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True Things. The World as an Open Field of Relations of the Human Mind in Medieval Thought

ABSTRACT: The assumption that not only a specific environment or a life-serving milieu but reality as a whole, the world, is the relational field of the human mind is at the core of Modern approaches to philosophical anthropology. However, these interpretations lack something that, in the view of medieval thinkers, is indispensable for a comprehensive philosophical understanding of man's world-openness: an ontological explanation that shows that and why the world, the totality of being, is by itself oriented towards being known by the human mind. The doctrine of ontic truth offers such an explanation. It shows that man can relate to the world as a whole because reality – every real thing – is of itself, in its own being, always accessible to the recognition of the human mind. However, this intelligibility of being for the human intellect has, as Thomas explains in *De Veritate* q. 1, its ultimate ground in the fact that being has an even more primordial relationship to the creative-designing divine intellect. All reality is knowable by the human intellect because it is known by God.

KEYWORDS: ontic truth • world-openness of the human mind • adequation of intellect and thing • intelligibility of being • Thomas Aquinas

Experiences of joy or unhappiness, boredom or curiosity, can lead us to transcend the perspective in which we practically cope with life and ask ourselves what reality is all about. The question is then not about this or that in its particular quality according to which it can be pleasant, useful or morally valuable. It is rather directed at the being of things in general. Its aim is thus no longer of a practical but of a theoretical nature. Reality as a whole cannot be the object of our action, but we can endeavor to gain knowledge about it with theoretical intentions. And it seems that our mind tends of its own accord to transcend the horizon of common sense in the direction of the whole of what is.

The explicit question of the world as a whole and its systematic discussion with the aim of a well-founded, rationally verifiable insight are not

achievements of modern times. As far as we can tell from the available evidence, their origin coincides with the beginning of philosophical reflection among the Milesian thinkers of the 6th century BC – Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes¹.

Aristotle developed the first comprehensive doctrine of science. Since then, the question of being, in general, has had a definite systematic place within philosophy: it belongs to the philosophical discipline that Aristotle sees as the most fundamental of all sciences and therefore also calls “first philosophy” (*protê philosophia*)². In the fourth book of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes it as a universal science, which has as its proper object being as being and those properties that necessarily belong to it³. The history of this science coincides from its beginning with the history of the question of being.

The thinking of the Latin West in the 13th century now occupies a special position therein. This is evident in two moments:

(1) On the one hand, the question of being in general is systematically distinguished from the question of God for the first time. Until then, the question of what being is as being was answered by considering a specific, extraordinary being – the divine. Aristotle also proceeds in this way. In his view, the question can only be answered with regard to the categories – more precisely: with regard to that which is highest in the first and fundamental category (*ousía*, substance), the divine. For here, in the divine substance, being shows itself in its fulfilled, paradigmatic form, from which and with reference to which all other forms of being are to be understood. *Metaphysics* is therefore primarily concerned with the divine. For this reason, Aristotle occasionally refers to First Philosophy as ‘theology’⁴. This theological concept of metaphysics remains prevalent in the Greek commentary tradition and throughout the Latin Middle Ages until the 12th century. In the 13th century, however, a new orientation took place: metaphysics was systematically distinguished from Christian theology of revelation for the first time. As a result, it separates itself from its traditional self-understanding as a science of the divine; it becomes a universal science of being in general⁵.

¹ Algra, Keimpe, „The beginnings of cosmology”, [in:] A. A. Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*. Cambridge 1999, 250–270; Christof Rapp, *Vorsokratiker*. München 2007.

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI, cap. 1, 1026° 24.

³ *Ibid.* IV, cap. 1, 1003° 20–25.

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI, cap. 1, 1026a19.

