle to say that vocal sounds signify the conceptions of the intellect immediately and things by means of them.” (Leonina 1,1 10b–11a; Translated by Jean T. Oesterle, see Thomas Aquinas 1962. 25.) For the semantic principles underlying Aquinas’s metaphysics see Klima 1996, especially 90–118. For a more general account of what Gyula Klima calls “via antiqua semantics” see Klima 2008. 392–405. For Aquinas’s theory of language see further Klima 2011a. 371–389.

¹⁴² A phrase of biblical and patristic origin. See Rom 10:8 “sed quid dicit prope est verbum in ore tuo et in corde tuo hoc est verbum fidei quod praedicamus.” See further 1 Cor 14:24–25: “occulta cordis eius manifesta fiunt.” The whole passage is illuminating, especially as Aquinas refers to it SCG 3.154 (see footnote 147 below). See 1 Cor 14:24–25: “si autem omnes prophetent intret autem quis infidelis vel idiota convincitur ab omnibus diiudicatur ab omnibus occulta cordis eius manifesta fiunt et ita cadens in faciem adorabit Deum”. Aquinas often hints at Augustine with respect to “verbum cordis”. See e.g.: QQ V.5.2: “Respondeo dicendum quod secundum Augustinum, XV De trinitate, verbum cordis importat quoddam procedens a mente, sive ab intellectu.” Sometimes it is referred to as “cogitatio cordis.” See, e.g., DV 4.1, sed contra 4: “Praeterea, verbum, secundum Augustinum in xv de trinit., nihil est aliud quam cogitatio formata” and DV 8.13. See further the *locus classicus* in Augustinus Hipponensis: *De trinitate* lib. 15, cap. 10: “[...] formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus verbum est quod in corde dicimus, quod nec graecum est nec latinum nec linguae alicuius

uncomplex and complex (formed or misformed by composition and division), therefore it can misrepresent the world, even if it is the principal tool of our intellectual cognition and by its nature – i.e. under circumstances when it is not constituted by an imperfect operation of the intellect – correctly represents things (*res intellectae*) as their likeness.¹⁴³

alterius, sed cum id opus est in eorum quibus loquimur perferre notitiam aliquod signum quo significetur assumitur” and *De trinitate* lib. 14, cap. 7: “[...] sed quia ibi uerbum esse sine cogitatione non potest (cogitamus enim omne quod dicimus etiam illo interiore uerbo quod ad nullius gentis pertinet linguam), in tribus potius illis imago ista cognoscitur, memoria scilicet, intelligentia, uoluntate.”

¹⁴³ QQ V.5.2: “Est autem duplex operatio intellectus, secundum philosophum in iii de anima. Una quidem quae uocatur indiuisibilium intelligentia, per quam intellectus format in seipso definitionem, uel conceptum alicuius incomplexi. Alia autem operatio est intellectus componentis et diuidentis, secundum quam format enuntiationem. Et utrumque istorum per operationem intellectus constitutorum uocatur uerbum cordis, quorum primum significatur per terminum incomplexum, secundum uero significatur per orationem.” “But, as the Philosopher says in book III of *On the Soul*, the intellect has two acts. One act is called the apprehension of indiuisibles, by which the intellect forms within itself a definition or a concept of something simple. The other is the intellect’s act of combining and diuiding, by which it forms a proposition. Each of the things constituted by these acts of intellect is called a mental word”, i.e., the word of the heart (*uerbum cordis*). (Translated by Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies. Thomas Aquinas 2020. 403.) In this passage, Aquinas calls both the incomplex and the complex internal conceptual structures “words”. Has his usage of the term “uerbum” in the context of mental representations any philosophical relevance? If so, how could we characterize the language-like behaviour of concepts that are – in Aquinas’s view – natural likenesses of the things conceived? According to a sophisticated proposal, we should make a distinction between semantic and syntactic compositionality. On the level of the formal concepts as likenesses, we cannot talk about syntactic rules that organize mental representations in language-like expressions. However, if we take into account the content of these representations, we have to acknowledge semantic compositionality by virtue of the semantic values these “words” naturally carry. For this approach see Pasnau 1997. 558–575; Klima 2001. xxxvii–xxxix; Hochschild 2015. 29–45. For the concept of mental representation see Klima 2011b. 7–15. In contrast, according to John O’Callaghan, Aquinas’s terminology does not have any philosophical significance. It is only “a theological metaphor” that the various *uerbum mentis* interpretations mistakenly turn into a philosophical doctrine. See O’Callaghan 2000. 103–119. If we have a look at the issue from the perspective of errors that Aquinas seeks to eliminate by writing the *Summa contra Gentiles*, it seems clear that, in Aquinas’s view, (1) one of the operations of the intellect (composition and diuision) is a necessary condition for making an error and (2) there is a “conformity” between the sign (vocal utterance) and what it is the sign of (the conception of intellect) to the extent that the former is – “according to the order of nature” – not only similar to the latter, but also “imitates” it, just like an effect imitates its cause (see In PH I, ; Leonina I*, 1. 14a–b. Thomas Aquinas 1962. 30). Now, it is not easy to see how the composition and diuision of mental words can be a cause of vocal utterances in this sense without exhibiting syntactical compositionality, if it is syntactical compositionality that makes it possible to attribute truth value to a vocal utterance in the first place. As a matter of fact, Aquinas cannot avoid unequivocally referring to syntactic compositionality when talking about the making of falsity in human mind. SCG 3.108 speaks for itself: “Moreover, falsity occurs in our case in the intellectual operation of composing and diuiding, as a result of the fact that it does not apprehend the quiddity of a thing simply, but, rather, combines something with the thing that is apprehended [*rei apprehensae aliquid componit*]. Of course, in the operation of the intellect, whereby it apprehends that which is, no falsity occurs except accidentally, by virtue of mixing, even in this operation, some part of the operation

Conventional linguistic signals (*exterior words*), on the other hand, are arbitrary in two respects. Firstly, they are not world-bound, since their form is not implied by the meaning associated with them. Secondly, they are not even interior-word-bound, since – being artifacts – their use is dependent on the will. The interior word therefore is a final and an efficient cause of the exterior word: we use the latter to make manifest what we think, and we produce the exterior word just as a craftsman produces an artifact based on the blueprint in his mind.¹⁴⁴

Although the interior word is „naturally prior” to the exterior word,¹⁴⁵ and human beings are providentially given the ability to use the exterior word to make our knowledge of the world accessible to others,¹⁴⁶ it is nevertheless a deep and

of the intellect composing and dividing. Indeed, this happens because our intellect does not immediately attain the knowledge of the quiddity of a thing, but with a certain order in the process of inquiry. For example, we first apprehend animal, then we divide it into the opposed differences, and, leaving one aside, we put the other with the genus, until we come to the definition of the species. Now, falsity may occur in this process if something is taken as a difference in the genus which is not a difference in the genus. Of course, to proceed in this way to the quidditative knowledge of something pertains to an intellect reasoning discursively from one thing to another. [*Sic autem procedere ad cognoscendum de aliquo quid est, est intellectus ratiocinando discurrentis de uno ad aliud.*]” (Leonina 14. 339b; Marietti 3. 164. n. 2836; ET 3/2. 105–106. n. 5.) I think, it seems reasonable to assume that the intentional objects of a “discursively reasoning” intellect should certainly exhibit syntactical complexity. If this is the case, then Aquinas’s semantics is clearly inconsistent. Aquinas, however, did not seem to be worried about all this when mixing up some highly influential remarks of Aristotle, Augustinian conjectures, florilegical elements of biblical folklore and theological speculations. What did deeply worry him, especially when writing the SCG, was that some seemingly dysfunctional quasi-entities (errors) seem to have the causal efficacy “to entice away the minds of humans from God,” “to whom faith seeks to lead them” [*hominum mentes a Deo abducit, in quem fides dirigere nititur*] (SCG 2,3. Leonina 13. 278b; Marietti 2. 117. n. 869; ET 2. 34. n. 6).

