

HENRY OF GHENT AND THE TWILIGHT  
OF DIVINE ILLUMINATION

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**T**HE arrival in medieval western Europe of Aristotle's most profound works, including the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *De anima*, brought on revolutionary changes in thirteenth-century thought, and marked a high point in the history of Western philosophy. However, the growing influence of Aristotle came at the expense of a family of doctrines that were deeply entrenched in pre-scholastic, Augustinian-oriented thought. In particular, the growing dominance of the Aristotelian theory of cognition quickly made the Augustinian theory of divine illumination (hereafter, "TDI") seem superfluous. Naturally, not everyone approved of such changes. We can see an instance of the conservative backlash in a letter written in 1285 by the Franciscan John Peckham, himself a noted philosopher.

A. I do not in any way disapprove of philosophical studies, insofar as they serve theological mysteries, but I do disapprove of irreverent innovations in language, introduced within the last twenty years into the depths of theology against philosophical truth and to the detriment of the Fathers, whose positions are disdained and openly held in contempt.

Continuing, Peckham criticizes the doctrine

which fills the entire world with wordy quarrels, weakening and destroying with all its strength what Augustine teaches concerning the eternal rules and the unchangeable light, the faculties of the soul, the seminal reasons included in matter, and innumerable questions of the same kind.<sup>1</sup>

Peckham goes on to invoke not just the Church Fathers in defense of the tradition, but also "the philosophers," among whom he

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 359.

presumably includes Aristotle. Nonetheless it is clear that his target in this letter is the Aristotelian movement that was challenging traditional Christian philosophical doctrines. Many of those doctrines had been given their original form by Augustine and were being defended in that form by Franciscans such as Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure in the thirteenth century. Foremost among those who were introducing the "irreverent innovations" was Thomas Aquinas, whom Peckham almost surely had in mind. His reference to "the last twenty years" covers the period of Aquinas's most important writing and the establishment of his reputation. Further, all three of the specific doctrines which Peckham mentions are ones on which Aquinas did hold controversial views.<sup>2</sup>

The first doctrine Peckham mentions as being under attack is of undoubtedly the TDI, according to which human beings are illuminated by "the unchangeable light" so as to attain the "eternal rules."<sup>3</sup> This language of light and illumination is of course most closely associated with Augustine, but it permeates the entire Christian medieval tradition. Until Aquinas's time the TDI had played a prominent role in all the most influential medieval theories of knowledge, including those of Anselm, Albert the Great, Roger Bacon, and, especially, Bonaventure. However, by the beginning of the fourteenth century the theory had fallen out of fashion.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the three best philosophers

<sup>2</sup> Aquinas had completed the *Summa contra gentiles* in 1264 and had begun writing his *Summa theologiae* in 1266. For further discussion of this letter of Peckham's see Gilson, *History*, 359–60 and James Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (London: Doubleday, 1974), 288–9.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Bonaventure: "Everything that is cognized with certainty is cognized in the light of the eternal reasons"; St. Bonaventure, *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi* (hereafter, "*De scientia Christi*"), q. 4 resp., in Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5 (Rome: Quaracchi, 1882–1902), 22b.

<sup>4</sup> For surveys of various aspects of the doctrine see Camille Bérubé, "Olivi, critique de Bonaventure et d'Henri de Gand" in *Studies Honoring I.C. Brady* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1976); Martin Grabmann, *Der Göttliche Grund menschlicher Wahrheitserkenntnis nach Augustine und Thomas von Aquin* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1924); Steven Marone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste: New Ideas of Truth in the Early Thirteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Joseph Owens, "Faith, ideas, illumination, and experience" in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Jean Rohmer, "La théorie de l'illumination dans l'école franciscaine, de Alexandre de Halès à Jean Peckham," *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 3 (1928).

of the scholastic period—Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and William Ockham—would all reject the theory in its standard form. Even by 1285 supporters of the TDI such as Peckham were evidently feeling rather defensive (as in *A*). It seems entirely plausible to attribute this attitude, in large part, to the influence of Aquinas's views on human knowledge.

## I

From his earliest writings on, Aquinas had opposed the TDI.<sup>5</sup> The argument which he regularly relies on begins by distinguishing God's ordinary moving and directing of the created world from an additional, special influence. In the first way, God sustains every single action that takes place in the created world, including the human act of knowing. God both gives creatures the form through which they act and, as the First Mover, moves them to act. So in a sense human beings cannot know anything without divine help. This is not to say, however, that further extraordinary assistance is needed:

*B.* It must be said that for the cognition of anything true a human being needs divine help in this way: that the intellect is moved by God to its act. But one does not need a new illumination added onto natural illumination in order to cognize the truth in connection with all things, but only in connection with those that exceed natural cognition.<sup>6</sup>

When confronted with passages from Augustine claiming that all knowledge requires a divine illumination, Aquinas (rather implausibly) interprets Augustine as referring to this first, everyday sort of assistance.<sup>7</sup> However, the existence of this sort of divine help is

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the passages cited in the text below, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum in quattuor libros Sententiarum* (hereafter, "*Sent.*") II, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1; II, d. 28, q. 1, a. 5 (Parma, 1856); St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibeta* 10.4.1 (Rome: Marietti, 1956).

<sup>6</sup> "Sic igitur dicendum est quod ad cognitionem cuiuscumque veri, homo indiget auxilio divino ut intellectus a Deo moveatur ad suum actum. Non autem indiget ad cognoscendum veritatem in omnibus, nova illustratione superaddita naturali illustrationi; sed in quibusdam, quae excedunt naturalem cognitionem"; *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, "*ST*") I–IIae, q. 109, a. 1, c. (Rome: Marietti, 1950–1953).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *ST* I–IIae, q. 109, a. 1, ad 2; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (hereafter, "*SBDT*") q.1, a.1, ad 2 (Vatican: Leonine Commission, 1992).

consistent with claiming that the soul is adequate for perceiving truth.

C. Hence just as other natural active powers conjoined to their passive [counterparts] suffice for natural operations, so also the soul, possessing active and passive power in itself, suffices for the perception of truth.<sup>8</sup>

It belongs to the very nature of the rational soul, Aquinas claims, to know certain kinds of truths—namely those we can come to know through sensible things.<sup>9</sup> Other truths, such as future contingents and truths of faith that transcend the faculty of reason, cannot be naturally known. Any knowledge of that sort requires an additional special illumination—prophecy, in other words, or revelation.<sup>10</sup>

Aquinas's position would win out in the long run. However, the most immediate effect of his challenge to the TDI was to provoke a renewed effort in the last quarter of the thirteenth century to find a firm philosophical basis for Augustine's theory of knowledge. The writer who made the most sustained and original effort in this respect is Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), a Parisian master and the most influential thinker in the years between Aquinas's death and John Duns Scotus's emergence at the very end of the thirteenth century. Henry is particularly interesting because although he accepted large parts of Aquinas's theory of cognition, he sharply took issue with Aquinas's repudiation of the TDI. It is in this context that we must read the

<sup>8</sup> "Unde sicut aliae potentiae activae naturales suis passivis coniunctae sufficient ad naturales operationes, ita etiam anima habens in se potentiam activam et passivam sufficit ad perceptionem veritatis"; *SBDT* I-IIae, q. 1, a. 1, c.

<sup>9</sup> "Sic igitur intellectus humanus habet aliquam formam, scilicet ipsum intelligibile lumen, quod est de se sufficiens ad quaedam intelligibilia cognoscenda: ad ea scilicet in quorum notitiam per sensibilia possumus devenire"; *ST I-IIae*, q. 109, a. 1, c.