⁵ See Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*. From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez, Leiden–Boston 2012, esp. 75–80, 196–200; Albert Zimmermann, *Ontologie oder Metaphysik? Die Diskussion über den Gegenstand der Metaphysik*

(2) On the other hand, the human mind is systematically included in the discussion of the question of being. If there is a universal science of being as such, then the human mind obviously has the ability to refer to the totality of beings. After all, it forms the concept of being as such. The horizon of the human mind is thus not limited to this or that class of objects, to a particular such-or-such being, to a particular environment or a particular milieu; rather, it is capable of transcending any particular environment and all particular categorical modes of being – but not in the direction of the transcendent, but in the direction of reality as a whole. Man is therefore not ‘environmentbound’, but ‘world-open’. “Such a being has world” – this is how Max Scheler expressed this idea in his famous essay *The Place of Man in the Cosmos* from 1928⁶. This idea has its roots in the medieval doctrine of the transcendental openness of things and the human mind, which is centered in a doctrine of the „truth of things“. In this doctrine, the open-minded human spirit on the one hand – and the world as its infinitely open field of relationships on the other – are brought together. I would like to report on this connection in more detail here.

I. Historical Background

The 12th and 13th centuries bring a tremendous boost to science⁷. It is connected with a kind of “paradigm shift”, the change from a neo-Platonic-Augustinian to a more Aristotelian worldview: the reasons for things and processes in the world are no longer sought only in unchangeable intelligible entities beyond experience, but primarily in the naturally changeable things themselves. Compared to the transcendent divine sphere of ideas – which Christian authors since late antiquity have identified with the second divine person, the ‘Word’, “eternal truth” or “divine wisdom” following Philo’s *Logos* speculation – the world of experience is given its own inherent being. It is recognized as having a reality of its own and thus also an intrinsic value and real inner comprehensibility or intelligibility.

im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert, Texte und Untersuchungen, Leuven 1998; Ludger Honnefelder, „Der zweite Anfang der Metaphysik“, in: J. Beckmann/L. Honnefelder/G. Schrimpf/G. Wieland (eds.), *Philosophie im Mittelalter*, Hamburg 1987, 165–186.

⁶ Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, ed. W. Henckmann, Hamburg 2018, 48.

⁷ See Peter Weimar, *Die Renaissance der Wissenschaften im 12. Jahrhundert*, Zürich-München 1981; Andreas Speer: *Die entdeckte Natur. Untersuchungen zu Begründungsversuchen einer «scientia naturalis» im 12. Jahrhundert*, Leiden–New York–Köln 1995; Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Die Philosophie im 13. Jahrhundert*, München–Paderborn–Wien 1977.

The reasons for this change are diverse. In this context, two reasons are particularly important: a new wave of Aristotle's reception and the founding of universities.

(1) Universities

Universities were founded in several European cities around 1200: Bologna, Paris, Oxford (Paris as the model) – later Cambridge, Montpellier, Toulouse, Padua, Naples, Salamanca – Vienna (1365), Cologne (1388). Universities concentrate and intensify the search for methodically founded, generally verifiable knowledge and thus develop a form of human rationality that is fundamental to European identity. This, like the idea of the university itself, has since gained acceptance all over the world⁸. Neither the need for professional training nor a political motive was decisive for the founding of universities; what was most important was a scholarly, scientific interest. Aristotle opens his *Metaphysics* with a famous thesis that emphasizes a desire peculiar to human beings: "All men by nature desire to know"⁹. The human desire for knowledge plays a decisive role in the origin of universities.

However, the name „university“ does not refer to the universality of knowledge (Latin: „*studium generale*“), but to the organizational form of a corporation; the university is a special case of the guilds and corporations that emerge everywhere in the flourishing cities at this time. In a city, professors and students come together to form a *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. As a result, University studies are being professionalized (*curricula*, exams, titles corresponding to the level of training in the skilled trades). Science has become a profession. The model of science on which this was based – at all faculties – focuses on the interpretation of texts that are regarded as authoritative. In this sense, medieval science – not only at the theological faculty – is 'scholastic', i.e. "school-like", referring to authoritative texts¹⁰.

