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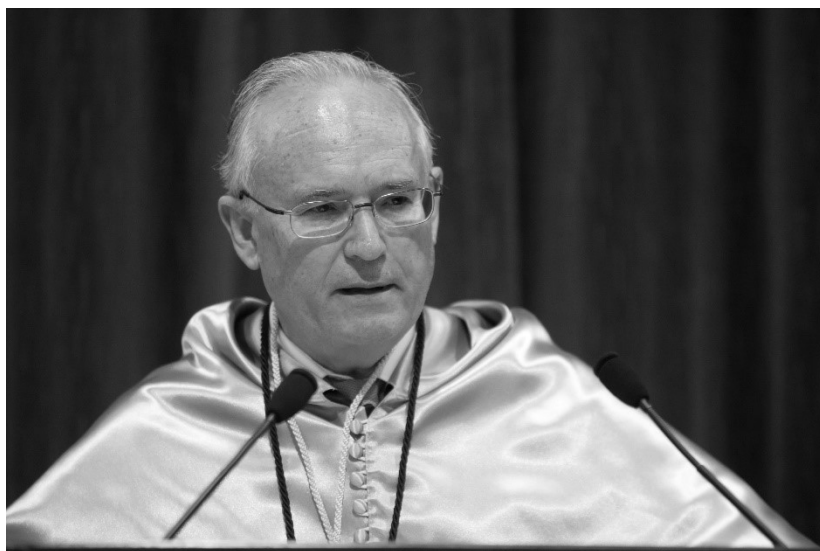
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Angel Luis González, Professor of Metaphysics at the University of Navarra, died suddenly but peacefully this last April 16, 2016. He was one of the principal promoters of the research and publications of Leonardo Polo's thought. Until his passing he was Editor-in-Chief on the Board of the *Complete Works* of Leonardo Polo and of *Studia Poliana*, the philosophical Journal on Polo's thought published yearly since 1999 by the University of Navarra. In a conference after receiving an Honorary Doctorate by the Panamerican University (Mexico), he said that Polo was the "university professor that I principally admired." He dedicated a good part of his life transmitting a passionate spirit for the truth in the university and fostered an unlimited search for truth. This issue is dedicated to his memory. May he rest in peace.

The Knowledge of Being

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ABSTRACT: This article explores a crucial question: does human reason know the real as it is or just the universal abstract obtained from it? To analyze this, I utilize various sources that refer to Thomas Aquinas, specifically to his distinction between *conversio ad phantasmata* (a mode of knowing the universal in the particular) and *separatio* (a way of knowing the real as real, proper to metaphysics). I then connect this to Leonardo Polo's methodical proposal: abandonment of the thought-object's limit. The first dimension of the abandonment is the intellect's innate openness to being; the innate habit of the first principles, as a method that adverts the being of the universe as persistence, as non-contradiction, and the being of the Origin as persistence's origin.

KEYWORDS: Being, Object, Abstraction, Separatio, Innate Habit, First Principles, Abandonment of the Mental Limit

What first comes to mind is being; secondly, that this being is not that being.”¹ “That which is first seized by the intellect is being.”² Throughout Thomas Aquinas’ work, these claims have given rise to various interpretations by commentators, scholars and followers. In short, the question that concerns us is: according to St. Thomas, do we know the specific entity, the “universal entity” as a concept, the effective existence, the act of being as the essence’s actuality or, instead, being as the entity’s first act? Aquinas’s claims have been interpreted in various ways. In order to properly understand his thought, we must look beyond the analysis of explicit texts, and search his entire thought.³

I have closely examined research on this topic, conducted by J.M. Núñez Pliego, in order to synthetically respond to this question. His work is a good presentation and analysis of the question at hand. Additionally, it is a successful attempt to understand the issue from two perspectives: the meaning and scope of being, and how the intellect reaches it.⁴

First, through the notion of being, one captures that being is and that it is something. It is a composite notion, it includes essence and being. Thus, the meaning of St. Thomas’ statement: “That which is first seized by the intellect is being.” In this case, it would capture both essence and being. Now, is this the result of an abstraction, a judgment or is it another form of knowledge? “From the notion of entity, two paths have been taken: knowing the entity as its essential notion or as

¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. Th.* I, q.11, a. 2, ad 4.

² THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. Th.* I-II, q. 55, a. 4, ad 1.

³ With respect to this topic, let us refer to the knowledge of being. We know the path Rahner followed after “literally” interpreting a mistranslated Thomistic text regarding what is first known: Avicenna’s famous aphorism, which Aquinas cites at the beginning of *De veritate* (“That which the intellect first conceives as the most obvious and in which all its conceptions are resolved is the entity”). “Rahner considered (that) human understanding is open *a priori* to the knowledge of the *esse* at its maximum amplitude. Such a perception of being recalls Heidegger’s *athematic perception* of being... In any case, this statement does not fit with Thomistic philosophy, despite Rahner’s intentions, because, according to Aquinas we first know *ens* and not being.” SARANYANA, J.I., “La antropología trascendental rahneriana” [“Transcendental rahnerian anthropology”] in *Anthropological Proposals for the Twentieth Century*, Vol. I, 317.

⁴ Cf. NÚÑEZ PLIEGO, J. M., *Abstracción y separación. Estudio sobre la metafísica de Tomás de Aquino* [Abstraction and separation. A study of Thomas Aquinas’ metaphysics], Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, No. 210, Pamplona, 2008, 90.

being.”⁵ This first way, knowledge of the essence, is proper to science, while knowledge of being as being is proper to metaphysics. Thus Thomas Aquinas states: “Although the subjects of the other sciences are parts of being, which is the subject of metaphysics, the other sciences are not necessarily parts of metaphysics. *For each science treats of one part of being in a special way distinct from that in which metaphysics treats of being.*”⁶

This poses two questions: each sciences’ object and mode of study. In both ways, metaphysics distinguishes itself from the other sciences. Let us begin with the first question: what is science’s object? Our response: the essence, each nature’s properties. Then, what is metaphysics’ object? According to Aquinas: substance, accident, act, being.⁷ In other words, that which is present in all beings. As for the latter, in following Aristotle, Thomas makes it clear that the essence of things is captured by an intellectual operation: abstraction, the method of all sciences. But, what cognitive operation captures *being*?

1. CAPTURING BEING AS ACT

There are many authors who believe that capturing the act of being is a mix of profundity, even reflection,⁸ a process involving the intellectual operation called *separatio*.⁹

Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between these two operations. Abstraction, he says, “distinguishes one reality from another when it understands what something is, without considering anything from any other reality, regardless of whether it is connected or separate... This distinction is properly called abstraction but only when those things,

⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In I de Trin.* q, 5, a. 1, ad 6.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, q, 5, a. 1 c.

⁸ Cf. NÚÑEZ PLIEGO, J. M., *Abstracción y separación [Abstraction and separation]*, this work includes quotes and references from various authors.

⁹ Without attempting a study of this topic, it is necessary to try to better understand the scope of this intellectual operation. In order to do this, I refer to two works by Carlos Llano. Both are dedicated to the “noetic bases for a non-rationalist metaphysics,” which I will promptly quote.

which can be understood independently, occur in reality simultaneously.”¹⁰ He refers to the latter operation as: “the operation of the intellect joining and dividing which is properly called separation and this belongs to divine science or metaphysics.”¹¹

Thus, through *separatio*, the intelligence captures what is specific to every being. This is metaphysical knowledge’s proper method, not abstraction.¹² Indeed, being as being cannot be captured by abstraction, since being is not a genus, as Aristotle made clear.¹³ ‘Being’ cannot be captured by abstracting it from concrete beings; however, essence and accidents can be considered separately, without concrete being.

The intellect reaches the notion of act, potency, substance and soul through *separatio*. But, does this capture the act of being as an intimate, first act of reality? Although some Thomists agree¹⁴ I say no. It is one thing to understand that something is, or that it is in act (in a sense), or to understand what form is for matter. It is, however, another thing to know being *ut actus*, in an entity, but as its radical act. In this sense, I think Núñez Pliego’s expression “to think of being as being” to refer to the topic at hand, helps us see the difference: to think of being does not mean capturing being as act, or the real as real.

We must affirm *separatio* as metaphysics’ method, closely linked to the analogical predication of being (and to other concepts attributable

¹⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, co 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, q. 5, a. 3, co 5.

¹² In this same text, St. Thomas distinguishes between two modes of abstraction: “There is another through the operation by which the quiddities of things are conceived which is the abstraction of form from sensible matter, and this belongs to mathematics. And there is a third through the same operation which is the abstraction of a universal from a particular, and this belongs to physics and to all the sciences in general, because science disregards accidental features and deals with necessary matters.” THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, co 5.

