

certainties is that going about our language-games differently is hardly imaginable at all.

None of these observations and questions implies that Coliva's work is anything but rigorous, thoughtful, and stimulating. If her aim is to stir debate about *On Certainty* for a new generation of philosophers and beyond, one can applaud her industry with enthusiasm.

*University of Connecticut School of Law
55 Elizabeth Street
Hartford, CT 06105-2290
USA
thomas.morawetz@uconn.edu*
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THOMAS MORAWETZ

Aquinas on Human Self-Knowledge, by Therese Scarpelli Cory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. xi + 241. H/b £55.00.

The topic of self-knowledge is perhaps the most mysterious part of Thomas Aquinas's theory of human nature. He says enough about it that one might reasonably hope to understand his view. Yet interpretation has been various in the extreme, running all the way from those who would read Aquinas as a latter-day Augustine, to those who read him as a forerunner of Hume.

Therese Cory's book is clearly the best that has been written on the topic. It marks the impressive debut of a scholar who aspires to marry the scholarly precision of traditional Thomistic scholarship with the philosophical ambitions of analytic history of philosophy. What is most impressive about her book is that it is full of good ideas about how to understand Aquinas's views. But before saying something about those, let me make a few more general remarks about the book's strengths and weaknesses.

What is most immediately impressive about Cory's work is her formidable grasp of both the primary and secondary texts: she weaves together material from every corner of Aquinas's vast corpus, and displays a comprehensive familiarity with a broad secondary literature. At the same time, Cory has an unusual ability to organize all that data around important philosophical questions. Over and over, she asks just the right question, and thereby drives the discussion forward into fertile philosophical terrain.

Despite these merits, this is a book that takes some patience and charity to work through. For one thing, perhaps because of its origins as a PhD dissertation, the book's structure is rather awkward. The first chapter contains a potted history of the medieval debate over self-knowledge, which is a perfectly useful thing to have, except that this history is poorly integrated into the book's subsequent chapters. Similarly, chapter two dutifully works through Aquinas's texts in chronological order, making some suggestions about how his views may have changed. This too is useful, but Cory herself

hardly uses the information in the chapters that follow. A more serious complaint is that, very often, the sea of jargon rises so high that it becomes difficult to know what is being said. We are introduced in chapter one, for instance, to ‘natural supraconscious self-knowing’, and every fifty pages or so the term gets used again, and then forgotten for a while. So what does it mean? If one manages to hunt down its first occurrence, one learns that it is ‘an actual, non-conscious self-knowing that is built into the very nature of the soul’ (p. 26). But what does that mean? It is quite unclear, even though Cory tells us that this is ‘the main opposing theory that Aquinas targets in his theory of knowledge’ (p. 26). This sort of thing builds up, so that, at the start of chapter five, Cory thinks her reader will be able to make sense of this:

The basic intuition that self-identity ought to provide an advantage in self-knowledge makes the experience of self-opacity especially galling. For thirteenth-century thinkers, this intuition was associated with the notion of natural self-knowledge, and was often cited either in support of supraconscious self-knowing or against dependent self-awareness. Although Aquinas rejects the latter views, he nevertheless seeks to maintain their foundational intuition. His account of habitual self-awareness is designed to show that an account of dependent self-awareness grants the advantage of self-identity without having to explain away self-opacity in the process (p. 115).

All of this jargon is Cory’s own, and although a supraconscious reader can make sense of it all, less opacity would be welcomed. Indeed, Cory herself is perfectly able, in her better moments, to write clearly and vividly, connecting Aquinas’s views both with familiar everyday experiences and with philosophical traditions outside of scholasticism.

Turning to the substance of Cory’s work, we can think of her overall project as attempting to situate Aquinas between the countervailing force of two ideas: first, that the mind has some kind of privileged self-access; second, that the mind is opaque to itself. Clustered around that first idea, as Cory tells the story, are the Neoplatonists, Augustine, Avicenna, and Descartes. The boldest champion of the second idea is of course Hume, but here one might also locate Aristotle, whose epigram (often quoted by both Aquinas and Cory) is that ‘the intellect is intelligible like other intelligibles’ (*De an.* 430a2). The great achievement of Aquinas, Cory argues, is to find a stable position between these two poles.

Cory’s strategy is to work through the complex tangle of distinctions that Aquinas explicitly draws among the different forms of self-knowledge, and to add some of her own that she takes the texts to license. In outline, she distinguishes between (1) an innate habitual self-knowledge and (2) an actual self-knowledge, and then between (2a) quidditative self-knowledge and (2b) mere self-awareness, and then between (2bi) implicit self-awareness and (2bii) explicit self-awareness. These distinctions must then be brought to bear on the different candidates for being the objects of self-awareness (mental acts, the soul, the self, etc.), and of course the whole scheme must then be poised in balance between self-opacity and self-privilege.