Revelation theology must be given a place among the university disciplines. That creates a tension. From the newly discovered Aristotelian

⁸ See Hans-Albrecht Koch, *Die Universität als europäische Institution*, Darmstadt 2008, bes. 7–112; Jürgen Miethke, *Studieren an mittelalterlichen Universitäten. Chancen und Risiken*, Leiden–Boston 2004; Wolfgang Weber, *Geschichte der europäischen Universität*, Stuttgart 2002, bes. 9–153; *Geschichte der Universität in Europa*, W. Rüegg (ed.), Bd. 1 *Mittelalter*, München 1993, esp. 13–19, 58–79.

⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, cap. 1, 980a21.

¹⁰ See Rolf Darge, „Scholastik: Transformation eines Wissenschaftsmodells vom Mittelalter zur frühen Neuzeit“; in: Th. Kührtreiber/G. Schlichta (edd.), *Kontinuitäten, Umbrüche, Zäsuren. Die Konstruktion von Epochen in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit in interdisziplinärer Sichtung*, Heidelberg 2016, 265–288.

sources, another science rich in tradition appears on the scene, which claims to provide final explanations and to be the conclusive science of the divine: first philosophy or metaphysics. The tension is resolved by philosophical means at the leading university of the time – Paris – in that first philosophy separates itself from its earlier claim to lead to knowledge of the divine essence, i.e. to be the science of the divine; this is achieved by the consistent application of Aristotle's doctrine of science to his *Metaphysics*. As a result, First Philosophy constitutes itself newly as a universal science of being as being¹¹.

(2) The reception of Aristotle

From the last third of the 12th century onwards, the scientific writings of Aristotle, his writings on ethics and politics, *Metaphysics* and the doctrine of science in the *Second Analytics* became known to the Latin West in the course of an enormous translation activity. At the same time as Aristotle's writings, important commentaries by Arab thinkers – who were usually not theologians but natural scientists, physicians or jurists – were translated: Thanks to the translation work of Syrian Christians, the Arab world had access to these writings for centuries. The Arab commentators – especially Avicenna and Averroes – paved the way for the reception of Aristotelian thought in the Latin West. This posed a huge challenge to Christian authors¹². An integration of the Augustinian-influenced Christian worldview on the one hand and the Aristotelian profane-scientific worldview on the other hand into an overall understanding of reality is to be achieved, which on the one hand takes into account the goal of Christian revelation and on the other hand the concern for universal rationality. One moment of this integration is the doctrine of real or ontic truth. It is formulated paradigmatically in the first question of Thomas Aquinas' *Quaestiones disputatae De veritate*¹³.

¹¹ See note 5; furthermore: Jan Aertsen, „Mittelalterliche Philosophie: ein unmögliches Projekt? Zur Wende des Philosophieverständnisses im 13. Jahrhundert“, in: *Geistesleben im 13. Jahrhundert*, J. Aertsen/A. Speer (edd.), Berlin-New York 2000, 12–28; Rolf Darge, „Die Aristotelesrezeption im Philosophieansatz bei Bonaventura und Thomas von Aquin“, in: *Kulturkontakte und Rezeptionsvorgänge in der Theologie des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*, U. Köpf/D. R. Bauer (edd.), Münster 2011, 19–209.

¹² Alain de Libera, *Die mittelalterliche Philosophie*, Paderborn 2005, esp. 21–25, 77–106; Richard Heinzmann, *Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Stuttgart 1998, esp. 137–164; Peter Schulthess/Rüdi Imbach, *Die Philosophie im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Zürich e.a. 1996, esp. 38–76; Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Die Philosophie im 13. Jahrhundert* (see note 7), esp. 39–116.

¹³ Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia* XXII/1–3 (ed. Leonina), Rome 1970–1976 (*De veritate*).

