

THOMISM AND
'AFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE'

It is probable that the most serious obstacle in the way of a *rapprochement* between Thomism and much 'modern thought' is the widespread misgiving that Thomism ignores or rejects 'value-perception' and 'value-experience.' This misgiving is impressive both to the layman and to the professional philosopher. To the layman, because it is supposed that the embracing of the principles of a system so frigidly rational and so rigidly scientific involves a repudiation of the 'appreciative,' 'humanistic' attitude to life, and with it the denial of the validity of one's most cherished and intimate personal experience. To the philosopher, because, in the words of Professor Fringle-Pattison, 'At the present time philosophy is carried on more explicitly in terms of value than at any previous time.'

That 'experience,' 'value-perception,' 'intuition,' 'instinct,' 'real' or 'affective' knowledge—call them what you will—have in great measure come to claim the place which of old was ascribed to logical reasoning is a commonplace which calls for no proof. Even among those whom the Romanticist revolt from reason has not led to an admitted abandonment of logical, hard-headed thinking, there has come about a divorce of 'experience' from 'thought' whose effects can be scarcely less disastrous. 'Description' and 'appreciation' come to be regarded, not merely as distinct and independent ways of approach to the same reality, but as terminating in diverse realities. Such epistemological dualism leads ultimately to the setting up of two distinct and disparate deities: the God of thought, First Mover, Metaphysical Absolute, can no longer be identified with the God of 'religious experience.' 'My objection to all the metaphysical approaches to Deity,' writes Professor Julian Huxley, 'is that the God which they claim to reveal (*sic*) . . . has no relation, so far as can be observed, with the various Gods or aspects of God which humanity in its thousands of millions has actually worshipped.'

That we have in recent years seen the beginnings of an intellectualist reaction may be true enough. But a mere reaction is necessarily ephemeral; it tends to over-emphasis, and so reacts too far. The swing of the pendulum of unprincipled thought does not make for the stability of a *philosophia perennis*. Indeed Von Hügel has seen the history of human thought to be one relentless series of action and reaction between 'intuitive-emotionalism' and the reign of 'clear transparent thought' which flourishes in the 'cultivated, well-drained plains of human science and strict demonstration.' The

nineteenth century flight from Reason to Romance was a not wholly unhealthy reaction to the disembodied rationalism of the *Aufklärung*, the false intellectualism of Idealist 'objectification'; a sound if exaggerated protest of maimed human nature against the tyranny of a deified function which had become blinded and indifferent to the needs it was intended to serve. It was perhaps unfortunate that the reaction took for the most part the path of an anti-intellectualist and subjectivist romanticism rather than the sounder—if still inadequate—Existentialism of Kierkegaard, whose influence indeed seems still almost negligible in professional philosophical circles in this country.

But an intellectualist philosophy which is content to ignore or make light of affective experience is not only doomed to impermanence, it must forfeit the claim to be either truly intellectualist or truly philosophical. If intelligence is to be arbiter it is self-condemned if it must confess itself unable to account for the most vital and intimate forms of personal experience. If philosophy is by definition a system of universal applicability, if it is to explain to us the ultimate reasons of all things to the extent that these are discoverable by human powers, it follows that a system which must exclude affective knowledge from its purview can make no valid claim to be strictly philosophical. We are in no position ever to dispute the usurpations of 'value-experience' unless we are in possession of a critique of it which will enable us to judge of the validity or invalidity of the claims made on its behalf.

It may be regretted that Newman has occasioned the designation of the two modes of knowledge as 'notional' and 'real,' implying thereby that 'notional' knowledge is in some way wanting in reality.¹ But it remains true that affective experience is the more 'real' to us. 'The Universal and the Abiding does not move the will. What does move it is the Individual and the Evanescent.' The problem of value-perception is too urgent to be ignored, too real to be dismissed by ridicule and the all too easy method of a *reductio ad absurdum* (in which, as likely as not, it will revel) or the stigma of 'sensualism' or 'voluntarism.'

