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Truth, Scholastic Transcendentals, and the Implications of Ideal-Realism

ABSTRACT: *The paper explores the possibility of philosophical cooperation between Thomism and American pragmatism by resurrecting a largely forgotten debate between Wilmon Henry Sheldon and Jacques Maritain. The discussion focuses primarily on the problem of truth as it is discussed by Peirce and by some contemporary Thomists, including Maritain but also Milbank, Pickstock, Lonergan, Balthasar, Pieper, and Ulrich. The paper claims that, if we bring Peirce's version of pragmatism into the picture, cooperation is not possible but likely to be fruitful for both pragmatism and Thomism.*

KEYWORDS: *Thomism, Pragmatism, Peirce, Ideal-Realism*

1. Introduction¹

In 1944, *The Modern Schoolman* published a series of articles in which Wilmon Henry Sheldon and Jacques Maritain discuss to what extent Thomism and American pragmatism can cooperate (Sheldon 1944a; 1944b; 1944c; Maritain 1944). Maritain's contribution was later published in his 1952 [1948] *The Range of Reason* (Maritain 1952: 30-50). Despite its intricacies, the kernel of the debate could be summarized in the following way: on the one hand, Sheldon claims that the two traditions are compatible if correctly understood; he also suggests that they ought to cooperate in order to learn from each other; on the other hand, Maritain is more hesitant about endorsing the doctrines of pragmatism and seems to stress the fact that what is good in pragmatism is already contained *in nuce* in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

Both Sheldon and Maritain take pragmatism to mean roughly the “naturalistic” philosophy of John Dewey. As it clearly appears in Maritain's general remarks about pragmatism, what pragmatism means for him is a

¹ Sections 1 and 2 reproduce in part what I have written in Stango 2019. The present article could be considered a deepening of the argument presented there.

form of reductive naturalism, not too different from logical positivism in its insistence on experiments, verification, and scientific-mathematical approach to phenomena. Sheldon agrees with Maritain on the “naturalism” of the tradition of classical pragmatism culminating with Dewey, but he wishes for a new phase in which pragmatism could free itself from its historical boundaries and could finally cooperate with Thomism. In this sense, no matter how “enriched,” both our authors think that classical pragmatism is nothing more than a form of naturalism (cf. Hare 2015: 117-121; Roth 1963). There is certainly some truth in this reading. For one, Dewey went as far as giving his philosophical proposal the name of “technology” (LW15: 88), henceforth strengthening those interpretations that saw in his pragmatism a kind of philosophy completely dependent on the contents and methods of the empirical sciences and their practical applications.

One of the aims of this paper is to challenge this reading of pragmatism. In fact, ever since Arthur O. Lovejoy (1908a and b) pointed out that “pragmatism” is a constellation of meanings (the same could be said of “naturalism”), we know that pragmatism encompasses very different views and has been subject to significant changes since its founder, Charles S. Peirce, introduced the “pragmatic maxim” in 1878 as a tool “to make our ideas clear” (EP1: 124-141). Dewey’s pragmatism carries within itself both metaphysical aspirations, chiefly anticipated by Peirce, and nominalist tendencies, whose immediate products were George H. Mead’s philosophy of the act (Mead 1938) and Percy W. Bridgman’s operationalist conception of science (Bridgman 1927). For this reason, it is hard to assess the debate between Sheldon and Maritain without putting Dewey’s pragmatism into perspective. The aim of the present paper is twofold: first, it aims at reviewing the Sheldon-Maritain debate on *the problem of truth* in light of the broader context of the pragmatist tradition, integrating Dewey’s proposal with the philosophies of William James and especially Charles S. Peirce, therefore bringing up once again the question, ‘Can Thomism and Pragmatism cooperate?’. Second, it aims at showing that some major contemporary Thomists (Milbank, Pickstock, Lonergan, Balthasar, Pieper, and Ulrich) rely precisely on an understanding of Thomistic truth that *requires and implies*, rather than excluding, that *dynamic, time-based, and history-sensitive interpretation of the transcendental notion of truth* that was precisely, from my point of view, the main contribution of Peirce’s reflection on this problem. This will be shown by giving special attention to the metaphysical framework of ideal-realism and to the central role that “abduction” and “hope” play in the thought of the Thomists to whom I will refer.

In conclusion, the overarching goal of the paper is to suggest that the mutual enrichment that Sheldon envisages between Thomism and pragmatism is not only possible, but also desirable, especially if we bring into the picture Peirce’s concept of truth. Sheldon claims prudently that “the project of harmony between philosophies,” Thomism and pragmatism in this case, “is more or less a millennial one” (Sheldon 1944c: 94). Less prudently, I shall suggest that the cooperation is already possible if Peirce’s philosophy is brought into the picture.

2. Truth, Scholastic Transcendentals, and Pragmatism: Broadening the Sheldon-Maritain Debate

Both Sheldon and Maritain recognize that the problem of truth is a most pressing issue at stake when Thomism and pragmatism are compared. According to Maritain, the disagreement between the two orientations is complete.² Sheldon calls it “the root-opposition” (Sheldon 1944c: 94). Before entering the details of the discussion, it is important to stress again the popular interpretation of the pragmatic theory of truth that was circulating in the 40s and later, and which to some extent is still discussed today, including within neo-Aristotelian circles (cf. Ross 2008: 80-82). On the one hand, pragmatic truth was taken to mean something like practical satisfaction: a belief is true if and when it satisfies the goals that a subject pursues by acting upon that belief.³ On the other hand, the pragmatic approach to truth was reduced to crass sense-experience verificationism, a theory similar to that of the logical positivists.⁴ Thus, the popular depiction of the pragmatic truth as what “works” (for the believer, for a community of believers, etc.) underlies the two elements just mentioned, that of practical satisfaction and that of verification. Reasons to believe that this was in fact the pragmatist theory of truth can be found in different degrees in all the classical pragmatists. However, as I will point out soon, these reasons are ultimately partial and they are to some extent the result of a misinterpretation of the pragmatist project. To this brief sketch, we can add a third element, which is usually associated with Dewey’s theory of inquiry and which is probably what both Sheldon and Maritain had in mind as another fundamental aspect of the pragmatic theory of truth, namely, the idea of truth as “warranted assertibility” (LW12: 15). The troubling aspect of this chiefly Deweyan characterization of truth is its extremely limited applicability and its impossibly tight dependence on actually successful inquiry: if truth is what we can justifiably believe and assert because our responsible inquiries have convinced us that we can do so, it follows that only what *has been successfully tested* can properly be said to be true. For many, this position is unpalatable, and rightly so, because it leaves out too much – most importantly, what is *unverified* and what is properly *unverifiable*.

Since G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell ridiculed the pragmatic theory of truth (Moore 1992; Russell 1992),⁵ by relying primarily on their knowledge of James, Dewey, and Schiller, the pragmatists have painstakingly attempted to point out the many misrepresentations of their approach to truth, unfortunately without success. In the context of his critique of “subjective (instrumental, formal) reason,” Max Horkheimer has gone as far as saying that in pragmatism “calculability replaces truth” (Horkheimer 2014: 30). Citing Peirce, James, and Dewey, he comments

2 Similarly, Gilson (1952: viii-ix) characterizes (James’s and Dewey’s) pragmatism as a form of skepticism about truth, obviously incompatible with Thomism.

