

## Laval théologique et philosophique



# Speculative Grammar in St. Thomas Aquinas

Francis A. Cunningham

Volume 17, numéro 1, 1961

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020002ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020002ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Laval théologique et philosophique, Université Laval

### ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Cunningham, F. A. (1961). Speculative Grammar in St. Thomas Aquinas. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 17(1), 76–86. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1020002ar>

## Speculative Grammar in St. Thomas Aquinas

In the thirteenth century, the New Aristotle dominated the Faculty of Arts at Paris. Aristotle's influence was felt in linguistics no less than it was in the Natural Sciences.<sup>1</sup> His principles of act and potency were found to be applicable in the relationship of a predicate to its subject, even as they were in that of a substantial form to prime matter. His modes of signification were incorporated into the Commentaries on Priscian.<sup>2</sup> The advocates of these modes were called *Modistae*.<sup>3</sup> His logic put Poetry to rout in *The Battle of the Seven Arts*.<sup>4</sup> All sorts of speculative grammars began to appear.<sup>5</sup> The better ones were attributed to the intellectual giants of the day, to St. Thomas, to St. Albert the Great,<sup>6</sup> to Scotus,<sup>7</sup> to Roger Bacon.<sup>8</sup>

One Breslau manuscript attributes *De Modis Significandi* to St. Thomas. That was the most celebrated of all the speculative grammars. Today, that work is commonly attributed to another Thomas, Thomas of Erfurt.<sup>9</sup> The mistake was understandable. St. Thomas was familiar with these modes. His relations with the

1. Henri D'ANDELI, *The Battle of the Seven Arts*, tr. by L. Paetow, Univ. of Calif. Press (Berkeley, 1914). See Introduction, pp.20-27.

2. M. GRABMANN, "Der Kommentar des seligen Jordanus von Sachsen zum Priscianus minor," *Archivum Fractum Praedicatorum*, (Rome, X, 1940), pp.5-19. For those of Petrus Helias and Kildwardby, see J. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, Univ. Press (Cambridge, 1903), pp.640-641.

3. For Michael "Modista" of Marbais, see SANDYS, *op. cit.*, p.641.

4. Henri D'ANDELI, *op. cit.*

5. M. GRABMANN, "Die Entwicklung der mittelalterlichen Sprachlogik," in *Mittelalterliches Geistesleben* (Munich, 1926), vol.I, pp.104-146; "Les Œuvres de Siger de Courtrai," éd. Wallerand, in *Les Philosophes Belges* (Louvain, 1913), tom.viii, pp.91-125; John of GARLAND, *Morals Scolarium*, ed. Paetow, Univ. of Calif. Press (Berkeley, 1927); "Die Modi Significandi des Martinus de Dacia," *loc. cit.*

6. O. MEERSEMAN, O.P., *Introductio in Opera Omnia Alberti Magni*, C. Beyaert (Bruges, Belgium, 1931), p.143.

7. P. O. SCHAFER, O.F.M., *Bibliographia de vita, operibus, et doctrina Joannis Duns Scoti*, Herder (Rome, 1955), vol.1, pp.1-50, nn.2038 & 4977.

8. *The Opus majus of Roger Bacon*, tr. by R. Burke, Univ. of Penn. Press (Philadelphia, 1928) vol.I, Part III, pp.75-116.

9. H. ROOS, S.J., "Die Modi Significandi des Martinus de Dacia," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie Des Mittelalters*, Münster, i. w., 1952) vol.37, Heft 2, p.41, note 5: "Vgl. ausser der von Grabmann (*Thomas von Erfurt*, S. 26) Zitieren Belegstelle in Cod. IV, Q.81 b der Universitätsbibliothek in Breslau noch folgende: Melk, Cod. 181, p.661. 'Sed tamen sanctus Thomas de Aquino alium composuit quendam librum de modis significandi qui sic incipitur: Quoniam scire et intelligere contingit in omni scientia, ...'"

Faculty of Arts in Paris were much more cordial than they were with his own fellows in Theology. He considered it his business to interpret the New Aristotle in a Christian sense. He did not think it proper for a theologian to write about something which was altogether profane,<sup>1</sup> but he was not above making use of the spoils of the Egyptians. Here are a few instances of his use of these Aristotelian modes taken from his authentic works.