¹⁴⁴ See, e.g., DV 4.1: “Finalis quidem quia verbum vocale ad hoc a nobis exprimitur ut interius verbum manifestetur, unde oportet quod verbum interius sit illud quod significatur per exterius verbum; verbum autem quod exterius profertur significat id quod intellectum est, non ipsum intelligere neque hoc intellectum qui est habitus vel potentia nisi quatenus et haec intellecta sunt; unde verbum interius est ipsum interius intellectum. Efficiens autem quia verbum prolatum exterius, cum sit significativum ad placitum, eius principium est voluntas sicut et ceterorum artificiatorum, et ideo sicut aliorum artificiatorum praexistit in mente artificis imago quaedam exterioris artificii, ita in mente proferentis verbum exterius praexistit quoddam exemplar exterioris verbi.” (Leonina 22. 119b–120a.) See further SCG 2.1: “[...] consideratio enim et voluntas artificis principium est et ratio aedificationis”; “in the thought and will of the craftsman lie the principle and plan of the work of building” (Leonina 13. 271b; Marietti 2. 115. n. 854; ET 2. 29. n. 3).

¹⁴⁵ DV 4.1 co.: “et ideo, quia verbum exterius cum sit sensibile est magis notum nobis quam interius, secundum nominis impositionem per prius vocale verbum dicitur verbum qua verbum interius, quamvis verbum interius naturaliter sit prius utpote exterioris causa et efficiens et finalis” (Leonina 22. 119b).

¹⁴⁶ See, e.g., SCG 3.147: “[...] because they can reach intelligible truth by their natural operation, it is clear that divine provision is made for them in a different way than for other things. Inasmuch as man is given understanding and reason, by which he can both discern and investigate the truth; as he is also given sensory powers, both internal and external, whereby he is helped to seek the truth; as he is also given the use of speech, by the functioning of which he

fundamental conviction of Aquinas's that the words or cogitations of the heart are principally hidden from our fellow human beings.¹⁴⁷

This hiddenness – from a philosophical perspective – seems to be a consequence of Aquinas's semantic theory that regards external signals as *ad placitum* indicators of internal conceptual structures already having natural meaning as the likenesses of things. Aquinas stresses that the use of these structures depends on the human will, an active principle which is different from nature,¹⁴⁸ therefore only those can have a knowledge of them who are in the position to know the will that determines the way in which they are used.¹⁴⁹ Now, in Aquin-

is enabled to convey to another person the truth that he conceives in his mind (datus est etiam ei loquelae usus, per cuius officium veritate quam aliquis mente concipit, alteri manifestare possit) – thus constituted, men may help themselves in the process of knowing the truth, just as they may in regard to the other needs of life for man is 'a naturally social animal.' (Leonina 14. 435b–436a; Marietti 3. 221. n. 3202; ET 3/2. 223. n. 2.) See further Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's *Hermeneutics* (16a3–9): "Now if man were by nature a solitary animal the passions of the soul by which he was conformed to things so as to have knowledge of them would be sufficient for him; but since he is by nature a political and social animal it was necessary that his conceptions be made known to others. This he does through vocal sound. Therefore there had to be significant vocal sounds in order that men might live together." (Leonina 1,1 9b. Translated by Jean T. Oesterle, see Thomas Aquinas 1962. 24).

¹⁴⁷ See, e.g., SCG 3.154: "Non autem per hoc prophetiae donum sufficiens testimonium fidei adhiberetur, nisi esset de his quae a solo Deo cognosci possunt: sicut et miracula talia sunt quod solus Deus ea potest operari. Huiusmodi autem praecipue sunt in rebus inferioribus occulta cordium, quae solus Deus cognoscere potest, ut supra ostensum est; et futura contingentia, quae etiam soli divinae cognitioni subsunt [...]." "However, an adequate testimony to the faith is not supplied by this gift of prophecy unless it were concerned with things that can be known by God alone, just as miracles are of such nature that God alone can work them. Now, these things are especially, in the affairs of this world, the secrets of our hearts, which God alone can know, as we showed above, and contingent future events which also come only under divine cognition [...]." (Leonina 14. 450b; Marietti 3. 230. n. 3264; ET 3/2. 243.) "As we showed above": Aquinas refers to SCG 1.68 in which he shows that "God knows the thoughts of the mind and the motions of the will." (Leonina 13. 198–199; Marietti 2. 79–80. 567–574; ET 1. 225–227. n. 1–8.) See further – among many others – DV 8.13, co: "Unde motus voluntatis et cordis cogitatio non potest cognosci in aliquibus similitudinibus rerum naturalium, sed solum in essentia divina, quae in voluntatem imprimit." In Sent IV.45. 3.1 resp. ad argum. 5: "Ad quintum dicendum, quod cogitationes cordium solus Deus per seipsum novit; sed tamen alii cognoscere possunt quatenus eis revelatur vel per visionem verbi, vel quocumque alio modo." Similarly in ST 1a.57.4 co: "Alio modo possunt cognosci cogitationes, prout sunt in intellectu; et affectiones, prout sunt in voluntate. Et sic solus Deus cogitationes cordium et affectiones voluntatum cognoscere potest." ST 2a2ae.83.4: "Tum quia plerumque oratio magis agitur interiori actu, quem solus Deus cognoscit, quam voce, secundum illud quod apostolus dicit, i ad cor. xiv, orabo spiritu, orabo et mente." ST 3a.64.1: "[...] solus Deus illabitur animae [...]."

¹⁴⁸ "voluntas et natura duo principia activa ponuntur." See footnotes 32 above and 151 below.

¹⁴⁹ See Aquinas's responses to the questions whether angels (including daemons) know the hidden, interior thoughts of our heart. See, e.g., DV 8.13: "Responsio. Dicendum, quod Angeli cogitationes cordium per se et directe intueri non possunt. Ad hoc enim quod mens aliquid actu cogitet, requiritur intentio voluntatis, qua mens convertatur actu ad speciem quam habet [...]" (Leonina 22. 261b). See further DM 16.8: "Set quantum ad usum considerandum est quod usus specierum intelligibilium, qui est actualis cogitatio, dependet ex voluntate: uti-

nas's view, it is „only the person willing and thinking” who knows his or her own cogitations,¹⁵⁰ and God Himself, as He only knows an agent's voluntary acts through their cause and not only from their effects.¹⁵¹

The idea that – apart from the person herself – only God knows a person's willing and thinking is part of the traditional biblical and patristic lore.¹⁵² Usual-

mur enim speciebus habitualiter in nobis existentibus cum volumus;” “But regarding our use of the forms, we should note that such use, that is, actual thinking, depends on our will. For we use our habitual forms when we will to do so.” (Leonina 23. 321a; translated by Richard J. Regan, see Thomas Aquinas 2012. 2003. 493.)