3 This version has been given new life, through Wittgenstein, by J.T. Whyte’s “success semantics” (Whyte 1990). Brandom 1994 has criticized this view.

4 Cf. the classical neopositivist reading of pragmatism in Ayer 1968.

5 For a Deweyan response to Russell’s criticisms of the pragmatist theory of truth, cf. Burke 1994.

that pragmatism is “the counterpart of modern industrialism” and “reflects with an almost disarming candor the spirit of the prevailing business culture, the very same attitude of ‘being practical’ as a counter to which philosophical meditation as such was conceived” (35-36).

The incommunicability between Sheldon and Maritain about truth seems the aftermath of this sad story of mutual misunderstandings. There would be much to say in defense of the pragmatic idea of truth, and I will not go into the details here. However, I will give a taste of the overall issue by mentioning James. James was extremely vocal in clarifying that the “satisfaction” that is at the center of the pragmatic theory of truth is not the irrational and whimsical fulfilment of the subject’s desires, but the idea that something (a belief, an expectation, a proposition, an idea, a concept, etc.) is true when it is successful in “linking satisfactorily” different parts of our experience (James 1968: 382). James’s pragmatism was never meant to deny the fundamental intuition that truth is the correspondence between mind and reality; only, its aim was to develop this notion by moving from a rationalistic description of correspondence as a “static relation” to a description of it as a “rich and active commerce” between our thoughts and the great universe (James 1968: 386).⁶ All James ever wanted to maintain was that

The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth *happens* to an idea. It becomes true, is *made* true by events. Its verity is in fact an event, a process: the process namely of its verifying itself, its *verification*. Its validity is the process of its *valid-ation* (James 1968: 430).⁷

The main point of James’s view, then, is that what makes a belief true is the process through which a state of affairs *verifies* (or does not falsify) that belief. A belief is true only if it *can* be made true by a truthmaker, and a truthmaker is a truthmaker *primarily in the process* of truthmaking a belief. As Brian Embry has shown, a very similar way of treating truth was developed by some 17th-century Scholastics.⁸ The word used then was *verificativum*, namely, that which makes a belief true. If we dynamize the Scholastic notion of *verificativum*, what we obtain is *verification* – exactly the term used by James. The way pragmatism and some Scholastic authors think about truth is very similar indeed.

Let us go back now to the exchange between Sheldon and Maritain. Sheldon points out that the pragmatist’s stress on verification in experience – for instance,

⁶ Smith (1978: 58) calls Peirce’s and James’s approach a “dynamic correspondence” theory of truth.

⁷ Pegis (1967: 170-171) explains the special nature of human intellect according to Aquinas: “Intellect, senses, and bodily organs together constitute in man a complete intellect. Why is not the human intellect by itself adequate as an intellect? Because by itself it cannot do the work of an intellect. Why not? Because it falls short of *verifying* [my emphasis] within itself of all the conditions necessary to its work... To know not only man but also John Smith; indeed, to know man as John Smith and John Smith himself as a man, the human intellect must work with the senses, so that the co-operative while of intellect and the senses knows the individual John Smith adequately.”

⁸ See Embry 2015.

the verification of the belief in the existence of God derived from the Thomistic *viae* – should be welcomed as a suitable extension of the Thomist’s belief in the capacity of reason to grasp truth, including the truth of conclusions produced by demonstrations and proofs. He points out a limitation, a historical limitation but not a structural limitation, of the pragmatist, namely, his refusal to take the Thomistic *viae* seriously, and by extension any purely abstract argument which is not grounded in empirical verifiability.⁹ For his part, Maritain sympathizes with the pragmatist interest in the concreteness of human experience, but he laments at the same time a fundamental deficiency in the pragmatist approach to reason and truth – a metaphysical deficiency. In Maritain’s view, the pragmatist reduces the work of reason and the resource of truth to what is *empirically tested* and therefore *verified* and denies to reason the “metaphysical intuition” and speculative contemplation of being. In one passage Maritain connects this issue with the problem of being and becoming:

In the eyes of the Thomist, verification is only a way and a means of grasping the truth. And when the intellect has made itself true, the truth thus attained possesses objective consistency because it is the vital conformity of the intellect with what exists (actually or possibly) independently of the mind; and, however humble it may be, this truth is an end in which the intellect comes to fruition and has its perfection, rest, and joy... To enjoy the truth... is the very life of the intellect *qua* intellect, and the aim of science *qua* science as well as that of metaphysical wisdom. Whereas the Thomist emphasizes in this way the contemplative import of knowledge, the Pragmatist distrusts it as a ‘static’ illusion, opposed to the reality of the intellectual life which is only becoming and laboring. The quarrel between Being and Becoming, and between Truth and Verification, reveals a deep-seated antagonism that the best efforts cannot overcome (Maritain 1952: 39).

This passage shows with great clarity the troublesome consequences of certain popular Deweyan rhetorical attacks against the static and unprogressive nature of traditional (allegedly Platonic and Aristotelian) ontology, which includes the idea of contemplation, allegedly responsible for discrediting the world of practice as inferior and irrelevant to cognition.¹⁰ If this were all that pragmatism had to offer to a philosophical understanding of truth, it would be indeed a poor contribution, certainly incapable of inviting the cooperation of the Thomist.

Despite the limitations of Dewey’s philosophy, I would like to suggest that the conflict between Thomism and pragmatism is not necessary if we go to the roots of pragmatism, that is, if we bring again Peirce into the picture. If we look at the issue from the point of view of Peirce’s pragmatic understanding of truth, the cooperation between the Thomist and the pragmatist becomes not only possible, but mutually illuminating. When I speak of truth here, I mainly refer to the

9 Sheldon (1944a: 75-76) is not quite bold enough, however, in defending the pragmatist idea if truth appropriately.

10 Cf. LW4.

Scholastic tradition of the transcendentals.¹¹ The *locus classicus* for appreciating the Aquinas's understanding of truth as transcendental is probably *De Veritate* q. 1 a. 1, where Aquinas explains that truth is the way in which the notion of reality is declined when it is thought in relation to the human mind, a mind which is, as Aristotle already taught, capable in principle of being everything. The conformity in which truth consists, then, is not primarily the correspondence or agreement of a particular intellectual judgment with a particular state of affairs, but more deeply, the original connaturality of thought and being. Maritain himself stresses this dimension when pushed to say what is according to him the "central intuition" of Thomistic philosophy: "It is the intuition of the basic intelligible reality of being, as analogically permeating everything knowable" (Maritain 1952: 43).

My proposal can be illuminated through the following question: What would happen to our understanding of truth if we connected the transcendental meaning of truth and the judgment-dependent meaning of truth? Following Alice M. Ramos (2012), who has written about the need to think the Thomistic transcendentals "dynamically," my question can be formulated in the following way: What would happen if the dynamic nature of the transcendental idea of truth were seen in light of its consequences, that is, in light of *all its conceivable consequences*, for the human mind? Or, even better, for all rational minds? If being is intelligible, and if all human minds are open to the entirety of being as such (transcendental idea of truth), then it is plausible to say that true judgments and habits of representations *are* what these minds *would achieve in the long run*, and that the interaction among these minds *would tend to converge* in the long run toward an agreement, toward a common liberation from falsity. Wouldn't this be a beautiful way to look at the dynamic nature of truth without losing its metaphysical rootedness in the intelligibility of being?