This is the familiar theme of abstraction’s degrees: formal and total. For an explanation and analysis of Aquinas’ thought, and more or less successful interpretations within Thomism, please refer to: SELLES, J.F., *Conocer y amar [To know and to love]*, 288-311.

Under no circumstances does Aquinas admit that properly metaphysical knowledge is reached by abstraction. Some authors have tried to assign the highest degree of abstraction to metaphysics (including Maritain), but this error produces negative consequences for metaphysics as knowledge of reality.

¹³ Cf. For example, *In Metaph.* III, No. 443.

¹⁴ Cf. The study just mentioned, by NÚÑEZ PLIEGO.

to all that is).¹⁵ However, clarifying that this metaphysical scope is proper to man is not a 'method' in the formal sense, but rather a natural way of knowing. In his comprehensive study on *separatio*, Carlos Llano states: "The judgment of existence is at the very base of man's natural knowledge, not necessarily at metaphysics' beginning."¹⁶

Capturing the entity, grasping that 'this is,' that 'this is real' is different from knowing the essence of 'this that is real.' As we have said, the mind can consider the essence of 'this that is real' separately, abstractively. But it cannot do so with the reality of 'that which is.' However, our question remains unresolved: in its judgment, does our intelligence capture the entity's act of being as distinct from the essence? Or, does it capture being solely as a judicative connection, a predicate of the judgment of existence? Or, does it capture both?¹⁷

This important issue does not come with easy answers, but with many theoretical and practical implications for philosophy. For example, if reality cannot be captured, the truth loses its validity as truth, and becomes pure logic. If philosophy does not seek the truth, it loses its *raison d'être*.

¹⁵ Llano's commentary on analogy as a way of knowing is very enlightening. To those who claim that in St. Thomas being is univocal, and the difference between God and creatures is only due to composition and not essence, he states: "Such ideas do not understand St. Thomas' fundamental bases of philosophy and theology. For him, as a follower of Aristotle, analogy is the cognitive way to which man must recur precisely in order to deal with the real world's being. Not only with God's being, nor only with God's being in reference or comparison to creatures, but with the created entity's *esse*." LLANO, C., *Separatio. Bases noéticas para una metafísica no racionalista* [*Separatio. Noetic basis for a non-rationalist metaphysics*], Ediciones Ruz, México, 2007, 216-217. Under Polo's proposed distinction between the being of the universe and personal being, he considers analogy to be an insufficient method for knowing the person. In other words, it is not enough to analogically attribute metaphysical notions to the person because it is a different reality from that of the universe, not only substantially, but transcendently: the person is another being, distinct from the universe as being. We will discuss this matter later.

¹⁶ LLANO, C., *Separatio*, 125.

¹⁷ I find LLANO'S statements, seemingly contradictory to those of St. Thomas, to be correct. On the one hand, Aquinas says: "*oportet ut intelligatur aliquid esse, et postea quod sit aliquid*" (*In librum Boetti de Hebdomadibus Expositio*, lect II, n. 30), and later: "*omnis essentia potest intelligi sine hoc quod intelligatur de esse suo*." *De ente et essentia*, IV, No. 26. "This unfortunate argument... is clearly incurred in the confusion between true being and being in act." LLANO, C., *Abstractio. Bases noéticas para una metafísica no racionalista* [*Abstractio. Noetic bases for a non-rationalist metaphysics*], Ed. Ruz, México, 2005, 264.

Leonardo Polo devotes much of his work to shed light on this question. Although present from philosophy's beginnings, it has taken on new meaning in modernity. It can be addressed with two questions: does the foundation of truth rest on being or knowing? And, is it possible to know being? Polo addresses these issues from different perspectives: analysis of the transcendentals, and among them, truth; human knowledge, pure rationality's limits and a proposal for a broader method to access reality.

In an interview with Juan Cruz Cruz, Leonardo Polo responds to a question regarding the relationship between his epistemological proposal of 'abandoning the mental limit' and the Thomistic access to the act of being: "The first thing is: I do not know the real as the act of being *intentionally*. This cannot be. The knowledge that the known *qua* known is unreal cannot be knowledge of that which, upon ceasing to be real, is not in any way. Correspondingly, I must say that unreality, strictly speaking, is intentionality: speaking only of unreality is not sufficient to abandon the limit. Intentionality counter-distinguishes itself from the real. Intentionality is the thought-object *qua* object, not nothing, which, strictly speaking, neither is nor is thinkable."¹⁸

The key point we must understand in order to access Polian thought is his claim that knowledge through abstraction – 'rational' knowledge or the rational use of intelligence – is limited. This limitation is because it must 'extract' a certain aspect from reality and 'fix' it as a known-object. Hence, its limitations. Reality is not fixed; neither are the essence nor the act of being. Thus, thanks to the discovery explicated by Aquinas, when one understands that *essentia* and *actus essendi* really are distinct, one cannot claim that in order to know reality it is sufficient to know abstractively, rationally, 'objectively,' 'actually.'¹⁹ Human knowledge employs other methods in order to know: we must abandon the limit of purely 'rational' knowledge.

¹⁸ He adds: "I know of no thematic antecedent to this methodical proposal. In addition, some profound philosophers that I esteem very much argue that it is impossible to abandon the mental limit because, if our knowledge is limited to it, we must abide by this limit and proceed as we are able." "Filosofar hoy" ["Philosophize today"]. Juan Cruz Cruz interviewing L. Polo, *Anuario Filosófico*, XXV/1 (1992) 50.

¹⁹ I use quotation marks so as not to confuse Polo's use of 'objectively,' as contrary to subjectively. In this context, 'objectively' means and is used by Polo as 'thought-object.' Similarly, 'actually' is not opposed to 'not now,' nor 'virtually' or something similar: 'actually' means 'actual act,' fixed, not giving, but given. In this sense, neither the es-

In *Persona y libertad* [*Person and Freedom*] Polo asserts: “After establishing the real distinction²⁰ one cannot claim that every act is actual. In other words, the real distinction can be known only by abandoning the limit. Thomas Aquinas affirms this when he says the real distinction can only be known by *separatio* (Cf. *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3.). What Aquinas refers to as *separatio* is the abandonment of actuality.”²¹ These direct, conclusive, almost abrupt statements are frequent throughout Polo’s work. In order to evaluate them we must return to implicit reasoning and to its premises. In other words, the act of being distinct from the essence is not an actual act; rational operations are acts that possess the known as a fixed object, i.e., as an actual act; therefore, the act of being cannot be known through rational operations: we must abandon that limit.

St. Thomas says that *separatio* grasps being distinctly from essence, therefore *separatio* corresponds to what Polo calls “abandonment of the mental limit.” *Separatio* is “the abandonment of the mental limit,” in other words, a mode of intellectual knowledge that goes beyond abstraction, and thus captures what is not actual act: being.

Each of these premises requires careful study, and, indeed, Polo and many other authors have studied them.²² After reviewing numerous publications I have chosen one that, because of its approach, provides much insight. José Ignacio Murillo’s publication researches Aquinas’ theory of knowledge.²³ In it, Murillo seeks to understand Aquinas’ theory of knowledge within the context of the whole of his thought, rather than by analyzing select texts. I find this approach to be the most appropriate in order to delve inside an author’s mind, and moreover, if the author has not sufficiently systematized the subject, as in this case.

sence nor being are ‘actual.’ Here, ‘rational’ refers to intelligence’s procedural use: rational is not synonymous with intellectual. In terms of human knowledge, intellectual is superior to rational.

²⁰ This refers to the real distinction between *essence* and *act of being*, a Thomistic doctrine that Polo continues.

²¹ *Persona y libertad* [*Person and freedom*], Eunsa, Pamplona, 2007, 40.

²² For example: SELLES, J. F., “¿Qué ‘separatio’, según Tomás de Aquino, es el método de la metafísica?” [“According to Thomas Aquinas, What ‘separatio’ is metaphysics’ method?”], *Studi Medievali*, LI/2 (2010) 755-777.

²³ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [*Operation, habit and reflection*]. *El conocimiento como clave antropológica en Tomás de Aquino*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1998, 231. The author dedicates this work precisely to answering the question we are dealing with here: “If it is possible, how do we know the real in its real principles?” *Ibid.*, 27. He does this referring to Thomas Aquinas’ thought on knowledge, in order to detect up to what point he was able to answer this question.

Following along with his work, I will highlight what I consider to clarify the issue, according to my understanding.