<sup>10</sup> "Quaedam vero sunt ad quae praedicta principia non se extendunt, sicut sunt ea quae sunt fidei, facultatem rationis excedentia, et futura contingentia, et alia huiusmodi; et haec cognoscere mens humana non potest nisi divinitus novo lumine illustretur, superaddito lumini naturali"; *SBDT* I-IIae, q. 1, a. 1, c. Earlier in this question, Aquinas cites first principles of reasoning and conclusions drawn from those principles as examples of truths which can be known naturally. These examples are consistent with the general position quoted in the previous note, since even first principles are acquired only through contact with sensible things.

magnificent opening chapters of Henry's *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum*.<sup>11</sup>

Henry was, as we shall see, clearly aware that there is no obvious way of synthesizing the Augustinian and Aristotelian theories of cognition. As he at least implicitly recognized, a place needs to be made for the TDI in any Aristotelian theory of cognition. This is especially so for Aquinas's theory of cognition. The central difficulty in reconciling the TDI with Aquinas's account is that Aquinas attributes to human beings an unqualified ability (at least theoretically) to understand the material world. He writes that "if the human intellect comprehends the substance of some thing—for instance a stone or a triangle—then no intelligible aspect of that thing will exceed the capacity of human reason."<sup>12</sup> And in another place: "Our intellect is naturally suited to understand all sensible and corporeal things."<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising, given these claims, that Aquinas rejects the TDI as Augustine had formulated it, and allows divine illumination only in exceptional cases of prophecy and revelation. With respect to knowl-

<sup>11</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinariarum* (Paris, 1520; reprint, St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1953). References to *Summa* a. 34 and to the *Quodlibeta* are to the new edition: *Henrici de Gandavo Opera Omnia* vol. 27 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979-). After these opening articles of the *Summa*, strangely enough, Henry says scarcely anything more about divine illumination—neither in the *Summa* nor in his *Quodlibetal Questions*—even when he undertakes detailed discussions of the cognitive process (as in *Quodlibet* 4.7, 4.8, 4.21, 5.14, and *Summa* 58.2). The only significant exception to this is a brief discussion in *Quodlibet* 9.15, written much later. Hence these early articles of the *Summa* contain Henry's most considered judgment on the TDI. Because they are so early, and because Henry only rarely mentions the TDI in his later work, it is natural to wonder whether these questions really represent Henry's mature, definitive thought on the subject. (On this subject see Raymond Macken, "La théorie de l'illumination divine dans la philosophie d'Henri de Gand," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 39 (1972): 82-112; Steven Marrone, *Truth and Scientific Knowledge in the Thought of Henry of Ghent* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1985); Jean Paulus, *Henri de Gand: Essai sur les tendances de sa métaphysiques* (Paris: Vrin, 1938).) I will not try to answer that question one way or another. Instead I want to consider these arguments on their own, simply to try to understand the philosophical position in them.

<sup>12</sup> "Unde si intellectus humanus, alicuius rei substantiam comprehendit, puta lapidis vel trianguli, nullum intelligibilem illius rei facultatem humanae rationis excedet"; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter, "SCG") I, 3 (15) (Rome: Marietti, 1961-1967).

<sup>13</sup> ". . . intellectus noster natus sit intelligere omnes res sensibiles et corporales . . ."; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri de anima* (hereafter, "InDA") 3.1.140-1 (Paris: Vrin, 1984). See also C and note 9 above.

edge of this world, Aquinas's account seems to dispel any need for a special illumination.

Henry thinks he can show that the apparent superfluousness of the TDI is merely apparent, and that there are good epistemological reasons for maintaining the theory. He does, however, concede something to the TDI's critics: divine illumination is not required for *all* knowledge, but only for pure knowledge—or knowledge of the pure truth (*veritas syncera*).

D. It should be said absolutely, therefore, that there is nothing concerning which a human being can have pure truth by acquiring an apprehension [*notitiam*] of it through merely natural means. Such truth can be had only through the divine light's illumination.<sup>14</sup>

Henry is likely to have had Aquinas in mind in these early questions, written so soon after Aquinas's death. This is particularly clear in the following passage, which criticizes unnamed opponents for defending a conjunction of views—views that were explicitly endorsed by Aquinas.

E. Hence it is clear that they do wrong who [i] claim that first principles and rules of speculative matters are a kind of impressions from the rules of eternal truth and who [ii] along with this do not claim that any impression or informing is brought about in our concepts by the eternal light other than that alone which is brought about by a likeness [*specie*] taken from a thing with the help of a natural innate light.<sup>15</sup>

We have already seen Aquinas defend the second of these two claims (B,C). He makes the first claim in his *Quodlibetal Questions*, where he gives an affirmative answer to the question “whether it is in the first truth that the intellective soul cognizes everything that it cognizes.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “Absolute ergo dicendum quod homo synceram veritatem de nulla re habere potest ex puris naturalibus eius notitiam acquirendo; sed solum illustratione luminis divini”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 8rM.

<sup>15</sup> “Unde patet quod peccant qui ponunt quod prima principia et regulae speculabilium sunt impressiones quaedam a regulis veritatis aeternae: et cum hoc non ponunt aliquam impressionem fieri aut informationem in nostris conceptibus a luce aeterna: quam illam solam quae fit a specie a re accepta adiutorio lucis naturalis ingentiae”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.3; 10vG.

<sup>16</sup> “But we can cognize nothing of the truth unless on the basis of first principles and intellectual light, which can manifest the truth only inasmuch as they are a likeness of that first truth—for as a result of this they also have a kind of unchangeability and infallibility”; St. Thomas, *Quod.* 10.4.1c. (“Nihil autem possumus veritatis cognoscere nisi ex primis principiis, et ex lumine intellectuali; quae veritatem manifestare non possunt, nisi secundum

Elsewhere Henry explicitly considers and rejects the position that ordinary divine illumination amounts merely to a naturally innate capacity to know the truth.

F. To the first argument on the other side, that human beings can through their own activity [*motu*] acquire knowledge, it should be said that this is true [as regards knowledge] of natural things, in knowing what is true as regards the thing. But God teaches this, by giving a natural capacity for judgment through which one discerns the things to be known. Pure truth, however, or any truth that must be cognized supernaturally, or perhaps any truth at all, cannot be known without God himself doing the teaching.<sup>17</sup>

Acknowledging the same distinction that Aquinas relies on between a natural and a special illumination, Henry allows that, with respect to natural things, human beings on their own can acquire knowledge of “what is true as regards the thing.” The only role Henry attributes to God in such activity is to endow us naturally with the capacity for making judgments. However, a further kind of divine aid, what Henry here calls “God himself doing the teaching,” is required for knowing pure truth, supernatural truth, or “perhaps” any truth at all.

As we will see, Henry's argument for the TDI is original and of philosophical interest even to someone who would not consider taking the hypothesis of divine illumination seriously. In contrast, his account of the actual process of illumination is sketchy and quite unsatisfying. Still, a few details about that process need mention. He claims that God provides illumination through no natural necessity: “He offers these [rules of eternal light] to whomever He wishes, and from whomever He wishes He takes them away.” However, ordinarily this illumination is “presented equally to all men . . . unless someone by displaying outstanding evil deserves its being taken away from him altogether.”<sup>18</sup> He calls the divine light (the medium of di-

quod sunt similitudo illius primae veritatis: quia ex hoc etiam habent quamdam incommutabilitatem et infallibilitatem.”)

<sup>17</sup> “Ad primum in oppositum, quod homo potest proprio motu acquirere scientiam: dicendum quod verum est de rebus naturalibus, sciendo id quod verum est in re: quod tamen deus docet: dando naturale iudicium quo scienda discernit. Synceram autem veritatem, aut aliquam veritatem supernaturaliter cognoscendam, aut forte veritatem quancunque, non potest scire sine ipso proprio docente”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.7 ad 1; 17rM.