A philosophy which is to claim the permanent allegiance of the human mind, and of the modern mind in particular, must take account of the phenomenon of value-experience. But the sole recognition of the classical antithesis of 'conceptual' and 'affective' knowledge is sterile except it be an initial step to subsequent synthesis. A system of thought which would be accounted complete and final

¹ Cf. Maritain: 'Reflexions sur l'Intelligence,' pp. 92, 104, 124.

must be able to *explain* value-perception, to define its nature, its possibilities and its limitations, and to make precise its function in the life of the human spirit.

Is Thomism able to undertake this task? Has St. Thomas himself made any attempt to do so? At least, is there room in his synthesis for this method of approach to reality? Must we conclude that the problem of value-perception cannot be solved on Thomist principles? For if it is true, as Dr. Schiller maintained, that the 'discovery' of value was an 'achievement of the nineteenth century'; if traditional philosophy 'has never even expressly considered it'; if, furthermore, the problem is insoluble by traditional principles, then it seems vain to present St. Thomas as of any service to minds living under the influence of contemporary culture and beset by present-day problems.

The purpose of this modest essay is, in the first place, to show by a number of quotations from his writings that St. Thomas was quite alive to the existence of an 'affective,' 'connatural' or 'experimental' knowledge distinct from the purely rational process. In a further article we shall then attempt an outline of the Thomist critique of this *cognitio affectiva*, and so seek to make more clear the main points of agreement or divergence between the Thomist and recent treatments of the subject. It is hoped to be able to show good reason to believe that Thomism not only can fully account for much that has been a chief preoccupation of recent contributions to the subject, but is in a position to supply their acknowledged deficiencies.

Our first task, then, must be to establish the fact that the existence of an 'affective knowledge' distinct from 'rational' knowledge finds full recognition in the Thomist system, and indeed receives frequent mention in the writings of St. Thomas himself. Fr. Marin-Sola, O.P., in his illuminating discussion of the function of the Christian experience in the evolution of dogma,² has conveniently catalogued the various names by which these two modes of knowledge were known to St. Thomas. It may be useful to reproduce them here before quoting some actual texts.

There is first of all a kind of 'knowledge' which St. Thomas designates as: (1), *per usum rationis* (by the employment of reason); (2), *per rationis inquisitionem* (by rational inquiry); (3), *per modum cognitionis* (by the method of cognition); (4), *cognitio speculativa* (speculative cognition); (5), *per studium et doctrinam* (by study

² 'L'Evolution homogène du Dogme catholique' (2nd ed.), p. 363. Fribourg, 1924.

and teaching); (6), *scientia argumentativa* (knowledge attained by way of argumentation—i.e., by logical processes); (7), *scientia discursiva* (discursive knowledge); (8), *ex iudicio rationis* (by rational judgment).

Clearly distinguished and usually contrasted with these is a 'knowledge' which is (9), *affectiva*; (10), *per connaturalitatem* (by connaturality); (11), *per modum inclinationis* (by the way of inclination); (12), *per viam voluntatis* (by way of the will); (13), *notitia experimentalis* (experiential awareness); (14) *per modum naturae* (by the way of nature); (15), *per amorem* (through love); (16), *sine discursu* (without discursus); (17), *quasi ex habitu* (as it were arising from a *habitus*); (18), *cognitio absoluta et simplex* (absolute and simple cognition).

The catalogue is convenient; but it may already be remarked that it would be rash to assume that the terms included in the two sets are altogether synonymous in St. Thomas's mind. As will later be indicated, there are at least two forms of 'affective knowledge' recognised by St. Thomas, according as the 'affect' which conditions the knowledge is a *habitus* or an *act*—quite apart from the further differentiation which arises from the differentiation of the classes of objects. It may further be added that some of the terms in the second set, while they include, are by no means confined to 'affective' knowledge. *Notitia experimentalis* (to which we might add *perceptio*; cf. I. lxxxvii, 1 and 2, De Ver. x, 8 and 9), knowledge *sine discursu. absoluta et simplex*, and even *ex habitu* may be applied to certain acts of the intellect which are in no sense 'affective.'