¹⁵⁰ For the two ways in which the cogitations of human beings – at least “in a certain manner” (*aliqua*liter) – can be known to us see DM 16.8. co.: “uno modo secundum quod uidentur in se ipsis, sicut aliquis homo proprias cogitationes cognoscit, alio modo per aliqua corporalia signa”; “one may know them in two ways: in one way as one perceives them in themselves; in a second way by certain physical signs” (Leonina 23. 320b; translated by Richard J. Regan, see Thomas Aquinas 2003. 492). For “the person willing and thinking” also see DM 16.8. co.: “Vnde cum uoluntas interior non possit <moueri> ab alio nisi a Deo, cuius ordini immediate subest motus uoluntatis, et per consequens uoluntarie cogitationis, non potest cognosci neque a demonibus, neque a quocumque alio nisi ab ipso Deo, et ab homine uolente et cogitante.” “And so since only God, to whose ordination the movement of the will, and so voluntary thoughts, are directly subject, can move the will internally, neither devils nor anyone else but God and the person willing and thinking can know such thoughts.” (Leonina 23. 321b; Thomas Aquinas 2003. 494.) See further: *In Symbolum apostolorum reportatio*, art. 3: “Nullus autem cognoscit uerbum dum est in corde hominis, nisi ille qui concipit; sed tunc primo cognoscitur cum profertur” (Thomas Aquinas 1954. 200). DV 4.1, ad 5: “Ad quantum dicendum quod, quamvis apud nos manifestatio que est ad alterum non fiat nisi per uerbum uocale, tamen manifestatio ad seipsum fit etiam per uerbum cordis, et haec manifestatio aliam praecedat, et ideo etiam uerbum interior uerbum per prius dicitur” (Leonina 22. 121a). Aquinas neither assumes that our self-knowledge is infallible nor that we have privileged access to our cognitions and volitions, as God also has access to them. For self-knowledge and the problem of other minds in Aquinas see Pasnau 2004. 330–360.

¹⁵¹ SCG 3.56: “Quid autem velit aliquis uolens, non potest cognosci per cognitionem substantiae ipsius: nam uoluntas non tendit in sua uolita omnino naturaliter; propter quod uoluntas et natura duo principia actiua ponuntur. Non potest igitur aliquis intellectus cognoscere quid uolens velit, nisi forte per aliquos effectus, sicut, cum uidemus aliquem uoluntarie operantem, scimus quid uoluerit; aut per causam, sicut Deus uoluntates nostras sicut et alios suos effectus, cognoscit per hoc quod est nobis causa uolendi; aut per hoc quod aliquis alteri suam uoluntatem insinuat, ut cum aliquis loquendo suum affectum exprimit.” “However, what a volitional agent wills cannot be known through a knowledge of his substance, for the will does not incline to its object in a purely natural way; this is why the will and nature are said to be two active principles. So, an intellect cannot know what a volitional agent wills except, perhaps, through certain effects. For instance, when we see someone acting voluntarily we may know what he wishes: either through their cause, as God knows our will acts, just as He does His other effects, because He is for us a cause of our willing; or by means of one person indicating his wish to another, as when a man expresses his feeling in speech.” (Leonina 14. 155b–156a. Marietti 3. 76. n. 2328. ET 3/1. 190. n. 5.)

¹⁵² 1 Cor 2:11: “quis enim scit hominum quae sint hominis nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est ita et quae Dei sunt nemo cognouit nisi Spiritus Dei”; see SCG 3.59: “Hinc est quod dicitur i cor. 2-11: quae sunt hominis nemo nouit nisi spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est” (Leonina 14. 164b; Marietti 3. 80. n. 2352). SCG 4.17: “Quis enim scit quae sunt hominis nisi spiritus hominis, qui in ipso est?” (Leonina 15. 69a; Marietti 3. 279. n. 3532). Aquinas's references on Paul's text are based on Ambrose's *De Spiritu Sancto* II. c. 11. See Leonina 23. 320, footnote 147.

ly, its various expressions can be considered common phrases that are intended to draw attention to divine omniscience and justice in various contexts.¹⁵³

Aquinas, however, regarded the hiddenness of the cogitations of our heart as a severe structural constraint on human knowledge and communication that cannot be removed under any circumstances. In Aquinas's view, only God's direct intervention can ensure that a human being has knowledge of other people's cogitations which are principally and naturally hidden from anyone else.

An illuminating example is to be found in his *Commentary on the Sentences*.

In the second book Aquinas discusses the question whether Adam could be deceived before the Fall. He makes the following argument in favour of the affirmative answer: it is clear that before the fall Adam could not know the secret of the heart of the other, since even the angels do not know it, but only God alone does. However, there may have been somebody who claimed to think of something he did not really think of, and Adam may have believed him, because he did not know that the other was lying. Thus it seems that Adam was deceived.¹⁵⁴

Aquinas – who argues for the infallibility of Adam's cognition – disagrees with the conclusion of the argument. He does not deny, however, the inscrutability of the "secrets of the heart" (*secreta cordis*) but refers instead to the divine providence (omnipotence) which ensured that Adam would not be deceived before the fall. Even *in primo statu*, the intervention of the divine omnipotence, that is, a miracle is necessary to know other people's cogitations of the heart.¹⁵⁵ This saves Adam's intellect from falsity that – just as monsters cannot appear in unspoiled nature – cannot occur *in statu innocentiae*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Aquinas most often refers to Psalms 7:10: "et scrutans corda et renes Deus"; Jer 11:20: "tu autem Domine Sabaoth qui iudicas iuste et probas renes et cor"; 17:10: "ego Dominus scrutans cor et probans renes"; 20:12: "tu Domine exercituum probator iusti qui vides renes et cor"; Acts 2:23 "ego sum scrutans renes et corda"; 1 Cor 14:25 „occulta cordis eius manifesta fiunt" (for the latter see also footnote 142); Jer 17:9–10: "pravum est cor hominis et inscrutabile quis cognosceret illud? Ego dominus scrutans corda et probans renes." Mt 9:4: "et cum vidisset Iesus cogitationes eorum dixit"; Lc 9:47: "Iesus videns cogitationes cordis illorum"; Lk 16:15: "Deus autem novit corda vestra."

¹⁵⁴ In Sent II.23.2.3 arg. 3: „Praeterea, constat quod Adam in primo statu secreta cordis alterius hominis scire non potuisset, cum nec Angeli hoc sciant, sed solus Deus. Potuit autem contingere ut aliquis diceret se illud cogitare quod non cogitabat, nec Adam eum mentiri credidisset, cum hoc certitudinaliter non cognovisset. Ergo videtur quod deceptus fuisset." (Thomas Aquinas 1929. 578.) On the "Adamic cognition" and its infallibility in *statu primo* see Kretzmann 1992. 165–168.

¹⁵⁵ In Sent II.23.2.3 arg. 3: „Ad tertium dicendum, quod sicut divina providentia corpus hominis servasset illaesum ab omnibus exterioribus laesuris, ita etiam servasset intellectum hominis indeceptum in omnibus quae suam cognitionem impediabant, ut statim intelligeret, si quis falsum pro vero sibi diceret" (Thomas Aquinas 1929. 579).

¹⁵⁶ DV 18.6 co: "Unde sicut in conceptione humani corporis in statu innocentiae nulla monstruositas accidisset ita etiam in intellectu eius nulla falsitas esse posset" (Leonina 22, 2. 552b).