<sup>18</sup> “Sed illas deus offert quibus vult; et quibus vult subtrahit. Non enim quadam necessitate naturali se offerunt . . .”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 7vM. “Omnibus tamen quantum est ex parte dei hominibus aequaliter praesentatur . . . nisi exigente eminente malitia aliquis mereatur ut ei omnino subtrahatur”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 8vS.

vine illumination) "the proximate and complete basis [*ratio*] of cognizing pure truth." We do not directly see the divine light as we do objects in the external world. Rather, the divine light illuminates our cognitions of the external world, in much the same way as the sun illuminates natural objects.<sup>19</sup> God, therefore, does not provide the objects of such cognition, but somehow intensifies or clarifies our impressions of these objects.

## II

Henry's defense of the TDI rests on a distinction between knowing the true and knowing the truth. The true can be known without a special divine illumination; knowing the truth requires some extraordinary assistance from God. Henry first distinguishes between these two sorts of knowledge in the following passage.

G. It is one thing to know of a creature what is true in respect to it, and it is another to know its truth. Consequently, there is one cognition by which a thing is cognized, another by which its truth is cognized. For every cognitive power grasping through its apprehension [*notitiam*] a thing just as it has existence in itself outside the cognizer grasps what is true in it. But one does not through this grasp its truth. For the senses even in brutes grasp well enough concerning a thing what is true in it. But still they grasp or cognize the truth of no thing, because they cannot judge regarding any thing what it is in actual truth—for example, concerning a human being, that it is a true human being, or concerning a color, that it is a true color.<sup>20</sup>

To know what is true in something is what we might call having a veridical cognition of it—a cognition that represents the object as it is, or that gets it right. As Henry writes here, it is "grasping . . . a thing just as it has existence in itself outside the cognizer." Humans,

<sup>19</sup> "Proxima et perfecta ratio cognoscendi synceram veritatem . . ."; Ghent, *Summa* 1.3; 10rF. See *Summa* 1.3 F for further details.

<sup>20</sup> "Aliud tamen est scire de creatura id quod verum est in ea et aliud est scire eius veritatem: ut alia sit cognitio qua cognoscitur res, alia qua cognoscitur veritas eius. Omnis enim virtus cognoscitiva per suam notitiam apprehendens rem sicuti habet esse in se extra cognoscentem apprehendit quod verum est in ea. Sed non per hoc apprehendit eius veritatem. Sensus enim etiam in brutis bene apprehendit de re quod verum est in ea. Sed tamen nullius rei veritatem apprehendit sive cognoscit: propter quod de nullo potest iudicare quid sit in rei veritate, ut de homine quod sit verus homo, vel de colore quod sit verus color"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 4vC.

and nonrational animals as well, can grasp something in this way; and he says that beliefs formed on this basis should be called knowledge, when knowledge is understood broadly. However, grasping what is true in a thing, Henry claims, is not the same as grasping its truth. What then does the latter amount to?

In a broad sense truth is a relationship of conformity between an object and an intellectual representation of that object (which Henry calls an exemplar): "Each thing is true insofar as it contains in itself what its exemplar represents."<sup>21</sup> For Henry, following the standard medieval account, it is not just propositions that are true, but also things.<sup>22</sup> It is the truth of things that is more important here. Henry speaks of a true human being, for example, or a true color; a true color is just a genuine sample of a color, with nothing defective about it. The truth of a thing, Henry explains, "can be grasped only by grasping its conformity to its exemplar."<sup>23</sup> Two sorts of exemplars are relevant here: human ideas and divine ideas. Correspondingly there are two ways of grasping the truth.

H. A thing's truth has two ways of being cognized by a human being, with respect to two exemplars. . . . The first exemplar of a thing is its universal likeness [*species*] existing within the soul, through which the soul acquires an apprehension of all its individual instantiations [*supposita*]. This exemplar is caused by the thing. The second exemplar is the divine art containing the ideal formulations of all things.<sup>24</sup>

This is a potentially confusing passage. The truth of a thing requires the thing's conformity to the *divine* intellect. (A donkey is a true donkey to the extent to which it matches the divine exemplar of donkeys.) However, the kind of truth that is a conformity of the *human* intellect to a thing is the truth of a cognition of that thing.

<sup>21</sup> "Intantum enim vera est quaecumque res, in quantum in se continet quod exemplar eius repraesentat"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 5rD.

<sup>22</sup> See Ghent, *Summa* 34.1 (164), where Henry distinguishes the truth of a thing (*veritas rei*) and the truth of a sign (*veritas signi*). For Aquinas's doctrine of truth, see *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (hereafter, "QDV") q. 1 (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1975); see especially QDV q. 1, a. 4, c.

<sup>23</sup> "Intentio enim veritatis in re apprehendi non potest nisi apprehendendo conformitatem eius ad suum exemplar"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 5rD.

<sup>24</sup> "Dupliciter ad duplex exemplar veritas rei habet ab homine cognosci . . . Primum exemplar rei est species eius universalis apud animam existens, per quam acquirit notitiam omnium suppositorum eius: et est causata a re. Secundum exemplar est ars divina continens omnium rerum ideales rationes"; *Summa* 1.2; 5vE.

(A human cognition of a donkey is true as a result of its conforming to the donkey; but a donkey is not a true donkey as a result of its conforming to a *human* intellect.)<sup>25</sup> Hence it is potentially misleading when Henry says in *H* that a *thing's* truth may be cognized in two ways. This suggests that we might know the truth of the thing either by comparing our own ideas to the thing, or by comparing the thing to the divine ideas. It is only the latter conformity, however, that makes the thing true.

Of what value, then, are our own ideas for knowing the truth of a thing? Not much, it might seem, since the two sides of the relationship that constitute a thing's truth are the thing itself and the divine intellect. Henry seems to have built into his theory from the outset the conclusion that knowledge of the truth is impossible without knowing something about the divine intellect. Our own ideas will naturally play a role in our inquiry into the nature of the divine ideas. But in themselves these derivative human ideas will *necessarily* be insufficient. We must have contact with the divine ideas, and so the need for divine illumination seems to be a foregone conclusion.

However, the argument cannot stop here, and Henry knows it.<sup>26</sup> Although conformity to our own ideas is not what constitutes the truth of things, still there is reason to think that we might learn about the truth of things without any *direct* contact with the divine ideas. For the truth of a thing is not just any arbitrary match between an object and God's idea of it, but a match between the divine exemplar and the object's *essence* or *quiddity*.

I. It is this that the truth of a creature requires insofar as it is a creature—namely that it is in its essence that which is its ideal perfection

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas expresses this point clearly: "The truth of our intellection is measured by the thing that is outside the soul. For it is because it agrees with the thing that our intellection is called true. The truth of the thing, however, is measured according to the divine intellection, which is the cause of things"; *SCG* I, 62 (519). ("Veritas enim nostri intellectus mensuratur a re quae est extra animam, ex hoc enim intellectus noster verus dicitur quod consonat rei: veritas autem rei mensuratur ad intellectum divinum, qui est causa rerum.") Aquinas does note that a thing may be called true or false in comparison to a human intellect insofar as the thing has a tendency to produce a true or false impression of itself. It is in this way, he says, that fool's gold or a deceitful person is false; see *Sent.* I, d. 19, q. 5, a. 1).