To the second set of terms Fr. Marin Sola adds those which, in St. Thomas's writings, are applied solely to the soul's affective knowledge of God: (19) *per deiformem contemplationem* (by Godlike contemplation—i.e. by an apperception of the soul rendered Godlike by grace); (20), *per affinitatem ad divina* (through [the soul's] affinity to Divine Things); (21), *per contactum* (by contact or touch); (22), *sicut gustum* (after the manner of tasting); (23), *per unionem ad Deum* (through union with God); (24), *ex instinctu divino* (from divine instinct); (25), *ex intimo sui* (from the innermost self); (26), *ad modum primorum principiorum* (in the manner of our understanding of the axioms of reason—i.e. 'intuitively'³); (27), *per compassionem* (by compassion, or sympathy with Divine things).

³ On the place of 'intuition'—rightly understood—in the thought of St. Thomas, see especially 'L'intuition intellectuelle' by Régis Jolivet, 'Revue Thomiste,' 1932, pp. 52 ff. Also H.-D. Simonin, O.P., *ibid.* pp. 448 ff., M. de Munnynck, O.P., 'The Thomist,' 1939, pp. 143 ff. It is not of course to be supposed that the primary 'intuition' of being and of the first principles of reason is 'affective,' but that affective knowledge is also, in its own way, 'intuitive.'

It will already be seen that there is some similarity even of the terminology employed by St. Thomas with that of modern writers. The significance of his terms will be apparent when we study the nature of this *cognitio affectiva*.

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At the very outset of his masterpiece, the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas observes that knowledge concerning God may be attained by man in this life in two ways. He is making reply to the objection that Theology cannot rightly be termed 'Wisdom,' since Christian Wisdom is understood of a 'Gift of the Holy Ghost,' a God-given 'instinct' of the soul, whereas the knowledge of Theology is to be acquired by patient study :

Since judgment [whereby Truth is alone attained—cf. I. xvi, 2] belongs to Wisdom, 'Wisdom' can be understood in two ways, corresponding to the two ways of making a judgment. One can judge, in the first place by the *method of inclination* (*per modum inclinationis*); thus he who has the habit of a virtue judges aright concerning those things which are to be done in accord with that virtue, because he has a certain inclination thereto. Hence it is said in the Tenth Book of the *Ethics* [of Aristotle] that the virtuous man is a measure and standard of human conduct. Another manner [of making judgments] is by the *method of cognition* [alone] (*per modum cognitionis*); thus he who is versed in ethics is able to make judgments concerning virtuous acts, although he himself may not possess virtue.

It is therefore the first sort of judgment which belongs to that 'Wisdom' which is said to be a gift of the Holy Ghost: as it is written (I Cor. ii, 13): 'The spiritual man judgeth all things,' and concerning which Denys says: 'Hierotheus was taught, not only by learning, but by undergoing (*patiens*) Divine things.' But the second sort of judgment belongs to this doctrine insofar as it is to be possessed by study' (I. i, 6 ad 3).

From this we see that at the beginning of his *Summa* St. Thomas is careful to make precise what method is to be followed in his work. *Ex professo* the *Summa* is to be conducted on purely scientific, logical lines (cf. I. i, 8, 'Utrum haec scientia sit argumentativa'). The use of the affective process is as definitely to be excluded from 'argumentative' Theology as it must be from mathematics—though it must be considered by it.