#### I. THE CONCRETE VS. THE ABSTRACT

In modern linguistics, words are supposed to stand for things directly on a one-for-one basis. "Man" is a comparatively distinct mode of signification for Socrates, "humanity" is a confused mode. In the scholastic tradition, terms stand for thoughts, and thoughts stand for things.<sup>2</sup> There is some correspondence, of course, between the external word as a sign of the internal word, and the internal word as a sign of the thing itself. The concept is based on reality. But this mediation of thoughts between words and things allows for a multiple difference in the various modes of signification of the same one essence.

Modes of signification	—	terms	—	grammar is the logic of the external word
" " understanding	—	concepts	—	logic is the grammar of the internal word
" " being	—	things	—	metaphysics is the logic of the external world

Thus, there are two approaches to the modes of understanding. Modern philosophers pride themselves on taking their departure from things. The old Greeks started from the other end. Socrates began his philosophizing in wonder at the marvels involved in speech. Plato evolved his theory of ideas to account for the meaning of these terms. Aristotle extrapolated his meaning back into the things themselves. That was the basis for his metaphysics.

We call Socrates a man because of some relationship which he has to humanity; we say he is living by reason of his life; we speak of him as white on account of his whiteness; he runs in virtue of the act of running, to run. Socrates may be said to "have" humanity, to "suffer" ills, to "receive" praise, to "be subjected to" many forms. But he is not humanity, nor whiteness, nor praise, nor any of those particular forms. There is a built in difference in these modes of signification which we respect in our manner of speech.

1. *Opera Omnia*, Leonine ed., (Rome, 1894), *Summa Theol.*, Ia, q.75, proem.: "Naturam autem hominis considerare pertinet ad Theologum ex parte animae, non autem ex parte corporis, nisi secundum habitudinem, quam habet corpus ad animam, . . ."

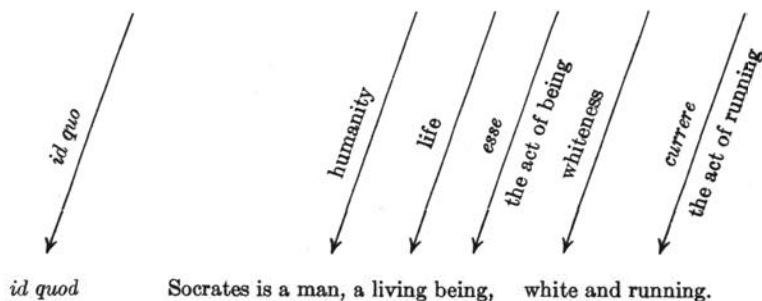
2. *The Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. Ross, (Oxford, 1928), vol.I, *De Interpretatione*, tr. by E. Edghill, cap.1, 16 a 1-7; Ia, q.13, a.1, c.

What is this relationship of man to humanity, of white to whiteness, and so on?

Plato hypostatized an Ideal Humanity, a Subsistent Whiteness, etc., to account for this difference. According to him, Socrates was called a man inasmuch as he partook of a separated Humanity, just as he may be said to be illuminated inasmuch as he shares in the light of the sun.

Aristotle denied the separate existence of forms such as humanity and whiteness. He could not see how such forms could exist apart from matter and still bear a transcendental relation to matter in their very definition. According to him, humanity is nothing more than the specific form of Socrates mentally abstracted from Socrates. Life is abstracted from a living being, the act of running is abstracted from someone running, and so on. Humanity, life, etc., are all principles of Socrates. They are logical principles. We call Socrates a man, because we recognize in him the form of humanity; we call him a living being, because of the form of life and *esse*, the act of being.