<sup>26</sup> Robert Grosseteste follows a very similar line of argument up to this point—but he is less interesting than Henry because he does stop here. See his *De veritate* in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 9 (1912): 137–8.

in the divine wisdom, which is to say that it entirely agrees, matches, and is conformed to it.<sup>27</sup>

Grasping the truth thus involves more than grasping what is true, because it requires the apprehension of an object's essence. Indeed, for Henry the truth of an object just is that object's *essence*;<sup>28</sup> knowing the truth, then, is just a matter of knowing essences. However, it does not, in principle, seem impossible for human beings to know the essences of things by the study of the things themselves. Why should one need access to the divine exemplar in order to discover the nature of an object? Recall that Aquinas claims human beings can, at least in theory, grasp the natures of things. Furthermore, Henry's own discussion of what the truth of a thing requires seems to make this possibility only more evident. He writes, for instance, that

J. Truth is said to be in something because that thing has that [sort] of form and essence imparted in itself which it is naturally suited to have according to its species.<sup>29</sup>

If this is what is involved in the truth of something, then it seems plausible that we could know the truth of some thing on our own—first by knowing the species of that thing, and then by recognizing that it has the form that something of that species must have. Could not I know of a human being, for example, that he is a human being, and then know that he has the form (say, rational animal) that human beings are naturally suited to have? Further, if I could know this much about human beings, then it seems that I should be entitled to infer that this must be the divine idea of a human being. For the essences of things *must* match God's ideas—this follows from the

<sup>27</sup> "Hoc enim est quod requirit veritas creaturae in quantum creatura est, videlicet quod ipsa sit illud in sua essentia, quod est eius idealis perfectio in divina sapientia, scilicet ut ei omnino consonet et respondeat et conformis sit"; Ghent, *Summa* 34.2; 176.

<sup>28</sup> "[Intellect perceives] not only that which is true, by which it is moved (in the way that the senses too apprehend), but *the truth itself, which is the very quiddity of the thing intellectually cognized*"; Ghent, *Quod.* 2.6; v.6, 32. ("... Non solum . . . id quod verum est, a quo movetur [sicut etiam apprehendit et sensus], sed ipsam veritatem, quae est ipsa quidditas rei intellecta.") See also Ghent, *Summa* 2.6 (27rD).

<sup>29</sup> "Ut ex hoc veritas dicatur esse in unoquoque, quia habet in se participatum id formae, et essentiae, quod natum est habere secundum suam speciem"; Ghent, *Summa* 34.2; v.27, 175–6.

fact that God created things according to his ideas of them.<sup>30</sup> Hence even though the divine exemplar is one of the *relata* of the relationship we are interested in, it seems plausible, at least from all that Henry has said so far, to think that all we need to know is the created side of the relationship, and we can automatically infer from this that the two sides conform. So Henry cannot claim just that we could not know the truth of things without direct access to the divine intellect. Theoretically, at least, it should be enough to have direct access to the created side of the relationship alone. We should be able to infer the rest.

It is because Henry sees this point that he says in *H* that the truth of things can be cognized in two ways, through either human or divine ideas. It is at this point that the purely epistemological part of Henry's argument comes out. As we have seen in *G*, he concedes that human beings have the ability to know what is true. In fact Henry concedes more than this; he concedes also that our senses are reliable and thus give us veridical awareness of the external world. But what Henry denies, in denying that we can know the truth, is that we can have knowledge of a different sort. Henry's claim, I want to show, is that we are unable to go beyond superficial appearances and grasp the defining nature of what it is to be a certain kind of thing. Henry describes this effort to grasp the truth as an attempt to dig beneath appearances and understand more and more about sensible objects. This is, he writes, an activity humans are naturally drawn to engage in.

K. For the first cognition, that of simple grasping, comes to the intellect naturally, just as to the senses. . . . The intellect is not content

<sup>30</sup> ". . . every creature is a kind of image of a divine exemplar . . ."; *Summa* 1.2; 6r1. ("Omnis creatura sit imago quaedam divini exemplaris.") For more on Henry's theory of ideas see L. M. de Rijk, "Quaestio de Ideis" in *Kephalaion*, ed. J. Mansfeld and L. M. de Rijk (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975); L. M. de Rijk, "Un tournant important dans l'usage du mot idea chez Henri de Gand" in *Idea*, ed. M. Fattori and M. L. Bianchi (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1989). Aquinas also emphasizes the necessity of the match between God's ideas and the created world: "It is therefore clear that a thing is adequate to the divine intellect however it is disposed, however it exists, under any form, privation, or defect. And in this way it is clear that every thing is true in comparison to the divine intellect"; St. Thomas, *QDV* q. 1, a. 10, c. ("Patet ergo quod res qualitercumque se habeat, sub quacumque forma existat vel privatione aut defectu, intellectui divino adaequatur, et sic patet quod res quaelibet in comparatione ad intellectum divinum vera est.")

with this, however, but goes further in order to cognize what is hidden in the thing being grasped—that is, in order to comprehend the *truth* of the thing being grasped and those aspects that are hidden within it, such as the accidental, contingent properties.<sup>31</sup>

Insofar as this activity of the intellect concerns the grasping of truth, human beings cannot engage in it on their own. Henry recognizes the Aristotelian position, according to which "one has fixed knowledge of changeable, particular, sensible, natural things through their universals existing in the intellect."<sup>32</sup> And he agrees that this is the way human beings do on their own acquire knowledge of the truth—insofar as they can.<sup>33</sup> But he denies that human beings could ever, on their own, be completely successful in this effort. Whereas Aquinas argues that the human intellect is able, through prolonged effort, to form more and more accurate universal concepts of the external world,<sup>34</sup> Henry denies that this effort could ever lead to knowledge

<sup>31</sup> "Hoc enim intellectui advenit naturaliter prima cognitio simplicis apprehensionis, sicut et sensui, ut dicitur in proxima quaestione. Sed in hoc non est intellectus contentus: sed ulterius vadit ad cognoscendum id quod latet in apprehenso—scilicet ad comprehendendum veritatem rei apprehensae, et ea quae in ipsa latent, ut sunt proprietates accidentia contingentia . . ."; Ghent, *Summa* 1.10 ad 3; 20vK. (I take the grasping of the truth to be a different sort of thing from the grasping of "accidental, contingent properties" mentioned at the end of this passage. Only the former, apparently, requires divine illumination.)

<sup>32</sup> "Aristoteles, videns . . . quod singularium propter eorum transmutationem non posset esse scientia ex seipsis, posuit universalia genera scilicet et species abstrahi per intellectum a singularibus, in quibus habent esse secundum veritatem . . . Et secundum hoc de rebus naturalibus sensibilibus, particularibus, transmutabilibus per eorum universalia existentia apud intellectum posuit fixam haberi scientiam"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.1 ad 4; 3r1.

<sup>33</sup> "To the first argument in opposition, that natural things are in continual flux, it should be said that this is true in the case of particular things themselves, but not in the case of universals abstracted from them which endure in the mind. In accordance with these universals there is certain knowledge concerning those [particulars], howevermuch the particulars may be changed"; Ghent, *Summa* 2.2 ad 1; 24rG. ("Ad primum in oppositum, quod naturalia sunt in continuo fluxu: dicendum quod verum est in ipsis particularibus: non autem in universalibus abstractis ab ipsis quae manent in mente, secundum quod de ipsis est certa scientia, qualitercumque particularia mutantur."); See also *H*.

<sup>34</sup> See notes 12 and 13 above. Norman Kretzmann, in his "Infallibility, Error, and Ignorance," discusses in detail how Aquinas sees human understanding as involving a difficult and slow movement from superficial and vague comprehensions of things to an understanding of their deepest essences. Only the first stage of this process is infallible, but it is theoretically possible for human beings *on their own* to get all the way to the end. Kretzmann labels this the progression from the alpha to the omega cognition of

of the essences or quiddities of things. It simply is not possible for human beings on their own to go beyond the senses and progress to the deepest understanding of the essences of creatures.