The weight of Aquinas's conviction is also shown by his remark in SCG 3.154: to know another fellow human being's willing and thinking is clearly equivalent to having an insight into a future contingent event that – *ipso facto* – is not existent yet. The ability to look into what is hidden in another human being's heart, along with the ability to know and reveal future event is one of the miracles that confirmed the apostles and disciples' oral teaching with regard to the aspect of God's nature that cannot be evident for us via demonstration.

However, an adequate testimony to the faith is not supplied by this gift of prophecy unless it were concerned with things that can be known by God alone, just as miracles are of such nature that God alone can work them. Now, these things are especially, in the affairs of this world, the secrets of our hearts, which God alone can know [...] and contingent future events which also come only under divine cognition, for He sees them in themselves because they are present to Him by reason of His eternity [...].¹⁵⁷

This assumption of principal hiddenness of our interior cogitations dramatically reduces the philosophical and theological relevance of external physical signals if it comes to knowing our fellow human beings' emotions, desires, intentions and thoughts. This is not only true for conventional linguistic signals that can easily be deceptive, but also for non-conventional, universal and hard to fake emotional displays in humans. For example, when investigating whether angels (including daemons) know the cogitations of our heart, Aquinas argues that they can only have accidental, indirect and occasional knowledge of human beings' interior cogitations "through certain physical signs" (*per aliqua corporalia signa*),¹⁵⁸ such as when we turn pale while being afraid of something or blush while being ashamed, or show signs of being joyful or sad when affected by our cogitations.¹⁵⁹

Aquinas's quasi incidental remarks on possible human apprehension of such signals and the interior states they display are particularly noteworthy. If an emotional state (*passio*) which is based on some internal cogitation is "forceful enough", says Aquinas, then also its external appearance will have an indication (*indicium*) that even "the less sophisticated persons" (*grossiores*) can grasp.¹⁶⁰ If "an emotion be milder, skilled doctors can detect it from change in the heart-beat that they note by the pulse" which is in line with Aquinas's general obser-

¹⁵⁷ SCG 3.154. See ET 3/2. 243. n. 10. See also footnote 147 above.

¹⁵⁸ DV 8.13: "angeli cogitationes cordium per se et directe intueri non possunt [...]"; "Sed per accidens potest cognoscere cogitationem cordis quandoque [...]" (Leonina 22. 261b).

¹⁵⁹ DM 16.8 (Leonina 23. 320) and DV 8.13 (Leonina 22. 261b).

¹⁶⁰ DM 16.8 (Leonina 23. 320): "Que si fuerit uehemens, etiam in exteriori apparentia habet aliquod indicium per quod potest etiam a grossioribus deprehendi [...]."

vation: “sometimes” “even doctors” are able to know “the passions of our heart” if “an actual cogitation results in a motion in the body”.¹⁶¹

It certainly never happens in Aquinas’s world that ordinary human beings just signal states of affairs and respond to each other’s signals without further theoretical and practical ado.¹⁶² In Aquinas’s view, even in the most obvious cases of emotional displays there must be “indicia” at hand that enable the adequately equipped intellect to draw practical inferences in order to get information from another person’s “word of the heart” that might represent or misrepresent aspects of the world as their exact or distorted “likeness”. Aquinas thinks that this kind of task is easier to accomplish for angels (including daemons) who are much more skillful and sophisticated than human beings, but the semantic, metaphysical and theological framework that imposes structural constraints on his treatment of the problem is all the same.

This framework rules out the universal adequation of internal representations and external signals as a consequence of pure natural processes, since both internal representations and external signals in human beings – as we saw earlier – are subject to a principle different from nature: will.¹⁶³ For the same reason, this framework also excludes that our will-dependent, complex internal representations naturally meet the conformity requirement set as a standard for truth by Aquinas. In Aquinas’s view, making an error literally means to produce something unnatural: errors are the monsters of our interior world.

[...] false judgments in the area of intellectual operations are like monsters among natural things; they are not in accord with nature, but apart from nature.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ See DM 16.8 (Leonina 23. 321b; translated by Richard J. Regan, see Thomas Aquinas 2012. 2003. 493). See also DV 8.13 (Leonina 22. 261b): “uno modo in quantum ex cogitatione actuali resultat aliquis motus in corpore dum aliquis gaudio vel tristitia afficitur ex his quae cogitat, et sic cor quodammodo movetur, – per hunc enim modum etiam medici quandoque possunt passionem cordis cognoscere.”

¹⁶² In reality, infants can reliably distinguish justified from unjustified emotional displays already at an age of 18 months. See Chiarella–Poulin-Dubois 2013.

¹⁶³ See footnote 148 and the passage from SCG 3.56 in footnote 151 above. See further, e.g., Aquinas’s reply in DV 8.13 where he states that the motion of the will does not depend on or has any connection whatsoever with any natural cause. “Motus autem voluntatis alterius non potest Angelo notus esse naturali cognitione, quia Angelus naturaliter cognoscit per formas sibi inditas, quae sunt similitudines rerum in natura existentium; motus autem voluntatis non habet dependentiam nec connexionem ad aliquam causam naturalem, sed solum ad causam divinam, quae in voluntatem sola imprimere potest. Unde motus voluntatis et cordis cogitatio non potest cognosci in aliquibus similitudinibus rerum naturalium, sed solum in essentia divina, quae in voluntatem imprimit.” (Leonina 22. 261b.)

¹⁶⁴ SCG 3.107: “Nullus autem intellectus talis potest esse: falsa enim iudicia in operationibus intellectus sunt sicut monstra in rebus naturalibus, quae non sunt secundum naturam, sed praeter naturam; nam bonum intellectus, et eius finis naturalis est cognitio veritatis” (Leonina 14. 336b; Marietti 3. 162. n. 2828; ET 3/2. 102. n. 9). Aquinas regards reasoning as a form of human imitation of nature’s work. See, e.g., the *Prologue* to his commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*: “Attendendum autem est quod actus rationis similes sunt quantum

Consequently, making internal states respond to the world by eliminating errors and making external states respond to internal states are permanent requirements to be achieved for a human being.¹⁶⁵ If either of these requirements remains unfulfilled, then error, deception and lying occur.¹⁶⁶

Now, what if Adam's state of innocence when no deception can occur is over and the apostles and disciples who had an insight into what could be known by God alone are not living among us anymore? How can anyone be certain about other people's cogitations – including their errors and deceptive intent – if people communicate with each other without benefit of divine intervention: as ordinary people usually do? How can we be certain that someone really possesses the religious quality displayed with conventional signals or even emotions? If it is not obvious that a religious signaller possesses the quality indicated by her signals, because low-cost conventional signals are used that can be easily faked and, in addition, we assume – as Aquinas does – that: (1) conventional signals are primarily signs of mental quasi-entities, and (2) these are in principle inaccessible to other people, then we are facing a frightening, dreadful world from the religious point of view: that of an opaque and possibly deceptive interior world of beliefs and desires of our fellow human beings.

ad aliquid actibus nature; unde et ars imitatur naturam in quantum potest. In actibus autem nature inuenitur triplex diuersitas: in quibusdam enim natura ex necessitate agit, ita quod non potest deficere; in quibusdam uero natura ut frequentius operatur, licet quandoque et possit deficere a proprio actu, unde in hiis necesse est esse duplicem actum: unum qui sit ut in pluribus, sicut cum ex semine generatur animal perfectum, alium uero quando natura deficit ab eo quod est sibi conueniens, sicut cum ex semine generatur aliquid monstrum, propter corruptionem alicuius principii.” “It should be noted that acts of reason are similar to some degree to acts of nature, whence art imitates nature insofar as it can. We find a threefold diversity in acts of nature: in some, nature acts from necessity, so that it cannot fail; in some acts, nature is usually effective; however sometimes it can fail in its act. In these latter cases there must be a twofold act: one which happens most of the time, as when a perfect animal is generated from a seed; and one which happens when nature lacks something befitting it, as when a monster is generated from a seed because some principal element is corrupted.” For the English translation see Copeland–Sluiter 2012. 790.