This is, I submit, Peirce's own view of truth, which I will call the eschatological agreement theory of truth (cf. Misak 2004; Legg 2014). In 1907 "Pragmatism," Peirce writes that

... the objectivity of truth really consists in the fact that, in the end, every sincere inquirer will be led to embrace it; – and if he be not sincere, the irresistible effect of inquiry in the light of experience will be to make him so. This doctrine appears to me, after one subtraction, to be the corollary of pragmatism. I set it in a strong light in my original presentation of the method... I hold that truth's independence of individual opinions is due (so far as there is any 'truth') to its being the predestined result to which sufficient inquiry *would* ultimately lead (EP2: 419).

The predestined result of inquiry is the final belief toward which all rational minds irresistibly tend, and about which they would agree if sufficient experience, time, and freedom from perverting factors were given to inquirers (cf. EP 1: 88-89). We all aspire to the revelation of reality in its full meaning because this revelation is the vocation, the *Bestimmung*, conjointly, of rationality,

11 For a historical and theoretical overview of the topic, see Aertsen 2012.

reality, and the beliefs (more or less true) that we already entertain.¹² But why is it so? Why is this eschatological agreement the essential explication of the idea of truth? Only because truth is grounded in reality, in the sense that reality is intrinsically intelligible and that the mind is structurally open to knowing it. As Peirce stresses since his first writings, “Over against any cognition, there is an unknown but knowable reality; but over against all possible cognition, there is only the self-contradictory. In short, *cognizability* (in its wider sense) and *being* are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms” (EP1: 25). *Ens et verum convertuntur*. Truth is the “entelechy of reality” (EP2: 324), the orientation of reality to be represented as it ought to be represented, to become faithful cognition (cf. De Tienne 2006). The human mind, in turn, has an affinity with and an “instinct” for truth (EP2: 444-445): the mind is the “seed of knowledge,” the “field of consciousness” within which the intelligibility of being can become true representation (EP2: 374). It is the “Seme of Truth” (Peirce 1906: 523). Put bluntly, Peirce’s eschatological agreement theory of truth is the pragmatic explication of the traditional transcendental idea of truth. The pragmatic and dynamic clarification of the transcendental idea of truth brings to light many before-hidden ramifications of the Scholastic idea, revealing once more the opportunity of a cooperation between Thomism and pragmatism.¹³

Peirce’s theory of truth has been given perverted interpretations and has been harshly criticized. For instance, it is sometimes held that Peirce’s understanding of truth *replaces* the traditional idea of truth as correspondence with the idea of “ideal agreement” at the end of inquiry. (It doesn’t seem to matter to those who advance this interpretation that the agreement is supposed by Peirce to be final, intersubjective, and destined.¹⁴) This mistaken interpretation has both defenders and detractors. For Nicholas Rescher (1993: 57-62), for instance, Peirce’s “consensus theory of truth,” just like that of its followers Jurgen Habermas and Karl O. Apel, is not capable of accounting for the obvious difference between intersubjective agreement and truth, as it is proved by the fact that agreement is

12 The popular opposition of realism, on one side, and pragmatism and idealism, on the other side – cf. Bigelow (1988: 123), who defines “realism” as the avoidance of “some sort of pragmatism and idealism” – is therefore misguided if we consider Peirce. Peirce’s ideal-realism (see below) is precisely the attempt to show that pragmatism reveals the ideal vocation of the real and the rootedness in the real of the ideal.

13 Nobody so far has attempted such project. Roth (1998: 69-71) compares Lonergan’s notion of transcendental with Peirce’s idea of man-nature attunement, but his comparison is hardly more than a side note. An interpretation compatible with the one I am sketching can be found in Sfondoni-Mentzou 1991. Reading Peirce’s eschatological agreement theory of truth in light of the transcendental philosophy of the Scholastics shows why it is wrong to oppose Peirce’s allegedly “epistemic” view and a realist view of truth, as Alston (1996: 188 ff.) does.

14 Interestingly, among contemporary Thomists, Ross 1988 has developed a quasi-Peircean model of truth for the faith in the eschatological promises of Christ (Second Coming, resurrection, final judgment, heaven and hell), according to which the truthmaker of faith is the “cognitive consonance between belief *in via* and cognition in the end,” or “how the last things will be experienced” by all the saved at the end of times. The “being true” of a belief *in via* is its final “fulfilment” in the knowledge of the Communion of Saints at the second coming.

possible also about falsity.¹⁵ On the opposite side of the spectrum, Richard Rorty (1999: 23-46) claims that the pragmatic idea of truth understood as agreement must be welcomed because it finally allows us to subtract truth from the field of epistemology and metaphysics and to turn it into a much more powerful tool of social emancipation; for him, inquiry is aimed at truth not in the sense that it aims at getting things right or the way things are, but only in the sense that what we actually do in our scientific and democratic practices is try to convince other people to agree with us.¹⁶

Both Rescher's criticisms and Rorty's approval rely on a wrong understanding of Peirce's idea of truth. One of the ways to counteract this misleading version of pragmatism is to show, as I am trying to do here, that Peirce's eschatological-agreement theory of truth is best understood as the pragmatic clarification of the transcendental idea of truth proposed by Aquinas. If my suggestion has some value, then, we must conclude that also at this level the cooperation of the Thomist and the pragmatist can be extremely productive and mutually enriching. I have already explained in what way the Thomist could benefit from a pragmatist approach to truth. What could the pragmatist learn from the Thomist? He could learn a great deal. In particular, he could learn that transcendental philosophy did not begin with Kant, and that the Kantian version of the transcendental (the role of which for Peirce the pragmatists still debate fiercely¹⁷) is a late and corrupted articulation of an older, glorious idea. Pragmatists, old and new, even when they do not have any antipathy for metaphysics (Peirceans generally don't), certainly have a resistance to the idea of the transcendental because they see in it the mark of the *categorical a priori*. For most pragmatists it is as if the question, 'Does the transcendental play any role in Peirce's philosophy?', could be given only a Kantian interpretation. This is not without reason, given that Peirce's introduction to philosophy was certainly through Kant. Nevertheless, Peirce's philosophical maturation was not in the line of Kant, but in that of Scholastic realism and Medieval logic. This is why Thomism can bring the transcendental spirit of Peirce's philosophy to a greater level of self-awareness. More specifically, Thomism can show the pragmatist that the real *a priori* is the fundamental sympathy between mind and reality, which is neither an innate idea, nor an *a priori* categorical schema, but is, again, an ontological transcendental.

The general tenet and main program of those philosophers who variously go under the name of "transcendental Thomists" have been to point out that, while the Scholastics had rightly identified the "objective" nature of the transcendental (*verum, bonum, and pulchrum* are rooted in objective *ens*), they had however left out its "subjective" conditions of possibility (McCool 2009: 115-131). In order to remedy the shortcoming of the Medieval Schoolmen,

15 Cf. Misak (2004) for the idea that Peirce's eschatological view of truth does not compromise the objectivity of truth.