L. It is also clear that if a human being can cognize certain knowledge and infallible truth, this is not possible for that person by looking to an exemplar abstracted from a thing through the senses, *no matter how much it is purified and made universal*.<sup>36</sup>

With this claim Henry rejects one of the two ways in which the truth of things may be known—that is, through an exemplar in the human intellect (cf. *H*). On this basis he rejects what he characterizes as the Aristotelian account of knowing, an account based “too much . . . [on] particular causes.” In its place he puts his synthesis of Aristotle and Plato. This synthesis, which he calls “the one teaching of the truest philosophy,”<sup>36</sup> is the philosophy of Augustine.

M. Hence Augustine, interpreting Plato’s pronouncements more soundly than Aristotle did, claims that the principles of certain knowledge and cognition of truth consist in eternal unchangeable rules or formulations existing in God. . . . And on this basis there can be certain and fixed knowledge of changeable things no matter how changeable they are.<sup>37</sup>

The Augustinian position, as Henry understands it, agrees with Aristotle that true knowledge is knowledge of unchanging, necessary

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the thing’s nature; see Norman Kretzman, “Infallibility, Error, and Ignorance,” in *Aristotle and His Medieval Interpreters* (= *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, supp. vol. 17) (1991): 159–94.

<sup>36</sup> “Patet etiam quod certam scientiam et infallibilem veritatem si contingat hominem cognoscere, hoc non contingit ei aspiciendo ad exemplar abstractum a re per sensus quantumcumque sit depuratum et universale factum”; Ghent *Summa* 1.2; 5vF.

<sup>36</sup> “et sic erit ex utrisque eliquata una verissimae philosophiae disciplina . . .”; *Summa* 1.4; 12vD. The philosophy of Aristotle “was destroyed because he attributed too much, indeed everything, to particular causes . . .”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.4; 12vD. (“Modus Aristotelis si non sensit id quod dixit Plato, erat diminutus: quia nimium attribuebat, immo totum, causis particularibus . . .”)

<sup>37</sup> “Unde Augustinus, sanius interpretans dicta Platonis quam Aristoteles, ponit principia certae scientiae et cognitionis veritatis consistere in regulis sive rationibus aeternis incommutabilibus existentibus in deo . . . Et per hoc de rebus transmutabilibus quantumcumque transmutabiles sint certa potest esse et fixa scientia”; Ghent, *Summa* 1.1 ad 4; 3r-3vI.

truths. However, such knowledge of the truth, although it is possible for human beings, is not possible without divine illumination.

### III

I have been trying to show how Henry’s argument for the TDI can be traced to an essentially epistemological disagreement with Aquinas’s theory of cognition. The heart of this disagreement is Henry’s claim that we are unable to grasp naturally the truth of things. It is this claim that distinguishes Henry so sharply from Aquinas and the Aristotelianism of his age. It is also this claim that distinguishes Henry’s argument from the classical arguments for the TDI, as made, for instance, by Augustine and Bonaventure. It is worthwhile to digress long enough to notice the way in which Henry’s argument differs from Augustine’s as given, for example, in the following passage:

N. Everything that the bodily senses attain, that which is also called sensible, is incessantly changing. . . . But what does not remain cannot be perceived; for that is perceived which is comprehended in knowledge. But something that is incessantly changing cannot be comprehended. Therefore, we must not expect purity of truth from the bodily senses.<sup>38</sup>

Here Augustine distinguishes two sorts of cognitions: sensation through the bodily senses on one hand, and comprehension in knowledge on the other. It is the latter and not the former, surprisingly, that he also associates with *perceiving*. One cannot, Augustine claims, comprehend or perceive what “does not remain” or “is incessantly changing.” However, since everything that is sensed is of this character, one cannot through the bodily senses arrive at the perception or comprehension that characterize knowledge. And so he concludes (evidently linking comprehension with truth) that the senses cannot arrive at the “purity of truth.”

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<sup>38</sup> “Omne quod corporeus sensus attingit, quod et sensibile dicitur, sine ulla intermissione temporis commutatur. . . . Quod autem non manet percipi non potest; illud enim percipitur quod scientia comprehenditur; comprehendere autem non potest quod sine intermissione mutatur. Non est igitur exspectanda sinceritas veritatis a sensibus corporis”; Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, q. 9; *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, 44A, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975).



The argument's characteristic claims are that (1) there are two kinds of cognition: sensory and some higher kind; (2) the objects of sensation are constantly changing; (3) for this reason only the higher kind of cognition has access to truth.<sup>39</sup> Similar versions of this general argument can also be found in Bonaventure, Matthew of Aquasparta, John Peckham, Roger Marston and no doubt many others.<sup>40</sup> Henry too sometimes seems to be making this very argument. However, it seems to me that when he is arguing at his best he gives the epistemological argument I have been developing. The crucial difference between the classic Augustinian argument and Henry's epistemological argument is that Henry's argument does not rest on (2). For Henry the truth in question is a truth of the external world. We want to know, he writes, that *this thing in the external world* is a true human being, and that *this thing in the external world* is a true color (cf. *G*). He in fact explicitly distances himself from a reading of the above Augustinian passage which would make the truth of the created world a contradiction in terms.

O. To the first argument on the other side, that pure truth must not be sought from the senses, it should be said that this is true as far as beholding the exemplar of uncreated light is concerned—and *this not because that truth is itself impure in anything*, but because it he-

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gilson: "Truth is necessary and immutable; but in the sensible order nothing necessary or immutable is to be found; therefore sensible things will never yield us any truth. That may be said to be almost a commonplace in the Augustinian schools of the thirteenth century"; Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Scribners, 1936), 230.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, Aquasparta's *Quaestiones de fide et de cognitione* q. 2 in *From Roger Bacon to William of Ockham*, vol. 2 of *Selections from Medieval Philosophers*, trans. Richard McKeon, (New York: Scribners, 1930), 268–302, or Bonaventure's *De scientia Christi*, q. 4 resp.: "Hence since things have existence in the mind, their proper genus, and the eternal art, the truth of things corresponding to the existence they have in the soul or their proper genus does not suffice for the soul to have certain knowledge, since both are mutable—unless the soul somehow attains them inasmuch as they exist in the eternal art." ("Unde cum res habeant esse in mente et in proprio genere et in aeterna arte, non sufficit ipsi animae ad certitudinalem scientiam veritas rerum, secundum quod esse habent in se, vel secundum quod esse habent in proprio genere, quia utrobique sunt mutabiles, nisi aliquo modo attingat eas, in quantum sunt in arte aeterna.") Both Aquinas and Peter John Olivi recite this standard argument, but each rejects it. Aquinas, tellingly, appeals to the agent intellect; see *ST* I, q. 84, a. 6, ad 1. For Olivi's reply see q. 2 ad 6 in the appendix to his *Quaestiones in Secundum Librum Sententiarum* (Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica, 6) (Rome: Quaracchi, 1926), 516–17.

comes impure in us when it is overshadowed by phantasms—just as the light of the sun is in a way impure to eyes darkened by smoke.<sup>41</sup>

Henry affirms here that there is nothing about truth as it exists in the created world that makes it unknowable. Knowledge of this world would count as real knowledge in the strictest sense—if only human beings could attain it. For Henry the real problem is that our cognitive faculties preclude understanding the truth about things.

In *Summa* 1.2, his most detailed treatment of these issues, Henry gives three arguments supporting his claim that our cognitive faculties preclude knowledge of the essences of things. The first one is the most penetrating.

