

ARTICLE

The Sapiential Task of the Thomist Tradition: To Enlarge and Perfect the Old by Way of the New

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Abstract

The disciples of St Thomas Aquinas have organized their enquiries in diverse ways throughout the history of Thomism. The surge of reinvigorated interest in Thomas Aquinas following Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* inspired a wide variety of purported types of Thomism in the twentieth century. What should Thomists of the twenty-first century learn from their inheritance of past centuries of Thomism? How can they take up Leo XIII's call *vetera novis augere et perficere*. I aim to address two issues in this essay. First, to identify a more principled demarcation of approaches to Thomistic enquiry, which eschews the commonplace but problematic and merely sociological classifications of the last century's 'schools' of Thomism. I argue that a more principled and agenda-setting criteria distinguishes "defensive-constructive commentary Thomism" and "tradition-constituted-enquiry Thomism". The first stresses fidelity to the conclusions found in careful readings of Aquinas's texts. The second emphasizes fidelity to Aquinas's systematic forms of enquiry directed to the truth. Second, I then probe the resources these two forms of Thomism have for addressing the epistemological crises facing Thomism, focusing on those concerning how to engage the *nova* of the sciences and rival philosophical traditions.

Keywords: Alasdair MacIntyre; defensive and constructive commentary Thomism; epistemological crisis; fallibilism; first principles; schools of Thomism; Thomism; tradition constituted enquiry Thomism

1. Thomism revisited

The disciples of St Thomas Aquinas have conducted their enquiries in diverse ways throughout the history of Thomism. The surge of reinvigorated interest in Aquinas following Leo XIII's 1879 *Aeterni Patris* inspired various 'schools' of Thomism in the twentieth century. What should Thomists of the twenty-first century learn from the inheritance of past centuries of Thomism? How can we Thomists take up Leo XIII's call

‘to enlarge and perfect the old by way of the new’ (*vetera novis augere et perficere*)?¹ I will dub this Thomism’s *sapiential task*.

After nearly one-hundred and fifty years since Leo’s encyclical, widespread disagreement has emerged concerning what is Thomism and how to prosecute Thomism’s *sapiential task*. In the later decades of the twentieth century, Gerald McCool and others argued that while *Aeterni Patris* commenced with the launch of a unified Thomism, encounters with both the *vetera* via historical research and the *nova* in constructive philosophical and theological engagements resulted in a fractured pluralism of Thomisms.² Some even predicted its demise. While recent decades have shown these Thomist death knells were premature, worries about a plurality of Thomist tribes persist. In this essay, I expound an alternative vision of the Thomist tradition of enquiry, one that argues for the underlying unity of Thomist philosophical experience and provides some direction for how Thomists should conduct the *sapiential task* of enriching the old by way of the new. I hope to spell this out in a way that has real import for how we Thomists should understand ourselves and coordinate our enquiries, which has implications for how we advise our students in their nascent enquiries and contributions to the Thomist tradition.

I argue there are two self-imposed obstacles standing in the way of Thomists discharging our *sapiential task*. First, many of us were, and students still are, introduced to Thomism alongside some promptings to align one’s reading of Aquinas and Thomism with a particular ‘school’ of Thomism. Against this trend, I argue these twentieth century ‘schools’ – especially as they are frequently portrayed as rival tribes engaged in Thomist tapestry turf wars – are unprincipled sociological cohorts. A superior and historically more adequate construal of these ‘schools’ is available, one that illuminates their genuine contributions to Thomism’s *sapiential task*. Second, I show why the dominant unifying approach to the Thomist tradition³ – call it ‘defensive-constructive-commentary Thomism’ (DCCT) – faces an *epistemological crisis* that renders it incapable of enlarging and perfecting the old by way of the new. This is because DCCT’s position-defining commitments prevent it from distinguishing internal from external debates with the *nova*, which undermines any efforts to understand properly what is required to engage in rational confrontations with the *nova* of rival traditions of intellectual enquiry. This includes the sciences insofar as their experiments ubiquitously *operationalize* conceptual-frameworks drawn from these rival traditions.

I conclude by advancing a more adequate self-understanding of the Thomist tradition, one that conforms to what we are doing as Thomists engaged in practices of theoretical enquiry. It also aims to unite rather than divide Thomist enquiries, thereby setting us on the path to discharging our *sapiential task*. I call this *tradition-constituted*

¹Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris: On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy*, 1879, §24. https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html (Accessed 16/02/2025).

²Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989); idem, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989); idem, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994).

³See Benedict M. Ashley, *The Way Toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Thomas Osborne, ‘MacIntyre and Thomism’, in Ron Beadle & Geoff Moore eds., *Learning from MacIntyre*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 52–76.

enquiry Thomism (TCET). To fend off the charges of relativism and introducing a *post-Thomist position* I show the necessity of endorsing it because it conforms better to reality, and it can overcome the epistemological crisis facing DCCT.

My essay has three limitations. First, my topic presupposes a great deal of Thomist history, which I cannot rehearse here. The partial histories of Thomism and its movements are many, and my debt to them is great.⁴ I hope my rather rarified discussion of abstract principles will be sufficiently clear to enable others to make the exigent hermeneutical descent into the concrete. Second, all my arguments require more extended elaboration and rational justification than I have provided. Many important counterarguments need to be given voice and responded to appropriately; there is much more to be done. Third, I narrowly focus on *philosophical* issues within the Thomist tradition. This requires an explanation.

2. Thomism and theology

One major deficiency of my approach is its restriction to philosophical matters, where Thomism is first and foremost a theology – a theology with distinctive philosophical commitments.⁵ Two are noteworthy. First, Thomism's theological enquiries and theses are only intelligible as *enrichments* and *perfections* of philosophical enquiries, concepts, arguments, and theses. These philosophical presuppositions are amplified by being employed in the light of divine revelation to enquire, understand, conceptualize, argue, and attempt to reflectively make judgments concerning truths that transcend the light of natural reason. But Thomism is also distinctive among some theologies in holding that human reason can arrive at knowledge of truths whose grounds and justifications stand independent of any revealed theological principles and justifications. One of the most important of these philosophically established truths is that all philosophical, scientific, and any other natural enquiries of human minds will always be incomplete. This includes the existential, and so practical, thesis that all goods pursued in this life – including the consummate good of human flourishing – are incomplete. Here below, we are wayfarers.