16 This line of interpretation has been developed by West (1989).

17 See Colapietro (2016); Maddalena (2017). Kant was aware that his sense of "transcendental" was new compared to the Scholastic tradition, see Aertsen (2012: 4).

these philosophers turned to Kant to find the resources for the much-needed integration. However, this project was doomed to fail, I believe, for at least three reasons: first, because the Kantian “Copernican revolution” could not allow for the ontological interpretation of the transcendental typical of the Scholastics; second, because a different line of German philosophy (roughly running from Hegel to Heidegger) could have better served the purpose of showing the subjective implications of transcendental truth; and third, because in a sense the Thomistic synthesis already presented, albeit *in nuce*, an understanding of transcendental truth that did not leave out the implications for the subject. In fact, for St. Thomas, “being” is that which *the intellect* apprehends in the first place and thanks to which the intellect perceives itself as capable of “understanding being,” namely, as capable of a transcendental relation to being as intelligible, as truth (ST I, q. 16, a. 4, ad. 1). So, even a cursory analysis of St. Thomas – but one could multiply the examples – can confirm that the transcendental notion of truth is always already developed by St. Thomas in connection to the implications of being-truth for the intellect (or the subject, as the moderns would say). The meditation on being, truth, and the intellect belong together essentially.

Peirce’s approach to truth is beneficial for Thomists because, first, it provides resources to the unpacking of the subjective implications of the medieval transcendental that do not risk the historicistic and immanentist possible outcomes of Hegelism and Heideggerianism, being Peirce a life-long advocates of “eternal verities” (EP2: 41); and second, because it shows that the main step forward in the understanding of truth as transcendental – the real step for which an integration, and not just an unpacking, is necessary – is not from a merely-objective to an objective-subjective transcendental, but from a *static objective-subjective* transcendental to a transcendental that is *dynamic and open to history* and that stresses the importance of the *inter-subjective* (collaborative, communal) vocation to and pursuit of the truth. Thus Peirce, with his explicit commitment to the Medieval transcendental, with his radical re-interpretation of the Kantian ‘thing in itself’, and with his theory of representation pointing in the direction of the eschatological agreement theory of truth, invigorates the generally static Medieval transcendental with a necessary dynamic component.

3. Peirce and Some Contemporary Thomists on Ideal-Realism and Abduction

The Peircean view of truth just described can be considered one of the most important implications of Peirce’s “ideal-realism,” namely, “the metaphysical doctrine which combines the principles of idealism and realism” (EP1: xxiv). “Realism” means here that reality is independent “of the thought of any individual or any number of individuals” (i.e., what I or you might happen to believe), but not independent of thought as such (i.e., what we would believe in the long run, in the sense explained in the previous section). “Idealism” means simply that “reality is of the nature of thought”; at least in one of its essential dimensions, reality is made of

“ideas.”¹⁸ What does this mean? De Tienne (2006) explains it best: ““If everything is cognizable for Peirce, it is not only because nothing can escape representation, but even more strongly because everything ‘wants’ to be cognized: not the will of an efficient cause, but the telic will of a final conditional cause.” According to the telic will of the final conditional cause, reality ‘actively tries’ to find strategies for being correctly represented. It is in this sense that reality is at the bottom (not only, but at the bottom) an “idea” (a general), more precisely a “living” idea – a telic will ‘seeking strategies’ for being represented properly. This ‘seeking strategies’ can neither be understood literally, nor simply metaphorically, but *analogously* to any form of personal will aiming at communicating with us: reality is intelligible because it ‘wants’ to be known and never ‘tires’ of arranging signs for us so that we can represent it in its truth.

When considering Peirce’s ideal-realism, the most striking version of contemporary Thomism revealing the (implicitly) Peircean turn (that I have made explicit in the previous section) is the interpretation of the Thomistic doctrine of truth given by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock (2001). In their study, Milbank and Pickstock challenge the reduction of St. Thomas’s “correspondence” theory of truth to the strictures of an epistemological doctrine. St. Thomas’s theory of truth is boldly ontological. According to it, “external reality” is teleologically oriented toward the soul and knowledge, in such a way that true knowledge is not a mere co-responding of what is, but rather a *modality of being* in which ‘subject’ and ‘object’ find their mutual fulfilment. More precisely, the adequation of mind and truth is not the episodic, punctual encounter between a proposition and a state of affairs, but it is rather the transcendental, original “sympathy” (or “proportion” or “harmony” or “*convenientia*”) between what there is and intellect, which are in turn oriented to indwell and fulfill each other (Milbank and Pickstock 2001: 4-5).

The intellect, therefore, is not the mirroring of an ‘object’ originally closed into itself, as much of modern philosophy believes, but that in relation to which reality is always already instituted, and that in which reality reaches its dwelling place. And this means that *St. Thomas’s metaphysics of truth must be a form of ideal-realism*:

Assimilation or adequation here, though obviously including crucial elements of a realist concept of truth, has an idealist dimension as well, which suggests that this is by no means an ordinary kind of correspondence. Being is not prior to knowing, so if Being measures knowledge, knowledge equally measures Being. One might call this ‘ideal realism.’ For, indeed, because Truth and Being are convertible, one with another, there is a continuity between the way things are in the external material world and the way things are in our mind. But this ‘continuity’ is not to be taken lightly. It is not for Aquinas a continuity in the sense of a mirroring or reflecting,

18 Although an idealist, Peirce remains an *ideal-realist*. Not only his idealism has nothing to do with any form of subjective idealism, but, notably, he criticizes Hegel for absolutizing Thirdness and omitting Secondness from reality, see e.g. EP2: 177. In other words, Peirce’s ideal-realism is, at least in his intentions, the most rigorous non-nominalist metaphysics (where “nominalism” means, for Peirce, any metaphysics that leaves out some essential dimension of being).

of our thoughts simply being ‘true to the facts.’ Rather, there is a sort of parallel or analogy between the way things are in material... substance and the way things are in our minds. It involves real relation, whereby our thought occasions a teleological realization of the formality of things, and, in doing so, is itself *brought to fruition*... This happens, because, for Aquinas, truth is less properly in things than in mind – it is usually, as it were, a dormant power until it comes to be known, at which point the power of its truth is awakened (Milbank and Pickstock 2001: 7; cf. McCarthy 1993).

In Peircean terms, true knowledge is not a mirroring of reality, but a contribution to the “growth” of the “concrete reasonableness” already at work in the cosmos (EP2: 58; 254-255), in which the embodiment and articulation through human “symbols” (which always presuppose adequate “icons” and “indices,” EP2: 193-194) bring together creativity and manifestation, or thanks to which, faithful manifestation occurs as genuine creativity and genuine creativity occurs as truthful manifestation (EP2: 322).¹⁹

Milbank’s and Pickstock’s approach to truth implies – down to the exact terminology adopted – the same re-interpretation of the notion of the ‘thing in itself’ proposed by Peirce. The ‘thing in itself’ is not the unknowable ‘beyond representation’ of reality, but that which thought is called to represent in the long run through the phenomena that are given: *phenomena are signs of the thing in itself*, that is, of the *noumenon*, of that which can and must be thought. That knowledge is the “form entering into the mind” (Milbank and Pickstock 2001: 8) through what is elaborated by the senses in perception and imagination can be fully appreciated only in light of this semiotic dialectic between signs (“appearances,” *phenomena*) pointing in the direction of objects (“thing in themselves,” *noumena*). Both re-interpretations of the ‘thing in itself’ – Milbank-Pickstock’s and Peirce’s – are implications of their ideal-realism.