*P*. The first argument is that such an exemplar, because it is abstracted from a changeable thing, necessarily has some of the characteristics of a changeable thing. Hence, since natural things are more changeable than mathematical things, the Philosopher claimed that we can have certitude of knowledge of mathematical things greater than that of natural things through their universal likeness [*species*], and this can be only because of the changeability of the likenesses themselves existing within the soul.<sup>42</sup>

Superficially this appears to be just another version of the classic Augustinian argument. However, differences begin to emerge as Henry develops and defends his position. Notice, to begin with, that *P* invokes the changeability of the *likeness* taken from the sensible object. This is a point we have seen Henry make before. In *L* Henry writes that one cannot know the truth of things through a likeness

<sup>41</sup> "Ad primum in oppositum, quod a sensibus non est expetenda syn-cera veritas: Dicendum quod verum est quantum aspiciendo ad exemplar lucis increatae: et hoc non quia ipsa veritas in se in aliquo sit impura: sed quia in nobis fit impura quando est phantasmatis obumbrata: sicut lux solis oculis fumo caligantibus impura quodam modo est"; Ghent, *Summa* 2.1 ad 1; 23vC. Note that it is unclear how "*in aliquo*" should be read in the italicized phrase. It seems that it could either mean: (a) *in any respect* or (b) *in any thing*—that is, *in any created instance*. In either case the fundamental point remains: the cause of the unknowability of truth is not the truth as it exists in things, but rather our inability to get at this truth.

<sup>42</sup> "Prima ratio est quod exemplar tale eo quod abstractum est a re transmutabili, necesse habet aliquam rationem transmutabilis. Unde quia res naturales magis sunt transmutabiles quam mathematicae: ideo posuit Philosophus maiorem haberi certitudinem scientiae de rebus mathematicis quam de naturalibus per species earum universales: et hoc non nisi propter specierum ipsarum existentium apud animam transmutabilitatem"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.2; 5vE.

from the created world, "no matter how much it is purified and made universal." The key to understanding Henry's argument is to understand what makes the likenesses we receive from the sensible world inadequate for knowing the truth of things.

If I am right in arguing that Henry is not making the "classic" argument for the TDI, then Henry's claim here had better amount to more than that there is no unchanging truth to be found in the created world. Indeed I believe there is more to the passage. The problem Henry is getting at is that while there *are* unchanging real essences in the created world, we cannot arrive at them through their sensible appearances. He makes this point more clearly elsewhere. He emphasizes, for instance, that pure knowledge (knowledge of the truth, in other words, or knowledge in the strict sense) requires an apprehension that goes beyond the mere veridical apprehension of the superficial sensible world.

Q. For there is no knowledge of things insofar as they are external in effect, but insofar as their nature and quiddity is comprehended by the mind.<sup>43</sup>

Insofar as things are external in effect—by which he means as far as their external appearances are concerned—there can be no such knowledge. Knowledge of the truth of an object requires knowledge of an object's "nature and quiddity"—its essence. Later in his *Summa*, in passages that were omitted from his final redaction and that now survive in only a single manuscript,<sup>44</sup> Henry makes this point still more clearly.

<sup>43</sup> "Non enim est scientia de rebus in quantum sunt extra in effectu: sed in quantum natura et quidditas earum a mente est comprehensa"; Ghent, *Summa* 2.2 ad 1; 24rG.

<sup>44</sup> These passages have recently been published for the first time, in the critical edition of article 34 of the *Summa*. How seriously should we take passages that Henry himself seems to have deleted from the final text? It may be relevant to note that I had arrived at much of my current understanding of Henry's argument for the TDI before finding these deleted passages in *Summa* 34. So these texts merely confirmed the existence of a doctrine that I had already thought present, although less explicitly, in *Summa* aa. 1–2. In these lengthy passages Henry restates many of the central arguments of the *Summa*'s first articles, including his defense of the TDI. (See, in particular, 223–4.) One might take these passages to show that Henry remained committed to the early doctrines of the *Summa*. On the other hand, one could claim that the reason Henry crossed out these passages is that he no longer wished to defend his early views.

R. But I do not see how our intellect can comprehend with certainty, without any error, this conformity of a quiddity to that of which it is a quiddity. For with respect to an external object our intellect receives only a sensible likeness [*speciem*] in the case of color, and like things [in the case of] other proper and common sensible objects—first in the particular senses, second in the imagination, and third in the intellect. Hence through this likeness the intellect cognizes only the sensible, whether under a universal or a particular aspect.<sup>45</sup>

Here Henry is not denying the role of intellect in forming abstract concepts on the basis of sensory data. What he is denying is that we could ever transform this sensory information into information about the inner natures of things.

Going back now to the argument of *P*, when Henry says in the first sentence there that the likenesses of things must be changeable because they are abstracted from changeable things, we should not take this to be a denial of the metaphysical claim that there are unchanging essences instantiated within changeable things. Henry is enough of an Aristotelian to agree that created beings have unchanging natures (see *O*). Indeed, as *Q* makes clear, he believes that these natures are precisely the objects of knowledge in the strict sense. Henry's point in *P* is that although unchanging essences do exist in the external world, it is the changeable sensory appearances of things that form the basis of all ideas we can form on our own. There is, Henry argues, no way for us on our own to get from the appearances of things to their essences. No matter to what extent sensory data are "purified and made universal" (*L*), they cannot give us knowledge of what it is to be a true human being or a true color. What we grasp instead are things as they are "external in effect" (*Q*). This is why Henry claims that we see objects through likenesses in the way that we see the sun through smoke (*O*). Elsewhere he writes that the truth cannot be grasped "through pure intelligible likenesses [*species*], which are only an image, not the truth itself."<sup>46</sup> Here he is not

<sup>45</sup> "Sed istam conformitatem quidditatis ad id cuius est quidditas, quomodo intellectus noster potest comprehendere certitudinaliter absque omni errore, non video. Cum enim de re extra nihil recipit nisi speciem sensibilem in colore et similia, et aliis sensibilibus propriis et communibus, primo in sensitivo particulari, secundo in phantasia, tertio in intellectu, per ipsam non cognoscit nisi sensibile, vel sub ratione universalis, vel sub ratione particularis"; Ghent, *Summa* 34.5 (expunged), 223. Cf. *Summa* 3.4; 29vP.

<sup>46</sup> "Unde per species intelligibiles puras: quae non sunt nisi idolum non veritas ipsa: hominem non contingit hic secundum communem statum viae synceram et liquidam sive claram veritatem, sive etiam qualemeumque scire: nisi aspiciendo ad exemplar lucis increatae"; Ghent, *Summa* 2.1; 23vB.

pressing the familiar line against representational realism (We cannot get at the things themselves . . .), but again claiming that all the senses get at is the accidental appearances of things, not their true nature.

What exactly, then, does Henry think we can know about human beings through the senses alone? He answers this question very clearly in the deleted sections of *Summa* 34.5.

S. For from a likeness [*specie*] taken purely from what is sensible, for example from a human being, we have only a kind of general concept which [consists of] figure, sensation [*sensus*], motion, and things of this sort, through which we judge concerning anything that appears to us whether it is a human being or not.<sup>47</sup>

What Henry is doing in this passage, it seems, is turning Aristotelian empiricism against itself. He concedes that human beings, on their own, derive all their concepts from the senses. However, the result is that on our own we can know only sensible things, such as shape and motion. Whether or not these concepts of shape and motion are particular concepts (the shape of a particular person) or universal, abstract concepts (the human shape in general) makes no difference to Henry's argument. Either way, he claims, we cannot learn the essences of things on the basis of these sensory data. He goes on in these deleted remarks to write that "the quiddities of substances are utterly unknown to us, and especially what is the nature of the ultimate *differentia* in each of them."<sup>48</sup>

Again it is worth comparing this view with Aquinas's. Aquinas would have agreed that we do not, in fact, understand the ultimate nature of most substances. He writes that we do not even know the ultimate nature of a fly.<sup>49</sup> However, Aquinas thought that in principle

<sup>47</sup> "Ex specie enim pure accepta de sensibili, verbi gratia de homine, non habemus nisi quemdam generalem conceptum quod figuram et sensum et motum et huiusmodi, per quem de quocumque quod nobis occurrit, iudicamus an sit homo an non"; Ghent, *Summa* 34.5; 223.