Dionysius, the pseudo-Areopagite, called the concrete subject, man, a *quod est*, and the abstract form, humanity, a *quo est*.<sup>1</sup> Boethius called them a *quod est* and an *esse*.<sup>2</sup> This became the common terminology. St. Thomas seems to have been the first to call them an essence considered as a whole supposit, and an essence considered as a part.<sup>3</sup>



The opposition between these two different modes of signification shows up in predication. Socrates is a man; he is not humanity. Predication is a sign of identity. It presupposes a real identity of

1. "De Divinis Nominibus," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, ed. I. Migne (Paris 1857-1865), vol.3, 585-996; S. Thomae Aquinatis, *In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus*, ed. Pera, Marietti (Turin, 1950).

2. "Quomodo substantiae in eo quod sunt," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, ed. I. Migne (Paris, 1844-1855), vol.64, 1311-1314 (*De Hebdomadibus*); S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Opuscula Theologica*, Marietti (Turin, 1954) vol.II, pp.391-408.

3. *Opuscula Omnia*, éd. Perrier, Lethiellieux (Paris, 1949), tom.1, *De Ente et Essentia*, cap.2, pp.30-34, nn.8-12.

the supposit denominated in the predicate with the supposit which is named in the subject. We express this identity in the terms of comprehension, when we say : No part is predicated of the whole. And we express this same identity in the terms of extension, when we say : The predicate of an affirmative proposition is particular.

No part can be predicated of the whole. Socrates is not his arm, nor his leg ; neither is he his humanity, nor his whiteness. Humanity and whiteness are closed concepts.<sup>1</sup> They prescind in the sense of positively excluding every other intelligible note save those which are contained in their own comprehension. And Socrates is not merely humanity, nor whiteness ; he is much more than any mere catalogue of abstract perfections.

We can say, Socrates is a man, however, and, Socrates is white. This is a different mode of signification. Man expresses the same essence as humanity, but it expresses that essence as a whole supposit. It stands as an open concept which includes not only the animality and rationality implicit in Socrates' humanity, but his whiteness also, his act of running, and every other individuating note in some vague confused way at least. Otherwise, man could not be predicated of Socrates, as it is. No part can be predicated of the whole. Humanity is only a part of the comprehension of Socrates ; man is a name for the whole supposit.

The predicate of an affirmative proposition is particular.<sup>2</sup> This rule expresses that same identity of a predicate with its subject, only it does so in the terms of extension. Just as man is an open concept which must grow to include all of the other intelligible notes in the comprehension of Socrates, so too, in its extension, man must shrink to a corresponding part of the two billion men in the world. It must become particularized. The extension of a term varies in inverse ratio with its comprehension. Otherwise, the supposit which is called man in the predicate would not be identical in its extension with its subject, Socrates.

There are two apparent exceptions to this rule. With a singular predicate, e.g., Marcus Tullius is Cicero, the predicate is already particularized. In a complete definition, the extension of the predicate is automatically coterminous with that of its subject. The complete identity in comprehension which a definition requires tailors the predicate to fit the extension of the subject also. It would be inconceivable that a predicate should have a greater ex-

---

1. G. VAN RIET, "La Théorie thomiste de l'abstraction," in *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 2 (1952), 353-393.

2. Sir William Hamilton attempted to break through this quantification of the predicate, *Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic*, ed. Veitch, Gould & Lincoln (Boston, 1865), vol.II, p.510. He considered predication much as an algebraic equation. This is part of the background of Symbolic Logic.

tension than that of its subject. A greater extension would mean a lesser comprehension. And no part can be predicated of the whole. S would simply not be P.

## II. ACT VS. POTENCY

Act and potency are another dimension in the modes of signification. The concrete and the abstract differ as an essence considered as a whole differs from that same essence considered as a part. Act differs from potency as a first differs from a second in the priority of our knowledge.

Nothing is knowable except inasmuch as it is in act.<sup>1</sup> We cannot understand what an acorn is until we have seen an oak ; we do not know what blindness is except in the terms of sight ; we come to the knowledge of a vacuum when we see a bottle emptied. We learn about our faculties from their operations ; we reach the notion of a substance by way of its accidents ; we arrive at our concept of matter from a varied succession of forms. A genus would be meaningless except as a potency of species. No essence can be distinguished apart from its *esse*. No potency can be known save through its act.