First, we must keep in mind that knowledge is act, always act. Polo also explains this: "The question of supra-sensible knowledge begins with considering unity. From this point of view, intellectual and intelligible are correlative terms delimited as two *connected parts*, or rather as a duality that is not entirely separate. If intellection is not an empty word, then the intelligible means that which is capable of being understood *in re*. But if the understood is really understood, we must point to an understanding. Therefore, the understood cannot isolate itself or be separate in any way: what is understood requires an understanding. In turn, the understanding refers to the understood according to its verbal value. If there is understanding, something is understood. Understanding does not end, is not finished, without understanding; it does not end before reaching it."²⁴ One either understands, or does not understand. There is no middle ground. One cannot 'half understand' because understanding is act: it is to 'have' the known, to possess it intentionally (although it does not possess it really and even less so, materially).

However, it is clear that the extra-mental reality is not intelligible *in act*. This reality pertains to another order, not that of intelligence (we could say there is no 'tie' between them). Thus, the extra-mental reality is only potentially intelligible. To be intelligible in act, the intellect must raise it to its level. In other words, the intellect gives actual intelligibility to what is potentially intelligible. "The connected duality of understanding and the understood is a maze of difficulties for a very precise reason, namely because the connection is a source of requirements that must be met at the same time, and not a unilateral way. The connection must be fulfilled. As a duality, each of the parts must focus on its fulfillment. But the fulfillment by one part does not absolve the other. Thus, the requirement is mutual and reciprocally directed: one part requires the other. Ultimately, each one must contribute its part, because something cannot be understood without understanding, and vice-versa."²⁵

²⁴ POLO, L., "Lo intelectual y lo inteligible" ["The intellectual and the intelligible"], *Anuario Filosófico*, XXV/2 (1982) 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

The known must contribute its part: to be and to let itself be known. Likewise, that which knows –the intellect– must also contribute its part. It must ‘actualize’ the known, take from reality that which cannot ‘be’ in reason. Thus, what is known as the known is not the real as it is in reality, but as it is in the knower. Upon carefully thinking about this, we will recognize that knowledge owes more to the knower than to the known. Murillo explains a similar idea: “The idea, as such, does not have to be real. However, this does not mean that it does not depend on a real act, which is the operation of understanding, because ‘the understood idea’s being is the same as its intellection’ (CG. IV, c. 11 n. 11).” He adds: “The idea is intentional and not real.”²⁶ Indeed, its only reality is its reference to reality.

Now, to affirm that the known is only the notion in the mind and not in reality would be to step outside of realism.²⁷ To be a realist –and this, indeed, is philosophy’s traditional approach to realism– one must sustain that we do not know concepts, but rather realities through concepts. “The concept, with its psychological or epistemological *esse* is not the object of metaphysical knowledge: it is only a means *quo* or *in quo* we know the object, which is the essence with its own, real *esse*.”²⁸

In other words, a realist admits that we know the real entity because intentionality implies that the act knows the real. But what is real in the mind is not what is real in reality. Moreover, the known real is not the same as the real in reality; in fact, it is neither the same nor equal. As Polo says, “the truth and the entity are not the same because ‘the same’ describes each thought-object... Undoubtedly, objective knowledge is true. However, it is not true transcendently because it would exhaust the knowledge of reality. Therefore, objective truth and the entity are not identical.”²⁹

Aquinas graphically declares: “Action and passion do not belong to things as they exist in thought but as they exist in reality.”³⁰ Rational

²⁶ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión. El conocimiento como clave antropológica en Tomás de Aquino* [Operation, habit and reflection. Knowledge as anthropology’s key in Thomas Aquinas], 23.

²⁷ “This confusion between the concept of being and the conceived being, often carried out with impunity, has serious consequences for metaphysics as a whole.” LLANO, C., *Abstractio*, 9.

²⁸ *Ibíd.*, 253.

²⁹ *Antropología Trascendental* [Transcendental Anthropology], Tomo I. La persona humana. Eunsa, Pamplona, 3ª ed., 2010, 59.

³⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet Trin.* q. 5, a. 4 ad 7.

knowledge's realistic explanation (and the idealist explanation, even less so) does not answer our ultimate question: do we know the act of being as act or do we only know other acts of reality? Let us explore this question.³¹

Through abstraction we come to know various aspects of reality that are "liberated" from their real attachment to matter, in order to make them intelligible (i.e., capable of being intellectually grasped). As we stated before, the intellect completes this task.³² Thus, the intellect knows material reality's principles (acts or forms, substantial or accidental) through concepts.

It is important to distinguish the abstracted form (intelligible species) from the concept, as St. Thomas does. He states: "*it is necessary that the intelligible species, which is the principle of intellectual operation, differ from 'verbum cordis,' which is formed by the intellect's operation; although the same verb can be called form or intelligible specie, as constituted by the intellect.*"³³ This confusion may lead one to conclude that what we know are concepts, not references to reality,³⁴ without acknowledging that "to comprehend is the operation by which

³¹ "Can we say that simultaneity is achieved once and for all? If not, must we not concede that the intelligible's priority does not exactly correspond to the understanding which accompanies it, or that the intelligible does not appear as the entire content of unity's criterion, proper to a previous effort of understanding?" POLO, L., "Lo intelectual y lo inteligible" ["The intellectual and the intelligible"], 2.

³² Sellés pertinently clarifies this: "Abstracting *form* from *matter* is proper to any knowledge inferior to intelligence, not only of this. Here, he refers to the corporal form. In taking form and leaving particular matter to the background, he does not dispense with the "material conditions" of matter's properties, because –as an example– the forms in the imagination are without matter, but they do not appear without material conditions. Instead, the intellect abstracts from matter and from its conditions." SELLÉS, J. F., *Conocer y amar* [*To know and to love*], 258. He cites numerous sources from the Thomist corpus.

³³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones Quolibet*. 5. 5. 2 Cor, cited by SELLÉS, J.F., *Conocer y amar* [*To know and to love*] 319.

³⁴ Cf. SELLÉS, J. F., *Conocer y amar* [*To know and to love*], 319. In a footnote he writes: "Most of contemporary literature omits the crucial difference between the abstract and the concept, combining them in the same object (...) The lack of distinction between them first leads to *nominalism* or *idealism* (...) For the impact of this error, see: POLO, L., *Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo* [*Nominalism, idealism and realism*], Pamplona, EUNSA, 1996. Nominalism and idealism are two sides of the same erroneous coin. This is, namely, that if we unite the abstract and the concept, one does not know the universal 'in re' but knows forms that are mental, not real. Consequently, the singular reality is unknowable (nominalism), and mental forms do not pertain to the real (idealism)."

one retrieves the physical real. We can only know the real *qua* real by forming the concept. Only through this operation does the abstract return to the real, but knowing reality as it is does not imply knowing it as *form* (*abstract*), but rather as the form really is, i.e., as a real *form* and, therefore, *causal*, or as a *formal cause* which is one (*unum*) for the many individuals (*multis*) in which such a form can be found. The distribution is the *material cause*. The species is the principle of intellection, but the concept is what is grasped through the intellect; namely, the result of that act of intellection that refers to the abstraction confronting, it with what the species abstracts is the species.”³⁵

Thomas Aquinas explains abstraction: “we can consider the abstracted notions in two ways: in themselves, and thus without individual matter and motion. Thus, they have no more being than that which they possess in understanding. We can also consider them by *comparing them* to the things of which they are notions, which certainly exist with matter and motion.” He concludes: “Therefore, *through* the notions considered without particular matter and without motion, the mobile and material entities with extra-mental existence are known in physics.”³⁶

Thus, the singular is known by *returning* to it, through comparison with the universal principles which are understood through a process of intellectual abstraction.³⁷ Intellectual knowledge of the material singular is indirect, mediated by a “return.” Some refer to this “return” as *comparison* and others as *reflection*; however, the latter term seems inappropriate, unless it is taken to mean veritative reflection rather than intelligence’s reflection of its acts.³⁸

³⁵ SELLÉS, J. F., *Conocer y amar [To know and to love]*, 320.

³⁶ In Boet. *De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 2, co 3. Quoted in MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión [Operation, habit and reflection]*, 71, note 26.

³⁷ It is not our attempt to explain knowledge’s entire process, as it is not necessary for this paper. We are only interested in synthetically reviewing material reality’s acts of knowledge in order to elucidate whether it is possible to, and how to capture, its act of being.

³⁸ “When understanding is actualized by an intelligible species, the peculiar reflection that occurs paradoxically leads to knowledge of form and, therefore, knowledge of the real. Moreover, it leads to knowledge of adequation, because intelligence discovers the *rei alterius* form in itself and finds itself adequated to something real, distinct from itself. We can call this «veritative reflection».” SEGURA, C., “Verdad, juicio y reflexión según Tomás de Aquino” [Truth, judgment and reflection in Thomas Aquinas], *Anuario Filosófico*, XXI/1 (1988) 162.