II. Ontic Truth

Aristotle does not yet have a doctrine of ontic truth. He even seems to reject such a doctrine: „the true and the false do not lie in things [...] but in thinking”¹⁴. For him, only the judging mind comes into consideration as the bearer of truth¹⁵. Nevertheless, his metaphysics is one of the most important sources of the doctrine of ontic truth: in the second book he refers to an inner connection between being and truth to explain why first philosophy is rightly called the „science of truth”: „each relates to truth in the same way as it relates to being”¹⁶. This explanation forms the common basis of the medieval drafts of a theory of truth as a property of being as such.

However, a problem arises for these drafts: a property is ontologically an accident, i.e. it must be really different from its substrate, the substance. But a property that is truly different from being as such cannot exist; for there is nothing outside of being; what is not intrinsically and essentially being does not exist. How then does truth relate to being? To explain this relationship, medieval thinkers once again turn to Aristotle. In the fourth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle explains the relationship of ‘being’ to ‘one’ in the following way: “Being and One are the same and a single nature, in that they follow one another..., but not in such a way that they are both defined by a single essential notion”¹⁷.

The statement emphasizes two aspects of this relationship: the identical nature and the conceptual difference between ‘being’ and ‘one’. In the medieval appropriation – and thus also in Thomas – this is understood in the sense that (a) the ‘one’ and ‘being’ are the same in reality, but (b) they differ from each other conceptually¹⁸. Accordingly, these are different concepts, but they have the same scope (namely every being) and can therefore be interchanged in the statement at the subject and predicate position. The statements do not form tautologies, since ‘one’ means more than just ‘being’: it adds to the character (*ratio*) of ‘being’ (that it includes), a conceptual feature, which expresses a general mode of being that is not yet expressed by ‘being’, namely the inner indivisibility (*indivisio*): ‘One’ means being insofar as it is undivided in itself. By adding a general aspect to the meaning of being that is not really but only conceptually distinct from being as such, it provides a kind

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI, cap. 4, 1027b 25–27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* IV, cap. 7, 1011b26–27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* II, cap. 1, 993b30–31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* IV, cap. 2, 1003 b 22–24.

¹⁸ See E. Halper, „Aristotle on the Convertibility of One and Being”, in: *The New Scholasticism* 59 (1985), 213–227; J. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, see note 5, 60–64.

of inner interpretation of the nature of being as such. The same applies to the true: it is essentially nothing other than being but adds something conceptually to being as such that is not yet expressed by 'being'. It is the existent under a certain aspect, in a certain respect. But in what respect?

The opinions of medieval thinkers differ on this question. Philip the Chancellor, for example, who was the first to systematically examine the properties of being as such¹⁹, defines the true, following Aristotle's example of the One, as a form of indivision, namely as the "indivision of being and that which is": "The true is being insofar as it possesses the indivision of being and that which is"²⁰. For Thomas, this purely ontological definition overlooks a decisive moment that Aristotle emphasizes when he defines the mind as the genuine place of truth: namely the relationship to thought. Accordingly, Augustine's definition of the ontic true: "the true is that, which is (*Soliloquia* II, 8)", also appears insufficient to Thomas if "that, which is" merely denotes the real²¹. A purely ontological definition of the truth of being loses contact with our primary, intuitive pre-understanding, according to which truth always has something to do with thinking or understanding.

In his answer to the question, "What is truth?"²² Thomas characterizes what 'truth' means in the ontological sense beyond 'being' as a relational aspect: One can consider (a) what is proper to every being in itself – and (b) what is proper to it with regard to other beings. In the latter case, a distinction can be made (b1) between that which is proper to every being according to its difference or separateness (*divisio*) with respect to other beings – and (b2) that which is proper to it on the basis of the opposite of separateness – its conformity (*convenientia*) with other beings. However, a feature that belongs to every being only arises here (b2) if it is assumed that there is something that is open to every being, so that it can conform with it. Thomas states this condition with reference to Aristotle: it is fulfilled by the existence of a soul, which – as Aristotle says in his treatise *On the Soul* – "is in a certain sense everything"²³. This means that the human soul has powers which enable it to relate to every being. On the one hand, this is the rational faculty of striving, the will – and on

¹⁹ See Jan Aertsen: „The Beginning of the Doctrine of the Transcendentals in Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1230)”, in: *Medievalia. Textos e Estudos*, 7–8 (1995), 269–286; Rolf Darge: „Die den Sinngehalt der Prinzipien nicht kannten, haben im Glauben Schiffbruch erlitten”. Zur religiösen Wurzel der mittelalterlichen Transzendentalwissenschaft”, in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 85 (2010), 321–340.