This is true in the experience of individuals. And it seems to be true also in the history of languages. Running is a much older word than runner, living than life, *esse* than essence.<sup>2</sup> This distinction between act and potency is clear enough when it is considered apart from that between the concrete and the abstract. In practise, however, we usually find these different modes mixed up together.

	ACT	POTENCY
ABSTRACT	— <i>esse</i> the act of being	<i>essentia</i> , essence, the kind of being
	<i>vivere</i> " " " living	<i>vita</i> life
	<i>currere</i> " " " running	<i>cursus</i> the race course
CONCRETE	— <i>ens, id quod est</i> , being	<i>res</i> a thing thought out, from <i>reor, ratum esse</i> .
	<i>vivens, id quod vivit</i> ,	<i>vivus</i> , one who shares in life
	<i>currens, id quod currit</i> ,	<i>cursor</i> , a member of the track squad <sup>3</sup>

We start with one who is actually running, a *currens*. We abstract the form *currere*, the act of running, *id quo est* from the

1. *Opus. Theol.*, vol.II, p.371, *In Librum Boetii De Trinitate*, lect.II, q.I, a.3, c : " Cum enim unaquaeque res sit intelligibilis secundum quod est actu, ut dicitur in *IX Metaph.* (cap.9) . . . "

2. S. AUGUSTINUS, PL.32, col.1346, *De moribus Manichaeorum*, lib.2, c.2, n.2 : " Itaque ut nos jam novo nomine ab eo quod est esse vocamus essentiam, quam plerumque substantiam etiam nominamus ; ita veteres, qui haec nomina non habebant, pro essentia et substantia naturam vocabant." Cf. vol.42, col.912, *De Trinitate*, lib.5, c.2.

3. *Opus. Theol.*, vol.II, pp.396-397, *In Librum Boetii De Hebdomadibus*, lect.II, nn.22-25.



concrete subject, *id quod est*, and we are left with a *cursor*, a runner, one who is still a member of the track squad even after the race is over and he is sitting down resting. A runner is in potency to run, just as *cursus* is the potency of *currere*. Similarly, starting with someone who is actually living, *vivens*, we abstract the form *vivere*, the act of living, and are left with the concrete potency, *vivus*, e.g., one of our posterity. We arrive at the abstract potency, life, *vita*, from its abstract act, *vivere*. Life, *vita*, is the potency of *vivere*, the act of living.

*Ens*, being, is the first object of the intellect.<sup>1</sup> *Ens est id quod est*: being is that which is.<sup>2</sup> We abstract the form *esse*, the act of being, from the concrete subject, *ens*, just as we abstract humanity from man, and whiteness from that which is white. We are left with the concrete potency, *res*, thing. This concrete potency can be called a thing, inasmuch as it is fully thought out. The Latin *res* comes from *reor*, *ratum est*, and implies the ratification of a *ratio*, even though it is still short of *esse*. The abstract potency, *essentia* is a late Latin word which according to this analogy is not derived from *res* but from *esse*.

Theoretically, I suppose, we should be able to arrive at the abstract potencies, *cursus*, *vita*, *essentia*, by abstracting these forms from their concrete potencies, *cursor*, *vivus*, *res*. But, nothing is knowable except inasmuch as it is in act. And concrete potencies are not in act. Therefore, it seems, we come to the knowledge of the abstract potencies from the left on a horizontal level rather than vertically from the concrete potencies below. The etymology of *essentia* obviously indicates this derivation from *esse*, the act of being, rather than from *res*, the concrete thing. St. Thomas is continually pointing out the connection essence has to *res*, — they are both potencies<sup>3</sup> — but he derives it from *esse*. "Essence means that through which and in which a being has its act of existing (*esse*)."<sup>4</sup>

What is really real?<sup>5</sup> There are four possible answers, *ens*, *esse*, *res*, and *essentia*. The "real" of this question is used in predica-

1. *Opus. Omnia*, tom.I, p.25, *De Ente*, proem.