So, can we say that we know the essence of the material? As a universal, we can certainly know it by abstraction. However, the abstracted essence is not the essence in matter: the essence in a thing is precisely the subject configured in a certain way, in order to respond to a finality. This particular materiality is known by *returning* from the abstract to the concrete, through the *conversio ad phantasmata* (we must not forget that the ‘phantasm’ is neither the sensitive thing, nor sensation, but its imagined representation, its image: it is a sign of the sensitive singular).

“Hence, Thomas Aquinas speaks of the inferior potencies as a means to advance knowledge of material reality (*“Dispositio sapientium of singularibus non fit nisi per mentem by vi cogitativa, cuius is unique intentiones cognoscere” De Ver., a. 10, a. 5, ad 2).*”³⁹ But, again, the “phantasm” is not a sensitive thing, nor sensation, but rather it’s imagined representation: it is a sign of the singular sensitive.

Therefore, the singular thing is not known as *it is*. We can know the singular material by comparison with the abstracted form in the mind. Matter *qua matter* is unknowable: it is knowable with the form as con-cause. That is, grasping the singular is nothing more than capturing *this configured matter*. Instead, we find another operation in the intelligence leading us to distinguish that what is thought is not what is real.

Murillo’s clarifies this: “comparing the universal with the singular corresponds to the real composition of form with matter.” He later states that this operation is possible “because an understanding between the two orders precedes it: the mental and real orders. We only really know matter and form as real causes by comparison with that from which the extra-mental character (previously omitted in abstraction) has been abstracted.”⁴⁰

In his *Curso de teoría del conocimiento* [Course on the Theory of Knowledge] Polo analyzes this stage of knowledge, i.e., the return from the universal to the singular. “The concept should point out the priority which corresponds to the many. It is important to remember that those many are not the mental presence. *Unum in multis* is not the same as *unum in praesentia*. *Unum in praesentia* is simply the abstract.

³⁹ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [Operation, habit and reflection], 85 and note 54. A detailed study on knowing the singular can be found in chapter II (pp. 93-100).

⁴⁰ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [Operation, habit and reflection], 88.

When the abstract begins its return to reality, *unum in multis* is explicit as a real statute. It is important that this statute be plural as it indicates that it is not mental.⁴¹ In other words, in this step the ‘fixed’ reality that imagines the concept is already ‘released.’

We should know what St. Thomas says about this because he introduced the real distinction between essence and being. After thorough research of Aquinas’ work, Murillo says: “Here we encounter a problem when following St. Thomas because he has not systematically developed a theory of knowledge... However, ... he is explicit when referring to the problem of knowing reality outside the mind: knowing *that the mind’s effectivity differs from its objectivity is only possible through reflection*.”⁴²

Up to here, we have indicated that the intelligence knows the essence in the universal. When it returns to the sensitivity it knows it in the singular: it understands that essence is given in these singulars, that this form is present in this matter.⁴³

However, Polo states that intelligence can do more: “It clarifies more: new con-causalities, not just the formal cause with the material (causes are only known as causes *ad invicem*). In my view –which stems from a classical thesis– judgement is the full knowledge of con-causality.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Curso de teoría del conocimiento [Course on the Theory of Knowledge]*, Tomo IV, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2ª ed., 2004, 31. For the purposes of this study it is not necessary to carefully analyze Polo’s contributions to the explanation of all rational operations. See: *Curso de teoría del conocimiento [Course on the Theory of Knowledge]*, Volume IV, and his work: *El conocimiento racional de la realidad [Rational knowledge of reality]*, Cuadernos de anuario filosófico, No. 169, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2004.

⁴² MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión [Operation, habit and reflection]*, 102. Again, this does not seem to be a reflection, but rather a comparison. To reflect means to return to something. It would be a reflection if it returned to the act. However, when capturing the universal in the singular there is no ‘return.’

⁴³ “Matter is the principle to which the abstract can return. Thus the *unum in presentia* can be explained as *unum in multis*, as *concept*. However, we must keep in mind that simultaneity is proper to thought.” MURILLO, J. I., “Distinguir lo mental de lo real. El «Curso de teoría del conocimiento» de Leonardo Polo” [“Distinguishing the mental from the real. Leonardo Polo’s Course on the Theory of Knowledge”], *Studia Poliana*, 1 (1999) 59-82. This article details Polo’s manner of continuing and completing the classic theory of knowledge. Cf. also SELLES, J. F., *Conocer y amar [To know and to love]*, 319.

⁴⁴ *Curso de teoría [Course on the Theory of Knowledge]*, IV, 31.

Thomas Aquinas makes another distinction: upon capturing the form separately from matter one does not grasp movement. Thus, “the mathematician deals with things that are abstract only in thought, insofar as they come under his consideration they cannot be the principle or the end of motion. So the mathematician does not demonstrate by means of efficient and final causes. But the things the metaphysician deals with are separate, existing in reality, and these can be the principle and end of motion. So nothing prevents his demonstrating by means of efficient and final causes.”⁴⁵

Polo makes a similar statement: “Judgment distinguishes itself from the concept by being more explicit. We know the material cause through the concept; in turn, the material cause’s *unum* is the formal cause. Additionally, the extrinsic efficient cause and, in a way, the final cause are both present, although this plurality does not mean they are simultaneously present. However, only in judgment does one fully know the end’s causal value through the intrinsic efficient cause.”⁴⁶ Thus, a new step. Not only does this mean the universal’s return to the singular (i.e., to explain the composition of the formal cause-material cause) but it also refers to capturing movement. This goes beyond hylemorphic composition. It means capturing con-causality, in other words, the four causes’ confluence: material, formal, efficient and final, which occurs in judgment. Murillo states: “the act of judging is a return to movement from that which is abstracted. To judge gives us knowledge of real causality in its own mutability.”⁴⁷

Judgment clarifies the real which does not allow us to know the concept. Polo refers to this as *complete causality*,⁴⁸ that is, physical *tetra-causality*.

Here, I wish to note the progress I see in Polo’s thought. He tersely concludes the last quoted text in *Curso de teoría del conocimiento* [*Course on the Theory of Knowledge*]: “In any case, the causes are *ad invicem* because they are causal senses, not things.”⁴⁹ That is, these causes are not substance, but rather essence. Thus Polo states: “To argue that knowledge of reality begins with knowing things is a mistake. We must address judgment’s long history to correct this error, which

⁴⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Boet. De Trin.*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 7.

⁴⁶ *Curso de teoría* [*Course on the Theory of Knowledge*], IV, 31.

⁴⁷ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [*Operation, habit and reflection*], 99.

⁴⁸ “Judgment is the complete knowledge of con-causality.” POLO, L., *Curso de teoría* [*Course on the Theory of Knowledge*], IV, 31. Cf. also: 20, 74 and 172-173.

⁴⁹ *Curso de teoría* [*Course on the Theory of Knowledge*], IV, 31.

continues to be maintained today in several versions (judgment has many different interpretations). The modern age, and much of this explains Spinoza's unilateral stance, has augmented an error that was already present in Aristotle, namely, interpreting the distinction between subject and predicate with the assumption that the subject forms part of the substance. But, if we know con-causality through judgment, we must understand the subject-predicate connection differently."⁵⁰

The intelligence does not simply discover the universal in the singular, and the thought-essence in the real essence, but it also distinguishes the thought-species from reality. It understands that thought is not real, but refers to the real. In my view, this act implies capturing the real as real. Thus, Aquinas affirms that the entity is the first thing known,⁵¹ although this does yet refer to attaining being as distinct from essence.

Moreover, judgment, which affirms or denies the adequacy of some universal to some singular, is not an operation between two abstracts. Instead, it assumes reality's existence.⁵² Therefore, judgment is predication, attribution, that exposes us "to reality as it principally is: it corresponds to real principles, and does not hypostasize objectivity."⁵³ In this way, intelligence achieves much, but, as Murillo points out, "it does not appear that knowledge of the principles provides us with knowledge of being as distinct from essence. In judgment, the appearance of the copula *is* does not signal knowledge of being as distinct from essence, but rather, (as Aquinas says) from the identity according to the reality of which it is comprised."⁵⁴

Indeed, judgment declares that something exists, or that it exists in a certain way. But St. Thomas distinguishes:⁵⁵ "'To be' can mean either of two things. It may mean the act of essence, or it may mean the composition of a proposition effected by the mind in joining a predicate to a subject."⁵⁶ Judgment refers to the latter explanation. Elsewhere Aquinas explains: "We use being in three ways. In one way, we refer to being as the quiddity or nature of a thing. Thus, some say its definition is the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Later in this work, we will discuss how to understand essence in Polo's work.

⁵¹ This view coincides with that of MURILLO, J. I., in *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [*Operation, habit and reflection*], 73.