⁴See McCool, *supra* n. 2; Russell Hittinger, 'Two Modernisms, Two Thomisms: Reflections on the Centenary of Pius X's Letter Against the Modernists', *Nova et Vetera* 5:4 (2007), 843–879; Romanus Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003); James Weisheipl OP, 'Thomism as a Christian Philosophy', in *New Themes in Christian Philosophy*, ed. Ralph M. McInerney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 164–185; idem, 'Thomism', in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 14 (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 40–52; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); idem, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); Thomas O'Meara, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997); Brian Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002); Fergus Kerr OP, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Blackwell, 2002); David Berger, 'Interpretations of Thomism Throughout History' *Anuario Filosófico*, 49.2 (2006), 351–370; Matthew Levering and Marcus Plested, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Thomas Joseph White OP, 'Thomism after Vatican II', *Angelicum* 12 (2019), 185–202.

⁵Thomas Joseph White OP, 'The Precarity of Wisdom', in *Ressourcement Thomism: Sacred Doctrine, the Sacraments, and the Moral Life. Essays in Honor of Romanus Cessario, O.P.*, ed. by Reinhard Hütter and Matthew Levering (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 93–97; idem, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria, Florida: Sapientia Press, 2016).

What these two notes point toward is that beyond any theory, Thomism articulates a determinate way of Christian living. Thomism on its own is not a way of life, but it does provide theoretical elaborations and justifications, of both a theological and philosophical nature, which have their source from, and aim to illuminate and enrich, the everyday practical living out of a Catholic Christian existential-worldview.

So, there are two justifications for the philosophical restrictions of my discussion here. First, Thomism accords philosophical enquiry and its true judgments genuine independence from revelation and theology. And second, I cannot address here the significantly more complex questions concerning Thomism's deeper commitments to Christian revelation, the Christian tradition, the development of Catholic dogma, and its sapiential investigation via Thomist theological reflection, and how these bear upon Thomist understandings of Christian philosophy.⁶ This is simply a stark reminder of what Aquinas says at the outset of the *Contra Gentiles* concerning how incomplete and difficult any such philosophical enquiry will be, including any headway my contribution might make in clarifying the philosophical contours of the Thomist tradition.

3. Thomist 'schools'

The all-too-common way of introducing and framing Thomist enquiries has been to invite students to ally their readings of St Thomas and Thomism with one of the so-called schools or movements of twentieth century Thomism. Both the received interpretation of them and the invitation to enlist in a 'school' often portray them unhelpfully as rival tribal alliances. The most well-known – and here I restrict myself to the largely North American twentieth century schools of Thomism – are frequently summed up in the following ways.⁷

Existential Thomism is identified with the figures of Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain along with their disciples who emphasized the significance of Thomas's doctrine of the act of existence (*actus essendi*) and its real distinction and composition with the essence of any creature, a thesis no Thomist could deny – though Gilson and Maritain expounded significantly different interpretations of being, *esse*, and how they are known. *River Forest Thomism* drew on Aquinas's natural philosophy to engage modern sciences – of course Maritain, Gilson, Lonergan and many others also constructively engaged the sciences. *Transcendental Thomism* is associated with Joseph Maréchal, Karl Rahner, Emerich Coreth, and Bernard Lonergan; according

⁶White OP, 'The Precarity of Wisdom'; idem, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity*; Jeremy Wilkins, 'Thomism as a Tradition of Understanding', *The Thomist* 85.2 (2021), 247–293; Weisheipl, 'Thomism as a Christian Philosophy'; Etienne Gilson, *Christian Philosophy: An Introduction*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993).

⁷Kerr, *After Aquinas*; McCool, *supra* n. 2; Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition*; John Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003); Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*; Norris Clarke SJ, 'The Integration of Personalism and Thomistic Metaphysics in Twenty-First-Century Thomism' in *The Creative Retrieval of Saint Thomas Aquinas: Essays in Thomistic Philosophy, New and Old* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009); Serge-Thomas Bonino OP, 'The Thomist Tradition' *Nova et Vetera* 8.4 (2010), 869–881; Stephen Mulhall, *The Great Riddle: Wittgenstein and Nonsense, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Levering and Pledsted, *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*; Philip-Neri Reese OP, 'Losing the Forest for the Tree: Why All Thomists Should (Not) Be River Forest Thomists' *Religions* 15.5 (2024), 1–11.

to some of its advocates and demurrers, they combined Thomism with a transcendental methodology and tried to beat Kant at his own game. *Thomistic Personalism* drew on phenomenology and personalism, and is said to include Karol Wojtyła, and Norris Clarke – but Maritain also defended personalism. *Analytic Thomism*, christened by John Haldane, encouraged Thomists to engage argumentatively in the debates of Anglo-American analytic philosophy – as Maritain did with Whitehead and Russell. Quite different is the *Grammatical Thomism* inspired by certain readings of the later Wittgenstein, which is associated with Herbert McCabe, David Burrell, Denys Turner, and Stephen Mulhall. Sometimes, as a reaction to a few of these movements, we have *paleo-Thomism*, which advocates the Scholastic commentators – a label Maritain once assigned to himself while on the same page identifying with St Thomas’s ‘existentialism’.⁸ More fine-grained articulations of these movements are possible, but all such assignments are immaterial to the point at hand. I contend that this entire approach of segregating rival schools of Thomism is a divisive and wrongheaded way to identify anything like a principled understanding of the agenda for Thomism’s sapiential task. These sociological dissections face two major problems that supply sufficient justification to abandon them as ways to understand and orient the sapiential enquiries of the Thomist tradition.

First, nearly all these ‘schools’ of Thomism are mere sociological partitions, and often rather inaccurate ones. These leaky bucket associations fail to provide criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of participants, which leaves them without any principled way to set the agenda for Thomism’s sapiential task. I do not have space to demonstrate this point with the evidence and arguments required, but a moment’s reflection on the bibliographies of the alleged founders of these Thomist schools should convey why these sociological pigeonholes are a fragile house of cards. As my m-dashes insinuate, these procrustean silos misrepresent the wide-ranging Thomist enquiries of Maritain, Gilson, Lonergan, and many others as much as they distort the sapiential task of Thomism.