2. In *I Peri Hermeneias*, ed. Spiazzi, Marietti (Turin, 1955), lect.5, n.71: "*ens nihil aliud est quam quod est*."

3. *Quaestiones Disputatae*, ed. Spiazzi, Marietti (Turin, 1949), vol.1, *De Veritate*, q.1, a.1, c: "nomen *res* quod in hoc differt ab ente secundum Avicennam in principio *Metaph.*, quod *ens* sumitur ab actu essendi, sed nomen rei exprimit quidditatem sive essentiam entis."

4. *De Ente*, c.I, n.3, p.27: "*essentia dicitur secundum quod per eam et in ea ens habet esse*."

5. W. NORRIS CLARKE, S.J., in *Progress in Philosophy* (Milwaukee, 1955), pp.61-90; "The Possibles Revisited," in *The New Scholasticism*, 34 (1960), pp.79-102; E. MORTON, S.J., "The Nature of the Possible According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 32 (1958), pp.184-189.

tion ; therefore, that rules out the two abstract modes, *esse* and *essentia*. *Ens*, being, is the only concrete mode which is actual, because, *ens*, being, alone has an *esse*. Can *res* also be called "real" ? *Res*, thing differs from *ens*, being, as a potency differs from its act. *Res*, thing, is something which has been thought out ; it is the concrete subject of a *ratio* which has been ratified, *ratum esse*, for an *esse*. It is called a possible inasmuch as it may be said to be capable of receiving an *esse*. It is the object of the divine intellect ; it is a reflection of the divine essence itself.<sup>1</sup> It would seem to be doing violence to language to deny that this *res* has any reality. That is the source from which we get the word "real".

Material substances are composed of matter, of form, and of *esse*. Immaterial substances do not have any matter ; hence, they cannot be composed of anything more than form and *esse*. The divine substance is *Esse* Itself Subsistent.<sup>2</sup> God is pure act. The other immaterial substances are compositions of act and potency. The essence of Raphael, for instance, is a potency which does not include *esse*, the act of being, in its comprehension any more than it includes a mission, *missum esse* to Tobias. If these perfections accrue to Raphael, they do so as logical accidents. *Esse*, the act of being is outside the comprehension of any creature. A creature has being, it has a share in *esse*, the act of being. God is *Ipsium Esse Subsistens* itself.

### III. PURE ACT VS. MIXED

What do we mean when we say, God is the Pure Act of Being Itself, God is Truth Itself, Goodness Itself ? We do not use this manner of speaking of anyone else. Socrates is a being, he is not being itself ; he is good ; but he is not goodness itself. What is the difference ?

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon argued from the fact that there was no composition in God to the conclusion that, therefore, we could not attribute any positive perfection to Him in an affirmative manner.<sup>3</sup> All we could say of God truthfully, was what He is not. The "Living God" merely means that God is not like inanimate things ; the "merciful God" means that He is not cruel. Others claimed that

1. J. CONWAY, S.J., "The Reality of the Possibles," in *The New Scholasticism*, 33 (1959), pp.139-161 ; "The Meaning of Moderate Realism," *Proceedings of the Jesuit Philosophical Association*, Woodstock, Md., vol.22 (1960).

2. *De Ente*, c.4, n.21, p.40 ; *Ia*, q.75, a.5, ad 4.

3. *The Guide for the Perplexed*, tr. by M. Friedlander, Pardes (no place), 1881, Part I, c.58, p.82 : "Consequently it is a false assumption to hold that He has any positive attribute."



the only possible affirmative meaning such expressions could have was that God is the Author of life and mercy.<sup>1</sup>

St. Thomas avoided this agnosticism by making use of the modes of signification.<sup>2</sup> In the *via affirmativa*, we abstract the notion of life from a vegetable or an animal ; in the *via negativa*, we purify this concept by denying of it all the imperfections with which it was accompanied in the vegetable or animal ; in the *via eminentiori*, we predicate this pure perfection of God.

And we predicate this pure perfection of God, not in the limited way in which it is participated in by creatures, but in the infinite way in which it exists in God. All of the colors of the rainbow are integrated in pure white light ; so too, all pure perfections are synthesized in God. The color, red, does not exist in the light of the sun in the same way in which it exists in a vegetable. In God, pure perfections exist in the full scope of their infinity, one with Subsistent Being Itself.