²⁰ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa de bono*, q. 2, N. Wicki (ed.), *Corpus philosophorum medii aevi II*, Bern 1985, 11: "verum est ens habens indivisionem esse et eius quod est."

²¹ Vgl. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1, ad 1, ed. Leon. XXII/1, 6b.

²² Cf. *ibid.* q. 1, a. 1, ed. Leon. XXII/1, 3a.

²³ Aristotle, *De anima*, III, cap. 8, 431b21.

the other, the rational faculty of knowing, the mind. Each of these two faculties has an object scope that encompasses everything that exists. Insofar as the soul relates to a being by a striving movement, this being is called 'good' – precisely insofar as it is capable of attracting a striving movement. However, every being can be the goal of such a striving movement and is thus called a 'good'. Finally, the soul by its understanding mind can also conform with being – in principle with every being. In the conformity of a being with the understanding soul thus lies the relational moment that 'truth' expresses beyond 'being'. 'True' adds to 'being' the conformity with the intellect²⁴.

Thomas attempts to explain the *convenientia* of intellect and thing in more detail through a general consideration of the cognitive process: all cognition is somehow based on an assimilation of the recognizer to the thing to be recognized. In the realm of sensory perception, for example, the sense of sight, which is oriented towards color, receives an imprint or structure (*species*) under the influence of a present-colored object, through which it is assimilated or conformed to the object, insofar as it is colored. The perception of the colored object then emerges from this adaptation. The more complete this assimilation is, the clearer the perception. It is similar to intellectual cognition. The first relationship between an entity and the mind, which leads the mind to understand the entity in question, is an assimilation or conformation (*adaequatio*) of the two.

It comes about because the mind, which is inherently capable of receiving the intelligible structures of things (*species intelligibiles*), is informed by such a structure. This explains the core meaning of the term 'true', which is not yet expressed by the word 'being': the conformization or adequation of intellect and thing. Real understanding is the consciously experienced consequence of this adequation²⁵.

Of the various traditional definitions of truth, Thomas prefers *adaequatio intellectus et rei*²⁶ because it explicitly grasps thing and intellect in

²⁴ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 1c, ed. Leon. XXII/1, 5b: "Alio modo secundum convenientiam unius entis ad aliud, et hoc quidem non potest esse nisi accipiat aliquid quod natum sit convenire cum omni ente; hoc autem est anima, quae «quodammodo est omnia», ut dicitur in III *De anima*: in anima autem est vis cognitiva et appetitiva; convenientiam ergo entis ad appetitum exprimit hoc nomen bonum, unde in principio Ethicorum dicitur quod «bonum est quod omnia appetunt», convenientiam vero entis ad intellectum exprimit hoc nomen verum."

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, ed. Leon. XXII/1, 5b–6a.

²⁶ For the origin and meaning of this definition see Gudrun Schulz, *Veritas est adaequatio intellectus et rei. Untersuchungen zur Wahrheitslehre des Thomas von Aquin und zur Kritik Kants an einem überlieferten Wahrheitsbegriff*, Leiden 1993, esp. 33–39; Christoph

their mutual relationship, but without characterizing this relationship in any determinate way, since it leaves unanswered the question, What is adequated to what? In this way, it opens up the wide horizon and framework necessary for the consideration of truth, within which the concepts of ontic truth and cognitive truth can be distinguished from each other and the order of their predication determined in more detail.