It is a version of ideal-realism such this one that can ground the eschatological agreement theory of truth which is more or less explicitly presented in some of the contemporary Thomists. The most explicit affirmation in this sense can be found in the work of Bernard Lonergan. For Lonergan, in fact, a philosophical account of “ontological truth” (i.e., truth in the transcendental sense, the “intelligibility” that belongs to “being as being”) cannot be isolated from its implications for human thought – and the reverse is also the case, in the sense that it is the internal, eschatological norm of critical and self-corrective inquiry that points in the direction of what we call ‘truth’: “the self-correcting process of learning consists in a sequence of questions, insights, further questions and further insights that moves towards a limit in which no further pertinent questions arise” (Lonergan 1992: 325).²⁰ He writes that ontological

19 Pickstock (2020) develops this point with no reference to Peirce, but by appealing to the poetical work of Rowan Williams.

20 Cf. the similarity to but also the radical difference from Wilfrid Sellars’s famous definition of knowledge: “empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise” (Sellars 1956: 300). Sellars’s empiricist pragmatism falls victim of the alleged incompatibility between metaphysical

truth is “the conformity of being to the conditions of its being known through intelligent inquiry and critical reflection” (Lonergan 1992: 576). We can thus appreciate the perfect convergence between Lonergan – who states that “being is what is to be known by the totality of true judgments” (Lonergan 1992: 374) – and Peirce – who claims that being is what is represented in the “predestined opinion,” that is, the opinion that “would ultimately prevail if investigation were carried sufficiently far” (EP2: 457). Thus, Lonergan’s ‘totality of true judgment’ is nothing else than the Peircean destined ideal of the ‘end of rational inquiry in the long run.’ This “destiny” is the faithful pragmatic unpacking of the transcendental idea of truth (a ‘would-be’) rather than a necessary, factual event in the future (a ‘will-be’). In pragmatic terms, Lonergan explains that “what is to be known by intelligence is what is meant by the intelligible” and that “being cannot lie beyond the intelligible or differ from it,” which corresponds to the Scholastic idea of the transcendental, confirmed by Peirce.²¹ So, if Lonergan explains the Thomistic notion of truth in clear eschatological terms, it is the Milbank-Pickstock interpretation of Thomism as a form of ideal-realism that provides the most explicit statement of the metaphysics underlying such understanding of truth. This, in turn, is an interpretation of St. Thomas’s philosophy that amounts to the same Peircean view I have developed.

Another aspect of ideal-realism has to do with the very possibility of *abduction*. According to Peirce, is “the opinion that nature and the mind have such a community as to impart to our guesses a tendency toward the truth, while at the same time they require the confirmation of empirical science” (EP1: xxiv-xxv). One can see here the dynamic use to which Peirce puts the traditional idea of the transcendental: given the original “community” between reality and intellect, the intellect has the extraordinary and surprising capacity to “guess” right explanatory hypotheses of phenomena (abduction) – hypothesis that, however, will be proven true only once inductively verified (EP2: 106-107).²² Moreover, Peirce’s insistence on abduction goes well beyond the guess to correct explanations insofar as abduction lies at the core of his overall theory of perceptual knowledge and abstraction, as we shall see shortly. The very possibility of successful abduction becomes in Peirce the evidence for confirming once again the crucial value of the transcendental of truth, based not on merely onto-logical arguments (the validity of which is not dismissed, but rather vigorously reaffirmed, as we have seen in the previous section), but on the very process of scientific inquiry.

foundations and pragmatic consequences that the account of truth I have presented here should have exorcized.

²¹ Lonergan discusses the role of the three theological virtues – faith, hope, and charity – in human knowledge, but at this level his treatment becomes mostly theological. A comparison with Peirce, although fruitful, would require a discussion of the distinction between natural and supernatural hope that cannot be conducted here.

²² Peirce’s talk of “rational instinct” is almost literally drawn from Aristotle, cf. e.g. *Rhetoric*, I, 1, 1355 a-b. On Peirce’s notion of “rational instinct,” see Maddalena 2003.

On the connection between abduction and truth, one can find unexpected but fundamental help in the work of the Swiss theologian and philosopher Hans Urs Von Balthasar, especially in his *Truth of the World*, the first volume of his *Theo-Logic*. The treatment of the problem of truth in this volume assumes the form of a long meditation on the Thomistic understanding of truth as transcendental, which unfolds in a tight confrontation with the major developments in modern and contemporary philosophy. For sure, signs of Peircean pragmatism are nowhere to be found in his discussion. But precisely for this reason, the convergence of Balthasar's and Peirce's approach on some fundamental points is even more remarkable. While a comparison between Balthasar and Peirce would deserve a lengthy treatment, I want to focus here only on two main points of convergence: first, Balthasar's revolutionary treatment of the process of perception, abstraction, and judgment of existence in terms of "guesses" (i.e., abductions), and second, the equally revolutionary adoption of a semiotic framework to talk about reality as "mystery."

In speaking of the dynamic of thought, Balthasar relies on the traditional Thomistic conception of intellectual knowledge (Balthasar 2000: 74-75). Roughly, the intellect abstracts the intellectual species from the sensory image of perception and imagination (*abstractio speciei a phantasmate*) and understands the abstracted species always within the 'material' of some sensory image and the product of imagination (*conversio ad phantasmata*). In abstracting the intellectual species relative to a being, the intellect has access to the "essence" of that being – namely, the intellect grasps everything that can be said about that being as belonging to a 'totality' whose content slowly unfolds as knowledge grows in details and accuracy. At the bottom of knowledge, moreover, there is what most 20th century Thomists call "judgment of existence." Any content that is apprehended relies on a more fundamental apprehension of being as such. As St. Thomas says, "*quod primo intellectus concipit quasi notissimum et in quod conceptiones omnes resolvit est ens... unde oportet omnes aliae conceptiones intellectus accipiantur ex additione ad ens*" (*De Ver.*, q. 1, a. 1 co.). Despite the agreement on this point, Thomists are not always explicit about what kind of cognition this judgment is and where it comes from. The extraordinary novelty that I find in Balthasar is precisely the interpretation of the judgment of existence, as well as the other moments of intellectual knowledge (*abstractio* and *conversio*), as *different but logically unified examples of guesses, or abductions*. In a dense passage worth analyzing in full, Balthasar writes:

Now, this [knowledge as *abstractio* and *conversio*] has two further results, which are also simultaneous. The first is a sort of creative 'divination' by which the subject, engaging the spontaneous power of the intellect, so to say *guesses* the intelligible from the sensible clue. Human knowledge is all too full of error, which is to say, the misreading of the perceptible image: proof, then, that we are really talking about guesses, not about a direct intuition of the object's essence. But – and this is the second thing that happens – the image itself prompts and categorically demands this very divination.

As we have already suggested, the same phenomenon recurs when the intellect, in its supreme and, as it were, most audacious creative act, posits existence. It has to recur

because the image *as such* neither reveals nor contains any trace of this existence. And yet the image is enough to give the subject, simultaneously with self-consciousness, the certain knowledge that its own center of existence is insufficient to account for the intelligible coherence displayed in the image. Such coherence, it knows, immediately requires it to posit extramental reality (Balthasar 2000: 74).