This is why we can say of God, that He is not only true, but that He is Truth Itself. The concrete mode of signification emphasizes His reality ; all of the realities which we experience in this life happen to be concrete material substances. The abstract mode emphasizes the perfection of the attribute ; the only way we can express the full perfection of the attributes we experience is to liberate them from their material subjects, e.g., mercy itself. The concrete mode does not do justice to the perfection of God's attributes ; the abstract mode does not do justice to their reality. Therefore, we need both.<sup>3</sup>

By what right do we say that the Son is eternal, that a man creates, that a God was born, suffered and died ? It is these same modes of signification which are at the back of the communication of idioms. A person can be denominated by any attribute which belongs to its nature.<sup>4</sup> And this holds true whether there is one Person involved or three, one nature or two. The Second person of the Blessed Trinity possesses the complete divine nature ; therefore, He is eternal. He also happens to have acquired a human nature in the course of time ; therefore, He can be said to have been born, suffered and died. When He is denominated by this human nature in the subject, a Man can be said to create, etc.

#### IV. THE MODES OF UNDERSTANDING

The old Scholastics looked upon language as something more than a mere mirror of our thoughts. It blows those thoughts up and

1. ALANUS AB INSULIS, *Theologiae Regulae*, 21 (PL 210, 631) and 26 (PL 210, 633).

2. *Ia*, q.13, a.2.

3. *Ibid.*, a.1, ad 2.

4. *IIIa*, q.16, a.2.

spreads them out over a wide surface, even as a prism refracts light. The big broad beams of a spectrum can tell us much about the components of a beam of light, so too, the big broad diagram of a sentence on a blackboard can tell us much about the modes of understanding which are going on inside our minds. Speculative grammar is the logic of the external word, just as logic itself is no more than the grammar of the internal.

Priscian had formulated the rules of grammar. But Priscian did not explain the causes for these rules. Why is it that we speak the way we do? This would depend upon our modes of understanding. These modes must be the same for all men. Hence, they must be fundamental in all language. Languages differ only as men do, accidentally.<sup>1</sup>

In his Commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, St. Thomas points out how τὸ ὄνομα, *nomen*, and τὸ ῥῆμα, *verbum* are understood analogously in the two different operations of the intellect.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle divided the object of the first operation of the intellect into ten supreme kinds of being according to meaning. He divided the object of the second operation into two formal parts according to their function, i.e., *nomen*, the name of the subject, and *verbum*, the word predicated about that subject.<sup>3</sup> The Stoics transferred both of these terms to the first operation and called *nomen* a noun, and *verbum* a verb.

But there are other possible subjects of a proposition besides nouns. There are phrases and clauses, not to mention the verbal nouns called participles, the gerund, and the supine, the infinitive with and without the article, adjectives used substantively. And there are other predicated besides verbs. The active and the passive voice of a verb expresses only two of the Aristotelian *praedicamenta*. Aristotle himself recognized ten.

These modes of understanding became the rationale for a whole literary *genre* which is practically lost today. The operation of an active faculty was expressed in the active voice, that of a passive faculty in the passive voice. A plant grows, but a sound is heard. The *principium quod* of a passive faculty was expressed by an ablative of agent together with its preposition; a *principium quo* was expressed by a mere ablative of means. The sound is heard by Socrates with his ears.<sup>4</sup>

1. Étienne GILSON, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Random House, (New York, 1954), p.313: "Thus conceived, grammar could become a science and be taught as a true learning because its object was universal and its conclusions deducible from principles. As Roger Bacon vigorously puts it: 'Grammar is substantially the same in all language, even though it may undergo in them accidental variations.'"

2. In *I Peri Herm.*, lect.5, n.68.

3. This is also Plato's understanding of these terms, SANDYS, *op. cit.*, p.90.

4. *Ia*, q.75, a.2, ad 2.

When the *principium quod* required emphasis, it could be used as the subject, but the *principium quo* never. That was because the *principium quod* was the responsible agent of the operation. Socrates is the one who does the seeing with his eyes; the eyes themselves were always kept *in obliquo*. No faculty could ever go about operating on its own accord. A faculty is not a responsible agent.