Is truth originally a mode of being of the mind or of things²⁷? To answer this question, Thomas analyzes the process of cognition: A thing is called 'true' because of its relation to the cognizing soul. However, cognition is accomplished by the fact that the thing as cognized is in the soul, i.e. takes on that soul's nature. Thus, the adequation that forms the core of the meaning of 'truth' is originally found in the soul – more precisely: in the mind. 'Truth' is therefore only said of things secondarily, namely with regard to their actual or at least possible adequation in the soul, i.e. to the truth of the mind. Truth is therefore primarily found in the mind and secondarily in things, insofar as they are oriented towards the mind²⁸. This relation of things to the intellect is to be considered more closely here. I continue to follow Thomas' *De veritate* q. 1, a. 2.

The intellect is either theoretically active – solely for the sake of knowledge – or practically active; in the latter case, it is about doing or producing something. Thomas attempts to explain the typically different way in which the mind relates to things with the help of the concepts of measure and the measured: The practical intellect directs the production of things and therefore forms the measure of what is produced. The theoretical intellect, on the other hand, refers to things that exist independently of its activity: it merely recognizes them. This is how our theoretical intellect relates to natural things. Insofar as it receives knowledge from them, the things of nature are its measure. But these are themselves measured again by the divine intellect, which designs them creatively without being dependent on anything itself – which is therefore exclusively determining and not measured. The things of nature are therefore on the one hand measured – namely by the divine intellect – and on the other hand, they are a measure: of the human theoretical intellect. Our intellect, however, is on the one hand measured as a theoretical one by the things of nature – and on the other hand, as a practical intellect, he is the measure of what we produce²⁹.

Kann, „Wahrheit als Adaequatio: Bedeutung, Deutung, Klassifikation“, in: *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 66 (1999), 209–224.

²⁷ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 2, ed. Leon. XXII/1, 8a.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.* c, ed. Leon. XXII/1, 9a.

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.* ed. Leon. XXII/1, 9b: „Intellectus divinus est mensurans non mesuratus, res autem naturalis mensurans et mensurata, sed intellectus noster mensuratus et non mensurans res quidem naturales, sed artificiales tantum.“

Natural things therefore stand between the creative divine intellect and the human theoretical intellect; and in both directions we can speak of an “adaequatio rei et intellectus”, i.e. of truth. In relation to the divine intellect, a natural thing is called „true” insofar as it realizes what the divine design determines it to be. In relation to the human mind, a thing is to be called ‘true’ insofar as it is “capable of causing a true estimation about it”, i.e. insofar as it is comprehensible to us³⁰. This latter relationship, however, is of secondary importance for ontic truth, since the human intellect is not the measure of things; what is actually constitutive for the truth of things is their relationship to the creative divine intellect. The latter is the cause – the measure – of the truth of things. And thus he is ultimately also the cause of the truth of the human intellect, insofar as this receives its measure from things. “Adequation of thing and intellect” therefore ultimately means the conformity of the thing to the divine intellect.

III. The Universal Relational Power of the Human Mind

Even if Thomas ultimately relates the truth of things to the divine intellect, his analysis has a philosophical-anthropological foundation: truth is introduced as a property of being in general with reference to the human soul. As with the good, this is a relational attribute whose other extreme is the human soul. Some interpreters see this assumption as a decisive step in the direction of modern anthropocentric thought³¹.

However, the idea becomes more understandable if we consider its Aristotelian background. Thomas relies on a statement by Aristotle in the third book of his *On the Soul*: “The soul is, in a sense, everything”³². Aristotle summarizes here the result of his investigations and intends to explain *in what sense* the soul is all things. According to the principle “like is known only through like”, the pre-Socratic philosophers claimed that the soul is really and actually all things: We recognize earth through earth in us, water through water in us, etc. According to Aristotle, however, the soul is all structures or forms of things *only in possibility* – namely insofar as it is able to assimilate them: the intelligible structures through the intellect and the sensual forms through the senses.