⁵² Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Aristotelis De anima*, l. 3, lec. 11, No. 15.

⁵³ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [*Operation, habit and reflection*], 101.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ This is in the context of knowledge of God, though the distinction is valid.

⁵⁶ *S.Th.I.*, q.3, a. 4, ad 2.

statement of what being is, because its definition is the thing's quiddity. In another way, we refer to being as the act of the essence. For example, how to live, which is to be for the living, is the act of the soul. This is not the second act, or operation, but the first act. We refer to being in a third way, as the truth of the composition in the propositions, according to which 'is' is called copula. In this way, being is in the understanding which unites and divides, as its complement but founded on the being of the thing, which is the act of the essence."⁵⁷ He clearly distinguishes judicative being (predication) from being as the act of the essence. In judgment, the being that appears is the first.⁵⁸

While commenting on this text from the *Summa Theologica* Polo says: "The first meaning of *est* is actual, objective; therefore, the second meaning of *est* should not be. So, if we do not detect the object as our mental limit and abandon it, it would be impossible to advert or attain the act of being... Undoubtedly, we cannot know the act of being: in any other case, Aquinas' distinction between the two meanings of *est* would be unsustainable. In other words, the preceding observations directly affect us capturing the act of being. Thus, it is not surprising that some Thomists ignore it and exclusively focus on objective knowledge."⁵⁹ Indeed, in judgment the intelligence makes the causes of the real explicit, and here we see the essence as being's potency. Polo explains: "The judicative habit knows order as unitary, but, at the same time, manifests that it is not entirely satisfied by any con-causality, nor by all. Therefore, the last rational operation explains the foundation as distinct from con-causality, and exclusive."⁶⁰

Thus, we capture essence as distinct from being, in need of grounding. Polo concludes the previously cited text: "The intellectual habit leaves reason behind and adverts the distinction between the created and the un-created, the metaphysical distinction between the first principles, which is much clearer than the distinction between the created act of being and essence."⁶¹ This conclusion is surprising unless

⁵⁷ *In I Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a 1, ad 1.

⁵⁸ On the other hand, if the real were not captured in any intellectual operation it would not be a cognitive act. Cf. the article about this by GONZALEZ, O., "La aprehensión del acto de ser, II" ["Apprehending the act of being, II"] *Anuario filosófico*, 24 (1991) 139-151.

⁵⁹ *Antropología trascendental* [Transcendental Anthropology], I, 100, note 102. Cf. *Curso de teoría* [Course on the Theory of Knowledge], IV, 15-22.

⁶⁰ *Curso de teoría* [Course on the Theory of Knowledge], IV, 46. Cf. MURILLO, J. I., *Op. cit.*, 107.

⁶¹ *Curso de teoría* [Course on the Theory of Knowledge], IV, 46.

one has studied Polo's explanation of the first principles, which we will discuss later. For now, suffice it to notice that the intellect has abandoned rational use in order to go a step further: to capture being as act. That is, judgment has captured the essence as a principle in need of grounding. The rational operation reaches up to this point. It can do no more because it cannot grasp the grounding. It cannot know it as an object, as 'fixed,' as something 'that is.'

Let us take a step further. Thomas Aquinas repeatedly says that truth's grounding is in being, but he also notes that truth (and error) is in judgment, in predication.⁶² Intelligence can determine whether its judgment is true or not. In other words, it returns to judgment in search of the truth's evidence. The discursive process follows judgment, searching for the most complex to the simplest evidence. In other words, this operation reduces all claims to one that is full and directly evident. Thus, the last judgment –or the first, depending on one's perspective– declares the principle of non-contradiction, which is self-evident.

According to Aquinas, "speculative reason's judgments *proceed* from natural knowledge of the first principles";⁶³ and elsewhere: "in any judgment the supreme judge determines the final sentence; likewise, in speculative things a proposition's last sentence is determined by the first principles' *resolution*."⁶⁴ Here, Murillo states: "we do not find explicit indications in Aquinas."⁶⁵ However, it is clear that the final judgment, which is not subject to logic, grounds all logic that does not wish to be purely formal. Judgment has this condition because it is not a common predicative judgment: it is an act of a superior habit that 'collides with being.'

That is, the intellect "is found" with the principle of non-contradiction, it does not conclude with other evidence.⁶⁶ It is the first principle

⁶² Cf. COLLADO, S., *El juicio veritativo en Tomás de Aquino* [Veritative judgment in Thomas Aquinas], Cuadernos de Anuario filosófico, 162. Pamplona, 2003.

⁶³ THOMAS AQUINAS, S. Th., I-II, 100, 1co. Quoted by SELLES, J. F., in *Conocer y amar* [To know and to love], 352.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I-II, 74, 7co. Quoted by SELLES, J. F., in *Conocer y amar* [To know and to love], 352, who adds: "Abundant parallel texts confirm the same thing: "*iudicium perfectum et universale* (this refers to theoretical reason) *haberi non potest nisi per resolutionem ad primas causas*." *Summa Theol.*, q. 57., a 2co; cf. also: Q. D. De Veritate, 15. 3co; In de anima, 1. 1. n. 6; *Summa Theol.*, 53, 4co.

⁶⁵ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [Operation, habit and reflection], 108.

⁶⁶ Cf. *La esencia del hombre* [The essence of man], Eunsa, Pamplona, 2011, 152.

of any logical process. Does this detection correspond to one of the operations we have discussed? Is it an abstraction or a comparative judgment?

Aquinas does admit the first principles are known by an operation: “there is no science in the principles, but something greater: intellect.”⁶⁷ Let us follow this indication. In order to do this, we must stop to consider that the principle of non-contradiction is not a judgment of purely logical value. It is an *encounter with being* as a way towards thought, and thus has logical value. To capture the first principles is to capture being.⁶⁸

We have already said that it is not a judgment, but a superior act: a habit. If we accept the results of Murillo’s research, then Aquinas takes no position on the possibility of whether or not an operation can capture being.⁶⁹ Polo, however, is quite explicit: “knowledge of the act of being is always transcendently true and is therefore closely linked with transcendental intellection; thus, *it cannot be achieved through judgment or with any other operation. Such insight is borne through the habit of the first principles, which is an innate habit.*”⁷⁰ That is, he places this habit in the intellect as a transcendental, not in the intelligence as cognitive potency.⁷¹ This appears to coincide with St. Thomas’ indication⁷² that I already pointed out: intellect, not science, pertains to the principles.

⁶⁷ S. Th. II-II, q. 25, a. 4, co. Quoted and commented by MURILLO, J. I., *Op. cit.*, 110. We will see that metaphysics is not a science of the third degree of abstraction, for being and its principles are not reached by abstraction.

⁶⁸ For Polo, the ‘principle of contradiction’ and the ‘principle of non-contradiction’ are not equivalent. The first pertains to a rational, logical order: one cannot predicate something and its opposite at the same time and in the same sense of the same subject. The second is real: the act of being of the physical universe. Cf. SELLÉS, J. F., *Estudio introductorio a Polo, El conocimiento racional* [An introductory study of Polo, Rational knowledge], 49, note 5.

⁶⁹ Cf. MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [Operation, habit and reflection], 168.

⁷⁰ *Antropología* [Anthropology], I, 69. I have added the emphasis in order to highlight what is fundamental.

⁷¹ We will return to this topic.

⁷² Polo states he has not found “other indications of knowledge superior to operational knowledge outside his notion of *separatio* and the existence of innate habits” in Aquinas. He also thinks “that he does not develop these indications.” *Antropología* [Anthropology], I, 126, note 132.

We must stress that non-contradiction is a condition of reality or, better yet, *reality itself*. “The habit of the first principles *advert*s the principal being,”⁷³ states Polo. In other words, habit adverts being. Indeed, the real is it not the contradictory: outside of being, nothing. And nothing is not. Nothing only exists in thought: in reality, there is only being. “We cannot think of being as not non-being, but rather understand it as excluding the thought of non-being.”⁷⁴

Thus, the intellect knows the real first principle: the principle of non-contradiction. Hence, it knows being. The principle of non-contradiction is not only a logical or mental formulation. It is the founding principle of reality, the act of being, being as act. “The principle of contradiction is at the basis of thought. Can we say that it is a real principle? Can we say that it is simply a logical principle? It is neither one nor the other, exactly. Strictly speaking, we should say that it is intrinsic as an *a priori* condition, like an innate habit, and without it we would be unable to think. It also has logical value.”⁷⁵

On this point, Polo advances further than Thomas Aquinas, although in continuity with him. He explicitly explains what is implicit in Aquinas’ theory of knowledge. That is, the real first principle, the act of being, is captured by the intellect –not in an operational way– but by another act of the intellect: “the transcendental truth is characteristic of the intellectual acts with which the distinct acts of being are known;⁷⁶ these acts are innate habits... To summarize, we must make a clear distinction: understanding objects is distinct from transcendental understanding. Thus, objective truths are not transcendental,”⁷⁷ i.e., they do not capture being as act.