Let us remember that these analyses are developed in the context of Balthasar's treatment of truth as transcendental, which remains the focus on his entire book. There are many points that Balthasar makes here that are crucial for our purposes. First, as I was saying, *abstractio* and judgment of existence are understood not as "intuitions," but as *guesses*. One can appreciate here many points of convergence with Peirce: the suspicion against intuition, the understanding of intellectual knowledge as abductive divination of the intelligibility of reality, and the awareness of the fallibility of human knowledge. What is crucial here is that these elements – anti-intuitionism, the understanding of fundamental judgments in terms of abductions, fallibilism – are introduced not in order to reject a metaphysical and transcendental view of truth, but to unpack it faithfully and non-dogmatically, with a nuanced attention to the logical dynamics of the knowing subject in apprehending the truth of the world. Peirce himself not only understood perceptual and intellectual knowledge as originally abductive acts, but also reflected in the same context on what Thomists call judgment of existence, proving a reading of this fundamental act as a form of fundamental abduction to the existence of the thing (see Stango 2015). Saying that the judgment of existence is a guess does not imply a rejection of the fundamentality and transcendentalism of this intellectual act. It only means that even the apprehension of truth at this fundamental level is in a sense 'dramatic,' as Balthasar would put it. Objective 'logical evidence' is not eliminated. Only, the Balthasarian-Peircean view implies that there is no objective 'logical evidence' that overcomes the need for the knowing mind to give its own free and creative contribution in encountering and receiving reality.²³

Second, Balthasar casts the abductive process in the light of the same semiotic understanding of *phenomena* and *noumena* introduced earlier in relation to Milbank and Pickstock. What must be thought – the essence, the *noumenon* – is "prompted," as a sign, by the sense image, the *phenomenon*, from which the intellect abstracts the intellectual species. The divination of the intellectual content from the sensory image is "categorically demanded" by the image itself, but in such a way that the intellect must take the risky and creative initiative of guessing. Once again, the semiotic framework of signs and objects, *phenomena* and *noumena*, is adopted by a Thomist as a way to unpack a metaphysically realistic understanding of truth which makes room for the creative and free abductive work of the subject. Ideal-realism is at work here as the underlying metaphysical framework: that

²³ Admittedly, Peirce would talk of these acts (judgment of existence and perceptual knowledge) as limit-cases of abduction, in which the element of deliberation is reduced to its bare minimum. Nevertheless, it remains true that no apprehension of existence is possible without a correlative (more or less deliberated) 'guess.'

reality is intelligible means that *noumena*-things in themselves ‘want’ to be known and ‘await’ for our correct guesses in and through the appearances-*phenomena*-signs with which they ‘provide’ us.

Also the other crucial piece of Thomistic metaphysics about which I want to speak– the description of reality as mystery – is developed by Balthasar in semiotic terms. This second point does not add much to what I have just discussed, but it confirms how a Peircean version of ideal-realism is secretly informing the best contemporary Thomistic reflection on truth. Admittedly, Peirce does not talk explicitly about the “mystery” of reality, as do on the contrary virtually all 20th century Catholic thinkers. Nevertheless, Peirce’s semiotics can and, I argue, should be read as offering the space precisely for this fundamental metaphysical tenet. Balthasar explains that “the knowability of things is not only compatible with their mystery but is actually inseparable from it” (Balthasar 2000: 104). This is because things have an “interiority,” namely, an inner intelligibility that always remains beyond our grasp. This is not because of a lack of intelligibility, but because of an excess of intelligibility. Just like a light can blind us when it is too strong for our eyes, so the inexhaustible intelligibility of any being, no matter how small, remains obscurely ‘beyond’ what we can conceptually grasp and categorize. Yet, also the interiority of things is somehow *given* if we can talk about it at all (the transcendentalism of truth is not denied!) – given, however, as that which can never be conceptually grasped and categorized exhaustively.

Having a non-reductive sense of reality as mystery means, for Balthasar, having this sense for the interiority of things. If this were all Balthasar had to say, one could take the point as valid, but the point would not be totally original. But what is striking in Balthasar’s presentation of the point is that this conception of reality as mystery is unpacked in *semiotic terms*. In order to keep the sense of the mystery of reality alive, reality as such must be seen, says Balthasar, as organized around two “polarities,” that of *signs and objects, signifiers and signified*. While a nominalist-constructivist metaphysics would tendentially sever the link between the two, a realist metaphysics devoid of the sense of mystery would tend to make them coincide perfectly, ending up paradoxically in a sort of nihilism for which ‘things are just what they are.’²⁴ In this latter case, beings would be reduced to their facticity, to “naked facts” emptied of their mystery. On the contrary, Balthasar explains, “every being, every event, has significance, is laden with meaning, and is an expression and *a sign pointing to something else*” (Balthasar 2000: 103, emphasis added). But this statement would still be partial without the central point relative to the nature of the relation between sign and object: “The crucial insight that springs organically from our discovery of the intimacy of being, then,

24 Aristotle says that of two “vices,” often one is closer than the other to the corresponding “virtue.” One would be tempted here to say that of the two mistakes, ‘nominalism-constructivism’ and ‘metaphysical realism reduced to the nihilism of mere facticity,’ the former is closer to a genuine sense of reality than the latter, insofar as it conserves at least a trace of the ‘mystery,’ which would be preserved in the form of the hidden abyss of what thought-language might still be able to come up with. Maybe the philosophical efforts of Rorty should be read precisely in this way.

is that *the signifier can be neither perfectly united with nor truly separated from the signified*" (Balthasar 2000: 103, emphasis added). It is this polarity of semiotic relation without identity of object, sign, and interpretation (or, as Peirce would say, interpretant) that allows Balthasar to put into words, for what is possible, the mysterious character of reality.

The fact that Balthasar adopts a semiotic framework to justify the view that reality is mysterious should be clear based on these passages. What is less clear is whether Peirce's own semiotic treatment of truth allows for the same conclusion. As I have already said, Peirce does not speak explicitly of the mysteriousness of reality, and a discussion of this point would deserve much more work than this essay can afford. Nevertheless, following Balthasar's insight, one can find hints in this direction in Peirce's writings as well. In fact, the Peircean idea of "infinite semiosis," namely, the idea that no interpretant of a sign can ever exhaust the meaningfulness of the object (on the contrary, every interpretant opens to new acts of interpretations), seems to present a view of cognition vis-à-vis reality which mirrors Balthasar's understanding of beings as full of "interiority" and "mystery." Thus, the Peircean infinite semiosis would not be the nihilistic theory of the 'absence' or indefinite displacement of the object of the sign, but, on the contrary, the denial that any interpretant of a sign can *conclusively and exhaustively grasp* the meaning of a being, which is *nevertheless faithfully though partially conveyed in any true interpretant*.²⁵

In discussing his semiotics, Peirce does speak of the possibility of an "ideal sign" in which the "total Truth" would be embodied, or, in other words, in which the object (the "form" of the totality, the "Universe"), the sign, and its interpretant would coincide (EP2: 304). However, he mysteriously leaves the problem open to whether such a sign is realizable at all by human cognition, and to whether this paradoxical identity of sign, object, and interpretant would collapse the relation into identity. Nevertheless, the sense that one gets, also considering Peirce's very strong sense of the fallibility of man and the irreducibly relational nature of the sign, is that his answer to both problems would be negative. Peirce's semiotic framework seems to invite the guess to the "ideal sign," which remains, however, a mere regulative ideal for cognition as such. Had he known this piece of Peircean semiotics, Balthasar the Catholic theologian might have detected in Peirce's thought a foreshadowing of the possibility of the Incarnation of God, the "ideal sign," the "Icon" and the "exegesis" of the Father, in Whom the Logos has become flesh.²⁶ What seems safe to say, however, is that the work of Balthasar and Peirce show how deep and fruitful the cooperation between Thomism and pragmatism can be.