Second, the divisive way these schools are commonly portrayed generates a superfluous impediment to our sapiential task. Clearly, the *whole* of Thomism cannot be defined by any one of the *parts* focused on by these ‘schools’. It would be impossible for Thomism to discharge its sapiential task by restricting the legitimate forms of Thomist enquiry down to a single-minded focus on the metaphysics of *esse*, or on natural philosophy and the sciences, or phenomenology, or analytic philosophy, or the commentatorial debates of the sixteenth century – not to mention the range of questions in theology or practical philosophy, which the received partitioning of ‘schools’ wholly neglect. In short, this is not a wise way to construe the Thomist tradition; it betrays a myopic mindset that generates ghettos and needless discord.

Is there a better way to understand these schools, one that contributes to the sapiential tasks of Thomism? I think there is. We should not treat these movements and their disagreements as rival Thomisms; it is better to see them as alternative attempts – sometimes problematic ones – to engage in distinct domains of enquiry that Thomists cannot fail to engage, but which Thomists can only engage adequately by cultivating

⁸Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*. trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 1.

specialized forms of enquiry. Thomism needs Thomists who specialize in the engagements with the natural and human sciences, the debates of modern philosophy, as well as contemporary phenomenological and analytic philosophy, including public and academic disagreements concerning religion, culture, ethics, and local, national, and international politics and economics. Thomism would fail as a perennial philosophy if it could not critically draw upon the insights of these other forms of enquiry, respond to their substantive challenges to Thomism, and identify errors and raise objections against rival positions and traditions. What was correct and even indispensable about the twentieth century Thomist movements was the recognition of the exigency to address the challenges and questions raised by the sciences, rival philosophical and theological traditions, and the broader culture. But no one of these schools covered all these bases. Consequently, no one could truthfully regard any of the Thomist movements or schools as complete on their own – and few if any of their pivotal figures ever did. The collaborative spirit of Thomism requires that we then and now have some among us engaged in these tasks, not as rival Thomisms – and especially not the tribal turf wars they sometimes became – but as *distinct and complementary theoretical specializations*, specializations in enquiries that are required due to the finitude of all human enquiries. This, I submit, is a more sapiential interpretation of the history of Thomist movements, one that should inform how we critically receive this rich inheritance. It also explains why every Thomist will inevitably need to discern which past or present specialized domains of investigation can I make the best contributions to as a participant in the collaborative enquiries of the Thomist tradition given my abilities and education, as well as the competencies of my teachers or colleagues, and whatever are pressing contemporary issues. This supplies a more personal way of asking ‘how can I enlarge and perfect the old by way of the new?’

4. A taxonomy of Thomist positions

In order to answer this question adequately, one’s education into the Thomist tradition requires learning both a critical appreciation of our shared Thomist *vetera* as well as critical competencies with the *nova*. We need to learn how to distinguish which questions and debates are of perennial concern to Thomism, which are appropriately circumscribed to some historical contexts, and which are dead ends. In his influential formulation of Thomism, Fr James Weisheipl supplies a starting point by distinguishing – albeit without principled definitions – ‘strict’ from ‘wide’ or ‘eclectic’ forms of Thomism.⁹ What we need then is a principled taxonomy that allows us to identify different kinds of positions that contribute to an overall understanding of Thomism. Let us designate positions that are (a) Thomas’s, (b) Thomasian, (c) Thomistic, (d) anti-Thomist, and (e) post-Thomist.

- (a) *Thomas’s*: Positions held by *Thomas Aquinas* as established by historical exegesis.
- (b) *Thomasian*: Positions defined by the *addition* of distinctions, principles, or even argued conclusions that go beyond but also plausibly follow in the spirit of Aquinas’s own enquiries, principles, arguments, and conclusions (e.g., John of

⁹Weisheipl, ‘Thomism’.

St Thomas's treatise on signs; Joseph Owens on the actuality and perfection analogy for *esse*).

- (c) *Thomistic*: Positions that *add* questions, concepts, distinctions, or principles to the positions of Thomas, and these amendments or revisions introduced by Thomistic positions are in significant ways *at odds* with Thomas's overt positions, but are justified as *error-reducing* revisions indispensable for safeguarding the truth of either more fundamental doctrinal theses of Thomas, or some other putative truths established by commonsense or other philosophical, theological, and scientific enquiries (e.g., evolutionary hylomorphism and incomplete personhood of separated souls).
- (d) *Anti-Thomist*: Positions that directly contradict or reject a core doctrine of Thomas or are fundamentally incompatible with Thomism – either in its Thomasian or Thomistic enrichments (e.g., Platonic Forms or nominalism; eliminative materialism or substance dualism; idealism; transcendental idealism; and anti-realism).
- (e) *Post-Thomist*: Positions that are significantly influenced by Thomas or the Thomist tradition but whose enquiries and theses make no efforts to provide *Thomistic justifications* for any departures from Aquinas and the Thomist tradition (e.g., Suarez, Przywara, and Lonergan).

This rough taxonomy needs to be delineated better and justified, but even this outline supplies us with an illuminating way for uniting the diverse kinds of Thomist positions that contribute to the sapiential task of Thomism. Several points are noteworthy.

First, initiation into the Thomist tradition has always involved gaining the capacity to make similar demarcations and to justify one's distinctions where there is exegetical disagreement. This taxonomy provides principled and more fine-grained discriminations that deepen some of the best-known characterizations of the Thomist tradition employed by Weisheipl, Cessario, Bonino, and others. Weisheipl's intuitive 'Strict Thomism' is captured and enriched by enabling us to discriminate among positions that are Thomas's, Thomasian, and Thomistic, whereas his and Bonino's 'eclectic', 'wide', or 'inspirational' forms of Thomism are best identified as 'post-Thomist' positions.¹⁰

To identify positions as *Thomas's* demands learning how to read the works of Aquinas in their historical context, the sources he drew on, and to critically appreciate ongoing interpretative debates. To identify *Thomasian* positions involves moving beyond the former to the discernment of lacunae or new questions and problems Thomas did not address, but that were or have now become exigent for the Thomist tradition to speak to. But these are not the only kinds of *nova* with respect to Thomas's *vetera* that Thomists need to identify. The identification of *Thomistic* positions and the exigency for them requires the critical competency to recognize real problems with Thomas's own answers, distinctions, or even substantive heuristics, and also to suss out some insight into the source of the error and how it can be resolved. Many of

¹⁰Weisheipl, 'Thomism'; Cessario, *A Short History of Thomism*; Serge-Thomas Bonino OP, 'To Be a Thomist' *Nova et Vetera* 8.4 (2010), 763–773; Berger, 'Interpretations of Thomism Throughout History'; Wilkins, 'Thomism as a Tradition of Understanding'.