The Psalmist in the *Vulgate* cried out with his voice; it was not the voice of the Psalmist which cries out, as it does in the new translation.<sup>1</sup> We smile when children speak of inanimate things as though they could decide to up and break themselves, "The glass broke"; and yet our modern stylists are continually personifying such things, "The bell rang," or worse still, "shrilled." Cheapened metaphors lose all their effect, e.g., The hunter "snaked" his way through the grass. Poets for their own good reasons, may invert the logical order, "Green was my valley." But they can only do such things so long as a logical order exists. To use a Chestertonian simile, you could not turn a man upside down, unless his head belonged on top.

This studied manner of writing had been developing slowly through the Middle Ages. As Latin ceased to be the living language of the man in the street, it came to be a more and more precise instrument in the hands of scholars. The art of letter writing, *ars dictaminis*, gave way to the art of the notary, *ars notatoria*, in Law. The rhythmic cadence of phrases employed in drawing up the Bulls of the Papal Curia and the official documents of the Imperial Chancery ranked as models. These rhythms were carried over into the hymns of the Breviary and the various *cursus* of the Collects in the Mass.<sup>2</sup> Sound was made to fit sense.

St. Thomas did not have to write in the wooden framework of scholastic Latin. He was introduced to these highly stylized forms of what they called calligraphy while he was still a child at Monte Cassino.<sup>3</sup> And it was his taste which was called upon to compose the liturgy for Corpus Christi, with its *Lauda Sion, Adoro Te devote*, etc. But he put all those elegancies aside when he came to construct his own philosophical prose. Here, he was writing for students. And many of those students were only beginners. He was willing to put his thoughts into a straightjacket, just so long as that format made those thoughts easier to follow. We can see why people thought he must have written the speculative grammar attributed to him.

1. *Psalms* 76 (77), v.2.

2. PAETOW, "The Arts Course at Medieval Universities with Special Reference to Grammar and Rhetoric", *University Studies*, vol.III, No.7 (Jan. 1910) (Champaigne, III., 1910), pp.70-73.

3. *Ibid.*, p.72: "Alberich of Monte Cassino, who lived in that famous monastery in the second half of the eleventh century may be considered as the founder of the new art." A. WALZ, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, tr. by Bullough, O.P., Newman, (Westminster, Md., 1951), p.14.

Its whole theory could have been abstracted from his practice, as though he were its model.

The style is the man. Dante speaks of St. Thomas' style as "discreto Latino."<sup>1</sup> Walz calls it "sober, clear, precise and objective."<sup>2</sup> I would characterize it as absolutely selfless. St. Thomas never shows temper. He never expresses a purely personal view. The word *ego* does not occur in the Thomistic lexicon. Even where he changes his opinion he remains completely detached.<sup>3</sup> He leaves out all unnecessary questions and arguments. He is as brief as possible. He is a careful writer. Every word is weighed; every construction reflects his thought. The skeleton of his thought stands out sharply, he does not smooth it over or round off its corners with padding. *Time* magazine uses adjectives; St. Thomas uses nouns. It is not unlike the simplicity of the *Gospels*, only theirs is a narrative form, whereas his is explicative. The Church would not trust a man's style for positive indications of sanctity; but here, is something altogether heroic.

The languages have always enjoyed a favored position in education so long as the close connection between the external word and the internal word was appreciated. Now, that children learn to do by doing rather than by thinking, the languages have lost this prerogative. When the curriculum was limited to the trivium and the quadrivium, Grammar was the portress to the tower of the liberal arts. Now that the curriculum has been broadened so as to allow our colleges to offer literally thousands of courses in the arts, I do not know of a single catalog which lists speculative grammar. And yet, to study St. Thomas without studying speculative grammar, it seems to me, is like studying Shakespeare in translation.

F. A. CUNNINGHAM, S.J.

---

1. *La Commedia*, Hoepli (Milan, 1888), vol.III, Paradiso, canto XII, 1, 144.

2. *Op. cit.*, p.174.

3. E.g., *IIIIa*, q.12, a.2, c.