25 One would also wonder, *pace* Short (2007: 45-46), whether Jacques Derrida's favorable reference to Peirce in his "de-construction of the "transcendental signified" is not an attempt to equally save the sense of the mystery of reality.

26 The same semiotic metaphysics could be analogically extended to the relation between the Incarnation of the Logos in Christ, the word of God in the scriptures, and the sacraments, which are all different forms of the "embodiment" of the Word. At this juncture, one would have to explain in what way the Incarnation of the Logos, understood precisely as the "ideal sign," does not eliminate the mystery of reality by collapsing sign and object but instead enhances it.

4. More Implications of Truth and Ideal-Realism for the Cooperation of Peirce and Thomism: Hope as an Intrinsic Dimension of Thought

While the connection between the transcendental truth and the very possibility of abduction could be analyzed at much further length, the aim of this final pages is to focus on a different but related point: the fact that transcendental truth, once dynamized, framed in terms of relation to time and history, and understood semiotically, implies that *one cannot talk about truth without talking about hope*. In other words, hope is implied by the very structure of the transcendental understanding of truth. As I will show, we find this essential connection between truth and hope at work in the reflection on truth of some of the major contemporary Thomists. Interestingly, the Thomists who adopt this view are those who remained open to a reading of St. Thomas's philosophy sympathetic to the contributions of modern philosophy.

Peirce highlights the essential connection between truth and hope early on in his discussion of what he calls the three "logical sentiments" required by "logic":

It may seem strange that I should put forward three sentiments, namely, interest in an indefinite community, recognition of the possibility of this interest being made supreme, and hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity, as indispensable requirements of logic... It interests me to notice that these three sentiments seem to be pretty much the same as that famous trio of Charity, Faith, and Hope, which, in the estimation of St. Paul, are the finest and greatest spiritual gifts. Neither Old nor New Testament is a text-book of the logic of science, but the latter is certainly the highest existing authority in regard to the dispositions of heart which a man ought to have (EP1: 150-151).

As it is clear to whomever has studied Peircean pragmatism, Peirce is certainly implying here that the "dispositions of heart which a man ought to have" are in no way accidental or extrinsic to the genuine scientific pursuit of the truth. In the passage quoted earlier from 1907 "Pragmatism," Peirce speaks of sincerity, not simply as a requirement for the acquisition of truth, but as the *dynamic, destined unfolding for an inquirer of the very structure of being-truth* – the fact that being is intelligible and that the intellect, despite all its moral and epistemic shortcomings (one would be tempted to say, 'sins'), is made to receive that intelligibility. One could go even further in this interpretation and state that the three logical sentiments are the habitual dispositions corresponding to the interpretation of truth – the three logical sentiments as the "ultimate interpretants" of truth.

From this point of view, then, what is truth? Truth would be nothing less than that which a fully charitable ("Charity"), trusting ("Faith"), and hopeful ("Hope") person would be after. But what is hope specifically in this context, and how is it related to the pragmatic unpacking of the transcendental notion of truth? Peirce clarifies the concept in the following way: "we all hope that the different scientific inquiries in which we are severally engaged are going ultimately to lead to some definitely established conclusion, which conclusion we endeavor to anticipate in some measure" (EP2: 87; cf. 106-107).

From a Thomistic point of view, one might say that the “definitely established conclusion” is the eschatological fulfilment of every bit of true knowledge in God’s knowledge at the end of times (cf. Ross 1988: 279-300). Thus, the truth to which we aim at any point in time is nothing else than a *finite participation* in the final truth. The *humus* for our scientific pursuits, then, must be precisely the hope that this participation is in fact already realized in our present beliefs and is simultaneously on the way to fulfilment in the future and beyond time. But this ‘hope’ is nothing else than the flourishing in the inquirer, in the form of a specific habit of the soul, of the genuine meaning of the transcendentality of truth: since mind and reality are joined in an original “sympathy,” the inquirer can, and in fact ought to, hope to reach the truth.

If some were to object that this cannot be taken as a *definition* of the idea of truth, the Peircean realist should be happy to concede the point. What we have here is in fact not a definition, but a ‘*pragmatic*’ *clarification* of the notion of truth, examples of which can be found throughout the history of philosophy. Doesn’t Aristotle claim that the true good is what the *spoudaios* would perceive, being the *spoudaios* the “rule and measure” of the good thanks to the virtuous dispositions of his character (Aristotle 2002: 44)?²⁷ And doesn’t St. Anselm famously state, against the fool, that the idea of God is the idea of “something than which nothing greater *can be thought*” (Anselm 1998: 87, emphasis mine)?

Two of the major German Thomists of the twentieth century have reflected on the necessary co-implication of transcendental truth and hope. One is Josef Pieper, who speaks about hope in relation to wonder and the intentionality of knowledge. The other one is Ferdinand Ulrich, whose discussion of the “speculative act of reason” and the “ontological difference” implies a discussion of “hope” as a necessary factor. In what follows, I will simply sketch more fully in what way hope plays a role in their Thomistic understanding of truth and knowledge, pointing out the connection to Peirce’s treatment in broad strokes.

Josef Pieper, as virtually all 20th century Thomists who engaged constructively with modern thought, never tires of stressing the importance of the transcendentality of truth for a correct understanding of being and the human soul. This is, in fact, the original meaning of “spirit”: for the human being, having a “spiritual” soul does not mean immediately “[the] property of immateriality,” but “primarily [the] ability to enter into relations with Being as a totality,” which in turn implies that being as such is intelligible, namely, it “lie[s] within the reach of the intellectual soul (Pieper 2006: 46; 47). Pieper, however, re-thinks the truth of Thomism in light of the lesson of 20th century existentialism and hermeneutics regarding the finitude of man. Informed by this awareness, he wonders how being and its intelligibility can be in fact given to man, given that man is, on the one hand, *structurally open to the totality of being* (“intellectual soul”) but he is, on the other hand, *finite*:

²⁷This implicit pragmatism is also at the heart of the account of the other transcendentals. Doesn’t Aristotle explain that the good is “that to which every thing *tends*”? Doesn’t St. Thomas explain that the beautiful is “that which is liked when *seen*”?

How is the world of man constituted?... The world of man is coterminous with the totality of the real, man lives amid and in the face of the totality of existing things, *vis-à-vis de l'universe – insofar as man is spirit!* He is, however, not only not pure spirit; he is finite spirit – consequently, the essence of things and the totality of things are given to him, not with the finality of perfect comprehension, but “in hope” (Pieper 2006: 50).