these will be *minor* (employing Thomas's principles to correct Thomas), but those difficulties that are *major* or never seem to go away, and to which no obvious answer for how to resolve them have been put forth can become, what Alasdair MacIntyre calls, 'epistemological crises'.¹¹

This taxonomy therefore affords the history of Thomism with a hermeneutical lens for retrospectively distinguishing contributions to establishing or elucidating Thomas's positions from those contributions that were either *Thomasian* or *Thomistic*, and thereby illuminating what distinguishes these three kinds of positions *within* the Thomist tradition from those that are *post-Thomist* or *anti-Thomist* positions. Put in terms of our sapiential task, this taxonomy elucidates how complicated the *endoxa* of the Thomist tradition's *vetera* truly are. The *vetera* for us go beyond Thomas's positions since Cajetan's analogy of proportionality or John of St Thomas's semiotics are *nova* with respect to the *vetera* of Thomas's works, but they are included in the *vetera* of the Thomist tradition for us and our contemporaries. One lesson Gilson taught us was to distinguish within this *vetera* what is Thomas's from what is Thomasian or Thomistic. One lesson further historical enquiry has established is that Gilson and paleo-Thomism – sometimes called *strict observance Thomism* – were both mistaken in their shared assumption that the Thomist commentarial tradition was of one mind on major issues. Gilson was therefore quite mistaken for disregarding *en masse* this rich but also heterogeneous deposit of Thomasian and Thomistic developments, just as *paleo-Thomism* was mistaken in presenting it *en masse* as uncontentious and homogenous minor elaborations of Thomas's positions.¹²

Thomists today inherit a complex and uneven Thomist tradition of collaborative enquiry that includes more than the *vetera* of Thomas's positions; indeed, it includes all five kinds of positions. The history of Thomism has shown how new challenges, magisterial decisions, or discoveries revealed that what Thomists regarded as contrary to Thomist positions – e.g., singular *ratio* for analogous terms, the immaculate conception, heliocentrism, and evolving biological species – needed to be re-examined, errors identified and deracinated, and novel distinctions and positions rationally justified as *Thomistic* positions. Inheriting this heterogeneous tradition demands Thomists, but especially those specialized in historical contributions to Thomism, acquire competencies to weigh critically through our inheritance and justify their identifications of which positions of Cajetan, Dominic of Flanders, Maritain, Lonergan, or Eleonore Stump are Thomas's, Thomasian, Thomistic, anti-Thomist, or post-Thomist – as many have done so already.

No less important than classifying which positions belong to the Thomist tradition is the task of identifying either what is fundamentally opposed to it as *anti-Thomist* positions (which can never be justified as *Thomistic*), or *post-Thomist* positions and

¹¹Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science' in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3–23; idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 361–369; idem, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 120, 145–146.

¹²For examples of this complexity, see Domenic D'Ettore, *Analogy After Aquinas: Three Logical Problems and Some Thomists' Solutions* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018); Thomas Osborne, 'Continuity and Innovation in Dominic Banez's Understanding of *Esse*', *The Thomist* 77 (2013), 367–394; Jorge Gracia, ed., *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation, 1150–1650* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

traditions that have emerged out of Thomism but do not seek to understand themselves as a form of Thomism or provide Thomistic justifications for their departures from Thomas. Just as Thomas's own synthesis is at points post-Augustinian or post-Aristotelian, it seems most of its exponents and critics would agree that the novel syntheses put forward by the major figures identified as 'Transcendental Thomists' more aptly fit under the designation of *post-Thomist*, especially because its position-defining transcendentalism is a putatively anti-Thomist position.

To be sure, this taxonomy is not a panacea. It leaves many of the most important intra-Thomist debates unresolved, but it can help render many of their disagreements more perspicuous. Furthermore, there have been and will arise both otiose and illuminating debates over how to identify certain positions, and different movements or 'schools' will corral around conflicting exegetical consensuses. Indeed, a better way to retrospectively re-interpret – and re-evaluate – some of the twentieth century 'school's' specialized investigations and disagreements were over whether certain theses were Thomas's, Thomasian, Thomistic, or even anti-Thomist. Some positions will be defended as Thomas's or Thomasian that others contend are in fact Thomistic because these positions are genuine rectifications of errors in Thomas's positions. A taxonomy like this sharpens the terms and grounds for justification within these debates and even dissolves some mere verbal disagreements. Of course, it is neither necessary to employ my stipulated terminology, nor make explicit in all one's works which kind of position one is taking as this could become a distracting burden or irrelevant to the intended audience. The point is Thomists need to learn how to make such distinctions when it is relevant and to make as clear as possible to one's readers, fellow Thomists and others, what one is doing so one's work can be appropriately evaluated.

This taxonomy also discloses why history is indispensable but insufficient for discharging our sapiential task. Settling historically what is Thomas's position, or even that a position of Cajetan's or Gilson's is Thomasian or Thomistic, does not thereby even begin to engage, let alone settle, debates concerning truths about reality. We Thomists often need to be reminded of this. Getting Thomas's texts right, important as that is, does not thereby establish that a contentious philosophical thesis is true.

Historical enquiry is essential for another reason, and here we need to distinguish two other ways of engaging with Thomas or the Thomist tradition that should not be identified with any commitment to the truth of the Thomist tradition. The first rather ahistorical form of engagement I call *reading and running with it*, wherein someone employs a text, distinction, or argument drawn from or inspired by Aquinas or Thomism, but makes no effort to reconcile it or justify its compatibility with Thomism. Just as Thomists who draw on Wittgenstein's anti-private language arguments or Husserl's phenomenology are not thereby committed to Wittgensteinianism or Husserlianism, so neither do similar engagements with Thomas's insights render someone a Thomist. The second form of engagement is that of *historical exegesis* wherein the aim is recounting Aquinas's place within philosophical or theological history. Both forms of engagement can raise interesting questions and sometimes substantive challenges to Thomism. This is especially true of historical exegesis, since in the absence of contemporary exponents of Avicennianism, Averroism, Albertism, Bonaventurianism, Ghentianism, Scotism, and Suarezianism, Thomists must rely on historical exegesis for uncovering some of the most formidable objections to Thomism, objections that often pinpoint precise theses of Thomism coming out of a largely

shared practical and existential-worldview of Roman Catholicism, informed by broadly shared Augustinian and Aristotelian sources. Historical exegesis is therefore not only indispensable for understanding Thomas's positions, but also informs us of past dialectical engagements, and reveals how our Thomist predecessors succeeded or failed to vindicate Thomism in their responses to the substantive objections of Scotism, Albertism, and others, by elaborating Thomasian positions and sometimes introducing and vindicating Thomistic positions.