<sup>48</sup> "Quidditates enim substantiarum nobis valde ignotae sunt, et maxime quod rationem ultimae differentiae in unaquaque earum"; Ghent, *Summa* 34.5; 223.

<sup>49</sup> St. Thomas, *In symbolum Apostolorum scriptum*, preface. See also *InDA* 1.1.254-5; *ST* I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 3; *SCG* I, 3 (18); *Expositio Libri Posteriorum* (hereafter, "*InPA*") (Rome: Leonine Commission, 1989) 1.4 (43), 2.13 (533). For an illuminating passage on how we do attain such knowledge, insofar as we do, see *Sent.* 3.35.2.2.1.

such knowledge was possible for us without divine illumination. The natural light of agent intellect, according to Aquinas, suffices to get behind appearances and reach the true nature of reality.<sup>50</sup> Henry's disagreement with Aquinas is not just in principle—it is not over the purely theoretical issue of whether human beings could ever achieve a *complete* understanding of reality. If this were all the dispute amounted to then there would hardly be much of a difference, for Aquinas himself is not very optimistic about our ability, in this life, to grasp the whole truth. (He saves this sort of knowledge for the next life.) Henry, however, thinks that in our current state we not only need but in fact receive divine illumination. His account entails that if God had been withholding such illumination from us over the years, we would be in a severely impoverished epistemological state.

At its most basic, Henry's critique of Aristotelianism is a critique of agent intellect. He accepts the doctrine of agent intellect for human beings,<sup>51</sup> but refuses to give that faculty the kind of efficacy that it has for Aquinas and other medieval Aristotelians. (It's interesting in this context to note that Henry, in his last defense of the TDI, calls God himself a kind of agent intellect.)<sup>52</sup> In earlier writers we can find traces of the argument Henry is making. William of Auvergne, for instance, raised similar questions about our knowledge of essences. William's argument for the TDI is much more straightforward and less interesting, however, because he rejects the Aristotelian agent intellect altogether.<sup>53</sup> What makes Henry particularly interest-

<sup>50</sup> ". . . lumen intellectus agentis, per quam immutabiliter veritatem in rebus inutabilibus cognoscamus . . ."; *ST* I, q. 84, a. 6, ad 1. See also St. Thomas, *InPA* 1.4 (16).

<sup>51</sup> "Oportet ergo ponere virtutem aliam existentem in actu quae intelligibilia in potentia facit intelligibilia in actu, ut possint actu movere intellectum passivum. Haec autem est vis quam appellamus intellectum agentum"; Ghent *Summa* 1.5; 14vB. (Following Averroes's usage, Henry often uses the term '*intellectus passivus*' to refer to the power Aquinas called the *intellectus possibilis*.) Aquinas, in contrast, equated the passive intellect with the cogitative power; see, for instance, *SCG* II, 60 (1371).

<sup>52</sup> Ghent, *Quod.* 9.15. See also the discussion of Macken, "La théorie," 92-3.

<sup>53</sup> William of Auvergne, *Opera Omnia, De anima* 7.6 (Paris, 1674; reprint, Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva, 1963), 211. See the discussion of Gilson, "Pourquoi Saint Thomas a Critiqué Saint Augustin," *Archives D'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 1 (1926-27): 67-72. See also Rohmer, "L'école franciscaine," for further anticipations of Henry's argument in earlier scholastics.

ing is that he tries to combine the TDI with the Aristotelian theory of agent intellect. According to Étienne Gilson, such a combination is "unproductive and even, in a sense, contradictory."<sup>54</sup> For Henry, however, the combination is not contradictory; what it requires is this innovative epistemological argument we have been following.

Henry gives a more metaphysical basis to the argument in the following passage, where he discusses how we form the mental word or *verbum* that constitutes our general concept of a thing.

T. For no agent can impress complete knowledge of a thing unless it possesses in itself and acts on the basis of the thing's complete truth. A stone acts to produce the mental word of its truth in an intellect not through itself but through its likeness [*speciem*], which is not its truth [but] which it acts to produce in the intellect. Hence for this reason a stone cannot form the mental word of complete truth concerning itself in a mind.<sup>55</sup>

All the intellect grasps of the stone, Henry argues here, is its likeness—that is, the sensible appearances of the stone which emanate from the stone into the eye, and (in an abstract and universal form) into the intellect. But what the stone really is—what its ultimate composition is—is not revealed by these appearances. He continues *T* in this way.

U. Similarly, because a donkey does not act through its form immediately, but through its power transmitted into matter, so it cannot form the complete truth of its form in matter. For nothing acts to produce a complete truth similar to itself in another except that which acts immediately through that which is its own truth—just as a seal through its own form immediately impresses the wax, and by the true figure through which it informs it informs the wax.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> "Réflexions sur la controverse: S. Thomas—S. Augustin" in *Mélanges Mandonnet*, vol.1 (Paris: Vrin, 1930), 379. J. V. Brown says much the same: "Indeed, it is doubtful whether any theory of the operation of intellect which purports to explain those operations in terms of an agent intellect and a possible intellect would benefit from the assistance of a theory of divine illumination"; J. V. Brown, "Intellect and Knowing in Henry of Ghent," *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 37 (1975): 709.

<sup>55</sup> "Non enim aliquid agens potest imprimere perfectam scientiam rei nisi habeat in se perfectam veritatem eius et per illam agat. Unde quia lapis non agit verbum veritatis suae in intellectu per seipsum sed per speciem suam quae non est veritas sua quam agit in intellectu: ideo non potest formare verbum perfectae veritatis de se in mente"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.4; 12vE.

<sup>56</sup> "Similiter quia asinus no[n] agit per suam formam immediate, sed per suam virtutem immissam in materia, ideo non potest formare perfectam veritatem formae suae in materia: nihil enim agit perfectam veritatem sibi

A seal *is* able to impress its form on the wax, because it can do so directly. However, Henry thinks that the form of a donkey (that is, the nature of a donkey) is concealed by its matter—and hence concealed from our senses, which perceive only accidental, material properties. We can of course try to understand the form through the properties that we perceive, and to some extent Henry seems to think we can succeed through our natural abilities. Yet Henry believes that on our own we are theoretically precluded from ever completely grasping this truth. This epistemological claim is the heart of his argument for the TDI.

## IV

What are we to think of Henry's argument? His example of knowing a true color shows both the attractiveness of this claim and the difficulty of maintaining it. Henry, like all his contemporaries, had a primitive understanding of color. He did not understand the anatomy of the eye, not the nature of light, not the surface properties of colored objects. In short, he did not know the truth about light. The reason for his ignorance, of course, was that no one could possibly learn these things through mere sensory inspection coupled with speculation. It takes more than the naked eye and reasoning on the basis of unassisted observation to understand what color really is. Hence in a sense Henry was right to say that appearances precluded him from knowing the truth about color. But of course the human eye did not remain unaided. Experimental methods and tools like the prism and microscope led later philosophers and scientists to discover, *on the basis of appearances*, the nature of color. So the example of knowing the truth about color cuts both ways.

The questions about human knowledge that Henry raises have continued to puzzle philosophers. W. V. O. Quine has drawn attention to our ability to group things into useful natural kinds, and attributes this ability to natural selection.<sup>57</sup> Early modern philosophers

similem in alio nisi quod agit immediate per id quod est ipsa sua veritas. Sicut sigillum per ipsam suam formam immediate imprimit ceram: et vera figura qua ipsum informat, informat eam"; Ghent, *Summa* 1.4; 12vE.