What is worth noting here is that the fact that man is not ‘infinite spirit’ does not point immediately or exclusively in the direction of an incapacity, an imperfection, a lack, etc., but rather reveals something that is specific of man, namely, the fact that *knowing for man naturally unfolds within the horizon of hope*. As for Peirce, hope is for Pieper essential to any truly human truth-seeking endeavor. Their views present different nuances and are mutually enriching: while Peirce stresses more the negative element of finitude (i.e., the epistemic and moral obstacles that blind us and prevent us from seeing the truth), Pieper stresses more its positive element (i.e., the fact that man is a creature and that therefore he is not the infinite spirit). Both, however, equally make clear that hope is intrinsic to human knowledge because *man knows in time* and therefore within a condition that is not identical to the eschatological manifestation of truth.

Pieper develops this point in relation to the notion of “wonder” (Pieper 2006: 60-61). According to Plato’s and Aristotle’s seminal *dictum*, man’s knowledge originates in wonder. One could say that *wonder* is the *apprehension of reality as an intelligible mystery*, namely, as something totally meaningful which, nevertheless, always escapes any definitive and conclusive grasp, comprehension, explanation, etc. – as Pieper puts it, it is a “combination of affirmation and negation.”²⁸ However, Pieper points out that acknowledging this fact does not mean “resignation.” “On the contrary,” he explains, “the wondering person is one who sets himself on a path” and who “sets off on the search” (Pieper 2006: 60). It is at this point that wonder reveals its connection to temporal existence and therefore to hope: “In this combination of affirmation and negation is manifested that structure of hope – that blueprint for hope – which, while characteristic of wonder, is also peculiar to philosophizing and to human existence itself. We are essentially *viatores*, underway, ‘not yet’ existing” (Pieper 2006: 61). Thus, “hope” underlies “wonder” and both are intrinsic to the “intentionality of knowledge.” For Pieper, *knowing the truth in hope* becomes almost synonym of being human (God does not hope) and of the fundamental attitude of *philo-sophy* (God does not erotically aspire to wisdom, but is wise). What is interesting here is that this reference to hope is a genuine advancement in the Thomistic understanding of truth (an advancement that does not discount, but deepens, the transcendental framework of the Scholastics), which presupposes a greater awareness of the implications of finitude and temporality for the clarification of the meaning of truth. What is even more interesting for the purpose of this essay is that the couple hope/transcendental truth was systematically discussed by Peirce as an essential element of his ideal-realism, as I have explained at the beginning of this section.

28 Cf. the discussion of Balthasar on the “interiority” of things in the previous section.

Also Ferdinand Ulrich, another eminent 20th century Thomist, put hope at the center of his reflections on reason and truth. In his *magnus opus*, *Homo Abyssus: The Drama of the Question of Being*, Ulrich develops “an attempt at a speculative unfolding of man’s essence in his participation in being” (Ulrich 2018: 1). In other words, Ulrich’s work is a clarification of man’s essence in light of the fact that man structurally participates in being and its transcendental properties, including of course the ‘true.’ Human reason, therefore, cannot be understood apart from being and its structural intelligibility. If Pieper’s key-notion is that of wonder, one cannot understand Ulrich apart from the notion of “ontological difference.” It is precisely this notion that introduces us to the way in which Ulrich includes hope within the scope of reason.

The idea of “ontological difference,” derived from Martin Heidegger but reinterpreted by Ulrich according to the Thomistic “real distinction” of “essence” and “existence,” is the framework within which Ulrich’s reflections on reason and truth unfold. For him, the ontological difference does not simply refer to the difference between God and creatures, but, more deeply, to the ‘horizontal’ difference between transcendental being (as the highest, unitary but always-already diversified perfection of creation) and beings (creatures), which is itself inscribed within the ‘vertical’ difference between God and creatures.

The first chapter of Ulrich’s book is eloquently entitled “The *Operatio* of Speculative Thought as an Ontological Enactment of *Hope*” and it sets the stage for the entirety of his metaphysical anthropology. According to him, any truth that we know is always suspended within the “‘not yet’ of the ontological difference between being and beings.” In other words, apprehending the truth of a *being* always also means apprehending such being on the background of *being as such*, of which each being is a particular concretion. Being as such is not reducible to the totality of beings and yet it is never found apart from the totality beings. But the fact that each being is a concretion of being as such means that the ontological difference is *a difference internal to each being* and therefore revelatory of what each being is. Thus, the knowledge of the truth of a being is genuine only if it carries within itself the awareness that this being is neither reducible to what it has been and what it has been thought of (the mistake of essentialism), nor is it reducible to an indefinitely postponed manifestation of it (the mistake of an eschatology interpreted as utopia). The knowledge of the truth of a being must dwell in the paradoxical space of the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ and must resist the temptation of absolutizing either of the two aspects. Only in this case thought ‘moves’ in the space of the ontological difference.

It is at this conjunction that Ulrich introduces the notion of hope as intrinsic to genuine thought. Both mistakes (i.e., essentialism and utopia) rely on a reduction of knowledge to “understanding,” which is in turn a forgetfulness of the hope intrinsic to genuine thought. Ulrich explains:

Understanding [*Verstand*], which “merely distinguishes and separates along precise boundaries, and therefore fixes things in themselves, *destroys the element of hope that belongs to the speculative act of reason* [*Vernunft*], insofar as it traps us either

in the ‘always-already-having been-in-being,’ allowing every ‘ad-vent of being’ that comes to pass to be submerged in the ‘has-been,’ making it a thing of the past and thus ‘aging’ it as something without a future [essentialism] – or else it abandons us, frozen, on the path, driving us toward an advent of being that remains within itself and never gives itself away, a future that throws us back upon the fruitless beginning (Ulrich 2018: 10-11).

For Ulrich, the neglect of the ontological difference and the reduction of thought to understanding implies a reduction of the truth of being to either a concluded past (essentialism) or an impossible future (utopia), both of which make the encounter with being in the present sterile – a useless repetition in the case of essentialism, a promise that is never fulfilled in the case of utopia. The alternative attitude is that of the “speculative act of reason,” the essential feature of which is precisely *hope*. We see here the perfect convergence between Pieper, who claims that the totality of being is given to man only in hope, and Ulrich, who states that the truth of being in its ontological difference can only be thought in hope. Only hope can acknowledge that the ‘already’ of what is presently given in knowledge must be conceived of in light of the ‘not yet’ of its eschatological fulfilment – to use Peirce’s phrase, the conclusion that could be known in the long run. By relying on a similar approach developed by Erich Przywara, Ulrich states again the essential connection between genuine thought, hope, and the truth of being apprehended as ontological difference:

The true ontological difference, which thinking attains in the element of hope, overcomes the impatience of the understanding that fixes things and so tears them apart in favor of ‘humble patience’ of the creature that accepts itself. Thus relationship comes about through distance, and both are redeemed in the ‘patience that hopes.’ In this patience, thought is placed outside of the ‘essentialized past’ and of the ‘advent’ that never conveys itself, and it is set in the now of ‘being-there.’ ‘Countering the ‘impatience’ of these rending absolutizations, there is the ‘patience’ of standing within the genuinely creaturely interval between creaturely essence and creaturely existence’ (Ulrich 2018: 11; Cf. Przywara 2014: 344).

Ulrich’s reflection on hope, together with his co-essential meditation on humility, patience, etc., goes to the heart of what it means for a human being to apprehend being, to know the truth. More explicitly, for Ulrich, as for Pieper and Peirce, a full unpacking of the transcendental, Thomistic notion of truth, enriched by the notion of ontological difference, requires the introduction of hope as a fundamental element of thinking.

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