5. Thomism and the *nova*

So far I have focused on the *vetera*, we must now pivot to how the *vetera* is elaborated, challenged, and perfected by our encounters with the *nova*. I have noted that Thomists need to be educated into their shared inheritance with a critical appreciation of its *vetera*, but they must also gain some genuine facility with the *nova*. Not merely the *nova* as Thomists understand it, but with the *nova* as it is understood and introduced by those rival traditions to Thomism. Our taxonomy illuminates the positions of the *vetera*, but it also elucidates what kinds of engagements with the *nova* are required. When confronting rival contemporary positions in theology, philosophy, and the sciences, can we defend Thomas's positions? Does engagement with the *nova* require elaborating Thomasian positions or are there errors in some of Thomas's positions that can only be overcome by defending a Thomistic position?

When we turn to address the *nova* we encounter no less than four kinds of debates staked out on diverse epistemological terrains.¹³ The first are disagreements at the level of commonsense. These include practical conflicts as well as deeper disputes arising from rival existential-worldviews, that is, standpoints on what exists in our world (*Welt*) and what is the ultimate significance or *telos* of life, living, dying, and death that govern our everyday practical interactions in the world. Commonsense is the source of our theoretical enquiries; theoretical investigations arise either from seeking systematic resolutions to everyday difficulties or out of wonder aiming to understand better some phenomena of experience. All theoretical investigations are to some extent accountable to the experiences that generate them, but theorization itself has the power to radically transform commonsense, as it has in agriculture, medicine, engineering, warfare, economics, politics, religion, education – the list is endless. What this interdependency and mutual accountability looks like depends on competing theories on the relationship of commonsense to theory. But for any enquiry concerned with the truth, reality as experienced by us provides some check on theoretical extravagances, even if there are ways in which theory can even lead to radical revisions of our initial conceptualizations of our experiences in the world.¹⁴

At a second level, we encounter *internal debates* among Thomists: debates about how commonsense and theoretical enquiry are interrelated, about how to understand the Thomist tradition, about which positions are Thomas's, Thomasian, Thomistic,

¹³cp., MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 145–148; *idem*, 'Intractable Moral Disagreements' in *Intractable Disputes about the Natural Law: Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, ed. L. S. Cunningham (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 1–52 (esp., 32–38); *idem*, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chs 2 & 4.

¹⁴Daniel De Haan, 'The power to perform experiments' in *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature*, ed. W. Simpson, R. Koons, and J. Orr (New York: Routledge, 2021), ch. 7, 191–219.

anti-Thomist, and post-Thomist, and so forth. Here, we confront a magazine of well-known ongoing exegetical, philosophical, theological disagreements concerning the natural desire to see God, whether the human intellect can cognize singulars, whether Thomists can demonstrate the immateriality of the intellect, whether animate hylomorphic species can evolve, and disagreements among Thomists concerning how to engage positions from rival traditions – which is the subject of this essay.

At a third level are Thomist disagreements with rival traditions of theoretical enquiry; these *external debates* are of two kinds. First are its debates with those rival traditions of theoretical enquiry which (largely) inhabit and share with Thomists the same existential-worldview of Catholic Christianity – like Augustinianism, Scotism, and Suarezianism. Each of these rival traditions of theoretical enquiry emerges out of a common point of departure from which they seek to resolve conflicts or contemplate reality via systematic investigations. Second are Thomism's debates with rival traditions of enquiry that do not inhabit or share little with the existential-worldview of Thomists, such as fideism, deism, agnosticism, and atheism, which inform the conflicting theoretical traditions of neo-Humeanism, neo-Kantianism, neo-Hegelianism, existentialism, naturalist positivism, and so on.

A fourth and radically distinct kind of conflict emerges against those who, like Nietzsche and Foucault, regard rival traditions of theorizing, not as alternative systematic ways to pursue the truth about reality but as different expressions of a will to power.¹⁵

I cannot say more here about how Thomists should engage in these distinct kinds of disagreements, but MacIntyre's *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* provides one exemplary illustration. What I must turn to now are the unique difficulties facing Thomist engagements with the *nova* afforded by the sciences. Let me again note sketchily what has been detailed elsewhere.

Thomists cannot treat scientific investigations as theory or tradition neutral. All scientific experiments *operationalize* conceptual-frameworks that involve theoretical assumptions in the design, implementation, and interpretation of experimental results. Unsurprisingly, few scientific experiments operationalize a Thomist conceptual-framework. Most of these theoretical assumptions are drawn from rival philosophical traditions incompatible with Thomism. Arguably, such experimental data need not be saddled with these rival theory-laden interpretations, but it requires cautious critical transpositions to extract interpretations compatible with Thomism. Thomists, in encountering the *nova* of scientific enquiry, therefore should not engage in their own version of the *reading and running with it* approach if they are to avoid the errors of question-begging and naïve correlationism.¹⁶

¹⁵MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.

¹⁶Daniel De Haan, 'Approaching Other Animals with Caution: Exploring Insights from Aquinas's Psychology' *New Blackfriars* 100 (2019), 715–737; idem, 'A Heuristic for Thomist Philosophical Anthropology: Integrating Commonsense, Experiential, Experimental, and Metaphysical Psychologies', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly: Thomistic Psychology* 96.2 (2022), 163–213; idem, 'Freeing the Will from Neurophilosophy: Voluntary Action in Thomas Aquinas and Libet-Style Experiments' *Religions* 15.6.662 (2024).

6. Two rival forms of Thomism

In setting out the uneven grounds of diverse kinds of debates and encounters with the *nova*, a major difficulty arises for the standard Thomist accounts of *scientia* and theoretical enquiry. It cannot satisfy the distinctive requirements for confronting the *nova* of internal debates *versus* external debates. This can be shown by examining how it misconstrues the Thomist theory of theoretical enquiry and the Thomist anthropology undergirding it.