Thus far, it may appear that to know the principal being (being as first act) is solely to grasp non-contradiction. Not exactly. Philosophy refers to the ‘first principles’ and not a single first principle for a reason. Leonardo Polo concludes: “I propose the following theses: the distinction between the habit of science and habit of the first principles

⁷³ *Ibid.* I, 111.

⁷⁴ *Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo [Nominalism, idealism and realism]*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2ª ed., 2001, 246.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 193.

⁷⁶ Polo distinguishes the act of being of the universe from the personal act of being, and the divine act of being. We will discuss this topic elsewhere.

⁷⁷ *Antropología [Anthropology]*, I, 60.

corresponds to the real distinction of essence and being in non-intellectual reality, provided the principle of non-contradiction and the principle of identity can be distinguished.”⁷⁸ We will address this issue in the next section.

2. THE HABIT OF THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

Determining what a habit is requires careful study, which has been conducted by many authors.⁷⁹ Although related to the topic at hand, delving into it would distance us from our objective. However, some explanation is necessary in order to address the topic. To begin, let us note Polo’s observation: “the habit (of the first principles) is an intellectual act *superior* to any operation and, therefore one of the dimensions of abandoning the mental limit.”⁸⁰

Without delving into this, we must note that there are distinctions among the intellectual habits: some are acts that know intellectual operations (to know that I know);⁸¹ others are habits acquired by exercising operations (abstract or judicative habits) and are followed by other operations.⁸² But “the habit of the first principles is a peculiar habit

⁷⁸ “Lo intelectual y lo inteligible” [“The intellectual and the intelligible”], *Anuario Filosófico*, XXV/2 (1982) 123.

⁷⁹ Cfr. among other works: SELLES, J. F., “Los niveles cognoscitivos superiores de la persona humana: la vinculación de los hábitos innatos” [The human person’s superior cognitive levels: the innate habits’ connection], *Studia Poliana*, 10 (2008) 51-70; COLLADO, S., *Noción de hábito en la teoría del conocimiento de Polo*, EUNSA, 2000. Cfr. also: SELLES, J. F., *Hábitos y virtud. II, Naturaleza de los hábitos y de la virtud* [*Habits and virtue. II, The nature of habits and virtue*], Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, Serie Universitaria, No. 66, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1999.

⁸⁰ *Antropología* [*Anthropology*], I, 111. I have added emphasis in order to highlight what is fundamental in this text.

⁸¹ “What is the difference between an act and a habit?... The acts of understanding refer to ideas. When one thinks, one thinks of something, and ‘something’ refers to what is thought, not the real nor the act. The name thought-‘object’ does not refer to a real ‘thing,’ but that which is thought, although the thought refers or relates to the real... Instead, *habits* have nothing to do with thought-objects. They do not illuminate or present ideas, but present the act of knowing, the *immanent operation*.” SELLES, J. F., *Hábitos y virtud, II, Naturaleza de los hábitos y de la virtud* [*Habits and virtue II, The nature of habits and virtue*], Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, Serie Universitaria, No. 66, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1999, 48-50.

⁸² “It is not Aristotelian to accept acts’ intellectual potency and nothing else, or not to admit an act other than the operation in action. Intelligence is also habits’ potency. For now, of acquired habits. We should also add that the intellectual habits, unlike moral

with respect to the others.”⁸³ I use the word ‘peculiar’ because it is in two ways: it predates intellectual operations, and is its condition of possibility.

The best way to understand the habit of the first principles is through habit’s classic definition: a stable disposition. We could say that it is the intellect’s innate openness to being.⁸⁴ In this sense it seems clear that it is an innate, not acquired, habit.⁸⁵ If this habit rests on the intelligence as potency, then the agent intellect requires close study, which several authors have done.⁸⁶ Thus, let us listen to a current expert on this question regarding classical philosophy, newly highlighted by Polo: “In order to solve the problem of reason’s activation, let us refer to the classic allusion of a superior *innate habit*. Such is the traditional distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. Reason’s knowledge is proper to a progressively activated *faculty*. The *intellect*’s knowledge is proper to a *natural habit* that is not activated since it is not yet *act*. One

virtues, are acquired with a single act. Modern philosophy has forgotten about the intellectual habits. In fact, references to them are rare and trivial. Because of this, modern philosophy is so objectivist and rationalism so conducive to irrationalism, and its version of logic so exclusively logical.” POLO, L., “Lo intelectual y lo inteligible” [“The intellectual and the intelligible”], 20.

⁸³ MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [Operation, habit and reflection], 170. Regarding the first principles, see: PIÁ TARAZONA, S., *Los primeros principios en Leonardo Polo* [The first principles in Leonardo Polo], Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, Serie de Filosofía Española, No. 2, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 1997; FERNÁNDEZ, S., “Intellectus principiorum: de Tomás de Aquino a Polo (y vuelta)” [“Intellectus principiorum’: from Thomas Aquinas to Polo (and back)”], *Anuario Filosófico*, XXIX/2 (1996) 509-26; MORÁN, J., “Los primeros principios: interpretación de Polo de Aristóteles” [The first principles: an interpretation of Polo’s Aristotle], *Anuario Filosófico*, XXXIX/3, (1996) 787-803; SELLÉS, J. F., “Sobre el sujeto y el hábito de los primeros principios. Una propuesta desde el ‘corpus’ tomista” [“On the subject and the habit of the first principles. A proposal from the Thomist ‘corpus’”], *Miscelanea Poliana*, 3 (2005) 20-29.

⁸⁴ Sellés references *habilitas*, a name Thomas Aquinas gives to the innate habits. Cf. SELLÉS, J. F., *El conocer personal. Estudio del entendimiento agente según Leonardo Polo* [Personal knowledge. A study of the agent intellect according to Leonardo Polo], Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, Serie Universitaria, No. 163, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 2003, 105.

⁸⁵ I disagree with Murillo on this point, as he believes that it is both innate and acquired.

⁸⁶ Cf. for example: CRUZ, J., *Intelecto y razón. Las coordenadas del pensamiento clásico* [Intellect and reason. Classical thoughts’ coordinates], Pamplona, EUNSA, 1982; SELLÉS, J. F., “En torno a la distinción entre *intellectus* y *ratio* según Tomás de Aquino” [“On the distinction between intellectus and ratio according to Thomas Aquinas”], in *El trabajo filosófico de hoy en el continente*, Memorias del XIII Congreso Interamericano de Filosofía, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá. July 4-9, 1994, 355-360.

is on the plane of the *potential*; the other is on the plane of the *intellectual*. At the *intellectual* level, traditional philosophy usually distinguishes between the *habit of the theoretical first principles* and the *habit of the practical first principles, also called synderesis*.⁸⁷

Polo indicates: “the notion of habitual knowledge allows us to specify the relationship between the agent intellect and intellectual potency. Let me make one observation: if the habits allow for new operations, we must conclude that not all operations are abstractive. And, because knowledge of that which is not merely abstract cannot be attributed solely to possible understanding, the habits must signal the continuation of *lumen intellectus*. In summary, the agent intellect not only provides potency to the imprinted species but also joins it in act, according to the operation. For example, Aquinas describes the habit of the first principles as *habilitas intellectus agentis*.”⁸⁸ It is easier to clarify whether the habit of the first principles is a habit of intellectual potency or of the agent intellect in Polo’s thought. We see indications of this in Aquinas, but Polo’s reasoning is more explicit.

If all habits were intellectual dispositions acquired by following the exercise of operations, intelligence would be undetermined active potency *ad unum*. Habits are only possible –and at the same time, necessary– in ‘open’ potencies: operative habits do not fit into vegetative potencies, which carry out operations according to their nature. However, the potencies that are not determined by a single object are susceptible to habits. At the same time, their perfection as potencies rests on these habits. In a sense, thanks to habits the potencies are strengthened.

Intelligence as potency requires, and is capable of, habits. Now, these would be second acts. But, how can a second act –an accident– take a transcendental act, such as the act of being, upon itself? We must overcome this obstacle. Moreover, how can an act that is pure activity (Polo uses the term pure ‘actuality’ to distinguish it from other meanings of activity) be captured ‘objectively’ as a *thought-object in act*?

Polo resolves this by focusing on the two problems together. He applies the meaning of ‘actuous act’ (characteristic of the act of being) to

⁸⁷ SELLÉS, J. F., *Hábitos y virtud III. Pluralidad de hábitos y unidad en la virtud* [*Habits and virtue III. Plurality of habits and unity in virtue*]. Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico, Serie Universitaria, No. 67, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, 1999, 48.