¹⁶⁵ See ST 2a2ae.184.5 arg. 2: “Praeterea, status exterior debet interiori statui respondere, alioquin incurrit mendacium, quod non solum est in falsis uerbis, sed etiam in simulatis operibus [...]. (This part of the objection is not against Aquinas's position). See further ST 2a2ae.94.2 co.: “Nam cum exterior cultus sit signum interioris cultus, sicut est perniciosum mendacium si quis uerbis asserat contrarium eius quod per ueram fidem tenet in corde, ita etiam est perniciosa falsitas si quis exteriorem cultum exhibeat alicui contra id quod sentit in mente.”

¹⁶⁶ Aquinas, as do many of his contemporaries, frequently uses the passive form of the Latin verb “to deceive” to refer to the state when someone is in error, and the words “error” and “to be deceived” in a phrase together (e.g., “errare sive decipi”), thus referring to our intuition that to err is nothing other than lightheartedly adhere or assent to something false, that is: to be deceived. See ST 1a.94.4 co.: “Respondeo dicendum quod quidam dixerunt quod in nomine deceptionis duo possunt intelligi, scilicet qualiscumque existimatio leuis, qua aliquis adhaeret falso tanquam uero, sine assensu credulitatis; et iterum firma credulitas.”

VI. AQUINAS'S THIRD ASSUMPTION: A VAST PART OF HUMAN MISERY COMES FROM DECEPTION AND ERROR

According to Aquinas, Socrates “was right in a sense” when he held that all virtue was knowledge and all sin was ignorance. Since Aquinas holds that the will has a natural inclination to follow the good or at least what is considered good by the willing person, the pursuit of evil can only be the consequence of ignorance or error that makes the bad seem good.¹⁶⁷

Not only is sin based on error in Aquinas's view, but also the opposite is true: error itself is sin or comes from sin.¹⁶⁸ For, in Aquinas's view, making an error is

¹⁶⁷ See SCG 3.108: “Nullum autem voluntatis peccatum potest esse absque errore: quia voluntas semper tendit in bonum apprehensum; unde, nisi in apprehensione boni erretur, non potest esse in voluntate peccatum.” “Moreover, no sin can occur in the will without error, since the will always tends toward the good as apprehended. Consequently, unless there is an error in the apprehension of the good, there cannot be a sin in the will.” (Leonina 14. 339a; Marietti 3. 163. n. 2833; ET 3/2. 104. n. 2). See further SCG 4.70: „Omne peccatum ex quadam ignorantia contingit: unde dicit philosophus quod omnis malus est ignorans; et in proverbii dicitur: errant qui operantur malum. Tunc igitur solum homo securus potest esse a peccato secundum voluntatem, quando secundum intellectum securus est ab ignorantia et errore.” “[...] every sin comes about from a kind of ignorance. Thus, the Philosopher says that every evil man is ignorant; and we read in Proverbs (14: 22): They err that work evil. Therefore, then, a man can be secure from sin in the will, only when his intellect is secure from ignorance and from error.” (Leonina 15. 220b–221a; Marietti 3. 373. n. 4048. ET 4. 272–273. n. 4.) SCG 4.92: „Peccatum in voluntate non accidit sine aliquali ignorantia intellectus: nihil enim volumus nisi bonum verum vel apparens; propter quod dicitur Proverb. XIV: *Errant qui operantur malum*; et philosophus III Ethic., dicit quod *omnis malus ignorans*. Sed anima quae est vere beata, nullo modo potest esse ignorans: cum in Deo omnia videat quae pertinent ad suam perfectionem.” “Sin cannot take place in the will without some sort of ignorance in the intellect, for we will nothing but the good whether true or apparent. For this reason Proverbs (14: 22) says: They err who work evil; and in the Ethics the Philosopher says every evil man is ignorant. But the soul which is truly happy cannot be in ignorance at all, since in God it sees everything which belongs to its perfection.” (Leonina 15. 288b; Marietti 3. 413. n. 4262; ET 4. 370. n. 6). For Aquinas's stock references that he steadily uses when discussing the connections between ignorance, error, and sin, see *Proverbs* 14,22 (“errant qui operantur malum misericordia et veritas praeparant bona”) and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* III, 1 (1110b 26–30): “Ebrius enim vel qui irascitur non videtur propter ignorantiam operari, sed propter aliquod eorum quae dicta sunt, non sciens autem sed ignorans. Ignorat quidem igitur omnis malus quae oportet operari et a quibus fugiendum et propter tale peccatum iniusti et universaliter mali fiunt.” (In NE, Leonina 47. Vol. 1. 125.) For Aquinas's reference to Socrates see ST 1a2ae.77.2 co.: „Respondeo dicendum quod opinio Socratis fuit, ut philosophus dicit in VII Ethic., quod scientia nunquam posset superari a passione. Unde ponebat omnes virtutes esse scientias, et omnia peccata esse ignorantias. In quo quidem aliqualiter recte sapiebat. Quia cum voluntas sit boni vel apparentis boni, nunquam voluntas in malum moveretur, nisi id quod non est bonum, aliqualiter rationi bonum appareret, et propter hoc voluntas nunquam in malum tenderet, nisi cum aliqua ignorantia vel errore rationis. Unde dicitur Prov. XIV, errant qui operantur malum.” For acrasia, error and sin see further Pasnau 2004. 241ff.

¹⁶⁸ See Kretzmann 1992. 180–181. See further SCG 1.61, with reference to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 2 (1139a 27): “Sicut *verum est bonum intellectus, ita falsum est malum ipsius*: naturaliter enim appetimus verum cognoscere et refugimus falso decipi.” “Again, as the true is the good of the intellect, so the false is its evil. For we naturally seek to know the truth

a presumptuous act against truth, as it is a mental act by means of which we approve something false as true.¹⁶⁹ Aquinas takes Socrates' position even further, in so far as, under certain conditions, he attaches moral value not only to error as a presumptuous act, but also to ignorance as an act of negligence. Although sheer ignorance, unlike error, does not imply forming an opinion about things we do not know, being ignorant amounts to depriving ourselves of the knowledge of things we should know.¹⁷⁰

What are those things that should not even be ignored? In Aquinas's view, the things that direct people in their actions have to be known by everyone. This general human obligation does not merely mean the acceptance and correct application of moral rules, but – according to Aquinas – it is also an eminently religious issue. Aquinas henceforth stresses that everyone must know what belongs to faith because faith directs our intentions.¹⁷¹

and flee from being deceived by the false.” (Leonina 13. 175b; Marietti 2. 72. n. 513; ET 1. 207. n. 8.) Aquinas explicitly says that error is sin: “error evidently has the nature of sin.” See footnote 169 below.