On this standard Thomist view, humans share a common nature in virtue of which we possess intellectual powers to make all things intelligible. An education actualizes our capacity to know by informing our intellect with theoretical *habitus* known as the intellectual virtues of *intellectus*, *scientia*, and *sapientia*; that is, understanding first principles, systematic demonstrations, and a sapiential grasp of how everything hangs together from ultimate sources to ultimate ends, respectively. Our mind is first enriched by an understanding of first principles that are self-evident, and it is on the basis of these universal, necessarily true starting points that scientific demonstrations are built up issuing in universal and necessarily true doctrinal conclusions. Earlier I called this standard reading of the Thomist *vetera* ‘defensive-constructive commentary Thomism’. It is characterized by three position-defining-theses.

First, a *universalist* account of the starting point of rational enquiry. *DDCT* contends there are self-evident first principles and standards of rational justification universally accessible to all humans. All rational animals, once they intellectually encounter being and the good, cannot but assent to universal self-evident first principles, which are the foundations for equally universal, necessary, demonstrative conclusions entailed by these primitives.

Second, an *infallibilist* account of rational justification. *DDCT* contends that because these self-evident first principles are known through themselves to be true, they are rationally justified in themselves. Furthermore, all demonstrative universal conclusions necessitated by these self-evident first principles are thereby likewise secured by *infallibilist justifications*. From these two, we arrive at a third presumption of *DCCT* that it is marked by its fidelity to Thomas’s sapiential doctrines, in particular its first principles and demonstrated conclusions. The sapiential task of Thomism, for *DCCT*, is to *defend* and *constructively* elaborate these doctrinal principles and conclusions by engaging historical and contemporary debates issuing in varieties of ‘commentary’ broadly construed – including Cajetan’s and Banez’s literal commentaries, Capreolus’s *Defensiones*, John of St Thomas’s *Cursus*, Maritain’s *Degrees of Knowledge*, or Stump’s *Aquinas*. It is a venerable approach to Thomism, and it has indisputably borne much fruit.

Nevertheless, *DCCT*’s understanding of the *vetera* generates a serious obstacle – an epistemological crisis – for Thomist engagements with the *nova*, since it understands the basic Thomist *vetera* to comprise universally accessible and self-evident principles to all rational agents. Yet if this is correct, why is it that these self-evident principles are rejected by the intelligent participants of rival traditions of theoretical enquiry? When we turn to engage the *nova* (or *vetera*) of rival traditions, we discover highly educated reasonable humans who reject the very theses Thomists contend are self-evident first principles universally accessible and assented to by all humans. In other words, engagement with rival philosophical traditions along with the plurality

of human existential-worldviews directly challenge the purported truth of the first and second theses and thereby provoke the exigency to re-evaluate the import of the third. It appears, then, that Thomists cannot even commence their sapiential task without begging the question against incompatible traditions. Has the Thomist tradition been undermined before it has even started engaging the *nova* of rival traditions? Must Thomists adopt the radically implausible and uncharitable position that all their contemporary interlocutors are either irrational or acting in bad faith when they claim to reject our self-evident first principles?

There is an alternative self-understanding of the Thomist tradition, one which rejects both *DCCT*'s universalist starting point and its infallibilism – call this *Tradition-Constituted-Enquiry Thomism* (*TCET*). It maintains that all human enquiry commences from some parochial education into a particular tradition of enquiry, and any tradition committed to universal tradition-transcendent truths – truths that justify its claims to veridical superiority over rival traditions – must *vindicate* its universal theses. The standpoint of universality is an achievement; it cannot be assumed from the outset, and even then, the finitude and contingencies of human collaborative enquiry show rational justification is fallible. A theory of human enquiry – including any universal anthropology that undergirds it – that aims to conform to the reality of human enquiry cannot neglect our shared nature as *developing* and *dependent* rational animals.¹⁷ *TCET* contends that *DCCT*'s position-defining-theses generate its misconceptions of Thomas's reception of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* and obscure the stories of how persons are initiated into the practice of the Thomist tradition of enquiry. This is why *DCCT* exaggerates the accessibility of Thomist first principles along with the role of demonstrative *scientia* within theoretical enquiry, while underappreciating the role of dialectical and narrative argumentation in their own intellectual formations. This also leads to *DCCT* to present a form of Thomism that emphasizes self-preserving fidelity to Thomas's conclusions, rather than *TCET*'s emphasis on Thomas's self-correcting form of enquiry.

Defenders of *DCCT* have objected to Alasdair MacIntyre's version of *TCET* arguing Thomists should reject it because it is incompatible with Thomas's theory of *scientia* as understood by *DCCT* and because *TCET* has historicist or relativist implications. While there is always more that can be said, I believe these and other serious objections to *TCET* have been given sufficient responses.¹⁸ What I aim to show is that the very fatal flaws that define *DCCT* and render it incapable of engaging in the Thomist sapiential task, are those theses rejected by *TCET* and whose alternative position-defining-theses enable it to unproblematically prosecute Thomism's sapiential task. In short, I will

¹⁷Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (London: Duckworth, 1999).

¹⁸John Haldane, 'MacIntyre's Thomist Revival: What Next?' in *After MacIntyre*, ed. by J. Horton and S. Mendus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 91–107; Alasdair MacIntyre, 'How can we Learn what *Veritatis Splendor* has to Teach?' *The Thomist* 58.2 (1994), 171–195; idem, 'First principles, final ends, and contemporary philosophical issues', 143–178, and 'Moral relativism, truth and justification', 52–73 (esp. 52–57), and 'Truth as a Good: A Reflection on *Fides et Ratio*', 197–215 in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); idem, 'Intractable Moral Disagreements'; idem, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*; Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy* (New York: Lexington Books, 2004).

argue that the Thomist tradition can only prosecute its sapiential task by rejecting *DCCT* and endorsing some version of *TCET*.