A great many of the details here are worthy of careful study, but I confine myself to two. First, Cory's distinction between implicit and explicit self-awareness, though only thinly supported by the texts, is quite intriguing. She offers it, in chapter six, as a solution to the puzzle of why Aquinas sometimes seems to say that (a) every act of understanding involves a self-understanding, whereas other times he says that (b) self-understanding is distinct from and posterior to outward-directed understanding.

Her solution involves claiming that every act of understanding has as part of its content, implicitly, a self-reflexive component. Hence the (a) texts. But only sometimes does that implicit content come to the fore as the explicit object of our attention, and that is the point of the (b) texts. Now, so far as I can see, Aquinas nowhere comes very close to saying quite this. Moreover, the (b) texts vastly outnumber the (a) texts. Indeed the only really good (a) text that Cory cites comes at the start of his *Sentences* commentary, which is unfortunate since chapter two had warned us that Aquinas's earliest writings on self-knowledge differ markedly from his mature view. Nevertheless, I think Cory's suggestion deserves serious attention, because even if Aquinas's considered view lies closer to (b), still he clearly does think our ability to reflect back on our acts of thought is unproblematic, indeed nearly infallible. And a very natural suggestion for why this might be is that such information is already contained, implicitly, in the original outward-directed act. Moreover, Cory offers a very clever model for what implicit awareness is like: she says it is like those cases, which Aquinas does discuss in some detail, where we grasp a whole and yet somehow are aware of the parts, understanding one thing and yet in some sense grasping more than one thing (p. 138). Self-knowledge, for Cory's Aquinas, is likewise an implicit part of our awareness of the external world.

A second noteworthy idea concerns our awareness of ourselves as agents. We have just seen how Cory's story gets us from thinking about toads (her example) to self-awareness of our thinking about toads. This by itself, however, is consistent with the sort of proto-Humean reading Cory wishes to reject, on which we manage to perceive one act of thought after another, but never a self that does the thinking. Such a reading might be supported by passages such as this: 'Our possible intellect understands itself not directly, by apprehending its essence, but through a species taken from phantasms' (*Quaest. de anima* 16 ad 8). Aquinas here goes on to invoke the above-mentioned Aristotelian epigram, and then the further Aristotelian dictum that 'acts are grasped through objects, powers through acts, and the soul through its powers' (see e.g., *De an.* 416a16–22). Although such remarks are often thought to describe the core of Aquinas's theory of self-knowledge, Cory takes them to hold only for level (2a) above—for the grasp of the soul's essence that is the culmination of scientific inquiry into the soul. With regard to everyday self-awareness (level 2b), Cory's interpretation is quite different. As we have seen, she holds that in apprehending an object

(e.g. toads) we implicitly apprehend our own act. But she then makes the striking further claim that, in apprehending our own act, we are at the same time apprehending the soul itself. Hence, even if Aquinas sometimes seems to characterize self-awareness as thoroughly mediated, in fact in ordinary cases we are aware of ourselves through an ‘irreducibly direct self-access’ (p. 101).

Cory grounds this adventuresome reading of Aquinas not in much by way of direct textual evidence, but in a plausible indirect argument from the character of Aquinas’s metaphysics. Those who read Aquinas’s account as mediated must believe that ‘perceiving an *act* is one thing, and perceiving an *agent* is quite another’ (p. 102). But this, she says, relies on the wrong metaphysics of substance: ‘for the medievals, however, acts are modifications of the agent-substance ... For Aquinas, an agent and an act constitute just one thing, the agent acting’ (p. 102). Hence she concludes that, for Aquinas, ‘to perceive an act is necessarily to perceive the agent directly in itself’ (p. 102). A thought about toads, then, is at the same time a thought about our thinking about toads, and a thought about oneself as agent.

Cory’s take on Aquinas’s metaphysics of substance is credible—acts and in general accidents, for Aquinas, do seem to be surprisingly like modes, or ways in which a substance is, rather than properties with an existence of their own. (She should not say this is true ‘for the medievals’ in general, but set that aside.) If that is right, then Cory has hit upon an important and neglected respect in which Aquinas’s view yields direct access to the mind. She builds upon this insight in the book’s final chapter, arguing that our direct access to ourselves as agents can be developed further into an account of ourselves as persons over time. But Cory goes too quickly here. Her key move is this: ‘a substance and its accidents constitute a single perceptual object and are thus perceptually inseparable’ (p. 102). But this inference ignores the referential opacity of intentional contexts. Consider the identification of heat with molecular motion. Does it follow that, in perceiving heat, we perceive molecular motion? Well, yes and no. Cory’s reading of Aquinas is similarly tenuous. Even if the true metaphysics of substance shows that acts of thought are mere modes of the mind, it hardly follows that our ordinary pre-theoretical self-awareness of our acts gives us any insight into the mind itself. That would be a theoretical discovery, not something directly revealed in thought. Short of this kind of metaphysical insight, we are more like Lois Lane, looking at Clark Kent.

*Department of Philosophy
University of Colorado
232 UCB
Boulder, CO 80309
USA
pasnau@colorado.edu
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ROBERT PASNAU