¹⁶⁹ See DM 3.7 co.: „Error autem est approbare falsa pro veris; unde addit actum quendam super ignorantiam: potest enim esse ignorantia sine hoc quod aliquis de ignotis sententiam ferat, et tunc est ignorans, et non errans; set quando iam falsam sententiam fert de his quae nescit, tunc proprie dicitur errare. Et quia peccatum in actu consistit error manifeste habet rationem peccati. Non enim est absque praesumptione, quod aliquis de ignoratis sententiam ferat [...]” “And error consists of assenting to false things as true. And so error adds an act over and above ignorance. For there can be ignorance without a person making judgments about unknown things, and then the person is ignorant but not erroneous. But when a person makes judgments about things of which the person is ignorant, then we speak in a strict sense about the person erring. And since sin consists of an act, error evidently has the nature of sin. For it is presumptuous for a person to make judgments about things of which the person is ignorant [...]” (Translated by Richard Regan, see Thomas Aquinas 2003. 163.) For the quasi-definition of “error” that Aquinas uses in this passage see Augustine's *Enchiridion* 17: “pro uero quippe approbat falsum, quod est erroris proprium” (Augustinus 1969. 57). For error as a presumptuous act see further In Ioh. caput 4. lectio 2: “Quidam namque participant eam obnubilantes tenebris erroris, et isti adorant in monte quia omnis error ex superbia causatur [...]” For the moral weight of “superbia” see Augustinus: *De civitate Dei* 12, 6: “Cum vero causa miseriae malorum angelorum quaeritur, ea merito occurrit, quod ab illo, qui summe est, aversi ad se ipsos conversi sunt, qui non summe sunt; et hoc vitium quid aliud quam superbia nuncupetur? *Initium quippe omnis peccati superbia.*” (Augustinus 1993a. 518–519.)

¹⁷⁰ DM 3.7 co.: “Set ignorantia de se rationem pene dicit, non autem omnis ignorantia habet rationem culpe: ignorare enim ea que quis non tenetur scire absque culpa est, set ignorantia illa qua quis ignorat ea que tenetur scire non est absque peccato.” “[...] ignorance of itself indicates the character of punishment, although not every ignorance has the character of moral wrong. For example, being ignorant of things that one is not bound to know involves no moral wrong, but the ignorance whereby one does not know things that one is bound to know involves sin.” (Leonina 23. 81a; Thomas Aquinas 2003. 163.)

¹⁷¹ DM 3.7 co.: „Tenetur autem scire quilibet ea quibus dirigatur in propriis actibus. Unde omnis homo tenetur scire ea quae fidei sunt, quia fides intentionem dirigit [...]” “And everyone is obliged to know the things that guide human persons in their actions. And so every human being is obliged to know things belonging to faith, since faith guides our striving [...]” (Leonina 23. 81a; Thomas Aquinas 2003. 163.)

Faith guides the present life. In order that anyone live well, it is required that they know whatever is necessary for living well. [...] Faith, however, teaches all those things necessary for living well.¹⁷²

Error and deception in this context are of particular importance, because they prove to be the major hindrance to human happiness.

[...] felicity excludes all unhappiness, for no man can be at once unhappy and happy. Now, deception and error constitute a great part of unhappiness; in fact, that is what all men naturally avoid.¹⁷³

Error and deception, as we saw earlier, belong to the lower grades in the great chain of degradation where defect, disorder and division prevail. In Aquinas's view, the main reason that error and deception exert a divisive force in social life is that their presence in our mental universe prevents us from learning the most important things that are necessary for living a happy life. They are fundamentally shattering human social relations and leading to misery already in this life, because they are persistently misguiding us all. In contrast, Catholic religion can be our guide for living well, because it is directed towards the first, simple and unchangeable truth which is contrary to falsity. As there is only one way of being truthful compared with the infinitely diverse ways to be in error,¹⁷⁴ truth is a unifying force in the lives of all those who have faith, i.e., who have an intellectual insight to what human beings in this life can apprehend from God's true nature in the hope of future life and happiness.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² "quia fides dirigit uitam presentem nam homo ad hoc quod bene uiuat, oportet quod sciat necessaria ad bene uiuendum." [...] "Fides autem docet omnia necessaria ad bene uiuendum." See Ayo 2005. 19–21.

¹⁷³ SCG 3.39: „Felicitas omnem miseriam excludit: nemo enim simul miser et felix esse potest. Deceptio autem et error magna pars miseriae est: hoc est enim quod omnes naturaliter fugiunt." (Leonina 14. 96a; Marietti 3. 45. n. 2170; ET 3/1. 128. n. 4.)

¹⁷⁴ This is because errors can be infinitely multiplied (*errores possunt in infinitum multiplicari*). See ST 2a2ae.10.5 co. and ad 1: "Unde in generali possunt assignari tres praedictae species infidelitatis. Si vero distinguantur infidelitatis species secundum errorem in diversis quae ad fidem pertinent, sic non sunt determinatae infidelitatis species, possunt enim errores in infinitum multiplicari, ut patet per Augustinum, in libro de haeresibus." [...] fides est una virtus, ex hoc quod adhaeret uni primae veritati; sed infidelitatis species sunt multae, ex hoc quod infideles diversas falsas sententias sequuntur." See further In Sent III.23.2.4 qc. 2 co.: „Objectum autem fidei est veritas prima, quae est simplex et invariabilis. Et ideo in fide inuenitur duplex unitas: ex hoc enim quod unum et simplex est cui fides ininitur, habitus fidei in habente non dividitur in plures habitus: ex hoc autem quod veritas est, habet potentiam uniendi diversos habentes fidem in similitudinem unius fidei, quae attenditur secundum idem creditum: quia, sicut dicit Dionysius, veritas habet vim colligendi et uniendi, e contrario error et ignorantia diuisiva sunt."

¹⁷⁵ In DDN 4.4: "Et hoc, consequenter, exponit ex opposito sicut enim ignorantia est diuisiva eorum qui in errorem inducuntur, ita praesentia intellectualis luminis, per quod cognoscitur veritas, congregat eos qui illuminantur, ad invicem et unit eos in una veritate cog-

Consequently, error is seen by Aquinas as the single most important and disruptive threat to the unity of his contemporary social environment. Since this unity, according to Aquinas, must rest on the Catholic faith as a unifying force, it is hardly surprising that – in his vast work on the problem of evil, *De malo* – after nescience, ignorance and error he introduces heresy as the ultimate degree of cognitive defect (*defectus cognitionis*). Heresy is neither a mere ignorance with regard to what we should know, nor is it just a presumptuous action against truth, i.e., error, but it is a conscious and stubborn adherence (*pertinacia*) to an error.¹⁷⁶ In Aquinas's interpretation, the word "heresis" most importantly refers to the divisive force that operates in a heretical act. Heresy is the breakdown of unity through the conscious choice of someone who persistently adheres to their erroneous position against the Catholic public opinion (*praeter communem opinionem*).¹⁷⁷

For Aquinas, as is well known, heresy was intolerable. If it is not possible to convert the heretics, says he famously in the *Summa theologiae*, the Church –

nita; manifestum est enim quod circa unum non contingit nisi uno modo verum dicere, sed multipliciter errare a veritate contingit." (Thomas Aquinas 1950. 109. n. 332.) See further In Matth 24.1: "Unde quia veritati non adhaeserunt, dati sunt erroribus. Et hoc accidit in Simone mago, qui libros scripsit, et appellavit se librum Dei, Deum magnum, omnia Dei, et multos seduxit. Illorum enim est seduci qui divisi sunt in errores, quia stultorum infinitus est numerus, eccle. i, 15. Unde veritas congregat, error autem dividit, et hoc est periculum." (Reportatio of Léger of Besançon; see Thomas Aquinas 1951. 297. n. 1911.) Furthermore, see the already cited passage from In DDN 4.11: "Viae enim tortuosae et difformes sunt causa erroris; uniformitas viae praeservat ab errore" (Thomas Aquinas 1950. 148. n. 450).