⁸⁸ POLO, L., “Lo intelectual y lo inteligible” [“The intellectual and the intelligible”], 19-20. Also see: *Antropología* [*Anthropology*], I, 147.

a cognitive act, that is, to the habit of the first principles. By stating that the act of being is known by a habit assumes that this habit should be at the same level: at being's level, not at the second act. Thus, "the habitual understanding of the first principles is the knowledge of being as act. Being as act is a meaning of act not found in Aristotle. Additionally, the habit of the first principles is a cognitive act whose theme is the act of being –the first from the transcendental order's point of view. Together, this means that habit must be superior to the *enérgeia* because *enérgeia* and *entelecheia* are Aristotelian meanings of acts that are inferior to the act of being, which is not an Aristotelian finding."⁸⁹ In short, this habit must be an act of being, or at least from the act of being.⁹⁰

To conclude this topic, I have attempted to show the extent to which there is a continuity in Leonardo Polo's thought with respect to Aquinas (and his Aristotelian precedents), and the aspects that demonstrate his progress. Polo's assessment can serve as a conclusion: "I think –he writes in *Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo* [*Nominalism, idealism and realism*]- I have quite clearly shown that the habit of the first principles can be likened to the first dimension of abandoning the limit. This satisfies me very much because I enjoy studying and referring back to the great, classical approaches. I prefer to deepen, or continue Aristotle's thought, then the Middle Ages' thought, or to find precedents in it, rather than to appear as an author who radically proposes a new approach."⁹¹

At the end of *Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo* [*Nominalism, idealism and realism*] Polo recapitulates: "To conclude, I will refer to a thesis held by Thomas Aquinas that says the habit of the first principles is innate. This distinguishes said habit from the other intellectual habits that are not innate, but acquired. Similarly, such habits manifest the

⁸⁹ *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 219.

⁹⁰ Thomas Aquinas refers to the habit of the first principles as an instrument of the agent intellect: cf. MURILLO, J. I., *Operación, hábito y reflexión* [*Operation, habit and reflection*], ed. cit., 172, he refers to several parts of the Thomistic corpus. For a discussion of this point, see Polo's thought in: SELLÉS, J. F. "Los hábitos intelectuales según Polo" ["The intellectual habits according to Polo"], *Anuario Filosófico*, XXIX/2 (1996) 1017-36 and the literature he references.

⁹¹ *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 173.

corresponding operation. Instead, the habit of the first principles detects the operation as the mental limit and should abandon it, thus, the habit is not followed by operations.”⁹²

Regarding the possibility of whether we can find a precedent for Polo’s ‘abandonment of the mental limit’ to better access reality in Aquinas: “Thomas Aquinas only very rarely refers to the mental limit, and he never speaks of abandoning it. He simply abandons it when necessary. In other words, he does not stop to think of habitual knowledge of the principles thematically, but rather to contemplate the soul and God (and he attributes an instrumental character to them more than once). There is no listed topic in Thomas’ works referring to knowledge of the principles, not because it does not exist but because they are an obligatory step towards wisdom. The habit of the principles thinks about science and wisdom, but not about said habit. Precisely because light allows us to see, it does not see, says Aquinas; that *by which* (“quo”) we know is not a topic of knowledge, but necessary in order to know or necessarily known.”⁹³ Now, as I already noted, the habit of the first principles is the knowledge of all of them, not one of them. In other words, it not only adverts non-contradiction, but also the principles of identity and causality.

In Polo’s *Antropología trascendental* [*Transcendental anthropology*], he explains his approach by noting that “if, in the first dimension of abandoning the mental limit one adverts a created act of being – persistence –, then it must also advert the un-created act of being. Here, we discover the thematic coherence: the two are first principles, distinct and yet not isolated from each other. Persistence is the advertence of the created extra-mental act of being without imagining it; the un-created act of being does not imagine it when adverting it as Originating Identity.”⁹⁴

Thus, we must clarify the other two principles using the same perspective that helped us discover the principle of non-contradiction. In

⁹² *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 260.

⁹³ FERNÁNDEZ BURILLO, S., “Intellectus principiorum, de Tomás de Aquino a Leonardo Polo (y vuelta)” [“Intellectus principiorum, from Thomas Aquinas to Leonardo Polo (and back)”], *Anuario filosófico*, XXIX/2 (1996) 513. I have respected the authors’ punctuation. Fernández Burillo narrows in on this, and I think he is right: “Polo’s texts will be unclear for Thomas Aquinas’ readers until one adverts the benefit of doing so (systematically thinking of the habitual knowledge of the principles).”

⁹⁴ *Antropología* [*Anthropology*], I, 119.

Nominalismo, idealismo y realismo [*Nominalism, idealism and realism*] Polo clearly reviews this topic: “precisely because it is not a single first principle, but three –identity, contradiction and causality–, knowledge of being’s priority intensifies as it expands.”⁹⁵ Being is first act, but we must “add a very important qualification to it: it can be first according to identity, causality, and non-contradiction. We must not confuse these.”⁹⁶

I think this is one of the most enlightening aspects of Polo’s approach: first, compared to the traditional way of presenting the first principles, primarily as logical principles, Polo presents them as “real first principles.” This does not mean the classical approach understands them as purely logical principles, without grounding in reality. However, Polo goes further in stating they are primordial realities or principles of reality. In other words, they are act of being.

Secondly, Polo proposes distinguishing the following principles (logical, with grounding in reality), and distinguishing them in reality (not just in logical predication): ‘Nothing can be and not be at the same time and in the same sense’ (non-contradiction); ‘A is A; A is not non-A’ (identity); and ‘every effect has its cause,’ and similar formulations, all attributed to the entity, to everything real as real. In other words, he proposes distinguishing that being can be really first as non-contradictory, or as identical, but not both at once.

“If, in order to be first, they must twin⁹⁷ then each one ceases to be first: one replaces the other, they alternate, and instead of balancing each other, each’s primacy is mutually suspended... *Without a doubt, being is first. The first principles are not manifestations or aspects of being, but the intellection of being as first.* Through intellection, we understand being as non-contradiction, as cause and as identity; or: we understand non-contradiction as being, causality as being and identity as being. By grasping this, one understands the first principles. However, if the first principles are first as being, we must cast aside its objective twin (we must abandon the mental limit).”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 226.

⁹⁶ *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 227.

⁹⁷ Polo borrows this geological term and uses it as he explains.

⁹⁸ *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 269.

Upon contact with reality other than itself, the agent intellect innately adverts that its grounding is not in its knowledge, both as a beginning or first cause (a beginning that neither ceases nor is followed,⁹⁹ a persistence in being) and as an Identical Principle, which is not cause but Origin. “The first principles are distinct as such, and therefore, with them we know distinct acts of being.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, intellect innately adverts the universe’s being as a *persistence*, dependent on the original identity: that is, it captures being as created and, therefore, distinct from its essence.¹⁰¹

This advertence is not the result of reason’s discursive process. We must stress that it is intellect’s active disposition to ‘advert’¹⁰² reality as existential dependence. If it is not adverted, Polo calls this objectivity’s intrusion. Let me explain: if we assume that the act of being of the universe (or that of singular entities, as is commonly thought) is a given fact, a fixed act, it is because I think of it as thought-object, not because it is adverted as such.

Another explanation that may be necessary in order to clarify this discursive exposition is as follows: one does not capture the act of being ‘at the end,’ after capturing the entity, abstracting forms, going from the universal to the singular, from abstract to concrete and understanding con-causality. No, it is habitual knowledge, both because it belongs to an act superior to rational operations (a habit) and because it is not a step from potentially knowing to knowing. As I understand it, if the habit of the first principles depends on the intellect *ut actus*, it is not potential. Thus, the act of being is always adverted. The problem is that reason hides it by abstracting, judging, comparing, deducing and by ‘objectifying.’ However, as I briefly mentioned, there is an implied capture of being in intellectual knowledge’s entire process.

⁹⁹ This is how Leonardo Polo often describes the being of the universe, as being that *persists*.

¹⁰⁰ *Curso de teoría* [*Course on the Theory of Knowledge*], IV/I, 65.

¹⁰¹ This appears again, and in line with his thinking is Polo’s statement that the distinction between creature and God is not the *essentia-esse* composition, but the created being. Cf. *Curso de teoría* [*Course on the Theory of Knowledge*], IV-I, 61. “That essence is really distinct from the act of being is not the reason that the act of being of the creature is not confused with the act of being of God, but vice-versa. In short, the only way to distinguish these two acts of being is to say that one is non-contradictory and the other is identical.” *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 289.