7. An epistemological crisis for defensive-constructive-commentary Thomism

A first error is *DCCT*'s conflation of two kinds of self-evident first principles that Aquinas distinguishes. First are those formal but nonsubstantive first principles that are indeed self-explanatory or self-evident to virtually all rational enquirers, like the principle of contradiction. While these axioms play an indispensable governing role in all our rational enquiries and arguments, they do not provide the substantive or contentful first principles of *intellectus* employed in the systematic theoretical investigations and deductions of any *scientia*. Aquinas maintained these substantive primitives are only self-evident to the wise; that is, they require an education into the relevant theoretical investigations, which confers upon its participants the critical competencies exigent to intelligently verify that certain theses are primitives, understandable in themselves. Said otherwise, the mastery of a specific domain of theoretical enquiry is required to shift from assenting to some thesis as a *postulate* to the verifying-insight of it as a *primitive* (*Posterior Analytics*, I.10). It is not axiomatic formal principles, like contradiction, but these substantive primitives grounding the substantive deductive conclusions of Thomism that are rejected by rival traditions of enquiry. Aquinas recognized that the self-evidentness of these principles is *contingent* upon someone acquiring the theoretical-education-dependent *intellectus* required for grasping these primitives as true and intelligible-in-themselves. This ineliminable human *contingency* is therefore sufficient to falsify *DCCT*'s position-defining-theses that Thomist substantive primitives are self-evident with infallibilist justifications and universally accessible to all rational persons as such – i.e., independent of their education into any particular tradition of enquiry.

The significance of the contingencies presupposed by any successfully acquired *intellectus* brings out several additional errors generated by *DCCT*'s position-defining-theses. In *Contra Gentiles* I.1-8, Aquinas employs Aristotelian and Augustinian sources to diagnose a multitude of impediments to theoretical enquiry. What we must notice is that even when these are overcome, students introduced into the Thomist tradition do not straightaway achieve *intellectus* or *scientia*. Rather, the purported primitives and demonstrated conclusions of theoretical disciplines, along with the neo-Aristotelian schema of speculative and practical sciences – in short, the *vetera* – are first learned by Thomists as *endoxa* or reputable claims of an authoritative tradition. They cannot be grasped as anything more than *postulates* at the outset of systematic theoretical investigations (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I.10; *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.1 1145b2-7). This is why MacIntyre highlights the constitutive role played by an authoritative tradition for any theoretical education including the reading of authoritative texts, rehearsals of formative arguments, or re-enactments of crucial experiments coordinated via an authoritative curriculum by authoritative teachers of that tradition.¹⁹ It is only by *trusting* such authorities that we can become initiated

¹⁹MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, chs. III–V & VIII; idem, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*; idem, 'Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods', *American Catholic Philosophical*

into the specialized practices of theoretical enquiry that will enable us to actualize and transform our rational powers such that later we can achieve the intellectual competencies and masteries within a certain domain required to intelligently vindicate, critically revise, or even seriously repudiate what we have received in our education.

Next, even if we achieve the theoretical competencies required to engage in theoretical investigations of our own, *DCCT* misrepresents the bulk of Thomist theoretical enquiry as taking the form of a demonstrative science, and that the primitives of a particular *scientia* are known from the *outset* of scientific enquiry. This is mistaken on two scores. First, most of our enquiries take the form of dialectical and narrative forms of argumentation which we employ critically to establish the correct basic questions, their formulations, how to theoretically conceptualize the relevant phenomena of enquiry, what needs to be explained about them, and only then can we begin to justify the *primitives* we introduce as fundamental *explanantia* for the host of *explananda* addressed by a discipline.²⁰

Second, contrary to *DCCT*, the primitives of a *scientia* – e.g., natural philosophy or metaphysics – cannot be established at the *outset* of any systematic theoretical enquiry. They emerge within systematic investigations as those self-explanatory primitives that pervasively unify and explanatorily interconnect a constellation of *explananda* – as form and matter do for such phenomena as composition, change, contingency, causality, temporality, real definitions and natural kinds, and individuation. Furthermore, since primitives are *explanantia* they are only intelligible as self-explanatory first principles *with respect to* the *explananda* they are introduced to elucidate and ground. *Explananda* – such as taxonomies of change, composition, and individuation – cannot themselves be approached aright without asking the correct questions, critically formulated in the correct ways that provide more adequate – and so rationally superior – ways to intelligently corner the *explananda* for which primitives like form and matter are introduced as *explanantia*.²¹

So it's only after one's initiation into the practice of theoretical enquiry has progressed to sufficient mastery that one can retrospectively reflect and systematize what the tradition of enquiry has achieved so far. Such mastery is required to provide the kind of scientific deductive ordering of theses and demonstrative conclusions prescribed by the *Posterior Analytics*, which can identify the self-verifying *explanantia* of substantive primitives – such as act and potency, form and matter, *esse* and *essentia* – that aim to systematically connect all the questions and explanations of a particular domain that orbit and depend on these primitives.

This host of contingencies that stand in the way of all rational agents universally acquiring Thomist *intellectus* and *scientia* undercuts *DCCT*'s position-defining-theses.

Quarterly, 66 (1992), 3–19; idem, 'First principles, final ends, and contemporary philosophical issues'; idem, *After Virtue*. 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2007); idem, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*.

²⁰MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science'; Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), chs 1–4, 10, 17 ff.

²¹MacIntyre, 'First principles, final ends, and contemporary philosophical issues'.

But *DCCT* also mistakenly presumes that insofar as someone can overcome these contingencies and does acquire intellectual virtue, that someone will thereby acquire primitives and theoretical knowledge that accords with Thomism. This is a mistake, since neither the Thomist account of primitives, nor its schema of the divisions of theoretical disciplines, nor the standards of rational justification within them are universally recognized. There are competing accounts of what Thomists characterize as *intellectus*, *scientia*, and *sapientia*, and there is no non-question begging way to deny this. Thomists must then acknowledge that there can be intellectual vices, just as there are intellectual virtues, and so must regard rival traditions as articulating counterpositions of *intellectus*, *scientia*, and *sapientia*.²² Even though Thomas's anthropology of education clearly implies such a possibility, the universalist starting point of *DCCT* fails to recognize that the rival *endoxa* informing the minds of individuals initiated into rival traditions of philosophical enquiry will inform their participants with different *habitus*. So the Kantian *intellectus* formed in the student's mind of the Kantian tradition will not be those of the Thomist, and so Kantians will have incompatible accounts of what Thomist characterize as primitives self-evident to the wise along with conflicting divisions of theoretical domains of enquiry and standards of rational justification. Both will be rational according to their own standards of rationality and by what seem to be self-evidently and *substantively* rational primitives according to the respective traditions of enquiry they have been educated into. But this means, contrary to *DCCT*, there is not one universal starting point for intellectual formation leading to agreement on universal self-evident principles to the theoretically educated or on the schema of domains of theoretical enquiry and their relationships to commonsense. *DCCT* therefore cannot avoid misrepresenting the *nova* of rival traditions; it is incapable of rationally engaging them as traditions external to its own.