<sup>57</sup> W. V. O. Quine, "Natural Kinds" in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 125–9.

often take up Henry's very themes. Locke, for instance, argues that we are unable to know real essences at all, and Descartes cautions against relying on the senses as guides to the essences of bodies.<sup>58</sup> Henry's readers, however, have by and large not realized that this is the point he is making. John Marenbon, for instance, reads Henry as claiming that certain knowledge must be knowledge of "what is in God's mind."<sup>59</sup> Charles Schmitt is just as mistaken, although in a different direction, when he reads Henry as having "showed himself to be more than a little dubious of the reliability of sense knowledge."<sup>60</sup>

Even Henry's most famous critic, John Duns Scotus, misunderstands the argument. Scotus mounts a detailed attack on Henry's defense of the TDI. Replying to the first of Henry's three arguments (*P*), Scotus writes that

V. This does not follow: if the object is mutable, then what is produced by it is not representative of anything under the aspect of immutability. For it is not the object's mutability that is the basis of the production. Instead, the basis of production is the mutable object's nature, which is, actually, immutable. Therefore, that produced by the object represents the [object's] nature *per se*.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Locke, *Essay* 3.6.9; Descartes, *Meditations*, 4. As Richard Popkin shows in his *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), these claims were commonplace in the seventeenth century—in the writing, for instance, of Mersenne (p. 136) and Galileo (p. 148, n. 65). See also Mersenne's treatise "The Truth of the Sciences Against the Sceptics or Pyrrhonists," a dialogue Roger Ariew brought to my attention.

<sup>59</sup> John Marenbon, *Later Medieval Philosophy (1150–1350). An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1987), 148–9.

<sup>60</sup> "Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus and Gianfrancesco Pico on illumination," *Medieval Studies* 25 (1963): 233. Raymond Macken and Steven Marrone both notice that knowledge of essences is involved in Henry's argument. (See Macken, "La théorie," 109–10; Marrone, *Truth and Knowledge*, 18–19, 136–7.) Yet neither recognizes how fundamental this issue is to Henry's argument.

<sup>61</sup> "Non sequitur etiam: si objectum est mutabile, igitur quod gignitur ab eo non est repraesentativum alicujus sub ratione immutabilis, quia mutabilitas in objecto non est ratio gignendi, sed natura ipsius objecti, quod est mutabile, vel quae natura est immutabilis. Genitum igitur ab ipso repraesentat naturam per se"; Scotus, *Ordinatio* I.3.1.4, n. 246. For a translation of this text, see John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Alan Wolter (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 116. For a discussion of the debate between Henry and Scotus, see Marilyn McCord Adams's *William Ockham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 551–88.

Scotus here attributes the following conditional premise to Henry: If the object being cognized is itself changeable, then the resultant cognition will also be changeable, and hence will not represent the object as universal. Scotus denies the conditional premise. He says that "the basis" (*ratio*) of the resultant cognition is not the changeable features of the object, but the object's unchanging nature. Therefore the resultant cognition can represent the object as universal, and can constitute knowledge of the object's nature.

Scotus's reply misunderstands the argument. First, he wrongly takes Henry to deny that we can have universal concepts, which is not the issue at all. (As we saw in *L* and *R*, Henry distinguishes between a universal apprehension of an object's external features, and an apprehension of an object's essence.) Next, Scotus simply asserts, without argument, that the basis of the resultant cognition is the object's nature. Then he makes an unwarranted inference: the object's immutable nature is the basis of the resultant cognition; therefore, the resultant cognition "represents the [object's] nature *per se*." Henry, as we have seen, agrees that there are such natures in physical objects. He might also be willing to accept that these natures are the basis of our cognitions of those objects—if this means only that that nature is the remote cause of the resultant cognition. Henry wants to claim, however, that the proximate cause of the cognition of, say, a human being is not a human nature. Indeed, Henry would think of that nature as being several steps removed from the resultant cognition. A likeness produced by the object is the proximate cause of a cognition. (Henry explicitly asserts this in *T*.) Furthermore, the proximate cause of the production of that likeness is the accidental features of the human being. It is the human being's material, sensible properties that are directly responsible for the way the object looks, feels, smells, and so forth. (This claim too Henry makes explicitly, in *U*.) Now it may be that the object's nature is the basis for these accidental properties. Henry would allow that. However, the whole point of his argument is that we cannot, on our own, go from the sensible features of the object to the object's nature. Scotus wants to claim that this is possible, but he does not explain how. Hence he never meets Henry's fundamental challenge: to explain how it is that sensory information contains information about the nature of things. It must be possible, according to the medieval Aristotelian picture that Aquinas endorses, to get at what it is to be a true human being (that is, to get at the essence of a human being)

through sensory appearances. That this is even *possible* is not at all self-evident. An adequate response to Henry at this point requires more than just asserting that the essences are there to be grasped. Granted that these essences are there, this leaves the hard question of *how* they are grasped.<sup>62</sup>

Despite Henry's challenge to the growing influence of the Aristotelian account, the days of the TDI were numbered. In Peckham's letter (A) we saw one instance of a reaction to Aquinas's attack on the theory. However, in general there was less resistance to its decline than one might assume. The question played no special role, as Martin Grabmann has noted, in the controversies over Aquinas's doctrines.<sup>63</sup> By the time of Scotus (circa 1300) it is clear that Aquinas's position had become orthodox. In criticizing Henry's position, one of Scotus's lines of argument attempts to show that, given Henry's commitment to various other positions, the divine illumination in his theory actually amounts to no more than God's activity as a remote cause. Scotus then concludes that Henry's position seems not to differ from "the common opinion, which claims that the eternal light, as a remote cause, causes all certain truth." He concludes that "either this opinion [Henry's] will be unsound or it will not be discordant with the common opinion."<sup>64</sup> Henry would of course have

<sup>62</sup> For another, less well-known medieval reply to Henry on the TDI, see Guy Terrena (d. 1342), as discussed in Grabmann, *Der Göttliche Grund*, 79–82.

<sup>63</sup> Grabmann, *Der Göttliche Grund*, 74. He goes on to note that William de la Mare's *Correctorium corruptorii* (an influential polemic against Aquinas) does not take up the question of the TDI and that soon after Aquinas's death interest in the theory diminished among the Franciscans. Grabmann further points out that Franciscan opponents of the TDI arose as well, and that many Thomists of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries did not even bother to discuss the question.

<sup>64</sup> "Si dicas [Henricus] quod lux increata cum intellectu et objecto causet istam veritatem sinceram, haec est opinio communis quae ponit lucem aeternam sicut causam remotam causere omnem certam veritatem, vel erit ista opinio inconueniens, vel non discordabit a comuni opinione"; Scotus, *Ordinatio* I.3.1.4, n. 260. Joseph Owens has taken this passage to show that some form of the TDI was the "common opinion" of Scotus's day; see Owens, "Faith," 457. But Owens misreads the passage. The "common opinion" Scotus cites is actually the view of Aquinas, and it is only in the very weakest sense that this can be called a form of the TDI. Any scholastic would have agreed that God is the remote cause of all truth and knowledge. Francis of Meyronnes, writing around 1320, provides later confirmation for Scotus's assessment of common scholastic opinion. In the course of rejecting the TDI, Meyronnes says that his view is that of the majority (*pars*

denied that he meant divine illumination to be a mere remote cause. But he would also presumably have been dismayed to find that his own arguments had had so little influence, and that Aquinas's position could, by the year 1300, be called the common opinion. Despite Henry's efforts, twilight was approaching for the theory of divine illumination.<sup>65</sup>

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*communior*); see I *Sent.* d. 3 q. 6; cited in Grabmann, *Der Göttliche Grund*, 43–4.

<sup>65</sup> This paper has benefited from comments by Norman Kretzinann, Carl Ginet, Sydney Shoemaker, Richard Boyd, audiences at Cornell University and Virginia Tech, and more APA job interviews than I care to recall.