¹⁰² Polo uses the term ‘to advert,’ which expresses what he means very well. To advert is not to elucidate, nor conclude, nor discover, nor understand; it is to be aware, to realize, to notice.

One problem regarding the ‘objectification’ of being is the confusion that takes place between the logical and real orders. Thus, if I can think ‘A is A,’ I transfer this thought-identity to the real and I assume that being is identical to itself. But the being of the universe (or the being of the entities, as we typically say) is not identical, even to its essence. In other words, in reality identity is not as it is in thought (just as nothing is not anything, although it can appear in thought). Thus, adverting the act of being requires abandoning this rational limit, expanding the intellectual scope. In other words, to let it be as it is. Thus, it does not confuse non-contradictory being with identity, and adverts dependence. This does not mean we can linguistically express this advertence, which is another matter (and not always easy).

When Polo speaks of ‘twinning,’ he is referring precisely to this confusion between non-contradiction and identity. And also to the confusion of causality, both in God and in the creature. It is quite easy to distinguish non-contradiction from identity.¹⁰³ Indeed, if we advert non-contradiction as it is, that is, as a beginning (not temporal, but real) that persists (because if the beginning did not persist, it would not be real), then this persistence is not identity, but dependence. We advert the Origin as real, which is identical, distinct from the originating persistence.

It is more difficult to advert causality that is neither combined with identity nor with non-contradiction.¹⁰⁴ The question is as follows: when conceptualizing ‘non-contradiction,’ ‘identity,’ and ‘causality,’ we attribute being a cause to identity and being an effect to non-identity. That is, with a conceptual knowledge of cause, we tend to think of God as cause and the creature as His effect, and that this is the difference between them. But, is this correct? In a doctoral course dictated

¹⁰³ “God does not exist as He persists. God’s act of being is not non-contradictory because it has nothing to do with the beginning; it is Un-created. The principle of non-contradiction is the intellection of the created act of being. The principle of identity is the intellection of the un-created act of being. However, if the un-created act of being is not twinned with non-contradiction, it is not with causality either. In other words, it is exclusively identity: pure principle of identity distinct from the pure principle of non-contradiction.” *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 248.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Nominalismo* [*Nominalism*], 248-49.

by Polo in 1990¹⁰⁵ he clarifies the distinction between causing and producing, “to cause and to produce are not the same.”¹⁰⁶ Potency produces as a necessary way to achieve its own perfection. Cause causes, but not because it must cause; it predates the effect which is pre-contained in it. Thus, we see that human action neither solely causes nor solely produces. If it were the former, everything would be contained therein; if it were the latter, it would be sheer necessity.

Instead, “the divine order does not produce. God neither produces nor causes, but creates *ex nihilo*.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, God is not un-caused Cause, but originating Origin. We must understand these details in order to understand Polo’s explanation of the principle of causality as the first principle, distinct from the principles of identity and non-contradiction. “As I said, the notions of cause and effect present an inevitable paradox: if the effect is real and distinct from the cause, it must be external to it; but, at the same time, the effect’s reality must be pre-contained in the cause. And yet precisely *being external to the cause means it cannot be pre-contained in it*. Therefore, the effect cannot be, as such, the cause’s effect. We can find the solution to this paradox by rethinking the approach: what is external –not external to the cause, but to the originating identity– is the cause, not the effect. Consequently, cause does not refer to the effect, but to the Origin, and in that sense it is cause in as much as it is created.”¹⁰⁸

We cannot attribute causing the created to God, as that would mean that the creatures are somehow contained in Him. As a first principle, cause strictly means caused cause, and not effect. Also, caused cause strictly means a radical dependence on the Origin, that is, reference to Him. Let me attempt to clarify this: what kind of cause is the being of the universe (*persistence*)? It cannot be a material cause, nor a formal cause, nor efficient, nor con-causality’s end. It is clearly not. It is cause on a distinct level, transcendental with respect to the universe’s essence (con-causality). However, it is clear that being is not external to es-

¹⁰⁵ This is in the context of clarifying the extent to which man’s freedom is indeterminate and how the determinations, products, results constitute man, as Hegel, Nietzsche, Sartre and Marx propose in different ways. This course is included in the book *Persona y libertad* [Person and freedom].

¹⁰⁶ *Persona y libertad* [Person and freedom] 185.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁰⁸ *Nominalismo* [Nominalism], 251.

sence, nor is essence pre-contained in it. Thus, we cannot say that essence is the effect of being; therefore, we must not apply the notion of cause to being in the same way as in the predicamental level. A footnote on a page of Polo's work sheds light on this issue: "The notion of effect can only be maintained at the level of predicamental causes, while con-causalities inferior to complete con-causality occur."¹⁰⁹

The act of being of the universe is cause because in it, con-causality persists. It is clear that the extra-mental act of being depends on the Origin: it is a beginning that continues and is not followed (if something were to follow it, then it would not be). In other words, in its dependence it causes. Thus, to my understanding, Polo calls it caused cause. However, the phrase 'caused cause' does not seem to be the most accurate: if God is not cause, in what sense is the created act of being caused? It is more accurate to say that created being is originated cause¹¹⁰ or better yet, 'originated ground.' "However, this does not mean we should refer to the Origin as cause, since cause, in fact, means caused cause. The originating identity is Un-caused; it does not cause. The caused cause is not effect, but cause (nor is it the cause of an effect; it is a distinct cause from the predicamental causes, which are not caused by the caused cause, but by analytical persistence). Thus, we can only accept the principle of causality as a first principle if we avoid the notion of effect: transcendental cause is not effect."¹¹¹

Therefore, the principle of transcendental causality is "*one principle's relation to another*, but without twinning. They are not twinned because the principle of identity is Un-caused, and the principle of non-contradiction does not end. Thus, *persistence is the act of being in as much as caused*; however, *that it is caused means precisely that it is causes*. Cause means nothing more than caused cause, that is, the real character of persistence's reference to God (God's reference to persistence is not another first principle, it is God)."¹¹² In short, "this dependence is the first principle of causality: not "another" creature, but

¹⁰⁹ *Nominalismo* [Nominalism] 251, note 39.

¹¹⁰ This view seems to coincide with that of Piá. He thinks it is better to refer to created being as 'created cause.' Cf. PIÁ TARAZONA, S., *El hombre como ser dual* [Man as a dual being], 84-98, which analyzes and critically evaluates Polo's proposal on this topic.

¹¹¹ *Nominalismo* [Nominalism], 251.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 254. I have added italics to highlight this idea.

the real relation, first as the act of the creature with God –the force between non-contradiction and identity.”¹¹³

In other words, reality is nothing other than dependence on God. Thus, when advertizing reality as act, the intellect adverts the creature-Creator dependence. To put it more clearly: advertizing that the real as real is not originating (which has nothing to do with whether or not it has a temporal beginning) is to advert the Origin as origin and the being of the entire universe as radically dependent on the Origin.¹¹⁴

Here, we once again see theory of knowledge’s importance for metaphysics (and anthropology). Indeed, in advertizing this we must not confuse the first principles with ideas, nor reduce them to logical formulations. “The difficulty of understanding the principle of causality as a first principle is precisely that the supposition is not abandoned with regard to the notion of cause.”¹¹⁵ The notion of cause, as a concept –with the permanence associated with being a concept– means that it causes. Instead, adverted as a real first principle, it is not ‘a thing that causes’: it is reality as dependent on its Origin.

Thus, Polo admits –with some reticence– that if we avoid ‘objectifying’ causality, and instead, ‘advert’ it as the real that persists as it depends, “we may, perhaps, even be able to say that causality is participation: participation of that which is un-participable, in other words, *with respect to identity*. This is the notion of caused cause. We may also observe its character as first principle: it is the first principle precisely because it is participation in the un-participable. Nothing about it is un-participable; however, to participate in it is to be first: its character of first principle. Thus, because as it is un-participable, participation does not come second to it. In other words, there is no degradation because degradation occurs when there is participation with the participable, not the un-participable; in other words, when there is something that participates. And here, we do not find anything that participates.”¹¹⁶

This always and exclusively refers to the possibility of knowing the being of what is external to the knower, and more specifically, the material as dependence, and God as dependence’s Origin. Another issue

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹¹⁴ Hence Polo’s persistent resistance to admit what he claims Aquinas does: admit that the relationship with God is an accident for the creature.

¹¹⁵ *Nominalismo [Nominalism]*, 256.

¹¹⁶ *Nominalismo [Nominalism]*, 256, note 43.

is how to know one's own being, one's personal existence as a unique and unrepeatable reality, distinct from all others that exist. In addressing this topic, Leonardo Polo presents epistemological approaches closely linked to his transcendental vision of the person.