What this digest reveals is that *DCCT* confronts an epistemological crisis in its incapacity to engage in Thomism's sapiential task due to its failure to conform the mind to the reality of the practice of Thomist theoretical enquiry and the demands of Thomism's sapiential task. It is a fatal epistemological crisis because the difficulties *DCCT* faces are insurmountable insofar, as the very source of the errors is located in *DCCT*'s position-defining-theses. To reject these theses, as Thomists must do if they are to conduct their sapiential task, is to reject *DCCT*. To reject *DCCT*'s infallibilism and universalism in favor of fallibilist justifications and the recognition that human enquiries start from a parochial education into a tradition that has to *establish* the universality of its claims to truth is to endorse the two key position-defining-theses of *TCET*. How does *TCET* vindicate these theses and respond to the charge of historicism and relativism raised by *DCCT* and others?

8. Tradition-constituted-enquiry Thomism and its sapiential task

If Thomism is to defend its claims to truth, it must be able to vindicate itself against its strongest objections, and this includes responding to the challenges found in both major internal and external debates. So, in the first case, the Thomist tradition

²²Cp. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ed. by C. Pera (Turin and Rome, Marietti, 1961), III.118, n. 2905.

must find resources within or outside to resolve its own internal perpetual problems or epistemological crises. Any resolutions will require Thomists to show why these epistemological crises are not generated by the position-defining primitives and substantive heuristics of Thomism, and also why any resolutions that require critical assimilations of the *nova* (e.g., insights from Wittgenstein, phenomenology, Gibsonian affordances, radical embodied-enactive-embedded cognitive theory, and new mechanist philosophy of biology) are Thomasian or Thomistic resolutions and do not constitute some post-Thomist or anti-Thomist position. This is one kind of contribution to Thomism's sapiential task.

Another is Thomism's engagement in external debates with rival traditions, which must be prosecuted in accordance with the different forms of disagreement highlighted above. Let me focus only on those external debates with rival traditions of enquiry whose common aim is truth and also hold that theory is in some way accountable commonsense. *TCET* contends common ground can be achieved between such rival traditions, but it must be gained and not taken for granted at the outset.

To this it will be objected *TCET* has abandoned objectivity for positions that entail relativism. But this is not so. For Thomists, truth is the aim of enquiry, and truth is the conformity of our minds to reality. What *TCET* incorporates – and *DCCT* misrepresents and obscures – is a more adequate way to conform our minds to reality, the complex reality of theoretical disagreements among rival traditions. Thomists, therefore, need to learn how to understand a rival tradition as it is comprehended by its exponents such that one comes to appreciate not only its doctrinal conclusions but also its primitives and standards of rational argumentation, the history of that tradition's internal debates, and the solutions and failed answers as evaluated by its own standards of rationality. It is only here, from this acquired alternative *intellectus* and standpoint, that Thomist criticism can commence.

From this vantagepoint, Thomists can employ the standards of rationality internal to some rival tradition to identify major and persistent difficulties with its position-defining-theses that plague this tradition. Often these epistemological crises will be apparent to anyone familiar with that tradition's history of internal disagreements – e.g., mind-body problem for philosophy of mind, disputations over the end to be maximized by consequentialism, transcendentalism's construal of phenomena and noumena. Many epistemological crises arise from the failure of some theory to capture adequately the experiences of commonsense it purports to enrich. Thomists can gain leverage here by disclosing the procrustean ways rival theoretically laden ways of conceptualizing phenomena – e.g., voluntary action or observable animal behavior – distort some inescapable putative *whole* given in the practical activities of everyday life.²³

With these epistemological crises in hand, Thomists must show how the position-defining-theses of the rival tradition are what generate these epistemological crises, that these fundamental problems can only be resolved by abandoning the position-defining-theses of the rival tradition, that Thomism does not have similar epistemological crises and, when relevant, show why Thomism's more adequate theoretically

²³MacIntyre, 'Truth as a Good: A Reflection on *Fides et Ratio*'; De Haan, 'A Heuristic for Thomist Philosophical Anthropology'.

laden conception of some phenomena of experience avoids such errors.²⁴ Insofar as Thomism can rise to the challenge of executing such a critical comparison of itself and a rival tradition, it will have achieved three things at once.

First, it will have employed a rival tradition's own standards of rationality to establish why its position-defining-theses generate an epistemological crisis that, by that tradition's own standards of rationality, demonstrate that it is itself resourceless to resolve. Second, it will have vindicated the superiority of the Thomist tradition over that rival tradition by showing (a) Thomism does not encounter a similar fatal flaw and (b) that Thomism's own position-defining-theses supply insights for illuminating and overcoming the source of the rival tradition's errors. It is precisely by appreciating a rival tradition's perspective from the inside that Thomism can initiate an internal and non-question begging criticism that leads beyond the rival tradition to Thomism's explanatory role in diagnosing and resolving a root error in the rival tradition. Third, Thomism will have transcended the parochial standpoint of internal Thomist debates, engaged critically in external debates, and advanced in the task of vindicating its universalist claims by establishing its theoretical superiority over at least one rival theory. *TCET*, therefore, doesn't deny all common ground between rival traditions; rather, it elucidates how common ground can be established. The key point is this common ground is more akin to a vantage point climbed up to rather than a shared plain taken for granted at the start.

What *TCET* prescribes is, indeed, a dizzyingly ambitious programmatic task, but how could it not be? Thomism's sapiential task is demanding precisely because the vindication of any claim to wisdom must be. In this essay, I have merely sketched the contours of Thomism's sapiential task to enlarge the old by way of the new. I distinguished in order to unite the distinct Thomist positions required to comprise and contribute to the Thomist tradition's sapiential task. I argued, we Thomists should move past the turf wars of Thomist schools and concern ourselves instead with the four kinds of debates targeted by our sapiential task, and with the conflicting rules of engagement detailed by *DCCT* and *TCET*. I concluded by arguing that, where defensive-constructive commentary-Thomism fails to discharge our sapiential task by inadequately conforming to the reality of the human condition of deep disagreements about reality, a tradition-constituted-enquiry understanding of Thomism can illuminate a sapiential path directed toward enlarging and perfecting the old by way of our critical engagements with the new.

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²⁴MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*; idem, 'First principles, final ends, and contemporary philosophical issues'; 'Intractable Moral Disagreements', 38–52; De Haan, 'Freeing the Will from Neurophilosophy'.

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