But unlike the object of mathematics, the Object of Divinity is *lovable*. God should be approached affectively. The disclosing of the Godhead made to man in Christ is not to be accepted by a 'dead faith,' nor to be contemplated merely by a loveless syllogising. The

Son of God is indeed the Divine Logos. He is nevertheless no sterile Concept of the Divine Mind, but the Logos who breathes forth Love in the Person of the Holy Ghost. *Verbum spirans Amorem* :

The Son is the Word, not any sort of word, but the Word Who breathes forth Love. Hence Augustine says : 'The Word we speak of is Knowledge with Love.' It is not therefore with any and every [sort of] perfection of the intellect that the Son is 'sent' to us, but by an illumination of the mind which breaks forth with the affection of love . . . It is significant that Augustine says that 'the Son is sent when he is known and *perceived*.' For 'perception' denotes a certain *experimental* knowledge. It is this which is properly called Wisdom (*Sapientia*), as it were a 'relishing knowledge' (*sapida scientia*) (I. xliii, 5 ad 2; cf. *Commentary on the Sentences*, I. XV, ix, 4 ad 3).

It is just on account of this 'relishing' or 'tasting' character of Christian Wisdom that St. Thomas sees that it differs so fundamentally from the purely speculative wisdom of the Pagans. 'Other sciences only enlighten the *understanding*, the Sacred Doctrine enlightens the [whole] *soul*' (*Commentary on Ep. to Hebrews*, chap. v, lect. 2). This contrast between philosophical and Christian theological contemplation is elaborated in the *De Adhærendo Deo* and in a *Commentary on Canticles* long attributed, though probably falsely, to St. Thomas :

Philosophers make the aim of contemplation to consist in mere knowledge. But contemplation as understood by theologians consists rather in *taste* (*sapere*) than in knowing (*sapere*); it consists rather in love and in sweetness than in thinking (*consideratione*). And if it is sometimes found that book-learning (the study of letters) is included in this contemplative life, even among theologians, this is just because we are led by such study to the love of God. If therefore anybody study solely in order that he may acquire knowledge, let him know that his contemplation is that of the philosophers, and not that of the Divines (*Commentary on Canticles*, chap. i; cf. III *Sent.* xxxv, 1, 2, 1).

Scholastic Theology, as distinguished from 'affective' or mystical Theology (in the old sense of the word) is not to be equated with the whole of Christian Wisdom. It is the scientific or 'argumentative' study of revealed truths. It professedly confines itself to the reasoning process. To criticise St. Thomas on the ground that he does not approach his subject-matter from the standpoint of value, that his approach to Deity as expressed in his theological writings is non-mystical and non-experimental, is to criticise him for fidelity to his set purpose, and indeed to display an initial misunderstanding

of the very nature of the scholastic method. The theological writings of St. Thomas are precisely an example of those 'letters' whereby we are to be led to the love of God. They do not claim to record that mystical, experimental penetration into Divine things which is brought about by that love.

But although it would be unreasonable to criticise St. Thomas and his followers on the ground that their method in their scientific treatment was non-affective, there would be just ground for complaint had they neglected to treat of this affective knowledge from their own scientific standpoint. We have already quoted the passage in the First Question of the *Summa* which goes to show that such is not the fact. Elsewhere in the First Part of the *Summa* he says :

Knowledge which is possessed thanks to grace is twofold : one sort is purely speculative . . . the other affective (I. ixvi, 1).

There are many references to this affective knowledge in the *Secunda Secundae*.

Correctness of judgment can come about in two ways : in one way by the right use of *reason*, in another way by a certain *connaturality* with those things concerning which judgment is made. Thus, he who has learned Moral Philosophy can, by the research of reason, form a right judgment concerning those things which belong to the virtue of chastity. But he who *has* the virtue of chastity can judge rightly of those things by reason of a certain connaturality with them (II^a II^{ae}. xlv, 2).

Knowledge of the Divine Will and Goodness is twofold. One is speculative . . . The other is affective or experimental, as, for example, when one experiences within oneself the taste of the Divine sweetness and the delight of the Divine will. Thus Denys says of Hierotheus that he learned Divine things on account of his sympathy with them (II^a II^{ae}. xcvi, 2 ad 2).