¹⁷⁶ DM 8.1 ad 7: "Ad septimum dicendum quod quatuor videntur ad defectum cognitionis pertinere, scilicet nescientia, ignorantia, error et heresis. Inter que nescientia est communius, quia importat simplicem carentiam scientie: unde et in angelis Dionysius quandam nescientiam ponit, ut patet in VI cap. Ecclesiasticae ierarchie; ignorantia uero est quedam nescientia, eorum scilicet que homo natus est scire et debet; error uero supra ignorantiam addit applicationem mentis ad contrarium ueritatis: ad errorem enim pertinet approbare falsa pro ueris; set heresis supra errorem addit aliquid et ex parte materis, quia est error eorum que ad fidem pertinent, et ex parte errantis, quia importat pertinaciam que sola facit hereticum [...]." "Four things seem to belong to deficient knowledge, namely, lack of knowledge, ignorance, error, and heresy. Of these, lack of knowledge is the most common, since it signifies the simple absence of knowledge, and so also Dionysius supposes some lack of knowledge in angels, as his work On Ecclesiastical Hierarchy makes clear. And ignorance is a kind of lack of knowledge, namely, of things that human beings are by nature constituted to know and ought to know. And error adds to ignorance the turning of the mind to the contrary of truth, since it belongs to error to approve the false as true. And heresy adds to error something both regarding the matter, since heresy consists of error about things that belong to faith, and regarding the one in error, since heresy implies obstinacy, which alone produces a heretic." (See Leonina 23. 195b–196a; Thomas Aquinas 2003. 323.)

¹⁷⁷ In Sent IV.13.2.1 co.: „Respondeo dicendum, quod nomen heresis Graecum est, et electionem importat secundum Isidorum; unde et haeretica divisiva dicuntur. Et quia in electione fit divisio unius ab altero, electio pro heresis dicitur, ut patet 9 Metaphys. Divisio autem contingit alicui parti per recessum a toto. Prima autem congregatio quae est in hominibus, est per viam cognitionis, quia ex hac omnes aliae oriuntur; unde et haeresis consistit in singulari opinione praeter communem opinionem." (Thomas Aquinas 1929. 564.)

“looking after the salvation of others” – separates them by excommunication (i.e., confirms, in reality, their already separate status) and delivers them “to a secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death.”¹⁷⁸ A heretic – by virtue of their avowed position – is outside the truth. Even while heretics tell the truth, they are always lying, as there cannot be a heretic without secret cogitations of the heart being infected with errors. Using the words of one of the most faithful followers of Aquinas, Bernardus Guidonis: when we proceed against heretics it can be very difficult to „find the truth against them.”¹⁷⁹

Nonetheless, however dramatic the consequences of breaking with Catholic unity should be according to Aquinas, we cannot say that he wrote the *Summa contra Gentiles* against heresies, much less against heretics, ancient or contemporary. He, famously again, refers to the difficulty of proceeding “against the errors of particular persons” (*contra singulorum errores*), partly due to a lack of knowledge about their theoretical positions.¹⁸⁰ As we have seen, Aquinas most likely was not familiar with contemporary heretics and their teachings. As we have also seen, he did not write SCG against gentiles either – as the work’s non-authentic title suggests – or anyone else as a person or a member of a group. We cannot even say that he wrote the book against infidels, as the work’s more accurate, possibly authentic title suggests. He writes SCG in order to manifest the truth and eliminate the errors opposite to it. Anyone can be therefore an ally of Aquinas’s in SCG if they represent a true theoretical position, regardless of religious and socio-cultural identity and vice versa: Aquinas thinks errors are to be destroyed no matter whose errors they are.

Aquinas’s epic fight for the truth in SCG takes place in a spiritual space that abounds in errors and is only populated by the avatars of the imaginary opponents of the work in so far as certain types of errors can be attributed to them.

¹⁷⁸ See ST 2a2ae.11.3 co.: „Respondeo dicendum quod circa haereticos duo sunt consideranda, unum quidem ex parte ipsorum; aliud ex parte Ecclesiae. Ex parte quidem ipsorum est peccatum per quod meruerunt non solum ab Ecclesia per excommunicationem separari, sed etiam per mortem a mundo excludi. Multo enim gravius est corrumpere fidem, per quam est animae vita, quam falsare pecuniam, per quam temporali vitae subvenitur. Unde si falsarii pecuniae, vel alii malefactores, statim per saeculares principes iuste morti traduntur; multo magis haeretici, statim cum de haeresi convincuntur, possent non solum excommunicari, sed et iuste occidi. Ex parte autem Ecclesiae est misericordia, ad errantium conversionem. Et ideo non statim condemnat, sed post primam et secundam correctionem, ut apostolus docet. Postmodum vero, si adhuc pertinax invenitur, Ecclesia, de eius conversione non sperans, aliorum saluti providet, eum ab Ecclesia separando per excommunicationis sententiam; et ulterius relinquit eum iudicio saeculari a mundo exterminandum per mortem.”

¹⁷⁹ Bernard Gui talks about the method and the difficulties to question and examine the Pseudo-Apostles when mentioning this serious issue: “Est autem sciendum quod valde difficile est ipsos examinare et veritatem contra eos invenire [...]” (Bernard Gui 1964. I. 96).

¹⁸⁰ See SCG I.2: “Contra singulorum autem errores difficile est procedere [...]” (Leonina 13. 6b; Marietti 2. 3. n. 10). See further ET 1. 62. n. 3, but the English translation is inaccurate there.

Aquinas thinks, however, that these errors can take root in human minds and, as a consequence of their causal efficacy, they can ruin human cooperation and happiness.

VII. SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE IN AN OPAQUE, ERROR-PRONE AND DECEPTIVE WORLD

Seen from this perspective, the *Summa contra Gentiles* is – quite literally – a struggle for souls. Aquinas seeks to ensure religious unity by what he thinks is a heroic and decisive battle that will result in establishing proper conditions for communication and cooperation without error and deception in society.

Aquinas often uses terms and metaphors borrowed from warfare in his works.¹⁸¹ In his controversy against certain secular Parisian theologians, Aquinas argues that during their warfare the friars use spiritual rather than physical weapons, i.e., “sacred doctrines in order to overcome the errors.”¹⁸² Although a spiritual war always takes place in the spiritual space inhabited by mental entities (“the words of the heart”) and is fought with only symbolic tools, the outcome of the fight cannot be considered symbolic.

It is real, not only in terms of its effects in so far as the identification of errors makes possible to identify pertinent people („errings”, „schismatics”, „heretics” etc.) even if they are not the adversaries of Aquinas in SCG, but also because, as we have seen, Aquinas believes that the most important events of human life and faith take place in the human soul.¹⁸³ The correct representation of the world, the possibility of cautious and accurate communication to avoid misunderstandings and punishment, and ultimately human happiness, worldly and eternal, depend on mental contents hidden in the non-transparent world of human minds.