Thomas has commented on this text elsewhere. At the end of his commentary, he summarizes that man is “in a certain sense” – namely in the sense

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹ Johann Baptist Metz: Christliche Anthropozentrik. Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin, München 1962, 50–52.

³² Aristotle, *De anima* III, cap. 8, 431b21.

of possibility or receptivity – the whole of being (*totum ens*), insofar as he is able to receive the intelligible structures of all things³³. In this assumption, which plays a central role in Thomas' thinking, three circles of thought converge that underlie the reflections on the truth of things in *De veritate* q. I³⁴.

(1) The first concerns a characteristic of intelligent beings. Beings that are endowed with cognitive faculties differ from those that are not – such as a stone – in that the latter have only their own forms, while the former are naturally capable of receiving the forms of other things as well. In this way, their nature has a greater plenitude (*amplitudo*) and a greater extent (*extensio*)³⁵. One advantage of intellectually cognizing beings is that they can in a certain sense be all things; for insofar as something is cognized, it is – according to its intelligible form – in the cognizer. In this way, it can be that the perfection of the whole universe exists in a being as recognized³⁶. Through this perfection, the intellectual-knowing beings, and thus also the human soul, attain a certain similarity with God; for in God 'are' – as Thomas says with Dionysius Pseudo-Areopagite – "all things before they attain existence"³⁷.

Clearly, Thomas does not abandon the basic metaphysical perspective on being in general in his explicit turn to man. The human intellect can be considered in two ways. On the one hand, it is a specific thing, a concrete mental faculty. On the other hand, however, this faculty has an unlimited horizon; it is capable of encompassing being in general: "Every spiritual substance is in a certain sense everything, insofar as it encompasses the whole of being with its intellect"³⁸. Without this quality, which Max Scheler later called the "openness to the world" (*Weltoffenheit*) of the human mind³⁹, metaphysics as the science of being as being would be impossible.

(2) The second circle of thought relates to the differentiation of the mental faculties within the soul: intellect and will. Classically, faculties are differentiated based on their special objects. If one looks at the universality

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia libri De anima* III, cap. 7, ed. Leon. XLV/1, Rome-Paris 1984, 236a: "...ut sit homo quodammodo totum ens, inquantum secundum animam est quodammodo omnia, prout eius anima est receptiva omnium formarum. Nam intellectus est quaedam potentia receptiva omnium formarum intelligibilium, et sensus est quaedam potentia receptiva omnium formarum sensibilium."

³⁴ See also Jan Aertsen: *Medieval Philosophy and The Transcendentals. The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden 1996, esp. 258–260.

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theol.* I, q. 14, a. 1c, ed. Leon. IV, Rome 1888, 166a-b.

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* I, cap. 44, ed. Leon. XIII, Rome 1918, 130a.

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theol.* I, q. 80, a. 1c, ed. Leon. V, Rome 1889, 282b.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* III, cap 112, ed. Leon. XIV, Rome 1926, 356b.

³⁹ Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, 51.

of the subject area of intellect and will, one must say that the distinction between intellect and will cannot be derived from a difference in the *things* to which these faculties are directed; both faculties refer to the totality of being, and there is nothing outside of being. The difference must therefore have its ground in the different way in which the same thing relates to the soul. This can, as Thomas explains in *De veritate* q. 22, a. 10c, be the case in two ways: (a) in such a way that the thing is in the soul – *per modum animae* – intentionally, through a cognitive *species*. This relationship is precisely the formal aspect of intelligibility; something is understandable just insofar as it can be in the soul in this spiritual way; and this is the very way in which being is the object of the intellect. On the other hand (b) something can be the object of the soul in such a way that the soul reaches out for the thing in its real being, i.e. inclines towards the thing insofar as it exists in itself. This relationship constitutes the formal aspect of desirability and characterizes the way in which being is the object of the will⁴⁰.