Knowledge of the truth is twofold. One purely speculative . . . The other affective . . . (II^a II^{ae}. cxlii, 3 ad 1).

St. Thomas often contrasts the naturally-acquired, purely intellectual 'habits' of wisdom, understanding and knowledge, with the Divinely-given, affective 'habits' of the same names, which are dependent on Charity :

The Wisdom which is a Gift is more excellent than the Wisdom which is an intellectual power (*virtus*), insofar as it attains to God more closely by a certain union of the soul with Him (II^a II^{ae}. xlv, 3 ad 1).

That which wisdom, the intellectual power (*virtus*) is to the understanding of first principles—because it *comprehends* them in

a certain manner—that is Wisdom the Gift [of the Holy Ghost] to Faith, which is the simple awareness of the articles (of the Creed) which are the principles of all Christian Wisdom. For the Gift of Wisdom proceeds to a certain Godlike (*deiformem*) contemplation (III. *Sent.* xxxiv, 1, 2).

God's knowledge is not discursive or argumentative, but absolute and simple: similar to it is the knowledge which is a gift of the Holy Ghost (II^a II^a. ix, 1 ad 1).

The Uncreated Wisdom first of all unites himself to us by the gift of Charity, and so doing reveals those mysteries to us the knowledge of which is called infused Wisdom. So infused Wisdom is not the cause of Charity, but rather its *effect* (II^a II^{ae}. xlv, 6 ad 2).

Wisdom is said to be an intellectual *virtus* when it proceeds from a judgment of the reason. But it is called a Gift when it proceeds from a Divine instinct (I^a II^{ae}. lxxiii, 1 ad 4).

St. Thomas's references to the instinctive, affective knowledge of God, which is to be attained by supernatural Charity and the instinctive operations of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, might be multiplied indefinitely. They will, however, be of little interest to the philosopher, except insofar as they show that St. Thomas did allow for such experimental and affective knowledge, at least of a supernatural and mystical character. While it is true that St. Thomas is mainly preoccupied with this mode of knowledge as applied to the order of grace rather than that of nature, where, owing to the obscurity of bare Faith and the inaccessibility of the Divine Object to our earthly intellectual potentialities, it has a quite peculiar value (a matter we will consider more closely in a further article), it would be a grave mistake to suppose that he considered it to exist only to the realm of Grace and supernatural Charity. Indeed, we have already seen him quote the *Ethics* of Aristotle as supporting his claims for the existence of such affective knowledge, and he not seldom speaks of it as existing in the purely natural order. Indeed there can be no doubt that he would be prepared to concede with Maritain that *de facto*, though not *de jure*, by far the greater number of human judgments are of an affective character (Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 119).

As the sense of *taste* judges of flavours according to its disposition, so the mind of man judges of things to be done according to its *habitual disposition* (II^a II^{ae}. xxiv, 11).

Some people have certain virtues by reason of a natural disposition . . . and consequently have naturally a *right judgment* (II^a. II^{ae}. xlvii, 15).

As man, by the natural light of his mind gives assent to axioms, so the virtuous man by means of the habit of virtue has a right judgment concerning the things which belong to that virtue (II^a. II^{ae}. ii, 2 ad 2).

Natural inclinations can be known without the deliberation of the reason (*Contra Gentiles* III, 38).

Sometimes the mind of man tends to the truth by a certain natural inclination, although he does not see the *reason* of the truth (*Commentary on the Physics*, I, lect. 10).

Extensive quotation is always wearisome, and if the quotations are isolated and disconnected ones from St. Thomas they are often fruitless. They are only really intelligible in their context: when they are co-related with all the relevant elements in his synthesis. It is this co-relation that we shall attempt to suggest in a further article, when we shall, after a brief survey of the Thomist theory of knowledge in general, examine the nature and differentiations of this affective knowledge as he understood them. In this article we have thought it sufficient to establish that the existence of such knowledge is fully recognised by him, and occupies an important place in his thought.

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(To be continued.)