¹⁸¹ See Synan 1988. 404–437.

¹⁸² CI 2.1: „ Magis videtur remotum a religionis proposito corporalis militia, quae armis corporalibus exercetur, quam militia spiritualis, quae utitur armis spiritualibus, scilicet sacris documentis ad errorum impugnationem [...]” (Leonina 41, pars A 58). The work was written in Paris in 1256. See Torrell 1996. 79–80 and 346.

¹⁸³ See section 5.4 above. See further SCG 3.119: “Et quia per interiores actus directe in Deum tendimus, ideo interioribus actibus proprie Deum colimus.” “And since we directly tend toward God through interior acts, we therefore properly give cult to God by interior acts.” (Leonina 14. 370b. Marietti 3. 177. n. 2913. ET 3/2. 132. n. 6.) *Sermo IV (Osanna filio David)*: “Dicunt alii: Magis laudabiles sunt qui bene uiuunt in seculo quam qui in religione; et ponunt exemplum et dicunt quod magis laudabilis est miles qui regi bene conseruat debile castrum quam qui forte. Deciperis: consideras quod seruire Deo sit solum in actibus exterioribus et non in actibus interioribus uirtutum. Principales autem actus sunt interiores uirtutes ut sapientia, prudentia.” (Leonina 44,1. 45.) In Sent IV.13.2.1 arg. 5: “Sed fides non consistit in uerbis oris, sed in assensu cordis” (Thomas Aquinas 1929. 563).

The purpose of a spiritual army such as the Dominican order, according to Aquinas, is that, as he writes, “to win over the people opposed to God.”¹⁸⁴ The struggles of Dominicans to fight heretics are also described by contemporaries as a spiritual battle, which is an equivalent complement to the real fight. “At that time, the count of Montfort [was] fighting against heretics with the material sword, and blessed Dominic with the sword of the word of God.”¹⁸⁵

Aquinas, as a member of the Dominican order, regarded this spiritual struggle as his most important vocation. This might be one of the reasons that the *Summa contra Gentiles* can be considered the most personal work of Aquinas.¹⁸⁶ Another reason is that by writing the work, Aquinas gave voice to his deepest convictions about how an opaque and deceptive social world abundant in cheap and easy to fake signals could be transformed with spiritual arms into a uniform common life that can, on his view, at least, lead people to ultimate happiness.

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Summa Contra Gentiles

Leonina: *Leonina*, followed by an Arabic number refers to the respective volume of the so-called Leonine Edition of Aquinas’s works (*Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia iussu Leonis XIII. P. M. edita*. Roma 1882–). In addition to the page number, I will also give the respective column number (e.g., Leonina 13. 17a). The critical edition of the *Summa contra Gentiles* is found in three volumes: *Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici Opera Omnia iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*. Tom. XIII–XV. Romae, Typis Riccardi Garroni. 1918–1930.

Marietti: *Marietti* always refers to the three-volume Marietti-edition of the *Summa contra Gentiles* in this paper. The first Arabic number refers to the respective volume, the second to the page number, and the third introduced by “n” to the paragraph number (e.g., Marietti 2. 8. n. 35). The bibliographical data of the three volumes:

Petrus Marc – Ceslaus Pera – Petrus Caramello (eds.) *S. Thomae Aquinatis Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium qui dicitur Summa contra Gentiles*. Vol. I. Introductio. Torino–Paris, Marietti–Lethielleux. 1967.

¹⁸⁴ In 2 Tim 2.1: „Sed militiae spiritualis finis est, ut victoriam habeant ab hominibus, qui sunt contra Deum [...]” “But the end of the spiritual army is to have victory over men who are against God [...]” (Thomas Aquinas 2007. 111).

¹⁸⁵ See Gerardus de Fracheto’s *Cronica Ordinis*: “Illo quoque tempore comes Montisfortis pugnans contra hereticos gladio materiali et beatus Dominicus gladio verbi Dei [...]” (Gerardus de Fracheto 1896. 322; English translation by Christine Caldwell Ames, see Ames 2009. 37.) Bernard Gui applies a similar metaphor when referring to the *Summa contra Gentiles* in his legend: “Supervacuum est autem recensendo errores describere quos idem veritatis doctor scripturarum suarum tanquam falce acutissima valuit extirpare. Sic contra gentilium errorem et stultitiam in archu et gladio doctrine sue prevaluit, quod in simili conflictu sibi hactenus modernis temporibus similis nullus fuit, sicut liber ejusdem qui summa contra gentiles pretitulatur, evidentius manifestat.” (See Bernard Gui 1968. 144.)

¹⁸⁶ See Gauthier 1993. 176 and 180.

- Ceslaus Pera – Petrus Marc – Petrus Caramello (eds.) *S. Thomae Aquinatis Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium seu “Summa contra Gentiles”*. Vol. II. Torino–Roma, Marietti. 1961.
- Ceslaus Pera – Petrus Marc – Petrus Caramello (eds.) *S. Thomae Aquinatis Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium seu “Summa contra Gentiles”*. Vol. III. Torino–Roma, Marietti. 1961.
- ET : ET refers to the five-volume English translation of the work I’m using. The first Arabic number refers to the respective volume, the second to the page number, and the third introduced by “n” to the paragraph number (e.g., ET 1. 71. n. 1). The bibliographical data of the individual volumes:
- ET 1 – Saint Thomas Aquinas: *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa Contra Gentiles. Book One: God*. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Anton C. Pegis. Garden City/NY, Image Books. 1955.
- ET 2 – Saint Thomas Aquinas: *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa Contra Gentiles. Book Two: Creation*. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by James F. Anderson. Garden City/NY, Image Books. 1956.
- ET 3/1 – Saint Thomas Aquinas: *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa Contra Gentiles. Book Three: Providence*. Part I. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Vernon J. Bourke. Garden City/NY, Image Books. 1956.
- ET 3/2 – Saint Thomas Aquinas: *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa Contra Gentiles. Book Three: Providence*. Part II. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Vernon J. Bourke. Garden City/NY, Image Books. 1956.
- ET 4 – Saint Thomas Aquinas: *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith. Summa Contra Gentiles. Book Four: Salvation*. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Charles J. O’Neil. Garden City/NY, Image Books. 1957.
- Summa contra Gentiles* is abbreviated as SCG throughout the paper. The first Arabic number after SCG refers to the respective book, and the second to the respective chapter of the work. E.g., SCG 1.6: the sixth chapter of the first book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*. For the Aquinas Institute’s online Latin-English edition of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, see <<https://aquinas.cc>>. For a Latin edition online, see <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org>>.

Further Abbreviations:

BDT	Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate
CI	Liber contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem
DM	Quaestiones disputatae de malo
DP	Quaestiones disputatae de potentia
DUI	De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas
DV	Quaestiones disputatae de veritate
In DDN	Expositio super Dionysium De divinis Nominibus
In Ioh	Super Evangelium Iohannis (reportatio)
In LP	Expositio libri Posteriorum
In Matth	Super Evangelium S. Matthaei lectura
In NE	Sententia libri Ethicorum
In PH	Expositio libri Peryermenias
In Sent	Scriptum super libros Sententiarum
In Symb	Expositio Super Symbolum Apostolorum / Collationes Credo in Deum
In Tim	Super Ad Timotheum
QQ	Quaestiones quodlibetales
ST	Summa theologiae

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