(3) This immediately opens up a third circle of thought, which leads back to the initial reflections on truth in *De veritate* q. 1 a. 1. It relates to the true and the good as attributes of being in general. The statement that the soul „in a certain sense is everything” also means, according to what has been said, that the soul’s object is being in general. The aspect under which the intellect now relates to being in general is the aspect of its intelligibility: this is expressed by the very word „true”; the true is being insofar as it is understandable to the intellect; therefore one can regard the true as the peculiar object of the intellect. The peculiar object of the will, on the other hand, is the good; for ‘good’ just expresses the relationship of being to the faculty of striving. The good and the true are thus essentially nothing other than being; but they differ conceptually from each other according to the different ways in which being appears in the universal horizon of the human mind and becomes, or at least can become, the object of its faculties⁴¹. In other words: under both aspects, as true and as good, the universe of things – reality as a whole – is the field of relations of the human spirit.

IV. Conclusion

The assumption that not only a specific environment or a life-serving milieu, but reality as a whole, the world, is the realm of relationships of the human mind, is at the core of modern approaches in philosophical anthropology. The founders of modern philosophical anthropology have unanimously

⁴⁰ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 22, a. 10c, ed. Leon. XXII/3, 636a.

⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *ibid.* ad 1, ed. Leon. XXII/3, 636a.

pointed out this human peculiarity in their writings: Max Scheler coined the term of 'openness to the world' in his pathbreaking essay *The Place of Man in the Cosmos*: „The human being is therefore the X that can behave 'open to the world' to an unlimited extent"⁴². Humans not only have organically bound practical intelligence, which helps them – like animals – to master their life challenges, but they also have spirit (Geist). According to Scheler, spirit is not a moment of the life process and can therefore oppose the immediate interests of life through ascetic acts of drive inhibition, even to the point of saying „no” to life in general. By virtue of his spirit, man is able to turn to reality in an objective way, not only with regard to a certain practical interest in life, but with a theoretical intention, and to grasp and interpret the essential structures of reality, the pure Suchness of things. Scheler illustrates this using the example of pain⁴³: I can ask about the meaning of pain at all, I can think about why there is pain in the world at all. Such a question is no longer practically motivated, because it has nothing to do with the goal of eliminating my pain. Rather, it corresponds to my desire for insight into the nature of the world. This desire, which Aristotle describes in the opening sentence of his *Metaphysics*: „All men by nature desire to know”, expresses the openness of the human mind to the world.

Arnold Gehlen goes even further. He interprets the entire human form of existence, including the physical constitution of the human being, from the aspect of openness to the world. To the mind's openness to the world corresponds an organic unspecialized nature of the human body, as well as a certain unspecialized „open to the world” structure of the human sensory apparatus, of the motorical apparatus and also of the human drive-energy.

As a result, man is not, like the organically highly specialized instinct-driven animal, fitted into a specific environment; rather, he is able to construct and shape himself his perceptual world, his powers of movement and the form of his driving energy and – by virtue of the control he thus acquires over his own powers – to transform nature into a cultural sphere that enables him to lead his life in almost any place he chooses⁴⁴.

However, these anthropological interpretations of man's openness to the world are lacking something that, in the view of medieval thinkers, is indispensable for a comprehensive philosophical understanding of man's openness to the world: an ontological explanation that shows it and why the

⁴² Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, 51.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁴ See Rolf Darge/Martina Schmidhuber: „Das Mängelwesentheorem bei Arnold Gehlen”, in: H. Schmidinger/C. Sedmak (ed.), *Der Mensch – ein Mängelwesen? Endlichkeit – Kompensation – Entwicklung*, Darmstadt 2009, 33–54.

world, the totality of being, is in itself oriented towards being understood by the human mind. The doctrine of real truth offers such an explanation. It shows that man is able to relate to the world as a whole because being – every being – is of itself, in its own being (*esse*), always accessible to the cognitive approach of the human mind. This openness of being to the human mind, however, as Thomas explains in *De veritate* q. 1, a. 2, has its ultimate ground in the fact that being stands in an even more original relationship to the creative and designing divine intellect. All of reality is knowable by the human mind because it is always already known by God. ∞

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